

Understanding Consumer Trends in Trading Scenarios for Handicraft Markets

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ABSTRACT

Research on trading and consumer perspective on handicrafts consumption has not been focused much in India. Studies have targeted urbanization and globalization but not as a means to examine the complex patterns of sale of these artefacts so local and ethnic to their place of origin. The present study was conducted on the urban customers of New Delhi, India to understand their knowledge and attitudes towards handicraft consumption and their usage in urban scenario. An on-site survey, along with FGDs and interviews, have been used for data collection. A systematic random sample was chosen using every third woman who visited one of our targeted haats buying the handicrafts. Qualitative data from the four focus groups of 6 women each and the eight in-depth interviews were analyzed mainly using content analysis. Content analysis revealed that the urban young are not attracted by these handicrafts as much as the older counterparts who attach a cultural value to the system. The paper concludes with concise suggestions to improve consumption of handicrafts for development of these old yet cultural antiquities.

Keywords: consumer, trading, handicraft markets, urban city, India

Research has shown significant shifts in consumer demand, towards value-centered products, services and experiences which meet emotional - as well as functional - needs. As markets evolve in response to recession and a changing economy, there is a need to understand how these values - and their associated behaviors - may shift and settle into new patterns of consumption relevant to contemporary craft. A challenge for most countries is to learn to understand these new patterns of consumption and use the provisions as laid down by the WTO to promote their own domestic interests (WTO

& UNEP, 2005). Speaking of the trading and consumer pattern, there are multiple lacunae that need to be countered. Some of the have been put forth by WTO since 2005. For example, it has been noted that developing countries have been less likely to use provisions associated with handicraft trading and consumer pattern because their delegations are under staffed and have little experience with trade policy issues and trade negotiations (Narlikar, 2003). There are other provisions of the WTO that should be used more actively by developing countries to protect their interests in the area of trade in

handicrafts. For example, in India, after opening trade from foreign nations, a surge was observed in handicraft and handicraft-competing imports from China and other exporting countries (Grobar, 2017). There are a number of initiatives that help us show how the art is being encouraged. For example, the preservation of cultural heritage in the form of new hybrid crafts in the developing world can be presented through the non-profit network. It has worked with silk-weavers in Varanasi, India as mentioned by Grober in a case study on India. The not-for profit nest has helped to revive the 500-year-old tradition there of hand-crafted silk-weaving. This traditional craft, and the heritage embodied in its production methods, was being threatened by cheap machine-made substitutes. This not-for profit nest also worked to revive this artisanal industry by sending fashion consultants to work with weavers in India to create new, modern designs using traditional weaving methods. These products were then introduced to luxury brands such as Lanvin, Oscar de la Renta, and Jean-Paul Gaultier, where they were well-received. The idea was to understand as to what, how and when this introduction and presentation will lead to a successful venture. Costing, uptake and need base are some aspects of purchase activity of consumers and industry that are being studied widely (Chaffey, 2007; Das, 1994; Grobar, 2017; Throsby, 2008).

Studies have also documented ideas of hybrid crafts that embody cultural heritage in multiple countries and for their cultural heritage especially through art and handicrafts, such as Indonesian batik, hand-block printing in Rajasthan, India, traditional basket weaving in Swaziland, traditional brass cast jewelry making in Kenya, and other traditional crafts. By adapting traditional crafts with modern designs and marketing these products to buyers in high-income countries, the cultural heritage of traditional methods of craft production can be preserved, and at the same time an industry is supported that can provide a living wage to artisans in the developing world (Klamer, 2012). This innovative yet traditional artifact

is known to be associated with higher uptake than general handicrafts (Patichol, Wongsurawat, & M. Johri, 2014).

The other idea that keeps the handicraft afloat is to strengthen links between handicrafts and potential buyers and the cultural society or industry of the country. It still remains to be seen how consumers perceive each idea and which of this potential marketing mechanism works while other may make either fail or rebound. Studies have suggested that countries can work to increase the number and quality of retail outlets for handicrafts and can also work to establish educational centers where tourists or potential buyers can learn more about traditional crafts and their production techniques (Dixon-Mueller, 2013; Littrell & Dickson, 1999).

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In India and Mexico, we also see examples of how developing countries can employ multiple segmented marketing and protection in their crafts sector. Chanderi fabric (a unique silk fabric that has been produced in the small town of Chanderi for centuries), Banarasi, Brocades and Sarees (high quality sarees made from hand-loomed brocades produced in Banaras using traditional methods dating back to the Mughal period of the 14th century) (Basole, 2015; Grobar, 2017) are now being bought by established Indian and global brands as raw material.

