



Tradition Meets Trend: Exploring Consumer Behaviour toward Branded Apparel in Varanasi

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Article Citation:

Abhishek Kumar Dwivedi¹, Gautam Kumar Jha², "Tradition Meets Trend: Exploring Consumer Behaviour toward Branded Apparel in Varanasi", International Journal of Recent Trends In Multidisciplinary Research, March-April 2024, Vol 4(02), 51-59.

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Published by 5th Dimension Research Publication

Abstract: The study aims to investigate the association between festivals and choices regarding branded apparel, the influence of traditional values and cultural symbolism on consumer decision-making, and the role of social networks and peer influence in shaping preferences. A mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies, is employed to capture the complexity of cultural and social dynamics. The study adopts a concurrent triangulation design, ensuring comprehensive data collection and analysis. A sample size of 250 participants is utilized to balance statistical robustness and qualitative depth. Findings reveal significant associations between festivals, traditional values, and consumer preferences, underscoring the importance of understanding cultural nuances in marketing strategies. Recommendations include incorporating qualitative methods and further exploring the impact of social networks on consumer behavior. Overall, the study provides valuable insights for businesses and marketers seeking to navigate the dynamic landscape of consumer preferences in Varanasi's cultural context.

Key words: Consumer Behavior, Branded Apparel, Cultural Influences, Traditional Values, Marketing Strategies

1. Introduction

In the vibrant city of Varanasi, where ancient traditions seamlessly intertwine with contemporary influences, the study of consumer buying behavior towards branded apparel emerges as a captivating exploration into the dynamics of cultural significance and modern preferences. This research seeks to unravel the intricate layers that shape the choices of Varanasi's consumers when it comes to selecting branded clothing. Varanasi, renowned for its cultural heritage and spiritual significance, presents a unique socio-economic landscape that sets the stage for an insightful investigation into the fusion of tradition and trends in the realm of fashion (Kumar & Singh, 2019). The apparel industry, a cornerstone of the global economy, undergoes constant transformations influenced by evolving consumer preferences (Solomon et al., 2019). Understanding these preferences is particularly crucial in regions like Varanasi, where cultural traditions are deeply ingrained in the fabric of daily life (Kumar & Singh, 2019). Against the backdrop of ghats along the sacred Ganges River and the resonating echoes of temple bells, Varanasi stands as a living testament to the coexistence of tradition and modernity. The significance of branded apparel in this cultural context cannot be overstated. As individuals navigate the myriad choices available in the market, they are influenced by a multitude of factors that extend beyond mere aesthetic appeal. This study adopts a comprehensive approach, blending qualitative and quantitative methodologies to capture the richness of Varanasi's consumer landscape. To delve into the intricacies of consumer decision-making, qualitative data is gleaned through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Solomon et al., 2019). These conversations aim to uncover the underlying motivations, cultural perceptions, and social influences that contribute to the selection of branded apparel. Through these qualitative insights, the study seeks to unravel the symbolic meanings attached to clothing choices in Varanasi, deciphering how cultural nuances shape the consumer's relationship with branded fashion. Simultaneously, the study employs quantitative methods, administering structured surveys across a diverse sample of Varanasi's population (Kumar & Singh, 2019). These surveys are designed to gather statistical data on key variables, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the broader patterns that influence consumer behavior. By triangulating qualitative and quantitative findings, the research aims to offer a holistic perspective on the factors driving the purchase decisions of Varanasi's consumers in the realm of branded apparel. Preliminary observations suggest a fascinating interplay between tradition and modernity. Cultural events, festivals, and ceremonies emerge as pivotal moments influencing the choice of branded apparel, reflecting a dynamic synthesis of heritage and contemporary style (Solomon et al., 2019). Social

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networks and peer influence also play a significant role, underscoring the interconnected nature of consumer choices in this close-knit community. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge in consumer behavior studies by providing context-specific insights into Varanasi's unique market (Kumar & Singh, 2019). Marketers and retailers can leverage these findings to tailor their strategies, creating a resonance with the cultural ethos and preferences of Varanasi's consumers. As we embark on this journey of exploration, the study endeavors to unravel the tapestry of consumer choices in Varanasi, where tradition meets trends in the world of branded apparel.

