

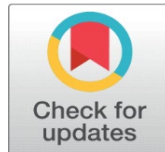
AUTHENTICITY IN CRAFTS IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CYBER BUSINESS MODULES

Harminder Singh ¹, Dr. Tejwant Brar ², Dr. Sachin Datt ³

¹ Research scholar Sushant University, Gurgaon, Associate Professor, Associate Professor, ISDI Atlas Skill Tech University, Mumbai

² Professor, School of Art and Architecture, Sushant University, Gurgaon

³ Associate Professor, School of Design, Sushant University, Gurgaon



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ABSTRACT

The research paper attempts to delineate the significant factors which may nurture or suffocate digital innovation among small business entrepreneurs operating in the handicraft industry. For the young Indian handicrafts entrepreneur, digital technology is like oxygen to survive the threats of economic downturn like the Covid-19 crisis. The research findings contribute towards the increasing body of digital information on newer and innovative approaches to entrepreneurship. This work proposes a standard against which new policies and tactics for reviving the economy and expanding the handmade goods industry through technological and entrepreneurial ingenuity can be measured.

Objective: The researcher aims to identify the obstacles, like lack of available high-quality digital infrastructures, the impact of economic downturn like the spread of Covid-19 pandemic, market disruptions over digital platforms, and the lack of knowledge and IT skills required to run an online entrepreneurship business.

Methodology: Owners of online handicraft enterprises and small businesses which have less or insignificant online presence - all of whom held unique craft skills, were interviewed using a qualitative technique, and the researcher then utilized inductive (qualitative) content analysis to identify the common threads from the recorded transcripts. The research findings showed that the pre and post Covid-19 pandemics' factors motivated the movement of handicraft businesses to digital platforms, encouraging entrepreneurship and digital innovation.

Keywords: Digital Innovation, Handicraft Artisans, Young Craft Entrepreneurs, Digital Entrepreneurship

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Mohi-ud-din T, Mir LA, and Bhushan S (2014) in 'An Analysis of Current Scenario and Contribution of Handicrafts in Indian Economy', there has been a slight decline in the demand for handicrafts as a result of globalization because there is fierce competition in the more commercialized handicraft production sector. Crafts people who want to export their goods often face difficulties because they are frequently disconnected from the end markets. Nevertheless, it remains one of the major drivers of employment creation and foreign exchange gains after agriculture. The world over is in awe of Indian handicrafts because of their masterful fusion of superb craftsmanship and quirky colours. The primary contributors to roughly 78% of the nation's handicraft production are both rural businesses and cottage industries. Of the craftspeople, about 76% work for themselves while the others are paid employees. A significant portion of the labour used to produce handicrafts is contributed by both men and women.

In the context of international trade, handmade products are in high demand for a variety of reasons, including comparative advantage in both supply and demand. Interesting oddities are just one of these causes. Because it is labor-

intensive, it contributes to the decline in unemployment, and the earnings in this industry are higher than those in the agricultural and related sectors. The production of jobs and foreign exchange earnings aside, handicrafts in India play a significant role in raising the standard of living for rural residents. Both men and women can find work in this sector, and successful handicraft and handloom businesses in the country are innovative, diverse, and forward-thinking.

In essence, the handicraft business is the small-scale, cottage industry that has been greatly perpetuated from generation to generation. It is a significant economic sector and a significant source of foreign exchange revenue for India. With deep roots across the nation, the handicraft sector is widespread. Numerous studies have shown that the production of handicrafts contributes significantly to the export of the rural economy and is a key source of employment in many developing nations, such as India. Due to competition from lower-priced machine-made local alternatives and imports, this old industry faces a sharp decline. The livelihoods of numerous skilled craftspeople will be negatively impacted by this type of increasing demand, both directly and indirectly. The primary cause of this is the handicraft industry's almost total lack of attempts at technological innovation and improvement, which has resulted in a stagnant market and rising manufacturing costs. In several states around the nation, there is a shortage of raw materials required for handicrafts.

