HOW IN-STORE FACTORS INFLUENCE PURCHASE DECISIONS IN A TRADITIONAL ETHNIC RETAIL SETTING.

Abstract

The Indian ethnic wear market, valued at over $20 billion, remains one of the most culturally significant and economically resilient segments of India's retail industry. While organized retail chains and designer brands have received considerable attention, limited research has examined the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour within traditional ethnic retail environments. This exploratory study investigates how staff behaviour, store ambience, and other in-store experiential factors affect purchase decisions and conversion behaviour in a traditional ethnic retail setting in Jammu, India. Using a mixed-method approach, the study combines primary survey responses with transactional sales log data from a leading ethnic wear retailer. The research is supported by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, which explains how retail environments influence customer perceptions and behavioural responses. The analysis evaluates the relationship between experiential retail elements and purchasing outcomes, providing insight into how environmental and interpersonal factors shape consumer decision-making. The findings suggest that positive staff interaction, personalised assistance, and a comfortable store environment significantly increase purchase completion and in-store engagement. The study highlights the importance of experiential retail strategies and suggests that mid-sized retailers can improve performance through investment in customer experience, staff training, and store design.

Keywords: Marketing, Retail Management, Consumer Behaviour, Store Ambience, Purchase Decision

Introduction

Traditional outfits such as Suits, Sarees, Lehengas, Kurtas, and Sherwanis - garments that are deeply rooted in India's cultural fabric - today stand together to form an industry that is valued at more than $20 billion.[1] This alone makes up around 22% of the global ethnic wear market, a space that itself is estimated to be worth nearly about $90 billion.[2]

This industry has experienced many twists and turns for the past few decades. The twin forces of modernization and globalization have perhaps left the deepest mark on it. With the advent of foreign influence and shifting consumer lifestyles, western clothing has progressively taken over daily apparel choices, now having almost 75–80% share of the entire Indian clothing market.[3]

Yet despite this overwhelming dominance of western attire in day-to-day wear, ethnic fashion continues to hold a deeper cultural and emotional significance. It remains the preferred choice, the natural go-to, for people across the country when it comes to the most meaningful and special occasions of their lives - moments like family gatherings, cultural festivals, or once-in-a-lifetime ceremonies.

Among all the occasions that support and sustain this market, weddings and festivals play the greatest role. In fact, recent data shows that out of the total $20 billion valuation of the Indian ethnic wear industry, more than half of it - well over 50% - is driven almost entirely by Indian weddings alone, a clear sign of how central marriage celebrations are to the survival and growth of ethnic fashion.[4]

In Tier-two cities like Jammu - ground zero for this research - ethnic wear isn't just a cultural staple, it's a significant economic driver. While high-net-worth individuals (HNIs) and the upper-middle class often shop for ethnic apparel in metro cities or hubs like Ludhiana and Amritsar, the majority still prefer traditional outfits for daily wear. This preference is especially pronounced in Jammu and its surrounding villages, where ethnic attire remains integral to daily life.

In India, the top 10% of earners capture nearly 58% of national income, while the bottom half receives only about 15%, indicating a highly unequal income distribution where a small affluent segment holds most of the spending power that can be directed toward luxury fashion consumption.[5] In spite of the temptation of luxury couture and fast fashion, only the highest 10–15% of the population can actually afford such lifestyles. The others continue to look toward traditional apparel, and ethnic wear becomes more than just a cultural demonstration - it's a demonstration of economic viability and cultural orientation.

In Jammu, ethnic wear boutiques and retailers cater to this demand, offering a range of traditional and fusion styles. This blend of tradition and modernity ensures that ethnic wear remains both relevant and accessible, resonating with the cultural fabric of the region.

The aim of this study is to capture how in-store factors, staff behaviour and store ambiance play a role when the customer has to tackle with the conundrum of whether to buy or not and the perplexity of whether to open their wallet and how much to spend.

Whereas some research has previously concentrated on ethnic trend wear in metro areas, not much is known about consumer behavior and buying habits in cities such as Jammu. Retailers can maximize in-store experiences and enhance buying strategies to achieve higher sales and revenue generation by understanding the above factors.

Founded in 2013, **Khwaab** has demonstrated sustained growth within Jammu's ethnic wear retail market. The brand began operations from a single-floor retail space of approximately 1,300 square feet in the Jain Bazar area of Jammu city and, over time, expanded to operate across more than 10,000 square feet spread over two locations. In the fall of 2023, Khwaab established its second outlet in the Gandhi Nagar area—one of the city's key commercial districts—marking a significant phase of spatial and operational expansion. This growth has been accompanied by a substantial increase in sales volume, with the store recording annual sales exceeding 60,000 articles. Such scale of operations, coupled with consistent customer demand, positions Khwaab as a leading retailer in the women's ethnic and bridal wear segment within the region. Consumer preference for the brand is largely driven by its emphasis on design originality, product quality, and price accessibility.

Its chain of outlets in Jammu is ranked among the top retail destinations in the area, attracting customers from all age groups looking for trendy and colorful ethnic wear. The brand has won immense customer loyalty for its carefully selected collection, uniform quality, and capacity to adjust to changing fashion trends.

With its growing prominence in the local retail landscape, Khwaab provides an ideal setting to study consumer behavior and in-store purchase dynamics in the ethnic wear sector.

From Boutiques to Brands: How Policy, Players, and Place Reshaped Ethnic Retail

Traditionally this industry has been majorly unorganized with various small boutiques, tailors and retailers. Now for the past few years with change in government policies like introduction of GST and UPI payments, customer and staff awareness and with the dawn of online shopping, this sector has steadily become organized.

Another factor to this shift is the role of big players in this market. Big designers like Sabyasachi, Manish Malhotra, Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla along with well established corporate giants like Manyvar, Biba, Fabindia have managed to change consumer habits and expectations, thus the industry standards.

These brands have made contributions on various levels. Starting with their supply chains, big houses have professional manufacturing and supply chains integrated with new technology, improved logistics and modern systems along with well qualified professional experts, which were rarely seen in this industry until now.

Inspired by the professional management of these big players across their various retail outlets, many mid-sized retailers devised such modern systems and omnichannel strategies that helped them expand and have a wide retail presence with numerous EBO (Exclusive Brand Outlets).

Focus on customer experience - which is the main idea of this research - is what is most responsible for this change.

Top brands and even the mid sized retailers have been now spending a lot on building in-store ambience and creating a personalised experience for each of their customers. All of this once exclusive to big brands is something that retailers today are using today as a manual to stand out and show the true essence and character of their brand.

The retail and ethnic wear market in Jammu has undergone significant changes over the past decade, shaped not only by shifting consumer preferences but also by the unique socio-political environment of the region. Jammu is a politically sensitive area, and though this paper isn't political in its theme, it is a fact that has majorly affected businesses in the region, thus it is quite relevant to this study.