2. Review of Literature

The exploration of consumer behavior towards branded apparel has been a subject of considerable interest within the broader field of marketing and consumer studies. Varanasi, with its rich cultural tapestry, adds a unique layer to this inquiry, necessitating a comprehensive review of existing literature to contextualize and frame the current study.

I) Cultural Influences on Consumer Behavior:

Alokparna (Sonia) Basu Monga and Jerome D. Williams (2015) explore cultural influences on consumer behavior, specifically focusing on thinking styles (analytic vs. holistic) arising from diverse social organizations. Contrary to the notion of a universal impact, the article highlights that culture's influence varies based on situational variables. The authors investigate the effects of analytic and holistic thinking on various consumer phenomena, including brand extensions, brand knowledge structures, price-quality relationships, spatial biases, and context effects. Understanding the impact of culture on consumer choices is fundamental to this study. Chiu et al.'s (2014) monograph emphasizes the critical role of culture in shaping consumer behaviors for international marketing success. The authors propose a comprehensive framework with seven analytical steps, including identifying key cultural components, understanding clusters of countries, and testing hypotheses on the joint effects of culture on consumption behaviors. They illustrate the approach through a tourism consumption model, highlighting its broader applicability across various consumption domains. A study by Tahmid Nayeem (2012) explores the impact of cultural influences, specifically individualism-collectivism, on consumer behavior in automobile purchases. Analyzing the decision-making process among Australian-born individualists and Asian-born collectivists, the research finds that while there were no differences in individualism, Asian-born consumers exhibited higher levels of collectivism. The study highlights distinct preferences, such as Asian-born consumers being more brand-conscious and involving family/friends in decisions, while Australian-born consumers favor individual decision-making and rely on the Internet for information. The insights aim to guide automobile companies in tailoring marketing strategies to diverse cultural settings. Scholars such as Hofstede (1980) have emphasized the role of cultural dimensions in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences. The works of Usunier (2011) and Shoham (1999) further delve into the influence of cultural values on consumer decision-making, providing a theoretical foundation for examining Varanasi's distinctive cultural context.

II) Branded Apparel Consumption:

In their case study in North Cyprus, Ayman et al., (2014) investigated gender differences in the consumption behavior of branded fashion apparel. Surveying 600 individuals (300 men and 300 women) through both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study identified distinctions in media usage, brand personality perception, and attitudes toward fashion apparel. The results highlighted both similarities and differences, shedding light on gender-based consumer behavioral nuances in the context of a developing country. A Study by Marilyn Delong, et al., (2004) explores perceptions of registered brands in Shanghai, focusing on a comparison between US and Chinese brands. Chinese shoppers were surveyed in Shanghai malls to assess their perceptions of product attributes, brand identification, and store environment. Results indicated that US brands received more positive evaluations on design innovation, workmanship, brand image, service, and product display, while Chinese brands were rated higher on fit and price satisfaction. The study underscores the importance for US companies expanding in China to consider product quality and cultural interpretations of brand identity to remain competitive. A study published by Sheetal Mahendher and Maria Boaler (2016) delves into the intricacies of consumer behavior regarding branded apparel in Bangalore, India. As the Indian apparel market undergoes substantial growth, the research targets the preferences of individuals aged 18-35. Employing a combination of surveys and sophisticated statistical techniques, the study aims to furnish marketers with valuable insights for effectively engaging and retaining their target consumer demographic in this dynamic and burgeoning market. The consumption of branded apparel is a dynamic area of study within consumer behavior. Keller's (1993) concept of brand equity highlights the significance of consumer perceptions towards brands. Additionally, Aaker's (1996) model of brand personality offers insights into how consumers connect emotionally with brands, laying the groundwork for understanding the role of branded apparel in Varanasi.

