



Role of E-commerce in socio-economic development of handloom weavers in India

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Abstract

The handloom industry is primarily rural-based commercial activities operated with primitive manual looms and is a decentralized cottage industry. It has a notable contribution to the growth of the country's economy that precedes the agriculture sector when considered for catering to livelihood in the rural zone of India. As the e-commerce market proliferates in the country, the handloom sector is also stepping into online platforms for its sustainability and growth. So, this paper strives to assimilate the potency of e-commerce in the socio-economic development of handloom weavers and the initiatives taken by the government to uplift weavers' livelihood conditions. This paper further ascertains the handloom sector's outcome from individuals' efforts and government interventions. The study is based on secondary data gathered from journals, commercial websites of handlooms, government reports, and books. The study conferred that the government has initiated bringing handloom products to the online market by collaborating with 23 online commercial platforms. It has resulted in positive results for proliferating the handloom industry and competing with global business. It will improve the financial position and employability scale of weavers resulting in their upliftment of the socio-economic conditions.

Keywords: E-commerce platforms, marketing, handloom industry, handloom weavers, government schemes, socio-economic development

Introduction

Handloom symbolizes our country's cultural and artistic legacies that are still preserved and continued by the weavers who inherited them from their ancestors. It is a significant source of livelihood for all the weavers and their families (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2020) ^[10, 12]. This is the only sector that depicts the ethnic patrimony of our country as their skills are passed on to the next generations. The peculiarity of handlooms is that each state carries its weaving style depending on the cultural influences, climate, and fabric accessibility that are persistently worked with far-fetched detailed embroidery. It possesses the strength of minimal capital requirement, innovation flexibility, minimal power consumption, and an eco-friendly production process. The handloom activities are mainly operated in the rural region with primitive manual looms, a cluttered and decentralized cottage industry (Shah & Patel, 2016) ^[17]. It has a notable contribution to the growth of the country's economy that precedes the agriculture sector when considered for catering to livelihood in the rural zone of India (Mishra *et al.*, 2022) ^[9].

Although the handloom sector possesses a vast capacity for occupation and revenue creation with a sustainable and ecological working environment, it tussles with the power loom industry that operates modern equipment for manufacturing purposes. Recently, customer demands have switched frequently, and handloom is a sector needing more innovation, marketing, and product assortment, which causes lagging in customer reach and competitive edge (Yadav & Jena, 2022) ^[22]. In the era of globalization, e-commerce vogue aids businesses in fighting against the dearth of commercial activities. E-commerce has transformed conventional business practices of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) into holistic business approaches (Giyar, 2011) ^[6]. E-commerce is evolving

tremendously and has become a marketplace for online users with the growth in internet usage. It provides an online platform for advertising and marketing domestic products worldwide. As the handloom industry reflects ancient Indian history, utmost efforts are made by weavers and the government to treasure the pride of handloom. The government is bringing handloom to electronic platforms to bridge the gap between weavers and customers by supporting weavers unfamiliar with technology and helping them to equip market opportunities. India is counted for the wide-reaching internet users throughout the world. Therefore, e-commerce is significant in grabbing the market and reaching global customers. Currently, many commercial websites, namely Craftsvilla.com, Flipkart.com, eBay.com, Amounee.com, amazon.com, and many others, are collaborating with the handloom sector to bring them into the digital world (Ghosal & Prasad, 2019) ^[5].

So, this paper strives to assimilate the potency of e-commerce in the socio-economic development of handloom weavers and the programs and schemes delivered by the government to uplift weavers' livelihood conditions. This paper further ascertains the handloom sector's outcome from individuals' efforts and government interventions.

Review of literature

The subsequent literature was reviewed to unleash the significant research gaps yet to be explored. The past and prevailing salient researches are unearthed in ambience to the role of e-commerce in the socio-economic development of handloom weavers.

Yadav & Jena (2022) ^[22] suggested espousing digital technology and modern marketing practices for the survival of the handloom industry, which is yet in the dawning phase. It comprehends problems and future expectations of using an e-commerce platform in the handloom sector.

