



# United International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (UIJMR)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 3048-6726 [www.ujmr.in](http://www.ujmr.in) Impact Factor: 6.934 (SJIF) Vol-3, Issue-2 ; April, May & June, 2026

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## The Crucible of the "BTech Bro": Masculinity and Lifestyle Shifts Among Indian Engineering Students (2010–Present)

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Article Received:16-05-2025 Article Modified:05-06-2026

Article Accepted:07-06-2026 Article Published:09-06-2026

DOI:10.37854/UIJMR.2026.3.2.132

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### Abstract

This article examines how, since 2010, the lifestyle choices, sociocultural identities, and masculinity of Indian Bachelor of Technology (BTech) students have evolved. Digital capitalism, algorithmic culture, global consumerism, artificial intelligence (AI), online gaming, social media, and precarious work patterns have all affected the fast-changing environment that Indian engineering students currently inhabit. They were once regarded as representations of discipline, technical proficiency, and middle-class aspirations. Drawing on studies of masculinity, media studies, sociology of technology, and post-liberalization Indian cultural studies, this paper investigates how the contemporary "BTech bro" manages professional anxiety, emotional repression, financial ambition, and digital self-performance in engineering campuses and dorm environments.

The research argues that engineering masculinity has changed from a previous paradigm centered on academic stoicism and provider responsibility to a fragmented, highly mediated identity dependent on visibility, algorithmic validation, and adaptable self-branding. Social media platforms, online gaming cultures, cryptocurrency speculation, dating apps, and AI-driven workplace upheavals have altered young male engineering students' perceptions of success, competence, beauty, and emotional resilience. Concurrently, migratory aspirations, placement culture, and changing marriage expectations continue to reinforce historical pressures associated with masculine financial responsibility. This study combines recent research on gender, digital culture, and youth identity to demonstrate how the contemporary Indian engineering student lives at the intersection of technological acceleration and cultural uncertainty. Rather than being merely a campus cliché, the evolving "BTech bro" is a broader sociological figure that represents the aspirations and worries of neoliberal Indian masculinity in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** Digital Masculinity, AI Anxiety, Campus Culture, Engineering Students, and Social Media



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## Introduction: Engineering Education's Role in the Development of Modern Indian Masculinity

Beyond the classroom, engineering education has a unique cultural status in India. Since the economic liberalization of the 1990s, the Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree has been a powerful socio-economic symbol associated with upward mobility, middle-class respectability, and manly achievement. The engineering student, particularly the male engineering student, has historically been viewed as the ideal embodiment of focused ambition in India's expanding neoliberal economy.

Sanjay Srivastava claims that post-liberalization Indian masculinity is increasingly linked to consumer want, professional success, and technological modernity (1–27). In this regard, engineering schools developed into institutional contexts where modern Indian manhood was developed, tested, and socially validated. But between 2010 and now, the social landscape surrounding engineering education has undergone significant transformation. The traditional perception of the quiet, academically focused engineering student has gradually evolved into a much more complex figure thanks to digital media ecosystems, online consumer culture, global internet subcultures, artificial intelligence (AI), and unstable work environments.

The "BTech bro" of today lives in a society where social validity is determined by factors other than academic success. Instead, masculinity is being displayed through algorithmic visibility, meticulously crafted digital identities, physical attractiveness, financial speculation, gaming expertise, and social adaptability. This shift reflects broader shifts in Indian society. The increasing use of social media, the globalization of teenage culture, the Jio revolution's inexpensive internet access, and the widespread use of smartphones have all altered how engineering students engage with one another, communicate, and picture their futures.

The engineering hostel, which was formerly defined by physical peer interaction and campus-based hierarchies, now simultaneously operates as a digital environment connected to global networks of influencers, entrepreneurs, gamers, merchants, and online communities. As a result, the modern engineering student must simultaneously negotiate several forms of masculinity, including the neoliberal demand for constant self-optimization, the traditional expectation of becoming a financially secure provider, and the pressure from the internet to project confidence, visibility, and lifestyle success.

This essay examines how, beginning in 2010, these shifts have impacted the male identities and lifestyle choices of Indian engineering students. The essay argues that the "BTech bro" is a new kind of digitally mediated masculinity characterized by fragmentation, anxiety, performance, and adaptation. It accomplishes this by referencing media studies, digital anthropology, sociology of youth culture, and studies of masculinity. While older versions of engineering masculinity placed more emphasis on technical skill and emotional control, modern engineering masculinity increasingly depends on digital validation and market-oriented self-branding.