The target consumer for this market seems to be explicit as mentioned in market trends or identifying research i.e., females, young and old, irrespective of age, hence, gender being the social identifying factors. Nationwide endorsements through advertisements and well-known faces have helped to authenticate handicrafts in the eyes of consumers. Studies show that consumers are willing to spend more on these items when they are assured that they are getting an authentic and high-quality product (Russell, 2010). Another motivation that works for handicrafts is that they can preserve a nation or region's cultural heritage by encouraging continued production using traditional methods, and protecting this domestic

production from inauthentic imported substitutes (Grobar, 2017).

The present study is part of a larger study which was meant to understand the knowledge, attitude and practice of the urban consumer of handicrafts as associated with the urban haats of New Delhi, India. The article is meant to speak about the perceptions of the handicraft, attitudes and purchase behavior towards artifacts and motivations for purchasing if any. We will also try and delineate themes around the individuals visiting urban haats to purchase textile products. Further sample was taken by both random and purposive sampling method if and when required. On pre-decided criteria, consumers shopping at urban haats who were above the age of 18 years were requested to fill in a questionnaire on days of the visit of the researcher, and visiting, with set frame of questions both open and closed.

For the present study being published in the article, self-selection was an inherent part of the recruitment process and the size of the groups 4 focus groups with 6 women each, this sample does not purport to be representative of the population as a whole. It contains women between age levels of 18-58 years, and from different ethnic groups. The study therefore highlights the limitation that this may reveal some general phenomena which might not be statistically significantly proved unless the study is repeated with a larger sample. We made this choice of data and sample as we emphasized the productive aspect of consumption. Consumer culture theory was used to explore how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in handicraft market and artifacts (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

This section of research has been defined as a qualitative descriptive study using primary data. The other methods used in data collection were in-depth interviews (n=8) and focus group discussions to understand and examine the complex patterns of sale of handicrafts and if being local and ethnic to their place of origin are crucial factors of sale. These therefore qualitatively explore the motives and values of the urban customer for handicrafts in New Delhi, India.

The study will reveal their knowledge and attitudes towards handicraft consumption and their usage in urban scenario. We will also include the ideas understanding buyer's perspective on market potentials, and essentials of what makes a "handicraft". An oral survey was used with questions pertaining to reasons for buying, preferred markers, what makes it popular or not so popular, why is a handicraft, workmanship, potential for growth or death of market, issues one faces as buyer. A systematic random sample was chosen using every third woman who visited one of our targeted haats buying the handicrafts.

This research is presented in the form of qualitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed mainly using content analysis. Content analysis is codified and this codification is then presented in the form of themes. Codification of the data can then be used to understand the phenomenon and the linkages between the phenomenon. Themes have been defined in order of frequency.

The present codes and themes emerged from the analysis are as follows: Reasons for buying handicrafts 4 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that "handicrafts make an exclusive gift" and it moves to present a more personalized product when bought and presented. It has been reported earlier that, these handicrafts have been documented as an attractive new notion of presentation and particularly valuable from the fact that it is for an exclusive use, including its creation and cultural artifact value especially in India (Macomber, 1918; Pradhan; Tyagi, 2008). Respondents also reported that they 'admire the human skill involved' (16%) or 'support the industry, makers, artisans, craftsmen' (55%) and they want to appreciate or promote it by keeping sales of these going (14%). Some consumers are attracted to the 'beauty, cultural or ethnic value, of the handicrafts' (55%) and these reasons have been reported in multiple studies elsewhere (Esperanza, 2008; Vadakepat, 2013). The 'exclusivity' of a handicraft and/or design was cited by nearly 30% consumers.

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Most consumers are likely to value an artifact or handicraft for their ‘uniqueness, workmanship, sometimes ethnic or cultural value or a prospective future value’ (60%) it may hold and only 20% value these handicrafts for its aesthetics and material qualities, or the stories these artifacts embody or live to tell (13%). Hence, the fact that these products can be appealing for the potential buyers wasn’t a major reason for sale of handicrafts as has been published in other studies (Littrell & Dickson, 1999; Peterson & Anand, 2004).

What curbs the purchase?

The most commonly stated impediments to handicraft consumption are the facts that they seem to be relatively expensive (40%) are as there are cheaper options both on in non-handicraft market and global handicraft market (Hinterdobler & Küpper; van Dijk, 2010). Segmentation of market has presented itself with the idea of prioritization spending (12%), non-reproducibility (no replacement) (11%) and febrile nature of trade and product as other reasons for low sales.