Since this sector provides many rural residents with their primary source of income, the government should step in to support it by making necessary raw materials available, facilitating easy loans to artisans, and fostering technological advancements. This sector has strong forward and backward linkages. Despite the remarkable development of this sector, it is still widely misunderstood. This is despite the fact that the handicraft industry has the ability to create jobs, improve the standard of living for rural residents, and receive the recognition it deserves. Several empires have left their mark on Indian craftsmanship. In rural communities, handicrafts have been an integral part of the culture and traditions for millennia. The majority of people in rural areas rely on handicrafts. To put it simply, handicrafts are products created by trained workers who utilised conventional or basic equipment to deal with materials like wood, clay, shells, pebbles, stone, metal, etc. The ethnicity of India is well-known.

As of right now, India is renowned for having a wealth of handicrafts and highly trained artisans who have helped to raise our nation's profile internationally. It is a manufacturer of a variety of handicrafts, including: bamboo, cane, bell metal, bone and horn, brass, clay, pottery, Dhokra, Jute, shell, rock, shell, paper, weave, embroidery, and wood crafts.

Aside from this, Indian handicrafts exhibit a trend of increasing exports due to their widespread dispersion across the nation. Small and smaller units predominate in this industry. Because of its enormous unrealized export potential, foreign exchange profits, and ability to create jobs, the handicraft industry is significant to the economy. The states that produce the most famous handicrafts include Kashmir, Saharanpur, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Tamilnadu. Compared to China, which holds a 17% global market share in handicrafts, India's share is a pitiful 2%. In order for a mechanised, contemporary component to arise and compete on a worldwide scale, a new research conducted by the EXIM Bank suggests that the Handicraft sector be granted industry status.

The most important stage in increasing the demand for Indian handicrafts abroad is this one. Once India realises the market's potential for handicrafts, it takes the lead. In order to achieve this, we must advance technology and techniques to increase handicrafts' global appeal.

1.1. THE MAIN MARKETS FOR INDIAN HANDICRAFTS

India exports its handicrafts to over a hundred countries worldwide. 85% of our handmade products are exported to these 10 major markets: the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, Italy, France, Canada, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland. About half of all Indian handicrafts are exported by the USA and Germany. Major markets by craft are described as follows:

Table 1: Major crafts of India and their markets:

Major Crafts	Major Markets
Hand Knotted Woolen Carpets	Germany, USA, Switzerland, U.K, Italy, Canada, Holland etc.
Art Metal Wares	Germany, USA, U.K, France, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Italy etc.
Hand Printed Textiles and Scarves	Germany, USA, U.K, Canada, Japan etc.
Embroidered And Crocheted Goods	USA, U.K, Japan, France, Saudi Arabia etc.

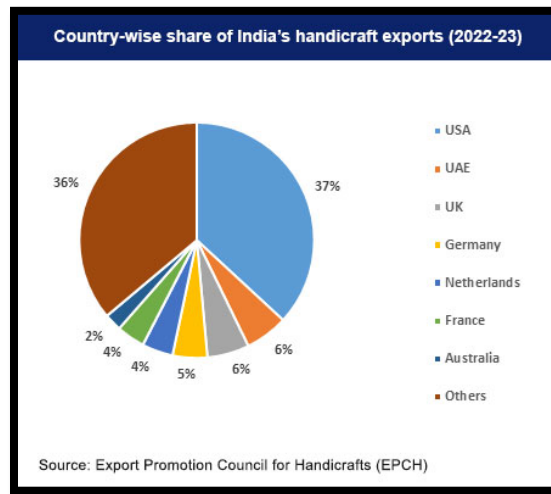


Figure 1: Country wise share of Indian Handicrafts Exports

Our community and culture are uniquely expressed through our handicrafts. The production of handicrafts is crucial to the survival of a sizable portion of the population. Both the jobs it creates and the money it brings in are essential to the expansion and improvement of the rural economy. It is necessary to look at livelihoods as a whole, not just economically, in order to comprehend the dynamic elements that dictate the rise and fall of craft. The government should offer incentives and help to encourage the best possible exploration of this artisanal business. The federal and state governments should work together to raise wages and enhance working conditions for those who work in the handcrafted industry.

1.2. THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE CRAFTS: SALIENT ISSUES

Creating a real-world learning environment for students in design classes is frequently seen through the prism of how well it relates to real-world careers. What this means is that "authenticity" in the classroom is trying to mimic the conditions seen in the "real world" (e.g., design studios and agencies, or internal departments) as closely as possible. Rather than producing "generations of useful machines who can think for themselves, criticise tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements," as Martha C. Nussbaum puts it, we risk producing "generations of useful machines" if we give in to the corporatization of higher education and priorities practicality and timing over thoughtfulness and criticality (Nussbaum, 2010, 2). To counteract the university classroom's over-commodification and corporatization, which prioritizes pre-vocational learning over scholarly work (Cote' & Allahar, 2011), we propose an alternative understanding of authenticity that is based on creativity and identity. This would allow us to provide our students with more relevant, empowering, and interesting educational opportunities.