The essay explores the ways in which AI-driven technological disruptors, online gaming, betting applications, dating platforms, binge drinking cultures, hyper-consumerism, and migratory fantasies impact the emotional and psychological realities of engineering students. These connected incidents



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demonstrate that engineering campuses are not only educational establishments but also labs where young men exercise modern Indian manhood in the midst of great economic and technological uncertainty.

## **Hyper-Competitive Masculinity and Engineering Education: The Historical "Engine of Mobility"**

India's post-liberalization economic expansion is intimately linked to the origins of engineering masculinity. By the early 2000s, expectations for middle-class security and international mobility were closely linked to engineering education. Admission to esteemed schools like the National Institutes of Technology or the Indian Institutes of Technology represented not only academic achievement but also manliness and family honour. This cultural significance intensified the fiercely competitive environment surrounding engineering entrance exams. In order to produce young men with technical discipline who could pass challenging admission tests, coaching institutes like Kota developed into industrialized institutions.

In these contexts, perseverance, selflessness, and emotional control were perceived as traits of masculinity. Success required the ability to withstand long periods of uncertainty, severe academic pressure, and loneliness. As a result, the engineering candidate was presented as a strong, unwavering individual. Emotional weakness, relaxation, and social distractions were often cited as threats to success. These opinions maintained long-standing patriarchal beliefs that men should prioritize their financial obligations over their personal welfare. Academic achievement and masculine legitimacy became intertwined.

Ana Jordan and her colleagues claim that university "lad culture" upholds hierarchies of masculinity through peer affirmation, competitiveness, and gendered behaviour (698–720). On Indian engineering campuses, this culture has historically manifested itself in late-night hostel encounters, harsh humour, male bonding rituals, and the normalization of emotional detachment. Students learned to conceal their concerns while projecting expertise and confidence in engineering dorms, which became predominantly male spaces. However, the nature of the competition gradually changed after 2010. Campus postings were valued by previous generations as a way to secure stable work. In contrast, students today must constantly enhance their abilities in multiple areas at once.

Technical skill alone no longer guarantees employability and social standing. Students are now required to improve their communication skills, code portfolios, networking abilities, entrepreneurial endeavours, and online professional visibility. This shift reflects the larger logic of neoliberal selfhood, which pushes people to see themselves as constantly improving projects. The notion that engineering students need to be adaptable, productive, and marketable at all times is becoming more and more embedded in their consciousness. In this system, failure is not merely seen as a lack of academic ability but rather as a crisis of masculine identity.

## **The Performance of Digital Masculinity and Social Media**

The advent of social media platforms after 2015 has changed the social environment on Indian engineering campuses. Low-cost smartphones and inexpensive internet access allowed engineering students to constantly participate in global digital culture. Reddit, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and



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other social media platforms have become important platforms for the performance, evaluation, and reward of masculinity. In contrast to earlier campus cultures when status was primarily decided by academic reputation or hostel dominance, digital platforms introduced algorithmic visibility as a new form of social power.

Students began to create identities through well-kept web profiles that showcased internships, coding achievements, fitness modifications, devices, travel experiences, and social lifestyles. In particular, LinkedIn became into a venue for professional masculinity. Students studying engineering were instructed to present themselves as motivated, disciplined, employable individuals who were constantly "upskilling." Announcements of internships, coding certifications, hackathon victories, and placement offers were examples of public demonstrations of proficiency. Instead of only achieving academic success, the engineering student was now expected to continuously promote himself.

This behaviour is congruent with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which holds that gender identities are formed through repeated acts and social performances. Visible digital repetition, such as sharing achievements, displaying productivity, demonstrating self-control, and expressing confidence, is a growing way for engineering students to express their masculinity. The online persona and the self-become intertwined. Through entertainment-focused platforms, students were concurrently exposed to global digital masculinities such as "gymbro," "hustle culture," "sigma male," and entrepreneurial influencer culture.

In these online spaces, the ideal masculine traits of hyper-individualism, self-optimization, financial independence, and emotional detachment are all pushed. Engineering students often absorb these tales during uncertain periods regarding relationships, placements, and career plans. There are detrimental psychological effects from this digital environment. Constant comparison exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and worry related to one's career. Students are ensnared in algorithmic validation loops where their social value is determined by exposure and engagement measures.

A successful internship announcement may encourage praise and confidence, but seeming stagnation can cause remorse and self-doubt. Additionally, social media makes it more difficult to discern between one's personal and professional identities. A growing number of students view themselves as brands that require ongoing maintenance and development. The engineering student consequently turns into a digitally mediated masculine subject who is impacted by visibility, competition, and monitoring.