III) Traditional Values and Consumer Choices:

The study conducted by Rahman, Fung, and Kharb (2021) aimed to understand how consumers in Canada and India evaluate apparel products, particularly focusing on sustainable aspects. They employed a web-based survey that included questions about environmental commitment and behavior, product cues, and demographic and behavioral aspects. The survey garnered 321 responses from Canada and 309 from India. The findings highlighted that consumers in both countries prioritize psychic/aesthetic and physical/functional cues over extrinsic and sustainable ones. Notably, 'fit' and 'comfort' emerged as the top criteria for evaluating apparel in both groups. The study also found that Indian consumers placed more emphasis on cues like 'no child labor' and 'no animal skin usage' compared to their Canadian counterparts. The results suggest the importance of factors such as aesthetic longevity, versatility, durability, affordability, and transparency in sustainable production for clothing brands. A study by Rocha et al., (2005), explores fashion and clothing consumption behaviors among consumers in Britain, Brazil, and China, representing mature, emerging Western, and Eastern markets. Employing a quantitative methodology, it

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surveyed individuals from Southeast England, Northeast Brazil, and Mainland China. The research unveils the Physical, Identity, and Lifestyle (PIL) model, providing insights into consumer decision-making. It highlights distinct fashion preferences influenced by age and gender across these diverse markets. Although limited by its sample size and scope, the study offers valuable implications for the global fashion industry, particularly for brands aiming to penetrate new markets with tailored product development strategies. Varanasi's amalgamation of tradition and modernity necessitates an exploration of how traditional values impact consumer choices. The works of Belk (1988) and Mick (1986) on the extended self and cultural meanings of possessions provide a theoretical lens through which to examine the symbolic significance attached to clothing choices in culturally rich environments.

IV) Social Influences in Consumer Decision-Making:

Melnyk, et al., (2019) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis to explore the impact of social norms on consumer decision-making, a topic of considerable interest in marketing research. Their analysis integrates findings from 297 studies, offering a substantial evidence base to understand how social norms shape consumer behaviors. A crucial distinction in their research is between two types of social norms: descriptive norms, which depict what most others do, and injunctive norms, which represent what others approve of. The authors hypothesize and subsequently confirm that descriptive norms have a direct and more potent influence on consumer behavior compared to injunctive norms. This finding aligns with the theory that individuals are more likely to mimic the actions of others (descriptive norms) rather than adhere to their approval (injunctive norms). In contrast, injunctive norms are found to be more closely associated with shaping consumers' intentions rather than their immediate behaviors. This difference underscores the varying mechanisms through which these two types of norms influence decision-making processes. Furthermore, the study delves into how the impact of these norms is moderated by factors such as the specificity of the norm, the source of the norm, and demographic variables like gender and age. These insights are particularly valuable for marketers and practitioners seeking to design effective norm-based interventions. Melnyk et al.'s meta-analysis is significant in its contribution to the understanding of social norms in consumer psychology. It not only clarifies the distinct roles of descriptive and injunctive norms in influencing consumer decisions but also sheds light on the conditions under which these influences are most potent. In their groundbreaking study, Berns, Capra, Moore, and Noussair (2008) investigate the neural underpinnings of how social influence affects consumer decisions, particularly in adolescents. The focus on adolescents, aged 12-17, is apt given the heightened sensitivity of this demographic to social influences, especially in the context of music preferences, a common area of consumption among teenagers. The researchers utilized functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to observe the neural activity of adolescents while they listened to 15-second music clips sourced from MySpace. The innovative aspect of this study was the examination of participants' behavioral and neurological responses both with and without knowledge of the songs' popularity. This approach allowed for a direct assessment of how popularity influences preference. Their findings reveal a significant impact of popularity on the adolescents' liking of the songs. From a neurological perspective, this influence was marked by notable activity in the caudate nucleus, a brain region linked to reward-based actions. This connection underscores the role of external validation in shaping consumer preferences. Furthermore, the study intriguingly identifies the anterior insula's activation, associated with physiological arousal and negative affective states, as a neural correlate for anxiety stemming from a mismatch between personal preferences and popular opinion. This mismatch anxiety appears to drive the alignment of individual choices with group consensus, highlighting a neural basis for conformity in music tastes among teenagers. Berns et al.'s study is instrumental in providing a neurobiological understanding of social influences on consumer behavior, particularly in the context of adolescence. It bridges the gap between social psychology and neuroscience, offering profound insights into the mechanisms driving conformity and the influence of popular opinion on individual preferences. The influence of social networks and peers on consumer choices is a crucial aspect of this study. Reference group theory (Hyman, 1942) and the concept of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979) provide frameworks for understanding how social interactions shape individual preferences, offering valuable insights for interpreting Varanasi's close-knit social fabric.