Mahapatra, D. M., Patra, S., Baral, S. K, (2022) ^[13] explained technology is an enabler that may be utilised to personalise and customise customer decision-making in terms of consciousness and purchasing intention.

Agrawal M. A. (2021) ^[1] reviewed customer willingness to opt for handloom and handicraft items, and their study unveiled that customers need to gain knowledge of authentic and replicated products. To have a direct connection between weavers and customers, online streaming of handmade products should be initiated to assure product quality, aid brand development, and enhance customer experience.

Bilal *et al.* (2021) ^[3] scrutinized the after-effects of e-commerce on Jammu and Kashmir handloom and handicraft export. The authors projected an e-commerce model to boost Indian handloom and handicraft export worldwide.

Singh *et al.* (2020) ^[18] explored the relationships between weaver's job satisfaction and scheme perks. The varying schemes intend to upgrade weavers living conditions through wage increments, skill enhancement training, raw materials availability, market reach, and robust infrastructure that remarkably affects the weaver's job satisfaction.

Tarai & Shailaja (2020) ^[21] analyzed the growth anticipation through e-commerce unification in the handloom sector by surveying weavers and consumers. The authors inferred that although consumers occasionally prefer handloom, its availability on an e-commerce platform can positively respond to consumer preference. Product accessibility, design variations, convenient online applications, product information clarity, and promptness in consumer complaints redressal are the consumer-driven factors for buying products.

Ghosal & Prasad (2019) ^[5] observed that the digital connection of producers with customers is required to widen the market approach by creating an online portal and increasing indigenous product awareness that will boost artisans' sales volume and profits.

Mishra *et al.* (2019) ^[11], in their research, sighted linking the consumers and producers in the same platform with the help of digital applications named "Khadi-Kart" using the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving (TRIZ) algorithms. This resulted in connecting rural areas globally through e-commerce and retaining their employment in the handloom sector. It encourages small-scale producers to beat big industries and hence fosters sustainable growth.

Ansari & Tripathi (2018) ^[2] studied the complications of the digital divide encountered by handloom weavers of Banaras. It was observed that weavers are unacquainted with technology due to a dearth of information. The Windows Internet Name Service (WINS) project would solve the weaver's condition by grasping the maximum advantage of modern technology to bring positive results for weavers and open a new door for their progression.

Shah & Patel (2016) ^[17] studied the problems faced by artisans while adopting e-commerce and how they can be resolved. They carried SWOT analysis to determine the barriers which hold back in terms of the progression of handicraft artisans. To grab the market, efforts are to be made at the individual level to start e-commerce activity by creating own website with support from cyber intermediaries. The participation of the government through the conduct of various programs and the application of schemes can boost the handicraft industry.

Sreenivas & Suman (2016) ^[20] analyzed the socioeconomic conditions of handloom weavers and came across challenges faced by weavers and prospects that can vitalize their working conditions. The conclusive plan of action by the government can act as a booster for the weaver's growth by assisting them in every means.

Research gap

The substantial literature reviewed shows the hurdles encountered on the path of handloom business activities and their future growth prospects. However, meager studies have been performed in the context of e-commerce adoption. So, this study intends to comprehend the role of e-commerce in the socio-economic development of handloom weavers.

Objectives of study

1. To cognize the role of e-commerce in the socio-economic development of handloom weavers.
2. To discern outcomes of government initiatives implemented for weaver's progress through e-commerce.

Research methodology

This research is based on secondary data and is conceptual in nature. Secondary data consists of sources like online books, journals, articles, commercial websites of handloom, and government reports for this current study to gather conclusive results.