## **The Virtualization of Gaming Culture and Male Socialization**

The social dynamics of engineering dorms were altered in the 2010s and early 2020s by the rise of internet gaming culture. Call of Duty: Mobile, PUBG: Battlegrounds, Valorant, and Counter-Strike 2 are a few examples of multiplayer games that have developed into significant spaces for male companionship, stress relief, and competitive performance. Among the traditional masculine characteristics that are duplicated in gaming environments are aggression, competitiveness, dominance, teamwork, and tactical skill. They do, however, transfer these behaviours into virtual settings where rapid reflexes, technical expertise, and strategic thinking are more important than physical strength. According



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to Brenner-Levoy (385–398), online gaming environments allow masculinity to be negotiated and displayed through digital participation rather than physical presence.

In engineering dorms, gaming serves a number of social functions. It creates alternative hierarchies unrelated to academic success, promotes community, and provides emotional solace. A student who struggles academically can acquire social recognition by becoming proficient in gaming. High ranks, tactical leadership, and technical expertise become sources of male praise. However, gaming culture often makes toxic communication patterns and verbal animosity worse. Competitive gaming environments legitimize insults, humiliation, and emotional repression. Students learn how to maintain composure under pressure while concealing their weaknesses behind animosity or humour.

These behaviours reflect broader male norms in engineering culture, where emotional transparency is often frowned upon. Gaming reflects deeper shifts in leisure in general. Traditional outdoor sports and college recreation are quickly coexisting with digital entertainment ecosystems. The engineering hostel is both real and virtual because students stay in touch via voice calls, Discord servers, and online groups long after courses are ended. Most importantly, gaming environments provide a little reprieve from the anxieties associated with placements, academic pressure, and uncertain futures. Virtual achievement gives one a sense of control in otherwise uncertain circumstances. But excessive gaming can also function as avoidance behaviour, allowing students to temporarily escape emotional distress without addressing its underlying causes.

## **The Artificial Intelligence and Technical Masculinity Crisis**

The trend that has most seriously damaged engineering identity may be the rise of generative AI beyond 2022. For many years, engineering masculinity in India was closely linked to technical skill, particularly in coding and algorithmic problem-solving. Effective code writing demonstrated intelligence, self-control, and employability. However, AI tools like ChatGPT, GitHub Copilot, and automated coding systems disrupted the symbolic meaning of routine technical work. Tasks that once required hours of manual labour may now be completed in a matter of seconds thanks to AI-assisted creation. This technological revolution led to the development of a kind of "coding existentialism" among engineering students. Many began to question the long-term value of their hard-earned technical skills. If machines could automate their own coding, what would make a human engineer special?

Anxiety about AI is a manifestation of broader worries about automation and employability in neoliberal economies. An increasing number of engineering students think that the job market is erratic and rapidly evolving. Traditional paths to software employment appear to be less reliable than they formerly were. As a result, students are constantly under pressure to become proficient in rapid engineering, system design, AI technologies, and transdisciplinary skills. As the ideal individual, technical expertise is replaced by adaptability and flexibility. These days, engineers are more than just programmers; they are capable of handling technical uncertainty and are dynamic problem solvers. This shift also threatens established hierarchies of competence. Younger students with access to AI tools may perform better than seniors who relied on traditional means.



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Educational authority spreads more widely as knowledge availability becomes more democratic. There are serious psychological consequences. Increased sentiments of imposter syndrome, fear of being out of date, and doubt about the stability of their future professions plague students. Engineering masculinity, which was formerly founded on confidence derived from technical skill, is becoming more and more defined by adaptability in the face of constant upheaval.

## **Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Hostel Stoicism**

In engineering dorm culture, male students' stoicism and emotional reserve have long been accepted. Academic stress, interpersonal issues, and personal fears are often addressed privately rather than publicly. On engineering campuses, vulnerability is still frequently associated with weakness, immaturity, or emotional instability. Male conventions frequently deter males in mental distress from seeking assistance, according to Grant Duthie and his colleagues. Deeply rooted ideas of masculine independence often oppose media initiatives that encourage emotional transparency (Duthie et al.).