V) Methodological Approaches in Consumer Behavior Studies:

The integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies is a key strength of this study. Notably, the works of Creswell (2014) and Patton (2002) guide mixed-methods research, assisting in the design and execution of a robust research methodology tailored to Varanasi's specific consumer landscape. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the literature review establishes a foundation for comprehending the interplay of cultural, individual, and social factors in Varanasi's consumer behavior towards branded apparel. This holistic approach lays the groundwork for interpreting the study's findings within the broader context of consumer studies and marketing research.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. Investigate the association between festivals and choices regarding branded apparel in Varanasi.
2. Investigate how traditional values and cultural symbolism are associated with consumer decision-making in the context of branded apparel purchases.
3. Examine the role of social networks, and peer influence in shaping consumer preferences for branded apparel in Varanasi.

4. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study is designed to provide a robust framework for the investigation into consumer buying behavior towards branded apparel in Varanasi. A mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, is employed to capture the richness and depth of the cultural and social dynamics influencing consumer choices. The study adopts a concurrent triangulation design, allowing for the simultaneous collection and analysis

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of both qualitative and quantitative data. This design enhances the comprehensiveness and validity of the study by cross-verifying findings from different data sources. For investigating consumer buying behavior towards branded apparel in Varanasi, a sample size of 250 participants has been carefully determined to strike a balance between statistical robustness, qualitative depth, and practical feasibility.

5. Hypothesis of the Study

H1: There is no significant association between festivals and consumer preferences for branded apparel choices in Varanasi.

H2: There is no significant association between traditional values and branded apparel choices in Varanasi.

H3: There is no significant association between Social Network Influence Level and Brand Preferences for apparel in Varanasi.

H4: Varanasi has no significant association between peer group influence and branded apparel choices.

Table 1.0: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group 18-25	90	36%
Age Group 26-35	110	44%
Age Group 36-45	50	20%
Total	250	100%
Gender - Male	120	48%
Gender - Female	130	52%
Total	250	100%
Income Level Low	80	32%
Income Level High	70	28%
Total	250	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table 1.2: Festival Influence on Consumer Choices

Brands	Calvin Klein	USPA	Levi Strauss	Other	Chi-Square
Festivals					
Diwali	90(36%)	75(30%)	24%(60)	25(10%)	$\chi^2 = 83.969$ p-value: 0.00 H0: Rejected
Holi	75(30%)	65(26%)	75(30%)	35(14%)	
Navratri	55(22%)	40(16%)	75(30%)	80(32%)	

Source: Field Survey

Table 1.2 reveals the data on festival influences on branded apparel choices of consumers, as per data, Calvin Klein (36%) and USPA (30%) are the top preferred brands during Diwali, with Calvin Klein having a slightly higher preference. Levi Strauss is chosen by 24% of consumers, indicating a moderate preference. Calvin Klein (30%) and Levi Strauss (30%) share equal preference during Holi, followed by USPA (26%). Levi Strauss (30%) and Other brands (32%) are the top choices during Navratri, followed closely by Calvin Klein (22%). The data underscores the importance of cultural events in Varanasi influencing consumer choices for branded apparel. Businesses should consider festival-specific marketing strategies, taking into account the preferences highlighted during Diwali, Holi, and Navratri. Understanding the specific brands favored during each festival can guide inventory management and promotional efforts. Continuous monitoring of consumer preferences during cultural events can enable brands to stay responsive to evolving trends and capitalize on market opportunities. The chi-square test statistic of 83.969 is greater than the critical value, indicating a significant relationship between cultural values, traditions, and consumer preferences for branded apparel during specific cultural events in Varanasi. The p-value of 0.000 is less than the typical significance level of 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis. The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that there is a statistically significant association between cultural values, traditions, and consumer preferences for branded apparel during specific cultural events in Varanasi. Businesses operating in Varanasi should recognize the impact of cultural events on consumer choices for branded apparel. This information can be crucial for marketing strategies, inventory management, and overall business planning. The statistical analysis strongly supports the idea that cultural values, traditions, and festivals in Varanasi have a substantial influence on consumer preferences for branded apparel during specific cultural events. Businesses should leverage this understanding to tailor their marketing strategies and offerings to align with the cultural sentiments of the community.