Indian handloom industry

The handloom sector devotes 15% of textile creation and aids economic growth through handloom export worldwide. India dominates 95% of global handloom fabrics, representing the flair of Indian weavers (Singh & Gautam, 2022) ^[19]. To aspire to the handloom sector, the government declared National Handloom Day on the 7th of August (Rashida, 2022) ^[16]. As per the 4th all India handloom census 2019-20 ^[14], the handloom sector specifies 26.73 lakhs weavers all around India. Nearly 89% of weaver households reside in rural regions, and the rest, 11.3%, live in urban areas, delineating a large group of rural individuals in handloom activities. Out of all weavers, female weavers account for 72% who are into handloom activities.

Around 31.45 lakhs weaver households were enumerated, indicating an increase in their count as the 3rd handloom census reports 27.83 lakhs weaver. The highest number of families hails from the four states, namely West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Manipur, showing that enormous handloom activities are executed from these states. Allied workers were enumerated as 8.48 lakhs who work pre- and post-loom activities and do not have their looms. 14% of the weavers have yet to finish their primary education, and one of every four has no formal education. The report states that around 28.2 lakh looms are retained today, of which 89.3% of handlooms are placed in rural regions. The handloom activities are fundamentally household-based tasks because 95.6% of looms are placed in their households. The principal source of yarn purchase is the open market and for sales of handloom fabrics is the local market. The intellectual property governance, such as the Geographical Indications tag for specific handloom fabrics, has been expanded to protect the craftsmanship of weavers and promote them globally (Mishra *et al.*, 2022) ^[9].

Table 1: States showing their different handloom fabrics

State	Type of handloom fabrics
Chhattisgarh	Kosa silk
Odisha	Sambalpuri, Bomkai
Madhya Pradesh	Chanderi, Maheshwari
Jharkhand	Kuchai silk
Maharashtra	Paithani, himru
Karnataka	Mysore silk, Udupi sarees
Tamil Nadu	Kanjeevaram silk
Andhra Pradesh	Kalamkari
Arunachal Pradesh	Apatani
Assam	Muga silk, Eri silk
Bihar	Bhagalpuri silk
Himachal Pradesh	Kullu shawls
Haryana	Panja
Goa	Kunbi
Gujarat	Bandhani, Tanchoi silk, Patola
Kerala	Kasavu
Manipur	Phanek
Meghalaya	Eri silk
Mizoram	Puanchei
Nagaland	Naga shawls
Telangana	Pochampally Ikat, Gadwal
Punjab	Phulkari, Khes
Uttar Pradesh	Chikankari, Naqsha
Sikkim	Lepcha
Tripura	Pachra
Uttarakhand	Panchachuli
Rajasthan	Kota Doria, Shisha
Jammu Kashmir	Pashmina

Source: Author’s compilation

The above table portrays different skills and artistry that weavers of each state carry and works on to preserve the culture. Every state possesses its fabrics and motifs allured

by culture, tradition, climate, and accessibility, such as tussar silk is prominent in Chhattisgarh, chanderi in Madhya Pradesh, Sambalpuri in Orissa, and many more.

The handloom industry is acclaimed for delivering employment and raising our country’s economy. Since this sector is fundamentally a household task executed by weavers with their families and labourer, women are more involved in this sector and thus make themselves financially independent and self-assured.

