

Why Customers Walk Out of a Jewellery Store Without Buying - Even When They Like the Product:

A Study of Emotional and Experiential Gaps in Luxury Retail

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Abstract - In the jewellery retail industry, attracting customers with appealing products does not always guarantee purchase completion. A significant number of customers leave stores without making a purchase, even when they genuinely like the design, quality, and pricing. This research paper investigates and explores the psychological, behavioural, and experiential reasons underlying this common retail challenge. Drawing on retail observations, sales training insights, and consumer behaviour theories, the study identifies key reasons, including poor listening, pressure tactics, a lack of emotional connection, choice overload, and insufficient trust-building. The paper concludes that enhancing customer experience and improving sales competencies are more effective strategies than focusing solely on product attributes to reduce customer walkouts and foster lasting brand loyalty.

Keywords - Jewellery retail, customer walkout, sales experience, emotional decision-making, luxury buying behaviour

I. INTRODUCTION

The jewellery market, particularly in regions such as South India, is defined by high-involvement purchases, deep cultural significance, and strong emotional sensitivity. Unlike everyday consumer goods, buying jewellery often involves family decision-making, long-term value considerations, and ritualistic importance during occasions like weddings and festivals. Given this context, one would expect that customers who genuinely admire a product's design, quality, and pricing would readily complete a purchase. However, retailers frequently encounter a puzzling and costly problem: a significant number of customers leave stores empty-handed, even after expressing clear interest in a specific piece.

This apparent disconnect between product liking and purchase conversion lies at the heart of this study. While much of the existing retail literature focuses on attracting customers through product assortment, visual merchandising, and pricing strategies, comparatively less attention has been paid to understanding why interested buyers walk out without transacting. This paper investigates the psychological, behavioural, and experiential factors that lead to such walkouts. Drawing on retail observations, sales training insights, and consumer behaviour theories, the study aims to identify

actionable reasons behind this phenomenon and argues that improving customer experience and sales competency is more critical than further product enhancement for reducing walkouts and building long-term loyalty.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Decision-Making in Luxury Retail

According to Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000) [1], luxury purchases are primarily driven by affective responses and self-image congruence. Customers do not merely evaluate functional utility; they seek emotional alignment between the product and their personal identity. In jewellery retail, this means that even when a piece is objectively attractive, a purchase may fail if the customer does not feel deserving, comfortable, or emotionally ready. Scholars such as Belk (1988) have also noted that luxury goods serve as extended selves, making emotional resonance a prerequisite for transaction completion.

The Role of Salesperson Behaviour

Soderlund and Rosengren (2008) [10] found that attentive, low-pressure selling significantly increases purchase confidence, while high-pressure tactics elevate post-purchase regret and in-store walkouts. Extending this to jewellery, Reynolds and Arnold (2000) argued that relational selling, where the salesperson acts as a consultant rather than a closer, enhances both satisfaction and loyalty. In contrast, aggressive behaviours such as forced urgency, repeated questioning, or dismissive attitudes trigger psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966), leading customers to withdraw from the purchase altogether.

Choice Overload

Iyengar and Lepper (2000) [7] demonstrated through jam-tasting experiments that an overabundance of options reduces purchase likelihood. This phenomenon, known as choice overload, is particularly relevant in jewellery retail, where variations in cut, carat, colour, and design can overwhelm customers. Chernev (2003) further noted that choice overload intensifies when buyers lack clear prior preferences a common scenario in jewellery shopping. Without expert curation,

customers experience decision paralysis and often exit the store to avoid post-decision regret.

Trust and Relationship Building

In high-value, infrequent purchases like jewellery, trust in the salesperson's integrity is paramount. Morgan and Hunt (1994) identified trust as a key mediator in relationship marketing, directly influencing commitment and purchase intention. In jewellery contexts, lack of transparency in pricing, certification, or return policies erodes confidence. Similarly, Doney and Cannon (1997) [3] found that personalised guidance and consistent communication build perceived trustworthiness, reducing perceived risk and walkout likelihood.

The Influence of Social and Cultural Factors

In culturally rich markets such as South India, jewellery purchases are rarely individual decisions. Miller (2001) [5] observed that gifting rituals, familial approval, and community norms heavily influence buying behaviour. For example, during weddings or festivals, the absence of a family member's endorsement can stall a transaction. Furthermore, Eckhardt and Mahi (2004)[4] noted that social visibility of jewellery its role in displaying status within community events means customers are highly sensitive to how a purchase reflects on their social standing. Retailers who ignore these cultural dynamics risk losing sales despite strong individual liking.

The Role of Store Environment and Sensory Experience

Bitner (1992) [8] proposed the Servicescape Model, arguing that physical environment cues lighting, layout, aroma, and music significantly affect customer emotions and behaviours. In jewellery stores, high-quality visual merchandising and comfortable seating reduce perceived waiting time and stress. Spangenberg et al. (1996) [11] found that pleasant ambient scents increase approach behaviour and purchase duration. Conversely, crowded displays, poor lighting, or intrusive store layouts increase cognitive load and exit intent. For high-involvement goods like jewellery, a serene, private browsing environment facilitates emotional connection and reduces walkouts.

Post-Decision Regret and Anticipated Regret

Research by Simonson (1992) [17] introduced the concept of anticipated regret customers imagining how they might feel after a wrong purchase. In jewellery buying, where financial and emotional stakes are high, customers frequently walk out not because they dislike the product, but because they fear making a permanent mistake. Zeelenberg and Pieters (2007) [14] distinguished between action regret (regretting a purchase) and inaction regret (regretting a missed opportunity). Interestingly, in luxury retail, action regret is often more painful, leading customers to avoid immediate decisions. Salespeople who fail to offer reassurance, return guarantees, or cooling-off periods inadvertently amplify this fear.

