MENicure movement: Nail polish may be next male beauty frontier

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This week scriptwriterlyricist Varun Grover surprised his one-lakh plus Instagram followers with photos that showed off the hottest trend in nail art — a tonal manicure. Amidst a flood of questions and homophobic responses, Grover explained why he was sporting nail polish: “Nail paint makes my hand look beautiful and more colourful with minimum of effort. And am surprised why more people don’t wear it.”

Once sported by counterculture icons such as David Bowie and Kurt Cobain, the trend has become more mainstream in recent years, with male celebrities such as Jaden Smith, Harry Styles, Brad Pitt and Zac Efron photographed wearing nail polish. Last month, Esquire declared 2020 as “the year of the menicure”, adding that “men everywhere are more and more comfortable wearing nail polish”. In 2019, global nail polish brand OPI launched a new video campaign titled ‘Will you Mani up?’ to break down the gender stereotypes against men wearing nail polish.

But in urban India, there is still a deep-seated social taboo in place. Noting the negative responses to his story, Grover called it “one of the final frontiers of masculinity”. “I think Indian men — even those who would support fellow men wearing it — are quite averse to the idea of nail paint. It could be conditioning or it could just be choice,” says Grover, who has been wearing nail polish for two years.

This explains why amidst a boom in men’s grooming services, Indian men are increasingly opting for manicures and pedicures, but aren’t bold enough to get their nails painted.

Urban Company (formerly UrbanClap), which launched men’s grooming services pan-India in November 2019, says the category has grown over 50% month on month and is expected to do so for the next 12-18 months. Pedicures and facials are also the most popular services after haircuts, shaving and beard grooming.

The trend is echoed across salons. Nearly 40% of male customers at the Chembur branch of spa and salon chain Bodycraft in Mumbai opt for manicures and pedicures, says manager Priyanka Sawant.