Table 2: Number of handloom workers

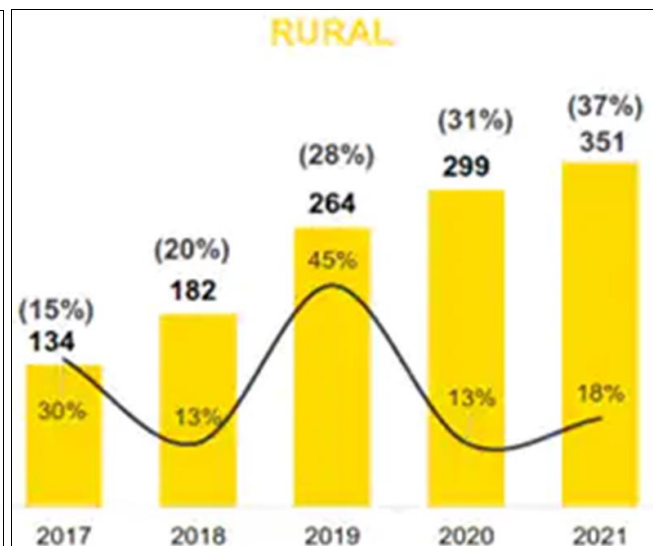
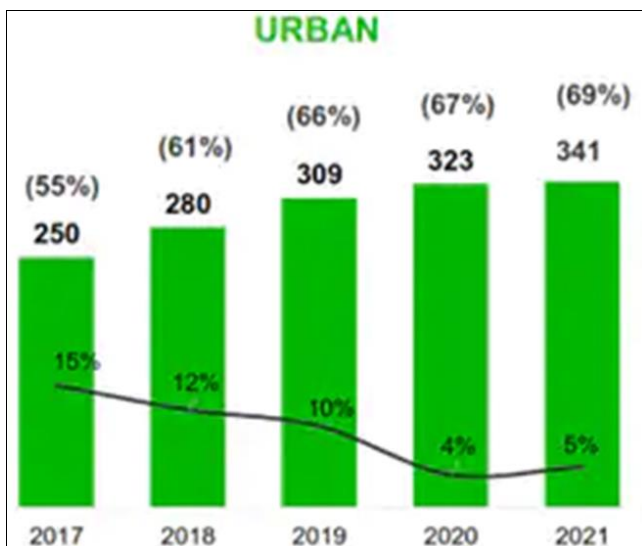
Gender	Rural	%	Urban	%	total	%
Male	7,78,772	26	1,96,961	42	9,75,733	28
Female	22,74,516	74	2,71,769	58	25,46,285	72
Total	30,53,691	100	4,68,821	100	35,22,512	100

Source: Fourth All India Handloom Census Report 2019-20

The above table portrays the gender-wise handloom employees in rural and urban regions. The majority of rural workers comprised female workers at 74%, and the same is for urban female workers with a contribution of 58%. This sector is propelled by female workers, with 73% of total handloom weavers.

Role of e-commerce in the handloom industry

The Indian e-commerce industry is growing expeditiously, resulting from a hike in mobile and internet usage (Parameswar & Dhir, 2022) [15]. As per statistical data extracted from the website of Statista, India clutches the second position in mobile internet users, with over 74.4 crore users in 2020 when compared globally. This graph inclined to around 84.3 crore users in 2021, which showed an increment of 13.3% in mobile internet usage.



Source

<https://www.cnbctv18.com/technology/iamai-kantar-report-says-rural-india-accounts-for-more-than-half-the-internet-users-in-country-14283262.htm>

Fig 1: Urban and rural internet users in India

According to the IMAI report and Kantar (data analytics firm), the country’s rural territory is propelling internet usage. About 35.1 crore users out of 69.2 crores of India’s internet users are from rural regions, with more than 50% of its share in internet usage. It can be contemplated as an opportunity for weavers to associate straightaway through e-commerce sites with customers in a broad range of rural

regions as their population is large when talking about internet users. It will strengthen the communication medium between producers, weavers, and customers. Furthermore, the E-commerce approach would facilitate weavers to sell their products handily and make them percipient in immediate market trends (Mohapatra & Mishra, 2020) [10, 12].