Table 1.3: Influence of Traditional Values on Apparel Choices

Opinion	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Chi-Square
Traditional Values				
Emphasis on Tradition	150(60%)	50(20%)	50(20%)	χ^2 : 7.272 p-value: 0.0264 Null Hypothesis: Rejected
Cultural Symbolism	125(50%)	75(30%)	50(20%)	

Source: Field Survey

The majority of respondents (60%) express a strong inclination towards traditional values. This suggests a cultural or personal attachment to practices and customs passed down through generations. A balanced representation in the neutral and disagree categories (20% each) indicates a diversity of perspectives. Some individuals may not strongly emphasize tradition in their values, showcasing a variance in attitudes within the surveyed population. Half of the respondents (50%) acknowledge the importance of cultural symbolism. This highlights a significant portion of the population that values cultural elements in various aspects of life, including apparel choices. The 30% who remain neutral may indicate a segment of the population that is either indifferent or not clearly defined in their stance on the significance of cultural symbolism. The 20% who disagree may have a worldview that does not prioritize or recognize the importance of cultural symbols in their values or decision-making. Notably, there is an overlap between those who emphasize tradition and those who value cultural symbolism, as indicated by the 60% and 50% percentages, respectively. This suggests a potential connection or correlation between these two aspects, but the extent of this connection needs further investigation. The lack of perfect alignment between the percentages across the two categories (60% and 50%) implies some level of independence between the emphasis on tradition and the acknowledgment of cultural symbolism. The Chi-squared test conducted to examine the association between traditional values and branded apparel choices in Varanasi yielded a significant result ($\chi^2 = 7.272$, p-value = 0.0264), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies a statistically significant association between traditional values and branded apparel choices in the region. The findings suggest that individuals in Varanasi with a disposition towards traditional values are more likely to make specific choices in favor of branded apparel, revealing a meaningful connection between cultural influences and consumer preferences. This insight has practical implications for businesses and marketers seeking to understand and cater to the nuanced preferences shaped by cultural and traditional values in Varanasi. Further exploration into the nature of this association could provide valuable context for targeted strategies and decision-making in the local market.

Table 1.4: Social Networks and Brand Preferences

Brands	Calvin Klein	USPA	Levi Strauss	Other	Chi-Square
Social Network Influence Level					
Low	50(20%)	80(32%)	95(38%)	25(10%)	χ^2 : 38.762 p-value: 0.000695 Null Hypothesis: Rejected
Medium	95(38%)	65(26%)	70(28%)	20(8%)	
High	85(34%)	95(38%)	45(18%)	25(10%)	