The buying affair

Buyers also mentioned in their interviews that ‘urban haats are one of the most accessible places’ (40%) for these products but complained about the cost factor. Some people said that it was important that this the handicraft purchase must be available at some textile shops, and also in exclusive galleries, exhibitions and / or fairs besides these haats (33%). More coverage may lead to better sales of handicrafts as presented in other research studies in India (Sahoo, 1985) and Vietnam (Huong, Thanh, & Khanh, 2003). 26% respondents also suggested that with online market so widespread, and ‘online browsers can also be a medium’ to provide this information which may make these popular amongst potential buyers. Yet a previous study did not juxtapose on the present one, and it has been suggested that buyers prefer ‘real world’ retail environments when it comes to actual purchasing handicrafts, it should be noted

that interest in buying online has roughly doubled since 2004 as suggested by Lukas (Husa, 2015; Sugandini, Sugandini, Rahatmawati, & Arundati, 2016) and some strategies need to be suggested (Robbins, 2009).

Speaking about artifacts and handicraft purchases were called ‘accidental, random and spontaneous’ and an article on crafts has presented an idea that reduction in uncertainty around the sale and purchase of handicrafts may be a good way to promote creative artifacts (Waldeback & Batty, 2012). Statements like ‘bought it because it caught my eye’ (21%) proposes that the purchase is mostly not need based until specificities of decorative or design motives are being discussed. Hence Sugandini and her coworkers have reported that visit to a fairs, exhibition or event, or local haats along with the idea of exploration or prospect to buy a unique artifact are prime triggers to such purchase (Sugandini et al., 2016).

Another notion that associates itself to the purchase of artifacts is this that their purchase has is a sense of risk with these craft purchases and there are no explicit endorsements or warranty or guarantee of the product or creator’s handiwork. Based on previous research work, it has been demonstrated for most buying be it any product, handicrafts or otherwise, consumers are generally aversive to this risk and may be a major determinant of the practice and attitudes towards handicraft purchase (Becchetti, Castriota, & Solferino, 2011; Hill, O’Sullivan, O’Sullivan, & Whitehead, 2017).

What attracts you to handicrafts?

35% respondents are of the opinion that these artifacts have a sense of ‘personalization’ for they are perceived to ‘have roots’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘uniqueness’ as compared to designer and other luxury goods, widely available and hence are associated with the idea ‘individualism’ in purchase behavior (Becchetti et al., 2011; Gilmore & Pine, 2007). All these factors may also present themselves as an opportunity to extend the craftsmen market for they must emphasize on

the uniqueness of artifacts, carving a niche for themselves. Another consumer came through with an interesting idea of ‘creating a product, as influenced by the buyer, making choices more personalized and thereby salability’.

Genuineness: Handicrafts are always related to the idea of genuineness and ‘authenticity’ both in structure and the story they embody, the experience and the product lifecycle each artifact goes through speaks volumes about the empiric of the creator. A study documented that consumer perceptions of craft as more ‘authentic’ than any other designer products, which may emerge as significant advantage for handicraft artifacts (Chartrand, 1988; Hawley & Frater, 2017). Eliciting the veiled notions, thoughts, stories and skills at the point of sale, could become a key marketing strategy in salability (McIntyre, 2010).

Ethical Grading: McIntyre provides an idea of ‘sustainability, human rights and fair trade’ with handicrafts and cultural artifacts (McIntyre, 2010). The consumers are of the opinion that they perceive making of these goods ‘employs a more sustainable or ethical practices and materials. Researchers are of the opinion that exactly this may help in carving a niche market and serve for significant future potential in sales of handicraft.

The value economy: The current market increasingly rides on the buyer’s interest in spending on not just values but also experiences. Handicrafts have long been associated with the roots, the culture, ethnicity and values. The craftsmen present their ‘handiwork as a story and also an experience. Sometimes, these are known to embody the identity of a place, a person, a deity or a thing’. If these products can signify or remind the buyer of this value or experience, that the craftsmen present, this market will be able to create multiple potential businesses within itself (Cranz, 2000; Dormer, 1997; Hutchinson, 2009).