Periodic episodes of terrorist attacks, curfews, and conflict create frequent disruptions in economic life. These events interrupt supply chains, restrict store operations, limit communication networks, and instill a climate of uncertainty and fear - all of which inevitably lead to a sharp decline in consumer footfall.[6]

What has hit the sales and customer footfall in the markets the most is the end 150-year-old practice called the "darbar move", a leftover of the days when Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by the Dogra kings. Every winter, the government and the entire administrative machinery of the state would shift from the summer capital of Srinagar in the Kashmir Valley to the winter capital of Jammu in the plains. The government would save more than Rs. 200 crore annually with this change. But for the business community this just meant more losses. About 10,000 government employees and their families pour into Jammu from Kashmir every winter. These people stayed and spent money here, boosting the economy of Jammu significantly. Since the stop of darbar move, the market was slow and businesses were just somehow managing to survive. Finally after a 4 year pause the tradition was revived in November 2025 by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, giving hope to the struggling business community of Jammu.[7]

Tourism, which is another key driver of retail demand in the region, is not immune to these disruptions either. Pilgrims to the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and Amarnath Yatra, along with domestic and international leisure tourists, constitute a key customer base for retailers. Turmoil, however, stemming from safety and political issues, tends to keep tourists away, undermining one of the jugulars of Jammu's retail economy.

Compounding this is the growing adoption of online shopping, which becomes a convenient alternative during times of instability, further diverting customers away from physical stores. The effect has been even more deteriorating due to

the recent launch of the new Vande Bharat Express train, which offers direct service to Srinagar and thus makes the stop at Jammu which was nearly inevitable earlier now avoidable and causes even less walk-in at stores.
Consequently, the path of retail expansion in Jammu has been much more unstable and uneven than in other second-tier cities like Ludhiana or Amritsar, where relative political stability has facilitated more stable growth. This "bumpy" growth pattern underlines the unique difficulties confronting retailers in Jammu and creates a rich setting for examining consumer behavior and in-store buying dynamics

About the Survey and the Methodology

Research design: The research is based on a quantitative survey using a well drafted and structured questionnaire. It is descriptive in nature to understand perceptions of all the walk-ins towards the staff behaviour, store ambience and other instore factors in an ethnic retail setting.
Research Site: For this study an EBO of Khwaab in Gandhi Nagar area of Jammu was chosen as our research site. Khwaab is a leading women’s ethnic wear brand in Jammu. It has multiple showrooms in the city, attracts a diverse customer base, and represents the organized segment of ethnic retail in this tier-two market.
Sampling: The target population consisted of walk-ins at Khwaab visiting during the survey period. We used a Non-Probability approach by devising a Convenience sampling method. A QR code linking to the survey questionnaire was pasted in the showroom, allowing consenting customers to submit their responses via google form. Survey participation was incentivized through a monthly draw, with one respondent receiving a Rs.5000 voucher. Store staff was excluded in the study.
The final analysed sample comprises 189 valid responses (collected 19 July – 27 Dec 2025). An earlier pilot (4–18 July 2025) collected 110 responses but was treated as a pilot and not used for main analysis due to instrument issues and discrepancies.
Questionnaires: A structured questionnaire was developed to understand customer demographics, shopping habits, and in-store behaviour at Khwaab. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections:

- *Demographic Information* – capturing customer name, WhatsApp number, contact number, age, gender, and city.
- *Customer Insights* – it included 6 sub-sections:
    1. Shopping Habits and Visit
    2. Staff Behavior
    3. Store ambience & layout
    4. Product & layout experience
    5. Purchase Behaviour
    6. Shopping preferences

In the first phase of data collection, our first version of the questionnaire (Version 1) had a number of major discrepancies that compromised the quality and reliability of the data. These problems required a complete redesign, which led to Version 2 being more structured and able to handle analysis better. Below are the main problems, how they affect things, and the steps that need to be taken to fix them.
Issues Identified in Version 1 (Pilot) & Improvements in Version 2 (Final Questionnaire):
During the pilot testing from 4 July to 18 July 2025 (110 responses), several issues emerged that affected data quality.

- Multi-Select Responses Treated as Single Strings
  Problem: There were questions wherein a respondent could select multiple options (eg. What most influenced your purchase decision?). The responses to such questions were stored as comma-separated strings in google sheets, where each combination of selection was treated as a unique category.
  Impact: Accurate counts of each factor and if a respondent selected a particular factor was quite impossible to calculate and thus analyse.
  Solution (Version 2): Multi-select outputs were structured for processing into binary columns (one column per factor) using formulas or scripts, enabling precise analysis while retaining respondent flexibility and original question format.
- Purchase Question Ambiguities
  Problem: Initial responses to purchase behavior did not always match billing records, and options such as “accompanied someone who purchased” were missing.
  Impact: This limited the ability to reliably classify respondents as buyers or non-buyers.
  Solution (Version 2): The revised questionnaire explicitly added an “accompanied someone” option. Cross-checking against invoice records ensures accurate classification.
- Lack of Total Footfall Data
  Problem: Without a reliable count of total visitors, true conversion rates could not be computed.
  Impact: Analysis of purchase behavior relative to overall footfall was impossible due to lack of total footfall data.
  Solution (Version 2): Despite this, the study provides strong directional insights into in-store influence mechanisms. The study refocused on purchase decision factors rather than absolute conversion, with recommendations to log footfall separately for future research.
- Respondent Carelessness and Staff Communication Issues
  Problem: Some respondents answered aimlessly due to rushed completion or misunderstanding survey

intent, partly because staff explanations were inconsistent.
Impact: This increased random or contradictory responses, reducing reliability.
Solution (Version 2): Staff were trained to provide a short scripted introduction emphasizing honesty and approximate completion time. One or two attention checks and duplicate items were included to flag careless responses. Moreover, the form itself was made longer with addition of more questions so that even if some questions were misunderstood and incorrectly answered they could be easily identified and ruled out for this research.

- Ineffective Open-Ended Question
  Problem: The first version of the questionnaire included an open-ended question towards the end that asked the respondent “What could improve your shopping experience at our store?” This led to a set of repetitive responses indicating the need for more discounts.
  Impact: Which were not really relevant to the study and took more time to respond while increasing response fatigue.
  Solution (Version 2): The question was removed in the revised questionnaire and replaced with structured multiple-choice items that specifically targeted key experience factors such as staff behavior, ambience, product arrangement, and store navigation. This improved both response efficiency and analytical clarity, allowing data to be quantified and compared more effectively.