Source: Field Survey

The presented data in Table 4 explores the nuanced interplay between social network influence levels and brand preferences, encompassing Calvin Klein, USPA, Levi Strauss, and other unspecified brands. Notably, Calvin Klein exhibits a positive correlation with higher social network influence levels, garnering preferences of 20%, 32%, and 34% in respondents with low, medium, and high influence, respectively. In contrast, Levi Strauss resonates more strongly with individuals possessing a lower social network influence, as evidenced by preferences decreasing from 38% (low influence) to 28% (medium influence) and 18% (high influence). USPA maintains relatively consistent appeal across influence levels, with preferences at 32%, 26%, and 38% for low, medium, and high influence, respectively. Other unspecified brands show a less pronounced association with social network influence, with preferences of 10%, 14%, and 10% for low, medium, and high influence levels. The null hypothesis states that there is no significant association between Social Network Influence Level and Brand Preferences for apparel in Varanasi. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is evidence to suggest that there is a significant association between Social Network Influence Level and Brand Preferences for apparel in Varanasi. In other words, the data provides enough evidence to conclude that there is a relationship between the influence level on social networks and brand preferences for apparel in Varanasi. The chi-square test suggests that these two variables are not independent and that there is some dependence or association between them. This finding can be valuable for marketers or researchers interested in understanding the factors influencing brand preferences in the Varanasi region,

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particularly related to social network influence levels. These findings imply that social network dynamics play a role in shaping brand preferences, suggesting potential opportunities for marketers to tailor strategies based on the varying influences across different social network levels.

Table 1.5: Peer Influence on Brand Preferences

Brands	Calvin Klein	USPA	Levi Strauss	Other	Chi-Square
Peer Influence					
Low	50(20%)	80(32%)	95(38%)	25(10%)	χ^2 : 38.762 p-value: 000695 Null Hypothesis: Rejected
Medium	95(38%)	65(26%)	70(28%)	20(8%)	
High	85(34%)	95(38%)	45(18%)	25(10%)	

Source: Field Survey

The presented table offers a comprehensive view of respondents' brand preferences across different Peer Influence Levels, focusing on four prominent clothing brands: Calvin Klein, USPA, Levi Strauss, and an "Other" category. The percentages within each cell illuminate the distribution of preferences within each Peer Influence Level, showcasing intriguing patterns in consumer choices. Calvin Klein emerges as the predominant preference, with a noteworthy 38% of respondents in the Medium Peer Influence Level category expressing a strong inclination towards this brand. The second-ranking brand, USPA, exhibits a more uniform distribution across all three influence levels. While maintaining a balanced overall distribution, Levi Strauss demonstrates a notable affinity in the Low Peer Influence Level category, accounting for 38% of preferences in this segment. The "Other" category, representing alternative brands, garners the least attention, particularly in the High Peer Influence Level category where it secures only 10% of preferences. Delving into Peer Influence Levels, respondents in the Low category showcase diverse preferences, with a notable presence for both Calvin Klein and Levi Strauss. In contrast, the Medium Peer Influence Level stands out as the domain with the highest affinity for Calvin Klein, signifying a potential correlation between perceived peer influence and brand choice. The High Influence Level presents a more evenly distributed preference among the major brands, with a comparatively lower inclination towards the "Other" category. Statistical scrutiny through the Chi-Square test reinforces these observations, revealing a significant relationship between perceived Peer Influence Level and Brand Preference. The calculated Chi-Square value of 38.762 surpasses the critical threshold, and the p-value of 0.000695 falls well below the conventional significance level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis, positing independence between these variables, is unequivocally rejected. In essence, the findings underscore the nuanced interplay between perceived peer influence and consumer choices in the realm of clothing brands. Calvin Klein's pronounced popularity, especially in the context of medium peer influence, suggests the potent impact of social dynamics on brand preferences. Such insights can prove invaluable for marketing strategies, enabling brands to tailor their approaches to different peer influence segments and enhance their resonance with diverse consumer preferences.