There is a lack of consensus among behavioural researchers over how to define and quantify authenticity, according to Jongman-Sereno & Leary (2019). The authors go on to debate whether, ultimately, being one's true self is always a desirable trait by discussing the effects of authenticity on mental health. By way of illustration, they state, "Contemporary perspectives implicitly assume that authenticity is uniformly beneficial, without recognising that behaving congruently with one's undesirable attitudes, beliefs, values, motives, and other characteristics can be highly problematic" (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019, 137). Not only that, but they bring up the idea of unavoidable authenticity, which states that our own traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and motivations create our deliberate behaviours independent of outside influences. This makes us wonder if there is such a thing as "inauthentic" behaviour.

The problem of how to gauge genuineness in artistic works also has its own obstacles. Belluigi (2020) examined two undergraduate art majors and discovered that while teachers did talk about students' work and artist statements while they were making it and writing their authorship statements, they hardly ever "referenced, discussed, or given weight

during grading processes" (Belluigi, 2020, 10). Policymakers can demonstrate compassion, understanding, and inclusivity by crafting regulations that maintain specific criteria but permitting some leeway for interpretation (Meyers, Rowell, et al. 2019).

1.3. AUTHENTICITY THROUGH THE LENS OF CREATIVITY

Learning to create in a way that is self-aware, inspired by one's own values, and supported by one's own rationale is, according to our definition, an ongoing process of creative authenticity. It is based on the principles of constructivism in education (Chuang, 2021). By incorporating elements of what Newman and Smith (2016) call "value authenticity" and "self-authenticity" into our definition of authenticity, we create space for artists to discover their own genuine creative identity as they create and reflect on their work. Criticising their output (execution/style), their method (physical and mental), and the reasons behind their choices in both the what and the how of their creative endeavours helps to build their identity as "creatives" or as they perceive themselves. Keep in mind that this is an ongoing procedure that will not, in and of itself, be completed. Similar to Tracy and Trethewey's notion of the "crystallised self" (2005, 186), creative authenticity is not about establishing a static identity but about continuously building upon one's sense of self by making, reflecting, and talking.

"Closely tied to reflexivity are questions of positionality," writes Schiffer (2020, 419). A person's positionality can be defined as the extent to which their gender, marital status, age, education level, ethnicity, and even personality shape their social standing or representation. Therefore, concerns about power and representation, intersectionality, and implicit prejudice are all interconnected with positionality. In order to negotiate power relations and approaches throughout the design process, Schiffer states that designers should carefully consider their own values, attitudes, and assumptions (Ibid., 419).

Table 2: Reflections on Personal and Creative Authenticity

Personal authenticity	Creative authenticity
What was the subject?	What was the process?
How did the artist choose that subject?	How did the artists choose that method/process?
Why did the artists chose that subject?	Why did the artists choose that method/process?

Assessing and critiquing creative work presents its own set of obstacles, particularly when it comes to evaluating authenticity. The process of establishing a creative, authentic identity throughout the application necessitates an equal amount of introspection and extrospection throughout. Although the self-reflection exercises aid in the unravelling of personal identity, it is the conversations and the opportunity to listen to diverse viewpoints that enable students to develop a more profound comprehension of the intricacies of the self.

According to Ce'nat et al. (2020), a research laboratory at the University of Ottawa, "Resilience must frequently be bolstered, and the impersonal nature of research groups can lead to the loss of talented students." The academicians are not only granted the freedom to be themselves, but they are also encouraged, liberated, and empowered for the long term by the establishment of an environment that is conducive to open dialogue and discussion.

Authenticity enables marginalised groups to observe their histories, experiences, and selves in a genuine manner in relation to their classes. Creative authenticity adheres to the philosophy of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which "posits dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and views the outcome of 13 learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (Paris & Alim, 2017, 1). This philosophy is consistent with the principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). In all sectors of society, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in pervasive calamities. The World Health Organisation has estimated that 279 million individuals were infected with the COVID-19 pandemic, and 5 million were fatally affected (WHO, 2021).