These dynamics are particularly noticeable on Indian engineering campuses. Substance abuse frequently entangles emotional coping mechanisms. Alcohol use, smoking, vaping, and cannabis usage all provide social and psychological functions. Hostel drinking sessions provide fleeting environments where emotional confession is socially acceptable under the guise of booze. Students can discuss loneliness, love disappointments, scholastic difficulties, and placement fears during these get-togethers without directly defying masculine norms regarding emotional control. Vulnerability becomes briefly acceptable since it is mediated by humour and communal drunkenness. However, unhealthy emotional addictions are also a result of this inclination. Students may find it challenging to find healthy communication methods or psychological support outside of drug-focused settings. Emotional expression becomes episodic rather than integrated into everyday life.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues. Prolonged lockdowns, online classes, loneliness, and placement uncertainty increased engineering students' feelings of anxiety and alienation. Many were more reliant on gaming, substance misuse, or digital escape during this period. Conversations regarding mental health have grown in recent years, despite the fact that it is still heavily stigmatized. Engineering masculinity still rewards resilience, emotional fortitude, and productivity. Students often worry about coming out as weak or inadequate when they talk about depression, anxiety, or burnout in public.

## **The Development of Financial Masculinity and Speculative Culture**

One of the most significant shifts in contemporary engineering culture is the normalizing of speculative financial activities. Engineering students are increasingly interested in cryptocurrency trading, betting apps, stock market investing, fantasy sports platforms, and online financial communities. This tendency reflects the emergence of "financial masculinity" as a concept. Young men are encouraged to take chances, amass wealth, and try their hand at entrepreneurship in order to demonstrate their intelligence and drive.



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Internet culture celebrates quick financial success achieved through trading, investment, or digital entrepreneurship. Through websites like Binance, CoinDCX, and stock trading apps, engineering students are continuously exposed to stories about financial potential. Influencers disseminate ideas about market domination, passive income, and financial independence. Engineering students often see speculative trading as an extension of their technical problem-solving abilities since they are trained to think logically and systemically. In many aspects, such as individualism, competitive ambition, obsession with technology, and faith in rational processes, the "crypto bro" identity is comparable to engineering masculinity.

Students frequently frame trading as a test of intelligence and strategic thinking. However, there is also a lot of psychological stress associated with financial speculation. Losses are often concealed from peers and family out of embarrassment or fear of being criticized. Unsuccessful investments might increase concerns about placements and financial stability. This speculative culture reflects broader neoliberal conditions in which stable employment appears increasingly uncertain. Engineering students can no longer rely just on traditional career pathways to guarantee upward mobility. High-risk financial speculation is not only an economic strategy but also a male expression of ambition and independence.

## **Hyper-consumption and Lifestyle Branding**

The rise of Indian e-commerce and influencer culture after 2015 altered the consumption patterns of engineering students. Thanks to platforms like Amazon India, Flipkart, and social media advertising ecosystems, campus culture has normalized desires for lifestyle-oriented consumption. In earlier generations, engineering students frequently prioritized affordability and usefulness. Today's students are more drawn to aesthetic consumerism, which includes sneakers, streetwear, gaming consoles, cell phones, workout equipment, and grooming products. This shift reflects the growing importance of creating a visible identity. Consumer goods are symbols of aspiration, modernity, and social inclusion. Possessing expensive gadgets or fashionable clothing is a sign of both wealth and adherence to the contemporary digital youth culture.

The notion of conspicuous consumerism by Thorstein Veblen becomes particularly relevant. Through consumer goods, engineering students communicate their knowledge, aspirations, and lifestyle achievements. Wireless earphones, mechanical keyboards, high-end laptops, and gym memberships are signs of self-optimization and technological prowess. Importantly, this consumption is intimately related to social media performance. Students purchase items for both real-world use and virtual representation. Lifestyle branding is fundamental to the formation of a masculine identity. New forms of financial distress are also brought about by hyper consumption. Students may feel under pressure to maintain appearances even with limited resources. Credit systems, buy-now-pay-later services, and aspirational marketing reinforce the relationship between identity and consumption.

## **Culture of Masculine Validation and Placement**

Campus placements remain the highest level of engineering education in India. The placement season serves as a structured ritual for the public evaluation and hierarchical allocation of masculine



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value. When students get a high-paying offer from companies like Google, Microsoft, or Amazon, their reputation is immediately enhanced. Placement outcomes become highly obvious indicators of intelligence, employability, and future provider potential. However, unpleasant placement experiences can lead to a great deal of emotional distress. Students who don't land their dream jobs may suffer from low self-esteem, social disengagement, and shame. Because engineering masculinity is still closely linked to financial ability, professional setbacks are often perceived as personal failings.

Neoliberal ideas of independence and competitiveness are also supported by the placement procedure. Examples of structural issues that are frequently adapted include automation, job freezes, and economic downturns. Students criticize themselves instead of more general market conditions. In this society, maintaining productivity is highly valued. Aptitude preparation, coding practice, networking, and resume development take center stage in final-year life. Employability is more important than leisure and mental health. Placement anxiety has increased significantly in recent years due to layoffs in the worldwide IT industry. Engineering students are increasingly concerned about the reliability of their long-term jobs, even after years of academic training.