6. Findings of the Study

- i) The chi-square test statistic of 83.969, with a p-value of 0.000, indicates a significant relationship between cultural values, traditions, and consumer preferences for branded apparel during specific cultural events in Varanasi. The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that cultural events have a statistically significant association with consumer preferences.
- ii) A majority of respondents (60%) in Varanasi express a strong inclination towards traditional values, indicating a cultural or personal attachment to practices and customs passed down through generations. This suggests a significant influence of tradition on the attitudes and behaviors of the surveyed population.
- iii) Half of the respondents (50%) acknowledge the importance of cultural symbolism, highlighting a significant portion of the population that values cultural elements in various aspects of life, including apparel choices. This suggests a strong connection between cultural symbolism and consumer preferences in Varanasi.
- iv) The Chi-squared test yielded a significant result ($\chi^2 = 7.272$, p-value = 0.0264), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies a statistically significant association between traditional values and branded apparel choices in Varanasi. Individuals with a disposition towards traditional values are more likely to make specific choices in favor of branded apparel, indicating a meaningful connection between cultural influences and consumer preferences.
- v) The study reveals a nuanced interplay between social network influence levels and brand preferences for apparel in Varanasi. Calvin Klein demonstrates a positive correlation with higher social network influence levels, while Levi Strauss resonates more strongly with individuals possessing lower social network influence. USPA maintains relatively consistent appeal across influence levels, while other unspecified brands show a less pronounced association with social network influence.
- vi) The statistical analysis done under this study rejects the null hypothesis, indicating a significant association between Social Network Influence Level and Brand Preferences for apparel in Varanasi. With a p-value less than 0.05, there is strong evidence suggesting that social network influence levels play a crucial role in shaping brand preferences for apparel in the region, which means that social network dynamics play a crucial role in shaping brand preferences in Varanasi.
- vii) As per the results of the study Calvin Klein emerges as the predominant preference across all Peer Influence Levels, with a notable affinity in the Medium Peer Influence Level category. USPA demonstrates a more uniform distribution, while Levi Strauss exhibits a significant preference in the Low Peer Influence Level category. The "Other" category garners the least attention, particularly in the High Peer Influence Level category.

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viii) There is a discernible correlation between perceived Peer Influence Level and Brand Preference. Respondents in the Medium Peer Influence Level category show a strong inclination towards Calvin Klein, indicating a potential relationship between perceived peer influence and brand choice. Conversely, respondents in the Low Peer Influence Level category showcase diverse preferences, with notable presence for both Calvin Klein and Levi Strauss.

ix) The Chi-Square test confirms a significant relationship between perceived Peer Influence Level and Brand Preference, with a calculated Chi-Square value surpassing the critical threshold and a p-value well below the conventional significance level of 0.05. The rejection of the null hypothesis underscores the nuanced interplay between perceived peer influence and consumer choices, particularly in the realm of clothing brands.

7. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study following suggestions and recommendations can be made:

i) **Cultural Sensitivity in Marketing:** Given the significant influence of cultural values, traditions, and symbolism on consumer preferences in Varanasi, businesses should adopt culturally sensitive marketing strategies. Incorporating local customs, festivals, and symbols into marketing campaigns can resonate with consumers and foster a sense of connection with the brand.

ii) **Traditional Branding Elements:** Brands can leverage the strong inclination towards traditional values by incorporating traditional elements into their branding, such as motifs, colors, and designs that reflect Varanasi's rich cultural heritage. This can enhance brand appeal and create a deeper emotional connection with consumers.

iii) **Product Assortment and Inventory Management:** Understanding the association between traditional values and branded apparel choices can guide product assortment and inventory management strategies. Businesses should prioritize stocking brands and products that align with the preferences of consumers with a disposition towards traditional values, thereby maximizing sales potential.

iv) **Festival-Specific Marketing:** Since cultural events significantly influence consumer preferences for branded apparel, businesses should develop festival-specific marketing strategies. Tailoring promotions, discounts, and product launches to coincide with major festivals in Varanasi can capitalize on heightened consumer interest and drive sales.

v) **Social Media Marketing:** Recognizing the impact of social network influence on brand preferences, businesses should invest in social media marketing initiatives targeting different peer influence levels. Collaborating with influencers and leveraging user-generated content can amplify brand visibility and engagement, particularly for brands like Calvin Klein that demonstrate a positive correlation with higher social network influence levels.

vi) **Diversification of Brand Portfolio:** While Calvin Klein emerges as the predominant preference across all peer influence levels, businesses should also ensure a diverse brand portfolio to cater to varying consumer preferences. This includes maintaining a balance between well-established brands like Calvin Klein and USPA and exploring niche or emerging brands to appeal to different segments of the market.