The handmade goods business has been rapidly embracing digital entrepreneurship, thanks in large part to the proliferation of digital platforms, which has allowed for physical isolation and closure (Dannenberg et al., 2020). Because of the pandemic, the economy and the development of new jobs took a major hit. By removing barriers to entry for new craftspeople and entrepreneurs, digital and inventive enablers such as open social media, educational resources, 3D printing, data mining, crowdsourcing, and digital photography are attracting a new generation of creators and innovators

(Steininger, 2019). Both del Olmo-Garca et al. (2020) and Gavrila et al. (2020) point out that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of SMEs and large corporations alike, especially in the handmade goods industry. Worldwide e-share commerce is expected to rise by 14-18% between 2019 and 2020, driven by an increase in the sale and purchase of more useful and visually beautiful goods and services on digital platforms by both companies and consumers in the handmade goods industry. Estimates put the figure at 22% by 2024 (Coppola, 2021).

Internal and external variables, like financial literacy, savings habits, and technological acceptance, are crucial to the strong handicraft business. Having said that, many small-scale enterprises, particularly those in the handmade goods sector, lacked the resources to establish an internet presence (Igbinkhase, 2021). Those who have reached the highest level of digital maturity have spearheaded the shift to digital handicraft-related businesses, one of three paths to moderate affluence.

Sales strategies are updated by companies with poor digital maturity and cash flow problems. As a last point, partners who are highly skilled in digital matters assist individuals who are less so (Priyono et al., 2020). According to Mukhoryanova et al. (2021), the handicraft industry is vital to the economies of many developed and developing nations. The cultural and traditional sector is a microcosm of the digital and global economy, hence studying its evolution necessitates investigation.

Enterprises classified as micro, small, and medium-sized employ about two-thirds of India's labour force. There has been less focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on India's handicraft industries compared to other countries (Herrera, 2020; Kim, 2021; Sahoo & Ashwani, 2020). For example, Tudy (2020), Parilla (2021), and Hidalgo et al. (2021) investigated the effects of pandemic mobility constraints on the digitalization of small businesses. In a more comprehensive analysis, Reyes (2021) surveyed the nation's most prominent corporations to determine their thoughts on the pandemic's financial impact and the government's response.

New digital tools, such as social media, mobile apps, business analytics, big data, and artificial intelligence, have opened up exciting new avenues of innovation for entrepreneurs (Chalmers et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2017; Holmström, 2022; Holmström & Hällgren, 2021). These new digital tools, called "external enablers" (Davidsson, 2015), have lowered obstacles for digital businesses and enabled the "democratisation of entrepreneurship" (Aldrich, 2014). The reason behind this is that they facilitate the process by which entrepreneurs go from conceptualization to the actualization of their business ideas (von Briel et al., 2018). "Digital entrepreneurship" refers to the practice of investigating "new enterprise opportunities given by new media and internet technologies" (Davidson & Vaast, 2010). This trend is attracting interest from researchers all around the world (Fang et al., 2018; Nambisan, 2017). While conventional entrepreneurship and this kind of entrepreneurship have many commonalities, the main difference is that digital forms are used for some or all of the important operations in the former.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE HANDICRAFT SECTOR

The item was made by hand or using basic tools, with the hand playing a central role in the creation process. Even in the absence of formal labour unions, rural and tribal populations in India have found excellent employment opportunities in the handicraft industry. People who make artisanal goods often lack formal training or education and rely on their own skills and experience. These days, most craft businesses are talented craftspeople who have taken the time to further their education. They received terracotta from India and carpets from India, which were sent to countries in the Middle East, the Gulf, and Iran. Some examples of handicrafts that are in high demand abroad include brassware, pottery, saris fashioned from Banarasi and Chanderi fabrics, as well as kalamkari, Patola, and Bandhani saris. After then, though, machine-made craft items began to supplant those from the handmade industry, and the former went out of business. Traditional craft artists in India lost their jobs and found it difficult to make ends meet.