The final questionnaire (Version 2) was deployed from 19 July to 27 September 2025, ensuring adequate response diversity and reliability.

Data Quality and Cleaning:

The final survey (Version 2) merely needed multiple-choice and Likert-scale items, so the dataset required minimal cleaning. The survey instrument automatically screened answers, and the modification of questions eliminated the open-ended inconsistencies present in Version 1.

If a person had completed the form multiple times on different days, each of them was retained as it represented a unique shopping experience. This strategy ensured that the final dataset was clean and trustworthy to a large extent and did not require significant modifications post-collection.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The framework explains how environmental stimuli influence the internal emotional and psychological state of an individual, which subsequently affects behavioural responses. Originally developed within the field of environmental psychology, the S–O–R model has been widely applied in retail and consumer behaviour research to analyse how store environments shape customer experiences and purchasing behaviour.[8]

The framework consists of three major components:

1. **Stimulus (S)**

Stimuli refer to the external environmental factors that customers encounter within a retail setting. These factors influence customer perceptions and overall shopping experience. In the context of this study, the stimuli include:

• Staff behaviour and interaction
• Store ambience and cleanliness
• Lighting, music, and fragrance
• Product display and arrangement
• Trial room experience
• Personalised assistance and styling suggestions

These in-store elements collectively contribute to the atmosphere of the retail outlet and shape the customer’s initial perception of the store environment.

2. **Organism (O)**

The organism component represents the internal emotional, cognitive, and psychological state of the customer after being exposed to the retail stimuli. The S–O–R model suggests that environmental conditions influence how customers feel and perceive their shopping experience. In this research, the organism component includes:

• Customer comfort and satisfaction
• Engagement and involvement within the store
• Sense of trust and confidence
• Emotional response towards staff and ambience
• Perceived convenience and shopping ease

These psychological responses influence the customer’s willingness to continue browsing, engage with products, and make purchasing decisions.

3. **Response (R)**

Response refers to the final behavioural outcome generated as a result of the customer’s internal reactions to the retail environment. In this study, the response component is reflected through:

• Purchase decisions
• Conversion behaviour
• Amount spent by customers
• Time spent inside the store

• Trial room usage and engagement
• Possibility of repeat visits

The framework suggests that positive retail stimuli and favourable customer perceptions are more likely to result in positive behavioural responses and increased purchase activity.

Application of the Framework to the Present Study

The S–O–R framework provides an appropriate theoretical basis for this research because ethnic wear retailing is highly experiential in nature. Unlike many forms of online retail, ethnic wear purchases often involve physical interaction with products, trial room usage, family participation, and personalised staff assistance. Customers frequently rely on visual presentation, fabric feel, fitting experience, and interpersonal interaction before making a purchase decision.

Within this context, the study examines how various in-store stimuli influence customer emotions and perceptions, and how these internal responses ultimately affect purchasing outcomes and spending behaviour. By applying the S–O–R framework, the research seeks to establish a relationship between experiential retail factors and consumer purchase decisions in a traditional ethnic retail environment.

Analytical Framework

This study adopts a data-driven analytical framework to examine how staff behavior, store ambience, and in-store experiential factors influence customer purchase decisions within a traditional Indian ethnic retail setting. Primary data was collected through a structured in-store customer questionnaire, while actual purchase behavior was validated using corresponding sales values extracted from the store's official sales log. This dual-source approach ensures that subjective customer perceptions are directly linked with objective transaction-level outcomes, strengthening the validity of the analysis.

The analysis begins with descriptive statistics to establish baseline patterns in customer behavior, including time spent in store, purchase occurrence, average spend, visit intent, and shopping frequency across physical and online channels.

Subsequently, the study examines **bivariate relationships** between key in-store factors and purchase-related outcomes. Staff-related variables (such as politeness on entry, attentiveness, non-pushy interaction, and usefulness of suggestions) and ambience-related variables (including lighting, cleanliness, music, scent, temperature, and overall ambience) are analyzed in relation to time spent in store, likelihood of purchase, and average spending. This allows for identification of which experiential factors are most strongly associated with positive purchase behavior.

To further deepen the analysis, influence factors selected by respondents (for example, staff behavior, store ambience, product display, pricing, or occasion-based need) are cross-analyzed with demographic and behavioral variables such as age, gender, shopping frequency, and channel preference (online vs in-store). The binary encoding of influencing factors facilitates a comparative analysis of average customer expenditure and purchase outcomes between customers identifying specific drivers and customers not identifying them, thereby enabling the relative impact of each factor on consumer purchasing behavior to be isolated and evaluated.

The framework also accounts for nuanced purchase outcomes by distinguishing between customers that made a purchase, customers that did not make a purchase, and customers that accompanied another purchaser. This distinction allows the study to capture indirect influence effects, where in-store experience may not immediately translate into a transaction but still contributes to engagement and future intent. Overall, this structured analytical approach ensures that conclusions are grounded in observed data patterns rather than assumptions, aligning closely with the study's objective of understanding how in-store experiences shape consumer purchase decisions in ethnic retail environments.

Key Findings

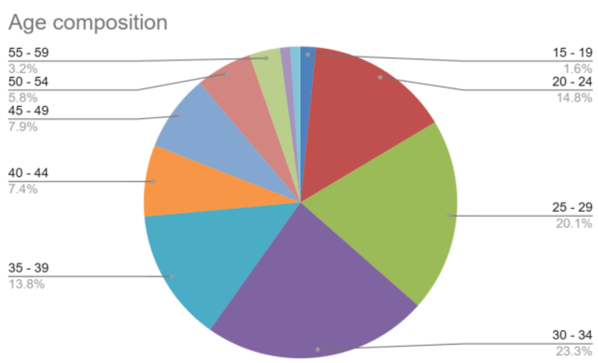

Figure 1. Age composition of survey respondents.

Age composition:

From the total validated responses, **as shown in Figure 1,** the following could be interpreted- the ethnic wear market is dominated by the 25-34 year old age group making up about ~45% of all the respondents. This shows that this age group of **young working adults or newly married women**, typically the age group that attends social gatherings, weddings, or festivals has a greater inclination towards ethnic shopping, which reflects a greater social exposure and a higher purchasing power.

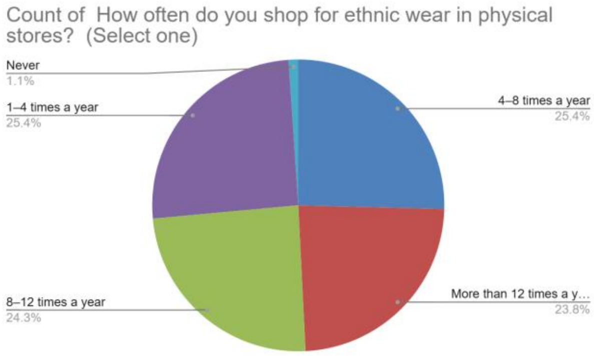

Figure 2. Frequency of shopping for ethnic wear at physical stores.