Government initiatives toward E-commerce platforms for handloom products

The facts derived from the ministry of textiles, the government of India, show that there are 23 e-commerce platforms of handloom fabrics engrossed by the handloom development commissioner for its promotion and marketing. They emphasized strengthening handloom fabrics by effectuating a policy framework wherein any succeeding e-commerce website possessor can join online handloom commercialization. Aar Mart is a pioneer online gallery to incept product bargains. It is a suitable platform for SMEs to publicize and sell to rationalizing consumers. As this website demands artistic and unique items, handloom fabrics suit the best to commercialize on this platform. eBay's efforts are to go overseas and sell Indian products effortlessly to grow entrepreneurial space. eBay prioritizes exhibiting handloom fabrics on the online platform and organizes individual sections of ratified handloom brands to make them avail to customers. Flipkart Samarth was instituted in the year 2019 with the intent to assist deprived sectors of the country, such as rural entrepreneurs, weavers, artisans, and many more by connecting them to the e-commerce stage and wide-ranging customers. Craftsvilla objects to publicizing handloom fabrics and assists weavers in their financial growth by building positional market space of certified handloom fabrics and catering them to widespread customers. Craftsvilla inspires people to connect with their roots in art and culture. Weave Smart, an online platform, exemplifies certified handloom fabrics that serve wide-ranging customers. It facilitates weavers to connect straightaway with customers and feasibly access spacious markets. Contemporary Weave Smart helps 26 clusters and has upgraded the financial status of more than 4000 weavers. To rejuvenate the handloom sector, Myntra allied with the ministry of textiles and worked directly with weavers by aiming to increase ten times sales growth of handloom fabrics in the coming year.

Surekha Arts prioritizes displaying handloom products through its poster on the homepage. They devised an exclusive segment of certified handloom fabrics with handloom marks. Charu Creations is one stop fabric destination entrenched in 1993, and since then, it has been trading nationally and internationally in around 57 countries. Go Coop is awarded as the number one online handloom platform that straightaway chains weaver cooperatives and its clusters with customers globally. The figures obtained from the Go Coop portal assert that there are above 70 clusters, more than 350 master weavers, and 3,860 weaver entrepreneurs engaged through this digital space. It has supported 30,222 weavers' livelihoods as of march 2021.

There are other e-commerce sites for handloom brands such as Sareez.com, Amazon, Dee's Alley, Graameen.in, denimclubindia.org, and bazaar.shopclues.com that are engaged in commercializing handloom fabrics.

Discussion

The introduction of e-commerce has made swift changes in transactions of commercial activities. Earlier, handloom weavers revolved around conventional trading through exhibitions, small haat, trade fairs, and tourists. The innovation of technology has paved the way for weavers to connect straightaway to a broad spectrum of customers. As per the 2020-21 report of the National Handloom

Development Corporation (NHDC), several digital operations have been formulated underneath the digital India campaign by a corporation such as the eDhaga application, enterprise resource planning (ERP) execution, direct benefit transfer to weavers through online medium. Digital innovations have made NHDC readily approachable to weavers within a minimal time for online exhibitions and virtual meet. National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) intends to build comprehensive handloom progression and weavers' well-being by catering ample raw materials, design variants, robust infrastructure, technology enhancement, and marketing assistance within the time frame of 2021-22 to 2025-26. The figures derived from the ministry of textiles depict that there had been 71.95 crores of overall sales of handloom products through the e-commerce portal as of the year 2019.

Conclusion

As the e-commerce business in India is flourishing quickly, leading digital commercial portals such as Flipkart, Amazon, and others are collaborating to assist and promote the handloom sector. So, the government must deploy ample resources to weavers at a feasible price. Including e-commerce in the handloom industry reflects growth opportunities if administered effectively. It will enhance the socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers. The government initiative to enter the e-commerce market is an excellent opportunity for handloom weavers to regain their culture, artistic skills, and financial position. Utilizing an online marketplace, artisans' operating income would also increase, benefitting the rural economy.

Implications

Since the beginning of time, the Indian handloom industry has maintained a rich legacy, and the handloom weaving technique has no adverse energy effects or environmental damage. To preserve the tradition of trade among handloom weavers, the wise course of action entails bringing high-tech weavers into the weaving sector to give cutthroat competition to the power loom sector. This study would carry the flag for boosting sales and advancing commerce in handloom goods. It would assist in formulating strategies for companies to bring handloom into e-stores.

Limitation

Since this research employs secondary sources to scrutinize the socio-economic development of handloom weavers through e-commerce, the study can be extended by taking primary data from the weavers with the help of interviews to know their progress and fetch opinions on the current working of e-commerce for their socio-economic development. The qualitative method executed in our research requires an in-depth paper review which was limited due to time constraints.

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