Over the past decade, the government of India has been making efforts to revitalise this sector by showcasing domestic talent and boosting the visibility of handicrafts both at home and abroad. However, these workers were left with little choice when the global epidemic of COVID-19 hit and rendered some of their coworkers unemployed upon their return to their home nations. Then, on 12 May 2020, the prime minister of India announced a programme called Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and a slogan for the locals, prompting a return to handcrafted goods (Kumar et al., 2022b). Along with other industries hit hard by the pandemic, the handcrafted goods market saw financial disasters and a worldwide drop in sales as a result of the toy shutdown.

Handicraft products, which are part of the small-scale industry, have been given a new dimension by digital and inventive entrepreneurship and innovation. The vast majority of entrepreneurs lack the requisite technical and conventional expertise; as a result, they must adapt their business practices to focus on digital innovation and creativity. Here, people must contend with items manufactured by machines on a worldwide scale. Craft entrepreneurs, particularly those just starting out, confront a number of obstacles in this field, not the least of which being the prevalence of machine-made craft on a global scale. They saw a drop in sales as a result of the pandemic's impact on their market (UNCTAD, 2021). Thus, young artists and entrepreneurs in the craft industry have encountered many challenges and restrictions, and they are currently seeking government assistance in order to market and manufacture their wares.

Customer satisfaction in the infrastructure and manufacturing (secondary sector) industries increased following COVID-19, leading to a greater faith in the effectiveness of digital and creative entrepreneurship as a problem-solving tool (Mohapatra et al., 2021). Jorge-Vázquez et al. (2021) found that in the European handmade and unorganised cooperative sector, there has been a noticeable uptick in the use of online platforms and structures for selling craftsmanship products. This is because these venues serve as promotional tools for a variety of disaster procedures that improve efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, supply chain management, and marketing competitiveness. An example of how digital and innovative entrepreneurship can ease data analytics and data management concerns is through the use of block chain technology, machine learning (ML), deep learning (AI), and other forms of artificial intelligence (AI) (Massaro, 2021).

According to Kumar et al. (2022a), over 87.5% of India's businesses are involved in the handicraft industry, which employs over 69% of the country's artisan labourers. Despite the fact that COVID-19 has been the subject of numerous studies looking at its impact on the global handicraft sector (Herrera, 2020; Kim, 2021; Sahoo & Ashwani, 2020), this crucial topic has received shockingly little focus in India. To find out how much money COVID-19 and government policies and activities have made, researchers have interviewed the CEOs of India's most profitable companies (Hidalgo et al., 2021; Parilla, 2021; Reyes, 2021; Tudy, 2020; Yadav et al., 2022a) and looked at how the trend towards digitising handicraft products has been affected by the pandemic.

According to Meyer (1982), who is a proponent of the resilience theory, one way to describe company uncertainty is via the lens of resilience. This lens looks at how companies react to crises and external shocks. When the market reacts unexpectedly and dramatically to news or other external stimuli, this is called a shock. Resilience is based on the idea that people, businesses, and communities may recover throughout time (Belitski et al., 2021). It contends that new businesses can draw on their entrepreneurial drive to weather the economic storm that the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked.

In order to create new ways of producing value, entrepreneurs need to be able to absorb new information. This is achieved through strategic and organisational procedures that allow them to integrate, lose, and recombine resources. As an example, in response to the pandemic's impact on the environment, numerous small businesses are reevaluating their strategies and investing in digital expertise (Priyono et al., 2020).

New business models, uncertainty management, and resilience enhancement are all areas that the theory of digitization seeks to elucidate. Putting one's own money into a business, trying new things, and taking calculated risks are all characteristics of an entrepreneur. Thus, it is considered a viable strategy for combating youth unemployment and dependency, which has the ability to inspire creative endeavours and economic progress in any country (Al Rayes and Kayiasseh, 2017; Geibel & Manickam, 2017; Page & Holmström, 2023).

Institutional voids, described as inadequate or nonexistent market mechanisms (Jamali et al., 2017), are common in developing nations. Human capital, exposure to technological advances, ICT capabilities, technical knowledge, skill-based resources, financial situation, and perceptions and attitudes toward society and technology are all examples of internal institutional holes in a firm. The government, market e-readiness, level of social Trust, financial market, and supporting industries' e-readiness are some examples of external institutional holes. Even if the aforementioned institutional components are linked to effective online venturing, material and cultural factors must also be considered when evaluating the success or failure of digital entrepreneurial endeavours.