Purchasing habits (physical stores):

As shown in Figure 2, the data shows a fairly equal, about 25%, distribution of frequency of purchase at physical stores, with just 1% respondents shopping never. This indicates **consistent footfall and high engagement** in physical ethnic wear retail. Ethnic wear still maintains a **loyal offline customer base**. Frequent store visitors likely value **trial, fit, and fabric quality**- things online shopping can't easily replicate.

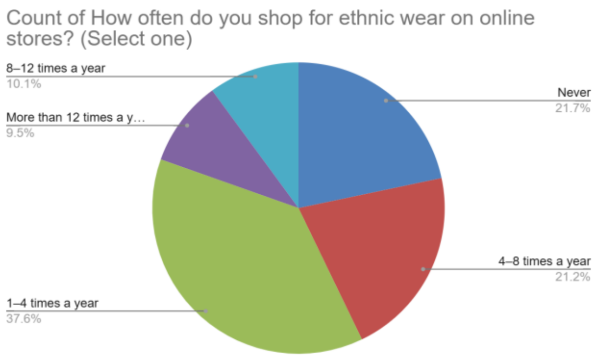

Figure 3. Frequency of shopping for ethnic wear at online stores.

Purchasing habits (online stores):

As shown in Figure 3, the responses show that the largest group of about 38% shops at online stores about 1-4 times in a year, and about 22% respondents never shop online. This indicates a digital gap, many still prefer physical shopping for ethnic wear. Ethnic wear consumers show lower online purchase frequency due to perceived risks related to fit, fabric authenticity, and delivery reliability. This could also be reasoned by the fact that people usually shop for ethnic wear for special once in a lifetime moments and this involves a higher purchase value. **People looking forward to making a purchase thus prefer to spend much more time and energy to make sure they make a justifiable expense.**

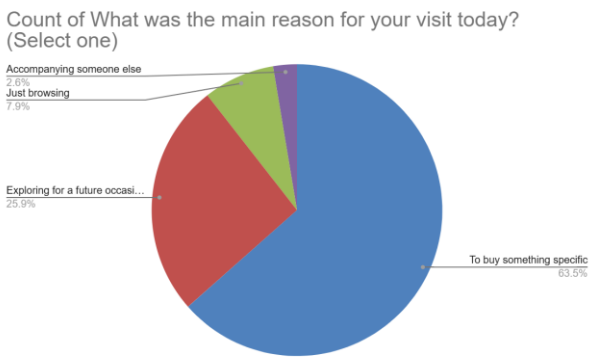

Figure 4. Primary reason for visiting the store.

Reason for visit:

As shown in Figure 4, the data shows that about 64% of respondents walked in the store to buy something and 26% were exploring for a future occasion while just 8% came in to browse. This suggests that the majority was goal driven and not window shoppers, and the **brand has now become a destination rather than a casual stop.**

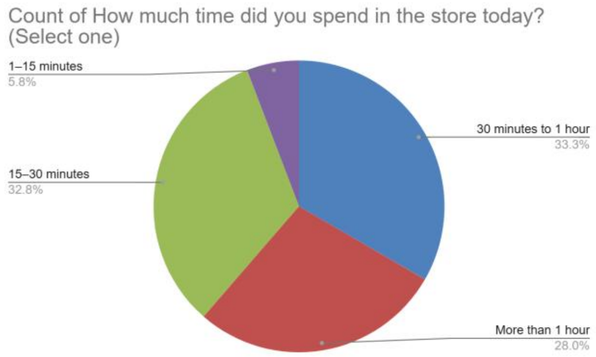

Figure 5. Time spent by customers in the store.

Time spent in store:

As shown in Figure 5, most shoppers spend 15-60 mins in the store (66%) while about 28% respondents spent more than an hour in the store, and just 6% were done in under 15 mins. Customers tend to **engage deeply in-store**, possibly due to the trial experience, personalized service, or cultural attachment to choosing ethnic wear carefully.

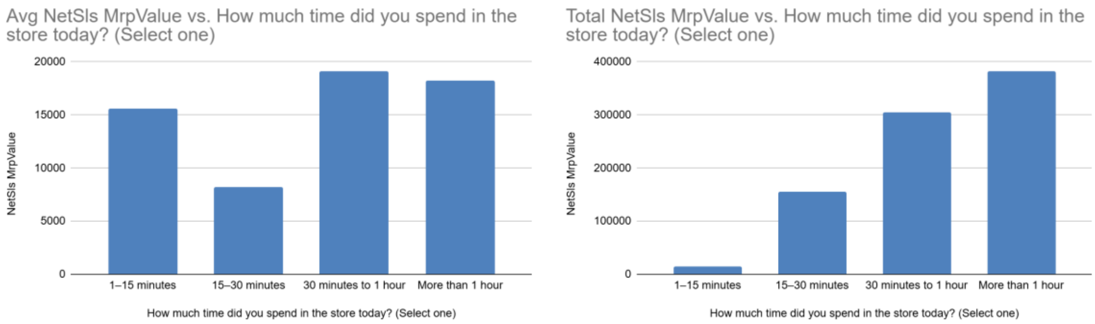

Figure 6. Average (a) and total (b) net sales value by time spent in store.

Time Spent in store vs Net Sales Value:

As shown in Figure 6, an analysis of Net Sales Market Retail Price Value (NetSls MrpValue) across different time intervals spent in-store reveals a compelling correlation between visit duration and purchasing behavior. **The total NetSls MrpValue (Figure 6b)** shows a clear upward trend: **customers that spent more than one hour in the store contributed the highest cumulative sales**, followed by those in the 30 minutes to 1 hour bracket. This suggests that longer visits are associated with greater overall revenue generation. However, when examining the **average NetSls MrpValue per customer (Figure 6a)**, the **highest individual spending occurs in the 30 minutes to 1 hour category**, slightly surpassing the "more than 1 hour" group. This indicates that while extended visits drive bulk sales, the optimal window for maximizing individual customer value may lie within the 30-minute to 1-hour range.