The Impact of Digital Pre-Shopping Behaviour

With the rise of omnichannel retail, customers increasingly research online before visiting physical jewellery stores. Verhoef et al. (2015) [20] noted that showrooming examining products in-store after online research changes purchase dynamics. Customers may arrive with high product liking but

low purchase intent if they plan to buy later online or from a competitor. Additionally, inconsistent information between online and in-store channels (e.g., pricing, certification details) erodes trust. Neslin et al. (2006) [21] emphasised that seamless integration across touchpoints reduces walkouts, as customers feel confident that in-store decisions align with digital expectations.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in an interpretivist research philosophy, which holds that consumer behaviour is socially constructed, context-dependent, and shaped by emotional factors. A qualitative research approach was therefore adopted, as it enables a deep examination of the psychological, behavioural, and experiential reasons behind customer walkouts, a phenomenon that quantitative methods alone cannot fully capture. Unlike numerical data, qualitative inquiry uncovers the underlying motivations and subjective meanings that drive customer decisions.

Research Design

An exploratory, multi-method qualitative design was employed, combining three complementary data collection strategies:

Table 1. Data Collection

Method	Purpose
Non-participant observations	Capture real-time interactions between sales staff and customers
Sales professional feedback sessions	Gather practitioner perspectives on recurring walkout scenarios
Post-visit customer interviews	Understand the customer's lived experience and reasoning for exiting without purchase

This triangulation of data sources enhances credibility and validity by cross-verifying findings across different perspectives (sales staff, customers, and researcher observations).

Setting and Context

The study was conducted across 40 jewellery retail stores located in South India i.e Bengaluru. These stores ranged from:

- Large established chains (10+ outlets)
- Mid-sized regional players (3–5 outlets)
- Single-location family-owned jewellers.

The South Indian jewellery market was selected due to its high cultural significance, emotional involvement, and the frequent occurrence of walkouts despite strong product interest, a paradox commonly reported by retailers in this region

Data Collection Methods

a) Non-Participant Observations (2025–2026)

Duration and Scope:

- Observation period: 12 months (April 25–April 26)
- Total observation hours: 240+ hours across 40 stores
- Peak hours observed: Evenings (6 PM – 9 PM) and weekends (Saturday and Sunday)

b) Sales Professional Feedback Sessions

Sample:

- i) 120+ sales professionals trained and debriefed
- ii) Breakdown: 65 women, 55 men
- iii) Experience range: 6 months to 18 years in jewellery retail

c) Post-Visit Customer Interviews

Sample:

- i) 85 customers who left a jewellery store without purchasing, despite expressing clear liking for a product
- ii) Recruited at store exits immediately after walkout
- iii) Demographic breakdown:

Table 2: Demographic Breakdown

Demographic	Category	Count
Gender	Female	62
	Male	23
Age	18–30	28
	31–45	39
	46+	18
Purchase purpose	Self-use	34
	Wedding/festival gift	41
	Investment	10

IV. FINDINGS: KEY REASONS FOR WALKOUT

Based on the data and the observations summarised in the practitioner’s note, the following reasons emerged:

Rank	Reason	Customer Quote Example
1	The salesperson spoke more, listened less	“He kept describing the gold purity, but never asked what I needed.”
2	Felt pressured, not guided	“I was asked to decide immediately for a ‘special price’.”
3	No emotional connection to the product story	“It was just a weight and rate, not a memory.”
4	Too many options without help	“They showed 20 rings – I got confused and left.”
5	Trust not built	“I didn’t feel they had my interest at heart.”
6	Focus only on price/discount	“The conversation was only about making charges, not design meaning.”

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V. OUTCOMES

a) *The Expectation Gap*

Today’s customers expect more than product knowledge. They desire attention, patience, personal connection, honest guidance, and decision-making confidence. When stores provide only technical details, the emotional need remains unmet.

b) *Emotional vs. Financial Readiness*

A customer may be financially ready (budget, card, etc.) but emotionally unready. The sales interaction must bridge this gap by validating feelings, reducing risk perception, and creating a sense of “rightness.”

c) *The Cost of a Walkout*

One walkout is not just a lost sale. It represents:

- i. Lost repeat business
- ii. Lost referrals
- iii. Negative word-of-mouth
- iv. Lower lifetime customer value

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JEWELLERY RETAILERS

- a. **Train for listening, not just pitching** – Use active listening frameworks.
- b. **Replace pressure with guidance** – Adopt consultative selling.

- c. **Create emotional product stories** – Link jewellery to occasions, heritage, or personal milestones.
- d. **Limit options per interaction** – Use the “rule of three” (show max 3 similar products at a time).
- e. **Build trust through transparency** – Explain making charges, buyback policies, and certification upfront.
- f. **Measure experience, not just conversion** – Track “confidence to purchase” as a KPI.

VII. CONCLUSION

Customers often leave jewellery stores without purchasing, even when they genuinely like a product not because of price or quality alone, but because the sales experience fails to make them feel confident, understood, or emotionally connected. This study identified key psychological and behavioural factors behind such walkouts, including poor listening, high-pressure tactics, lack of trust, choice overload, and anticipated regret.

In luxury retail, investing in people and processes matters as much as investing in inventory. Stores that prioritise customer experience over transaction volume will see fewer walkouts and achieve stronger long-term growth.

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