A country's degree of knowledge capital also affects how effectively businesses interact with their workforce. Still, knowledge capital shortage may lessen incentives to invest in particular industries or competencies (Rushita et al., 2023). In this situation, the high cost of hiring and retaining them may be responsible for the shortage of qualified and highly skilled ICT workers. Therefore, the presence of employees with the necessary knowledge and exposure to ICT skills to carry out e-commerce projects successfully denotes the emergence of entrepreneurial opportunities. This

implies that hiring experts at a higher level may be more expensive for business owners in emerging nations. The absence of long-term strategic planning may cause the staff members' limited understanding of e-commerce potential, which is indicated by their low ICT awareness. Additionally, because they lack the information, expertise, and resources necessary to succeed in digital entrepreneurship, small enterprises might not gain from ICTs. A negative stereotype regarding women and preconceived notions about technological aptitude exist (Kumar et al., 2022b). Other perspectives on race and social class show how white upper-class and elite males predominate in positions of power in advanced Western nations; as a result, whiteness and masculinity form the 'ideal' entrepreneurial type and are thought to be intangible resources for the legitimacy of entrepreneurial activity (Kaur et al., 2023b; Kumar et al., 2022a).

2.1. CRAFT RELATED ENTREPRENEURSHIP FEARS AND PRACTISED ONLINE DIGITAL PLATFORMS POST COVID-19

Digital entrepreneurship in the handcrafted sector is defined as "generating value through the optimisation of digital information gathering, management, diffusion, and usage through the use of various socio-technical drivers" (Sahut et al., 2019). Businesses in every sector are beginning to see the value of digital transformation in keeping up with the latest technological developments. Sales, operations, human resources, finance, customer support, research and development, and the production of new products are just a few areas that have been impacted by the digital revolution in advertising and business (Antonizzi & Smuts, 2020).

The management techniques of handicraft organisations have been completely transformed by the arrival of digital and cutting-edge technologies. According to Nambisan (2017) and Shiferaw et al. (2023), businesses that were open to digital innovation and entrepreneurial spirit might introduce new goods and improve operational efficiency. Thanks to digital revolution and the entrepreneurs' strong social networks and administrative abilities, small-scale industry, particularly in the handicraft sector, has been able to speed up (Li et al., 2018).

To maintain their businesses' success and viability, proprietors of handicrafts use a variety of strategies. A number of up-and-coming artisans were beginning to worry that they wouldn't have enough customers or funding to keep their businesses afloat. The use of drones, online education, and digital skills allowed them to adapt their work style to digital modes, such as work-at-home options, e-commerce, e-supply chain, and the delivery of handmade products. According to Liñán & Jaén (2020), Rushita et al. (2023), and Singla et al. (2023), among other sources, there are technological advancements in product supply, online marketing, software solution creation for the handicraft sector in India (such as the Handicraft app), and new digital skills for craftspeople. They gradually got back to work after the pandemic's effects had worn off. During this period, the rise of digital and innovative business has provided support to an increasing number of craftsmen. Not only that, but consumers have started buying the goods, and the transition to buying online has been incredibly swift.

2.2. POST PANDEMIC RESURGENCE OF THE INDIAN HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Out of the 1428 million Indian population, 600 million are engaged in small-scale or unorganised industries. The population's 2.4% annual growth rate and rapid development of the economy have led to an increase in demand for goods and services. Its gross domestic product (GDP) is \$360 billion, and it grew at a pace of 8% of India's GDP in 5 years before the pandemic. The service sector contributes 61% of GDP, whereas manufacturing contributes 29% (DIIP, 2021).

According to the Department of Industry Innovation Programme (DIIP), there were 1,357,620 commercial organisations registered to do business in the country in 2020. About 80.51% were micro, small, and small medium firms, and 19.49 per cent were major businesses. 10.25% were classified as small enterprises, 88.71% were micro-businesses, and 0.49 per cent were considered medium-sized (DIIP, 2021). Before COVID19, small-scale industries accounted for 68.66% of the country's employment, with half of those people working in the handicraft industry or, we can say, unorganised artisans. Of this total, 20.38% came from unorganised or micro-enterprises, 25.78% from small businesses and 7.50% from medium-sized businesses (DIIP, 2021; Yadav et al., 2022a). The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected India's handicraft industry, drastically altering the marketplace.