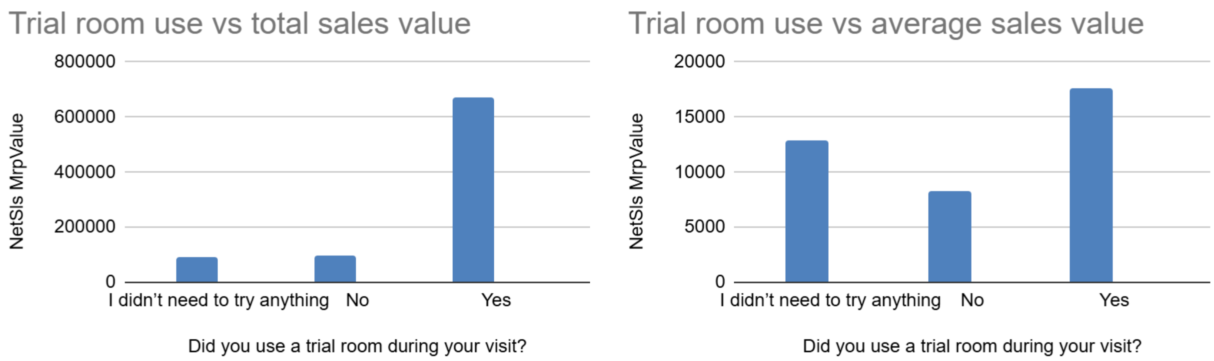

Figure 7. Total (a) and average (b) sales value by trial room use.

Trial Room use vs Net Sales Value:

As shown in Figure 7, to explore the impact of trial room engagement on consumer spending, we tested the hypothesis that customers using the trial room tend to spend more—both in total and on average—than those not using it. The data supports this hypothesis across both aggregate and individual metrics. The **total purchase value (Figure 7a)** is significantly higher among customers using the trial room, indicating their substantial contribution to overall sales. Furthermore, the **average purchase value per customer (Figure 7b)** is also highest in the trial room user group, suggesting that these individuals tend to make more valuable purchases. This result could be another reason that customers coming to shop for more expensive products like lehengas tend to spend a considerable amount of time in trials. Interestingly, customers reporting “not needing to try anything” spent more on average than those explicitly avoiding the trial room, implying that confident or pre-decided buyers may still contribute meaningfully.

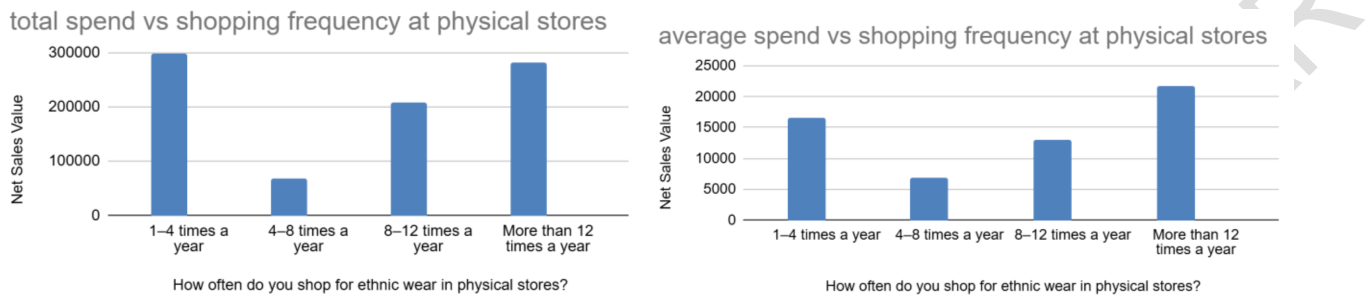

Figure 8. Total (a) and average (b) net sales value by shopping frequency at physical stores.

Shopping Frequency at Physical Stores vs Net Sales Value:

As shown in Figure 8, to understand broader consumer behavior in the ethnic wear retail segment, we examined how the frequency of visits to physical stores correlates with spending patterns. While the data does not isolate KHWAAB-specific visits, it offers valuable market-level insight. We tested the hypothesis that **higher visit frequency to physical stores is associated with increased spending—either in total or on average.** The results reveal a dual peak in **total spend (Figure 8a)** among both **infrequent visitors (1–4 times a year)** and **high-frequency visitors (more than 12 times a year),** suggesting that occasional buyers may make high-value purchases during key seasonal or ceremonial periods, while frequent shoppers contribute through consistent engagement. The **average spend per customer (Figure 8b)** increases steadily with visit frequency, peaking among the most frequent visitors, which supports the hypothesis in terms of individual purchasing behavior. These findings imply that KHWAAB operates within a market where both ritual-driven and loyalty-driven shopping behaviors coexist.

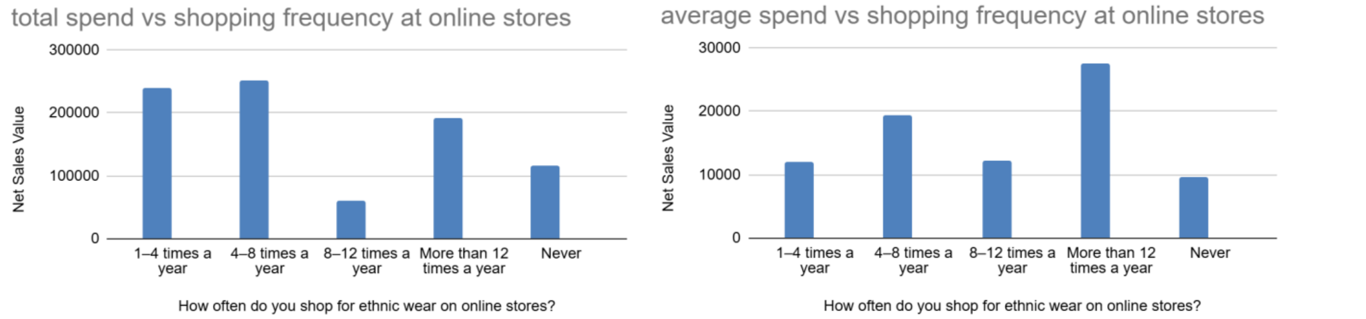

Figure 9. Total (a) and average (b) net sales value by online shopping frequency.

Shopping Frequency at Online Stores vs Net Sales Value:

As shown in Figure 9, customers that shop online moderately (**4–8 times a year**) show the highest spending levels in-store, both in terms of **overall contribution (Figure 9a)** and **average basket value (Figure 9b).** This indicates that moderate online activity does not replace in-store purchases; instead, it appears to enhance familiarity and purchase confidence, resulting in higher-value offline transactions.

Those that shop online **1–4 times a year** also contribute significantly to **total store revenue (Figure 9a),** though their average spend **(Figure 9b)** is slightly lower, suggesting that they rely on the store for key purchases but engage less consistently with online channels.

Interestingly, customers that shop online **very frequently (more than 12 times a year)** still display relatively high **average in-store spending (Figure 9b),** indicating that even heavy online users prefer the physical store for high-involvement ethnic wear purchases.