Buyers and potential market

Consumers are of the opinion that there should be specific opportunities developed to attract new buyers to handicraft industry. This can be done by targeting consumers of luxury products, extremely popular brands and present them with uniqueness and customization option for this makes it ‘special’ (23%). It has been presented one can use the idea of signal connoisseurship in new ways, particularly those with strong or emerging ethical motivations (Doma, Elaref, & Elnaga, 2015). Untap the potential of social media tools to encourage and support in-home industry, craftsmen and artisans for the best marketing policy is ‘peer endorsement’ (33%) as previously substantiated (McIntyre, 2010). It has also been suggested that if one can market by associating the handicrafts with specific lifestyle interests and market niches, such as vintage fashion or sustainability (Beard, 2008; McIntyre, 2010), it could enable potential and casual consumers to ‘meet their existing needs through these traditional artifacts’ (31%).

Focusing on triggers like ‘showcasing on huge events or spaces like urban haats, events and national festivals, along with retailers retailers may overcome the impediment associated with produce placement, availability and accessibility (33%). Uniqueness of the artifact as a present, a gift (22%), may facilitate another potential marketing program for it seems to be second major reason for purchase of artifacts. Involve potential buyers and make them familiar with the idea of handicraft and its production. It helps in overcoming the degree of curiosity and provides confidence in the product they are both buying and endorsing for future purchases. The sense of engagement in new interests and experiences, the provision of new ways of experiencing and buying handicrafts could increase the frequency of purchases made. Consumers seem to appreciate the ‘embodied stories’, ideas and skills behind the handicrafts and working on this idea might also encourage purchase. Buyer today is well read and wants to make well informed and involved

decisions. The idea of value and story helps them to gain a new and different perspective on crafts they are buying and will help them evolve more ethnic identities within themselves. A sense of identity in the product even as a gift or personal need, introduces the idea of customization and genuineness along with authenticity and this idea may appeal to the young, old and potential buyers of all socio-economic ranges alike. Present the product as an alternative and not just as a new product to appeal to the need-based market. Introduce range of choices and maintain its uniqueness to capture multitude of potential buyers.

Characteristics of 'artifacts' that makes it a Handicrafts. Most consumers are associated with the idea of handicraft as 'an artifact that encompasses heritage, and traditions' and have evolved further to include the 'contemporary' designs and work (37%). Personalization in production and dissemination of the product is yet another aspect. A choice of the older generation as compared to the younger one for the fact that these artifacts remind them of their 'roots and identity' (23%) and also, of their 'culture, sometimes nationalism' (3%) are other aspects of attitude towards handicrafts. Constructed at home, humanized, personalized, individualistic, personified and customized' (63%) are other words that governed the question of attitude of buyers towards the 'artifacts' that they call handicrafts

Discussion and Conclusion

The soaring of trade in handicrafts and other cultural artifacts in recent years, have threatened the existence of these crafts and the cultural heritage embodied within them. Hence the present study was undertaken to understand the response of the consumers to help increase the uptake and sales of these cultural artifacts. Consumers seem to imply that showcasing these goods on wider platform may help the cause and will help in the development of contemporary craft through on site advertisement. A key fallacy in understanding or reading these trends is that market dynamism is a concern all

business share and long-term sustenance needs constant monitoring and intervention to keep willingness for the craft high. The fact these handicrafts are associated with values, authenticity, and genuineness works in favor for the craftsmen and their handiwork as potential for the craft market as presented by the consumers. Market segmentation has revealed that marketing needs to focus on potential consumers that is the younger adults who less likely to be buyers than their older counterparts who associate these products with their roots and identity. Other potential buyers could be consumers who recognize the culture as an active determinant of purchase decision and if one can enhance their cultural experiences, the markets can be prevented from soaring. Consumers who already appreciate handiwork like craft objects for their uniqueness, need to see the beauty, skill, stories they embody, along with value of traditions. An endorsement that it is a home-grown product, better visibility besides the urban haat, the fact that its nation made, advertisement by known personalities, opening online markets, and presenting the goods as a need based products may further help increasing the uptake of handicraft market. Another recommendation is to encourage them to take part in activities associated with ethnic goods, may help to self-educate themselves about the benefits and value each of these goods uphold. This will also make consumers increasingly interested in knowing more about the origin of an object: where it comes from, who made it and how it was made. Some consumers like the idea of unfolding the relationship, handicrafts have with their creator, to showcase their creativity and may be presented as a motivator to make the sale trend, as ascending one. Personalization and customization, niche interests to reflect the uniqueness of the buyer and seller may be another key measure to tap. Building a network and passing on information on social media, so that information associated with handicrafts, how, what and where to choose or buy these products are other options presented by consumers to build a market for handicrafts.

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