Losses have been especially severe in the handmade goods sector of the micro industry, which is more vulnerable than larger manufacturing firms in times like these. Researchers and academics in the subject looked into the effects of the pandemic on the handicraft industry and how it rebounded (Kumar et al., 2022a).

Arts and crafts are vital in representing and promoting one's history, culture, and traditions. They are an excellent means of preserving traditional skills and talents that define the history of any country or region. In India, the arts and crafts industry is decentralized and employs millions of people from different parts of the country. The traditional art and indigenous products are mostly manufactured in rural areas through labor-intensive processes, while the retail of the products is more prominent in urban areas (Dash & Mishra, 2021).

Through informal knowledge, indigenous arts and crafts play a critical role in promoting a region's history and traditions (Das & Das, 2019). In India, the arts and crafts industry has been on the decline for several years now (Chamikutty, 2013). The main reasons leading to the decline have been identified as thin margins, inability to compete in the market, exploitation by middlemen, lack of infrastructure, and improper implementation of government schemes and policies (Shah & Patel, 2017). The challenges for indigenous artisans could be even more acute.

Local artisans continue to play a vital part in the rural economy's development. But because of limited opportunities and exposure, a significant number of the artisans migrate to urban areas to ply their trade. Most artisans can cut out the middlemen by selling directly to their customers which leads to migration to urban areas where the living costs and shop rents can be a deterrent. As a lot of artisans tend to earmark their products for export without quality certifications, ascertaining export quality becomes an impossible task, which can also lead to smaller margins (Dash & Mishra, 2021).

According to Khan B (2022) the demand and market for indigenous art, craft and handloom products in India have witnessed a massive decline in recent years. The growing popularity of machine-made products through online retail and a lack of monitoring for product quality led to genericism in the arts and crafts sector, which is detrimental to the indigenous and traditional handicraft businesses. India's sub-optimal performance in competitiveness factors such as basic infrastructure, intellectual property rights, education and broadband adoption not only bring down revenues for indigenous artists and crafts people but also lower consumer demand due to a lack of trust in the product as well.

The disparity in intake of resources between urban and rural populations in India is glaring. The urban population now receives formal design education, which is passed on generation-to-generation in the rural setting (Das & Das, 2019).

3. PERCEPTIONS OF THE CRAFTSPERSONS

An award-winning Madhubani artist reportedly suggested that her buyers were becoming increasingly interested in her work because of the originality she brought to it. "One of the things about Madhubani art is that it cannot be replicated easily. Those who know this art can easily tell an original piece from a fake one. I am pleasantly surprised by how well some of the tourist buyers know about Madhubani art," she claimed. Contrastingly, one of the respondents who specialized in camel bone art believed that this art form was losing appeal due to various reasons and that his family had been using this art form for ages to create products that could be sold to make a living. He did not see himself working in the field any longer and would not further impart the skills in the generations to come.

A craftsman specializing in Jodhpuri design, said, "If my products have a seal or a mark identifying it as a real Jodhpuri product, I can make more sales. Currently, replicas are mass-produced in factories, which can be sold at a much cheaper price, forcing us to lower our prices, which means that our trade is not profitable, despite having the quality to show for it". A camel bone artist also highlighted the need for better education about the products and traditional art. "My family has been in this business for many generations now and the knowledge is passed from one generation to another. We have been sustaining ourselves with this trade as we have had stable sales but in the last five to six years, we have been struggling to make ends meet. Plastic and silicone products sold in the name of camel bone art are really hurting our business and we are slowly shutting it down for good," he said.

3.1. SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH PROMOTION OF IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY- SOME POINTERS

There has been a gradual decline in the demand for arts and crafts products in India. The availability of cheaper alternatives has meant that crafts have lost their appeal for many as they are seen as antithetical to modern tastes (Chamikutty, 2013). This was also identified as the major challenge faced by art and craft sellers in India.

The biggest problem facing the arts and crafts sector today is genericide and the problem is getting progressively worse by the day. This is in line with India's competitiveness record in 'Intellectual Property Rights', for which it is ranked 44th out of 64 assessed countries (IMD., 2021). For the arts and crafts market, it has resulted in a hyper-competitive market with cheap knock-offs, replicas and similar looking products sold in the market at cheap(er) prices. The use of power looms and other modern machinery has propelled a market of generic products sold as indigenous products, which not only creates a trust deficit with the buyers but also forces the indigenous product sellers to sell at cheaper prices to be able to compete. As producing handicrafts and handlooms is a lengthy process, each product can take several days to be prepared and so profit margins have to be enough to sustain the artisans and the sellers. The trust deficit has also been affecting sales from physical shops as customers start doubting the quality and ingenuity of the products. Online markets have aggravated the problem with customers often disappointed with their purchases and dissatisfied with the quality of products.