In contrast, individuals that **never shop online** contribute the least—both in **total (Figure 9a)** and **average spend (Figure 9b)**—implying that strictly offline shoppers are not the strongest revenue drivers for ethnic wear retail.

Overall, this pattern suggests that omnichannel customers (those active both online and offline) are the most valuable consumer segment, and online interaction, instead of cannibalising offline sales, actually correlates with higher offline purchase value.

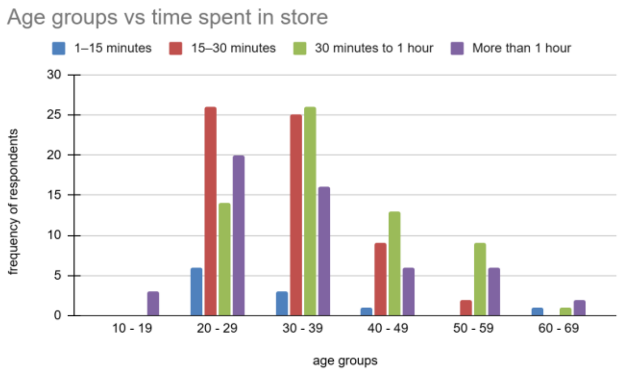

Figure 10. Time spent in store across different age groups.

Age Groups vs Time Spent in Store:

As shown in Figure 10, the analysis of age-wise time spent in the store reveals clear differences in in-store engagement across customer segments. Respondents in the **20–39 age group** account for the highest proportion of longer store visits, particularly in the **15–30 minutes, 30 minutes to 1 hour,** and **more than 1 hour** categories. This suggests that customers in early and mid-adulthood are more willing to spend time exploring products, interacting with staff, and engaging with the store environment.

In contrast, **short-duration visits (1–15 minutes)** are minimal across all age groups, indicating that ethnic wear shopping in physical stores is rarely impulsive and typically involves deliberate consideration. Older age groups (**40–59**) exhibit comparatively fewer visits but show a preference for moderate to longer durations when they do visit, suggesting more purpose-driven shopping behavior. Very young and older respondents contribute minimally, reinforcing that they are not primary decision-makers in purchase situations.

Overall, the findings indicate that **age significantly influences in-store engagement**, which may indirectly affect exposure to staff behavior, store ambience, and other experiential factors that shape purchase decisions.

Time Spent, Visit Intent, and Purchase Decision:

The relationship between time spent in the store, reason for visit, and purchase behaviour reveals important patterns in how consumers engage with ethnic wear retail spaces. While longer time spent in-store is often assumed to increase the likelihood of purchase, the data indicates a more nuanced relationship. Purchase incidence rises steadily from short visits (1–15 minutes) to moderate engagement periods (30 minutes to 1 hour), where the highest proportion of purchases is observed. However, visits extending beyond one hour do not show a further increase in purchase likelihood, suggesting diminishing returns to prolonged in-store time.

Across all time brackets, the primary reason for visiting the store emerges as the strongest determinant of purchase behaviour. Respondents that entered the store with the intention to buy a specific item consistently accounted for the majority of purchases, irrespective of how long they spent in the store. In contrast, respondents that reported “just browsing” or “exploring for a future occasion” rarely made immediate purchases, even when their time spent in the store was substantial. This highlights the central role of pre-existing purchase intent in shaping outcomes, particularly in the context of ethnic wear, where purchases are often occasion-driven and planned in advance.

Additionally, a notable proportion of longer visits involved respondents that accompanied someone else who made a purchase. This underscores the socially embedded nature of ethnic wear shopping, where purchase decisions are frequently influenced by companions rather than made individually. Such visits contribute to increased time spent in the store and play an indirect but meaningful role in the purchase process.

Overall, the findings suggest that time spent in the store functions more as an indicator of engagement and deliberation rather than a direct predictor of purchase. Entry intent and social shopping dynamics exert a stronger influence on purchase behaviour than duration alone, reinforcing the need to evaluate in-store factors within the broader context of consumer intent and decision-making processes.

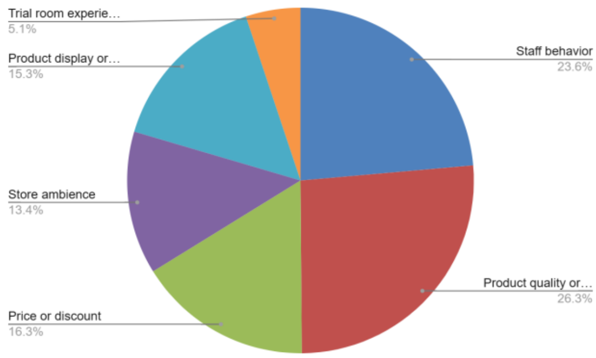

Figure 11. Factors influencing purchase decisions in-store.

Influence of In-Store Factors on Purchase Decisions:

As shown in Figure 11, the distribution of purchase influence factors reveals a clear hierarchy in how consumers evaluate their in-store shopping experience. Product quality or design emerges as the dominant determinant, accounting for 26.3% of total responses. This indicates that, within the Indian ethnic wear context, purchase decisions are primarily product-centric, with consumers placing the greatest emphasis on craftsmanship, fabric quality, design aesthetics, and perceived value. This aligns with the nature of ethnic wear as a high-involvement product category, where visual appeal and material quality strongly shape consumer preferences.

Closely following product attributes, **staff behavior** plays a critical enabling role in the conversion process. The relatively small gap between product quality and staff behavior suggests that while consumers may enter the store with an initial product preference, interpersonal interaction significantly influences whether interest translates into purchase. This underscores the importance of personalized assistance, product knowledge, and persuasive communication, particularly in a category where styling guidance and occasion-based recommendations are essential.

Price or discount ranks third, indicating that although cost considerations remain relevant, they are not the primary driver of purchasing behavior. This suggests that consumers in this segment may be willing to pay a premium when product quality and service meet expectations, reinforcing the idea that ethnic wear purchases are often value-driven rather than purely price-sensitive.

Environmental factors such as **product display or arrangement** and **store ambience** collectively account for nearly 29% of responses. Their combined influence highlights the role of visual merchandising and atmospheric cues in shaping consumer perception, encouraging prolonged engagement, and enhancing perceived brand positioning. However, their individual impact remains secondary compared to core product and service factors.

The **trial room experience** emerges as the least influential factor. This may indicate that trial rooms function more as a supportive or confirmatory element rather than a decisive trigger in purchase decision-making. Consumers may already have a high purchase intent before using trial facilities, particularly when assisted by staff or when shopping for familiar silhouettes.

The findings suggest a product-first, service-enabled purchase model, where strong product appeal initiates interest, staff behavior facilitates decision-making, and pricing and ambience act as reinforcing elements rather than primary motivators. Operationally, this implies that investments in product quality and staff training are likely to yield higher returns than focusing solely on store aesthetics or discount strategies.