## Dating Apps and Relationship Dynamics

Relationships on engineering schools have also altered dramatically since 2010. In the past, gender inequality and conventional social conventions limited romantic partnerships within engineering institutes. However, the way students form friends has been altered by dating applications like Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge. Digital dating sites personalize romantic relationships by reducing reliance on campus-based social networks. Relationships that go beyond simple peer observation are now possible for students. Hookups, casual dating, and fleeting meetings have become more frequent on urban engineering campuses. These innovations contradict traditional ideals of masculinity. Engineering students now have to cope with emotional communication, online courtship, profile display, and digital rejection in addition to their academic responsibilities.

Dating apps make male students' concerns about their appearance even worse. For romantic exposure, fashion, grooming, photography, and physical fitness all become increasingly important. On engineering campuses, this results in the rise of gym culture and aesthetic self-optimization. But dating apps can sometimes cause emotional instability. Algorithmic desirability rankings, rejection, and ghosting create new worries. Masculinity becomes entwined with romantic performance and validation on the internet. Despite increasing liberalization, conventional marriage and family norms continue to have an impact on student interactions. Many students balance modern dating culture with traditional family expectations on committed relationships.

## The Reorganization of Matrimonial Expectations and Provider Masculinity

In India's marriage market, engineering degrees are still highly prized. A background in engineering was once thought to indicate intelligence, financial stability, and career advancement qualities associated with the perfect husband. However, today's standards for relationships are evolving. Emotional intelligence, communication skills, compatibility, and lifestyle balance are becoming more important to



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educated women in addition to work success. Therefore, technological mastery is no longer sufficient to guarantee social attractiveness. This shift challenges traditional provider-centric masculinity. Engineering graduates are increasingly expected to cultivate interpersonal and emotional skills that were formerly disregarded in highly technical educational environments.

The change reflects broader changes in middle-class gender relations in India. Urban professional women are increasingly seeking fair partnerships rather than only getting married for financial stability. In addition to income potential, household participation and emotional availability become increasingly important. For many engineering students, this creates a mismatch between contemporary relationship reality and conventional patriarchal standards. They must strike a balance between more conventional forms of masculine control and more modern ideals that place an emphasis on emotional connection and respect for one another.

## **Migration, Global Ambition, and Manly Achievement**

Many engineering students believe that moving abroad is the height of academic success and masculinity. In countries like the US, Canada, Germany, or the UK, pursuing higher education is a sign of global competitiveness and socioeconomic growth. Concern and ambition are shown in the desire to study overseas. Students want better opportunities for research, higher compensation, and an escape from the extremely competitive Indian labour market. Migration is associated with both personal emancipation and international legitimacy.

However, this path carries a great deal of financial risk. When students take out student loans secured by family property, they assume a considerable degree of obligation. Success for men is associated with both individual achievement and the ability to make up for the sacrifices made by the family. Migration also modifies identity itself. Engineering students view themselves as global professionals capable of overcoming local limitations. In middle-class Indian society, the "foreign-returned engineer" continues to enjoy great regard. But migration can also make loneliness, cultural alienation, and psychological stress worse. In addition to adjusting to new academic systems, immigration rules, and work markets, students must manage expectations from home.

## **Conclusion: The New Architecture of Engineering Masculinity**

The development of engineering masculinity in India between 2010 and the present shows how digital culture, neoliberal economics, and technological advances have a big impact on how young people form their identities. The contemporary "BTech bro" is more than just an engineering student; he is a highly mediated social figure who has to reconcile competing demands for accomplishment, visibility, emotional stability, and financial success. Academic rigor, stoicism, and provider duty were highly valued aspects of traditional engineering masculinity. Modern engineering masculinity is still shaped by these ideals, but it is becoming more diffused due to social media performance, AI disruption, consumer culture, gaming ecosystems, and global digital desire.

The world in which today's engineering students operate is one of continuous optimization. They must simultaneously meet demands for employability, emotional control, physical attractiveness, financial



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aspiration, technical adaptation, and social visibility. Both opportunity and exhaustion result from this. Importantly, the evolving nature of engineering campuses reflects shifts in Indian culture overall. As neoliberal capitalism reorganizes work, relationships, and identity, young men increasingly perceive masculinity as a delicate act that requires constant maintenance and reinvention. As a result, the "BTech bro" figure offers important insight into the issues facing contemporary Indian culture. His struggles with placements, AI, digital validation, consumer aspiration, and emotional fragility demonstrate how the quick development of technology is altering not only professions but also what it means to be a man.

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