Proposed Solutions – 1

Geographical Indications

To deal with the emerging problem of genericide, a system that could provide an identity of their own to original indigenous products would be useful. When it comes to products that are indigenous to a region, Geographical Indication has become a cornerstone of intellectual property protection in the recent past (Saqib & Sultan, 2013). Geographical Indications are used to identify goods as originating from a specific region or geography. The credibility of the product is attributable to where it comes from. Internationally, a number of countries have operated with a Geographical Indication system. South Korea, for example, has had a GI system in place since 1999 (Suh & MacPherson, 2007).

Not only does GI marking give the products a brand identity, it also gives the sellers an edge in the market. This can be crucial in improving sales and competing with generic products of lesser value. GI can also help establish a brand image. Saqib and Sultan (2013) believed that in absence of an established brand identity, GI can give a small business the identity it requires to be able to compete and succeed. A study analyzing the regional impacts of GI using the case study of 'Boseong' green tea found that GI enhanced the image of the product, and led to increased demand and production (Suh & MacPherson, 2007).

GI seems to be the logical choice for existing and emerging challenges that threaten the people working in the sector—a system that can identify indigenous products can help in differentiating them from generic and mass-produced products. This can help in creating a brand image for such products, which will be valuable in improving sales and improving margins.

There is a need for multi-layer intervention that involves reforms at the policy level and upskilling of workers in the sector to help them thrive in a competitive market. The problem has been compounded by a lack of information campaigns regarding indigenous art forms. Inherently tied to tourism, such art forms are popular with international travelers but have been constantly losing their appeal in the domestic markets. Information and promotional campaigns, as have been used for promoting tourism in various states, are the need of the hour to start the revival of the arts and crafts sector in India. While the sector has been intrinsically integrated into the history and culture of the country, lack of focus on the challenges and issues can easily lead to their dilution as artisans and craftspeople look for more sustainable options

4. PROTECTION UNDER THE INDIAN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAWS

4.1. PROTECTION UNDER GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS OF GOODS (REGISTRATION AND PROTECTION) ACT, 1999

The following deductions have been arrived at assuming that there exists a distinction between 'handicrafts' and 'traditional handicrafts' since not all kinds of handicrafts are traditional in nature. Until the promulgation of the

Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, the working definition for 'traditional handicrafts' in India was the one prescribed by Task Force on Handicrafts in 1989 as:

'Handicrafts are items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and are generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration'¹⁶.

Combined Interpretation of Designs Act, 2000 and Copyright Act, 1957

Section 2 (a) of the Designs Act defines 'article' as:

' any article of manufacture and any substance, artificial, or partly artificial, and partly natural and includes any part of an article capable of being made and sold separately.'

Both 'handicrafts' and 'traditional handicrafts' fall within the scope of this definition. The right given under Section 2(c) of the Designs Act in India is a design copyright which is not the same as the one given under Copyright Act, 1957. Hence forth to avoid confusion reference to design copyright will be made as design right. The design right which is defined in Section 2(c) of the Designs Act gives:

'the exclusive right to apply a design to any article in any class in which the design is registered.'

This design right is granted only to the design of an object and not the object itself. This means one has to know what constitutes a 'design' under the Designs Act.

5. CONCLUSION

The traditional craft skill, however beautiful, needs sensitive adaptation, proper quality control, correct sizing and accurate costing, if it is going to win and keep a place in the market. Though a GI regime in India has been reasonably successful in the protection of traditional handicrafts, it has not helped in encouraging innovation from members within the indigenous groups, which is necessary in order to prevent stunted imagination and creativity within the groups to ensure that traditional handicrafts remain competitive in the market. Hence, a separate form of property which provides incentives for innovations in TCEs such as the one discussed in this paper is necessary and it would do well if the powers that be, come up with suitable mechanisms to tap the potential of the modern descendants of traditional groups for the perpetuation of traditional art forms.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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