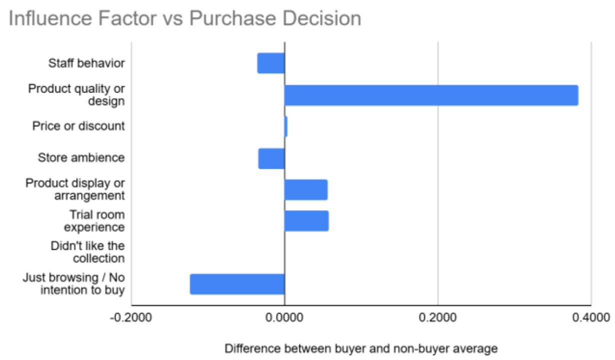

Figure 12. Difference in purchase influence factors between buyers and non-buyers.

Influence Factors vs Purchase Decision:

As shown in Figure 12, the most significant differentiator between buyers and non-buyers is **product quality or design**, with a large positive difference (+0.383), indicating that buyers are far more likely to cite product attributes as a decisive factor. This suggests product appeal is the primary conversion driver.

Factors such as **product display/arrangement (+0.056)** and **trial room experience (+0.057)** show mild positive differences, implying they support purchases but rarely act as standalone triggers.

In contrast, **staff behavior (−0.036)** and **store ambience (−0.034)** are slightly more cited by non-buyers, suggesting these factors influence overall experience but do not directly translate into purchase conversion.

Price or discount (+0.004) shows a negligible difference, indicating price sensitivity is similar across buyers and non-buyers. Finally, **"just browsing / no intention to buy" (−0.123)** is strongly associated with non-buyers, reinforcing the role of initial purchase intent.

Overall, the results point to a **product-led conversion process**, where experiential factors play a secondary, enabling role rather than being decisive.

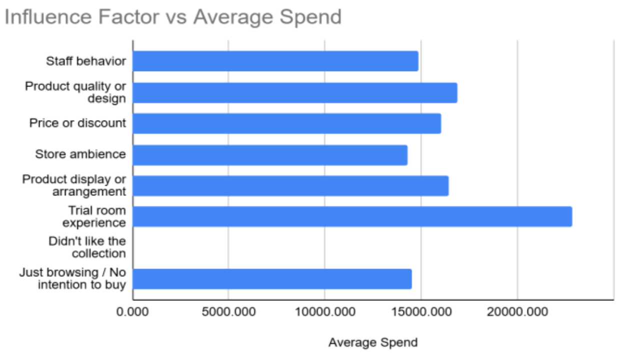

Figure 13. Average customer spend by purchase influence factor.

Influence Factor vs Average Spend:

As shown in Figure 13, the analysis reveals a clear stratification of in-store influence factors based on their association with average customer spend.

Trial room experience stands out as the strongest high-value indicator, with the highest average spend (≈ ₹ 23000). This suggests that customers that engage deeply with the product—by trying it on—are more likely to make higher-value purchases, indicating greater purchase confidence and commitment.

Product quality or design (≈ ₹ 17000) and **product display or arrangement (≈ ₹ 16500)** form the second tier. These factors appear to influence mid-to-high ticket purchases, highlighting the role of visual appeal and perceived craftsmanship in driving spending decisions in ethnic wear retail.

Price or discount (≈ ₹ 16000) is associated with moderate average spend, indicating that while pricing incentives attract buyers, they do not necessarily lead to the highest transaction values.

Lower average spends are observed for **staff behavior (≈ ₹ 15000)**, **store ambience (≈ ₹ 14500)**, and **just browsing / no intention to buy (≈ ₹ 14500)**. This suggests that these factors play a more supportive or facilitative role rather than directly driving high-value purchases.

The absence of data for **"didn't like the collection"** reinforces its role as a non-conversion factor rather than a spending determinant.

Figure 14. Shopping preference and purchase decision.

Shopping Preference vs Purchase Decision:

As shown in Figure 14, the data indicates a strong relationship between shopping preference and purchase behavior in the physical retail setting. A large majority of respondents preferred **in-store shopping (~85%)**, followed by the ones that stated their preference **depends on the product (~15%)**, while **online preference was minimal (~1%)**.
Among in-store-preferring respondents, **82% made a direct purchase**. An additional **10% of respondents accompanied someone who made a purchase**, indicating a broader influence on store-level conversion. This highlights the effectiveness of physical stores not only in converting buyers but also in facilitating group-based purchase decisions, which are particularly relevant in ethnic wear retail.
Respondents with preferences depending on the product showed the highest conversion rate, with **~90% making a purchase**. This suggests that for this group, **product appeal outweighs channel preference**, and once the right product is available, the likelihood of purchase is extremely high.
In contrast, the online-preference group was too small to draw statistically meaningful conclusions. However, its low representation suggests that consumers that strongly prefer online channels are less inclined to engage in in-store ethnic wear purchases.
Overall, the findings indicate that **in-store environments play a dominant role in driving purchases, while product suitability acts as the key trigger for conversion**, regardless of stated channel preference. The presence of non-purchasing companions further underscores the social and collective nature of purchase decisions in physical ethnic wear retail.

Implementation

After deep analysis of the primary data from the visitors at Khwaab's retail outlet we can see different trends and patterns which could ultimately yield to a purchase and a greater bill value. These insights if implemented in the business plan can reflect in growth.