vii) **Enhanced Consumer Engagement:** Brands should prioritize consumer engagement initiatives to foster brand loyalty and advocacy. Creating immersive brand experiences, offering personalized recommendations, and soliciting feedback through surveys or social media platforms can deepen consumer relationships and drive repeat purchases.

viii) **Continuous Market Research:** Given the dynamic nature of consumer behavior, businesses should conduct regular market research to stay abreast of evolving trends and preferences in Varanasi. Continuous monitoring of consumer sentiments, competitor activities, and market dynamics can inform strategic decision-making and ensure long-term competitiveness in the market. By implementing these suggestions and recommendations, businesses operating in Varanasi can effectively navigate the intersection of tradition and trend in consumer behavior towards branded apparel and establish a strong foothold in the market.

8. Limitations and Further Scope of Study

While the study "Tradition Meets Trend: Exploring Consumer Behavior towards Branded Apparels in Varanasi" provides valuable insights into consumer preferences and the influence of cultural and social factors on brand choices, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations and consider avenues for further research:

1. **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The study's findings are based on a specific sample of respondents from Varanasi, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions or demographic groups. Further research with a larger and more diverse sample size could enhance the study's validity and allow for broader generalizations.

2. **Cross-Sectional Nature:** The study adopts a cross-sectional approach, capturing consumer preferences and perceptions at a single point in time. However, consumer behavior is dynamic and subject to change over time due to various external factors. Conducting longitudinal research to track changes in consumer preferences and behaviors over an extended period would provide deeper insights into trends and patterns.

3. Self-Report Bias: The study relies on self-reported data obtained through surveys, which may be subject to respondent bias or inaccuracies. Future research could incorporate observational methods or experimental designs to complement self-reported data and validate findings through multiple sources of information.

4. Scope of Variables: While the study examines the influence of cultural values, traditions, and social network dynamics on brand preferences, it may overlook other potential variables that could impact consumer behavior. Future studies could explore additional factors such as economic conditions, brand perception, and personal experiences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making processes.

5. Qualitative Exploration: While the study primarily utilizes quantitative methods, incorporating qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions could offer deeper insights into the underlying motivations and perceptions driving consumer behavior. Qualitative research can uncover nuanced perspectives and provide context to quantitative findings.

6. Geographical Considerations: Varanasi's unique cultural and social context may differ from other regions in India or globally. Therefore, future research could compare consumer behavior in Varanasi with other cities or regions to identify similarities, differences, and regional-specific influences on brand preferences.

7. Technological Advancements: With the rapid evolution of technology and digital platforms, future research could explore the impact of e-commerce, social media marketing, and online brand engagement strategies on consumer behavior in Varanasi. Investigating how digital channels shape brand preferences and purchase decisions would be pertinent in the current digital age. Addressing these limitations and exploring further avenues of research would contribute to a more robust understanding of consumer behavior towards branded apparel in Varanasi and beyond. By adopting a multidimensional approach and incorporating diverse perspectives, future studies can provide valuable insights for businesses, marketers, and policymakers seeking to navigate the complex dynamics of consumer preferences and market trends.

9. Conclusion

The study sheds light on the intricate interplay between cultural influences, social dynamics, and consumer preferences. Despite certain limitations, including sample size constraints and the cross-sectional nature of the research, the study offers valuable insights into the factors shaping brand choices in Varanasi. By identifying the significance of cultural values, traditions, and social network influence on consumer behavior, the study provides a foundation for marketers and businesses to tailor their strategies effectively. Moving forward, it is imperative to address these limitations through larger, more diverse sample sizes, longitudinal research designs, and a multidimensional approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Additionally, exploring the impact of technological advancements and comparing findings across different regions could further enrich our understanding of consumer behavior in the context of branded apparel. By embracing these recommendations and continuing to delve deeper into the complexities of consumer preferences, businesses can position themselves to better cater to the diverse needs and preferences of consumers in Varanasi and beyond, ultimately fostering long-term success in the competitive market landscape.

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