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## MERWANA BLENDS DIGITAL MARKETING INTO THE FABRIC OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Seven years ago, pre-empting an emerging disruption in the ethnic wear sector, Pooja Shah took a leap of faith by taking their brick-and-mortar fashion brand, Merwana, online. In 2010, she, along with her husband Shivaji Shah, launched Merwanafashion.com to create a presence both online and offline as the e-commerce wave swept through the world. Merwana also aimed to plug a glaring but specific gap in the market for ethnic fusion wear.

It was Pooja's brush with a market reality that brought this 'gap' to her notice. It was the preparation for a December wedding of a cousin and best friend, who was flying down from the US that suddenly caught Pooja completely off guard. From choosing dresses for the trousseau, to clothes for Shivaji and herself for the different ceremonies, it was quite a whirlwind tour! But what really struck Pooja as odd was that the market had either very high-end designer wear or was flooded with low-end products in terms of both price points and quality. She needed clothes that were affordable yet chic for the different ceremonies that were lined up - *mehendi*, *sangeet*, the engagement and, of course, the wedding. Frantic searches, both in stores and online, revealed there was an opportunity in the market that was waiting to be exploited - that of premium yet affordable contemporary ethnic fusion wear. Merwanafashion.com was, thus, born to cater to high quality and premium ethnic segment of the market. As she sensed forward, Pooja realised this supply gap was not just in bridal wear but also in the non-bridal, occasion wear segment as a whole. Team Merwana was looking to give the market "a digitally-enabled fashion

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*Prof. Indranil Bose of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and Bhaswati Mukhopadhyay developed this case study as the basis for class discussion. This is a fictitious case study. Any resemblance to actual persons or organisations is purely coincidental.*

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house in essence and service” and not merely a platform for retail. The idea was to go global, especially tap into the diaspora customer base in the North Americas, the UK and elsewhere, with Merwana’s bridal, pret, and couture. They wanted to be a brand that would set the benchmark for all ethnic, occasion offerings.

The journey that started with just three employees in 2010 with the launch of Merwanafashion.com, posed many a critical question for Pooja and Shivaji. Some of the more pertinent ones were: How to build a brand strategy in order to scale up? If the answer to this was a non-linear growth path, then what kind of a path would that be? For a fragmented market, such as the one Merwanafashion was in, the dilemma further deepened when it came to the question of technology innovation. For Team Merwana, the key question was: What technology innovations could possibly keep them ahead in the game?