1. **Product first strategy:** The research data shows that the most important purchase driver is 'Product Quality or Design' at 26% and for Khwaab buyers cite it far more than non-buyers. So, a business plan should be developed which invests in strong product curation and design variety. Retailers should focus on high fabric quality and craftsmanship. Moreover, a sense of newness should be maintained by buying smaller quantities and increasing the number of stock turns. In ethnic wear retail, product appeal initiates the purchase journey, while other in-store factors act as supporting mechanisms. In apparel retailing, product design and perceived quality significantly influence customer evaluation and purchase intention.[9]
2. **Staff Training and Behavioral Strategy:** Staff behaviour is the second biggest purchase driver recorded at 24%. Staff should be trained with older staff members and often should be enrolled in sales and personality development courses which would ultimately make the customer experience even better and influence the repeated visits. Polite greeting and attentive service should be prioritised. Staff should be trained in non-pushy selling techniques and should encourage styling suggestions and outfit pairing. Salesperson interpersonal skills and customer interaction significantly influence purchase decisions and repurchase intention in retail environments.[10]
3. **Encourage Longer In-Store Engagement:** The data highlights the highest individual purchase is amongst the group which spends 30-60 minutes in the store while highest total purchase remains in the group that spends more than 1 hour in the outlet. So, such store environments should be made which encourage a greater browsing time without boring the customer. The buying decision of the customer should be nothing less than a journey and retailers should focus on creating a storyline rather than just a rushed purchase for the customer. Retail environments that encourage longer browsing times tend to increase purchase probability and impulse buying behaviour among shoppers.[10]
4. **Improve Visual Merchandising:** Product display and arrangement had a moderate influence on the purchase decision. While display style depends from store to store depending on the fortes of the retailers moreover factors like space influence it, but great attention should be paid to a clean and effective arrangement. Premium mannequins and dummies should be kept on display. Products should be arranged according to the price, fabric, collection style and product type. Proper space and display should be provided to high space occupying products like lehengas. If space allows retailers should spend on developing show windows in front of their stores to create a premium outlook. Visual merchandising elements such as store layout, product displays, and mannequin presentation significantly influence consumer purchase decisions and impulse buying behaviour.[11]
5. **Focus Less on Discounts:** Price has a limited effect on purchase decisions. According to the data it influences just about 16%. Meaning, Ethnic wear shoppers are not purely price sensitive. So, retailers should not focus on discounts, but more on genuine pricing according to perceived value taking appropriate profit margins. This should be done while focusing on product quality and uniqueness. This is an important measure for brand positioning.
6. **Maintain High Store Ambience Standards:** Even though ambience is not the primary driver, it extends browsing time. Cleanliness and organised look should be maintained by businesses. Comfortable temperatures and lighting should be ensured. Good quality speakers and light and appropriate music should be used along with fragrance diffusers to keep a pleasant environment. Moreover, these should be kept up with renovations and changes. Store ambience significantly affects consumer purchase intention and shopping experience.

7. **Target Omnichannel Customers:** Customers that shop online moderately spend more in-store. So, a good e-commerce presence should be developed which can be effectively promoted by a strong social media marketing strategy. This also encourages customers to visit the store after seeing products online.
8. **Recognize Social Shopping Behaviour:** Our research data shows that many customers often come with companions, and these companions mostly affect the purchase decision. Moreover, it is also to note that ethnic fashion purchases are family driven. So, it is important to make the store outlet more comfortable for groups, with appropriate seating and even often snacks and beverages to increase engagement. Also efforts should be made to cash in on accompanying companions as well to increase total sales. Shopping decisions in fashion retail are often socially influenced, with companions and family members playing a significant role in purchase decisions.[9]

Conclusion

This study set out to understand how staff behavior, store ambience, and other in-store factors influence customer purchase decisions in a traditional ethnic retail setting. Using first-hand primary data collected directly inside the store, along with actual sales values obtained from the store's billing records, the research was able to move beyond perception-based responses and link customer experience variables to real purchase outcomes.

The analysis shows that purchase decisions in ethnic retail are not driven by a single factor, but by a combination of interpersonal and environmental cues. Staff-related factors—such as attentiveness, politeness, and helpful suggestions—emerged as one of the strongest influences on purchasing, particularly in cases where customers spent more time in the store or used the trial room. At the same time, store ambience elements like cleanliness, lighting, temperature, and overall comfort consistently received high ratings, indicating that a well-maintained environment plays a crucial role in encouraging customers to browse longer and feel comfortable making a purchase.

The use of actual sales data added depth to the findings by allowing comparisons between customer-reported experiences and the amount spent. Patterns such as higher average spend among customers that stayed longer, used the trial room, or visited physical stores more frequently suggest that experiential factors directly translate into economic outcomes for the store. Additionally, differences between in-store and online shopping preferences highlight the continued importance of physical retail in ethnic wear, where touch, fit, and personalized assistance remain highly valued.

While the study is limited by factors such as a single-store setting and the inability to calculate an exact conversion rate due to unknown footfall, it still offers meaningful insights grounded in real consumer behavior. Overall, the findings reinforce that in traditional ethnic retail, strong staff engagement combined with a comfortable and well-designed store environment can significantly shape purchase decisions and spending patterns. This research demonstrates how first-hand, store-level data can be effectively used to analyze consumer behavior in a real-world retail context.

AI Acknowledgements

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to improve language, grammar, and clarity. All analyses, interpretations, and final content were reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for the manuscript.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted using primary data collected at the Khwaab retail outlet. The author would like to thank the management of Khwaab for allowing access to store-level observations and sales data used in this study.

References

1. Businessresearchinsights.com. Indian ethnic wear market size, growth | report [2032] [Internet]. Business Research Insights. 2024 [cited 2026 July 21]. Available from: https://www.businessresearchinsights.com/market-reports/indian-ethnic-wear-market-117563

2. Bonafide Research. Global ethnic wear market outlook, 2030 [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 July 21]. Available from: https://www.bonafideresearch.com/press/251015531/global-ethnic-wear-market

3. Datum Intelligence. Share of ethnic wear in Overall apparel industry is to Decrease [Internet]. Datumintell. 2023 [cited 2026 July 21]. Available from: https://www.datumintell.in/ethnic-wear-vs-western-wear/

4. Online wedding shopping india 2026 [Internet]. FirstResort. 2026 [cited 2026 July 21]. Available from: https://www.firstresort.in/blogs/research/online-wedding-shopping-india-2026?utm_source=copilot.com

5. Magazine, A. World inequality report 2026: Top 10% earners in India capture 58% of national income, bottom 50% get only 15%. The Indian Express [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 July 21];. Available from: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/top-10-earners-in-india-capture-58-of-national-income-bottom-50-get-only-15-world-inequality-report-2026-10412748/

6. Pattammal V. Economic impact of Terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir. Electronic journal of Social and strategic studies. 2021;02(02):259–69.

7. Zargar S. Why businessmen in Jammu are mourning the end of the J&K government's 'darbar move.' Scrollin [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2026 July 21];. Available from: https://scroll.in/article/1005904/why-businessmen-in-jammu-are-mourning-the-end-of-the-j-k-governments-darbar-move

8. Donovan R, Rossiter J. Store atmosphere and purchasing behavior. Journal of Retailing [Internet]. 1994 [cited 2026 July 21];70(3):283–94. Available from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/002243599490037X

9. Solomon MR. Consumer behavior: Why we buy. The business & management collection. 2013;2013(8):e1003317.

10. Muzumdar P, Basyal GP, Vyas P. Moderating effects of Retail operations and Hard-Sell sales techniques on salesperson's interpersonal skills and customer repurchase intention. Journal of Management research. 2020 Dec 15;13(1):21.

11. Liliyan A. The role of Elements in Visual merchandising on impulsive buying in Retail stores (study on SW market stores in Bantul). Journal of Social science and business studies [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2026 July 21];2(4):260–7. Available from: https://doi.org/10.61487/jssbs.v2i4.120

586