

IMPACT OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS ON THE GLOBAL REACH OF HANDICRAFT BUSINESSES IN BANARAS (VARANASI).

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Abstract:

The Banaras (Varanasi) handicraft sector is well-known for its elaborate craftsmanship and traditional goods including brassware, wooden toys, and Banarasi silk sarees, and it occupies a prominent position in India's cultural and economic landscape. The traditional restrictions that limited these handcrafted goods to regional and national markets have been lifted with the emergence of internet platforms, providing previously unheard-of chances for worldwide distribution. This study examines how digital platforms have revolutionised the marketing, distribution, and general expansion of handicraft enterprises in Banaras.

Digital payment systems, social media marketing, and e-commerce websites have all been integrated to enable small businesses and craftsmen to communicate directly with customers around the world. Virtual markets like Amazon, Etsy, and Instagram have increased profit margins and decreased reliance on middlemen. Additionally, by showcasing the artistry and cultural relevance of their items through visually captivating content, digital storytelling has allowed craftsmen to connect emotionally with consumers throughout the world.

But there are drawbacks to switching to digital media. Many craftsmen face major challenges due to a lack of digital literacy, poor infrastructure, and competitiveness in the global market. The "Digital India" campaign and e-commerce collaborations are two examples of government initiatives and training programs that are meant to close these disparities.

This paper's analysis of case studies and statistical data leads to the conclusion that, even if digital platforms have transformed Banaras' handicraft sector, strategic interventions and support networks are still necessary to guarantee long-term growth and fair benefits for craftsmen. The results highlight how digitisation can act as a catalyst to preserve traditional crafts and increase their appeal on a global scale.

Keywords: Digital platforms, Handicraft businesses, Global reach, Indian artisans, E-commerce, Cultural preservation, Entrepreneurial transformation.

Introduction:

A thriving and essential component of the country's cultural legacy, the Indian handicraft sector reflects centuries of artistic tradition, expert craftsmanship, and regional variation. This industry, which is well-known for its elaborate patterns, premium materials, and distinctive cultural symbols, is a tribute to India's inventiveness and rich past. Millions of people are employed by it, especially in rural regions, and it not only maintains the integrity of traditional arts but also contributes significantly to the national economy. Government reports state that the handicraft industry has a major role in driving socioeconomic development, particularly for underserved groups, and contributes significantly to the GDP.

The Indian handicraft industry has many obstacles that prevent it from growing and scaling up, despite its potential. These include disjointed supply chains, a lack of structured marketing channels, poor infrastructure, and restricted access to international markets. Due to weak distribution networks and a lack of technological know-how, artisans frequently find it difficult to reach consumers outside of their immediate area. The competition from mass-produced goods, which are usually more affordable and available to consumers, further exacerbates these limitations. As a result, even if there has been a recent increase in demand for genuine and sustainable handicrafts worldwide, Indian craftsmen usually pass up these chances, which makes it more difficult for them to expand their businesses and become financially stable.

The emergence of digital platforms in recent years has revolutionized the handicraft industry by providing creative answers to numerous persistent problems. Etsy, Amazon Handmade, and Shopify are just a few of the platforms that have opened up new avenues for artists to market and sell their goods to a worldwide customer base. These platforms facilitate direct communication between artists and customers by doing away with the need for middlemen, which improves profit margins and strengthens the bond between buyers and producers. Additionally, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest have given craftspeople effective marketing tools to advertise their goods, establish their brands, and interact with potential clients around the globe.

Digital platforms have an impact that goes beyond their financial advantages. They let audiences throughout the world to appreciate the rich legacy and artistry of Indian handicrafts by promoting cultural exchange. Products with cultural importance and a backstory are becoming more and more popular with consumers, and digital platforms offer the ideal venue for telling these tales. By sharing the history, methods, and customs that go into their works, artisans may now increase the perceived worth of their work and cultivate a devoted following of clients.

There are difficulties associated with this change. Many craftsmen encounter obstacles to entry, including digital illiteracy, limited access to technology, and challenges navigating online marketplaces, despite the enormous potential presented by digital platforms. Additionally, there may be fierce competition among craftsmen from other nations for the same market share on these sites. For the industry to succeed in the long run, it is imperative that Indian artisans have the knowledge, resources, and assistance they need to prosper in this digital environment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how internet platforms might help Indian handicraft companies expand their global reach. The study aims to evaluate how social media and Etsy have boosted international sales, promoted cross-cultural interactions, and stimulated entrepreneurial growth by looking at case studies of prosperous craftspeople and studying the characteristics and effects of these platforms. The study will also examine the difficulties craftsmen encounter when implementing these technologies and suggest solutions. The study's ultimate goal is to draw

attention to the revolutionary potential of digital platforms in reviving the Indian handicraft industry, guaranteeing its sustainability, and conserving its cultural heritage for coming generations.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse impact of digital platforms on global reach of handicraft businesses in Banaras, whether it is positive or negative.
2. To analyse challenges faced by these businesses in global reach.
3. To suggest strategies for using digital platforms for growth of the business.

Research Methodology:

Research Design: To examine how digital platforms affect the worldwide reach of Banaras' handicraft companies, the study uses a descriptive research design, which is suitable for comprehending the opportunities, difficulties, and current status of digitalisation in this industry.

Methods of Data Collection:

a) Primary Data:

- Surveys: To learn more about the experiences of craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders in the Banaras handicraft sector with digital platforms, structured questionnaires will be sent to them.
- Interviews: Qualitative insights will be obtained through semi-structured interviews with important stakeholders, such as government representatives, e-commerce consultants, and craftsmen.
- Focus Groups: To learn more about the opinions, difficulties, and recommendations of small groups of craftsmen, discussions will be held.

b) Secondary Data:

- Books about the digitisation of handicrafts and how it affects related sectors around the world.
- Reports from government programs such as "Digital India" and partnerships with online retailers.
- Case studies of the handicraft industry's successful digital revolutions.
- Sales trends for Banaras handicrafts are highlighted by data from e-commerce sites (like Etsy and Amazon).

Sampling Method:

- Population: Small company owners, artisans, and other participants in the Banaras handicraft industry.
- Sampling Technique: Participants who actively participate in the creation, promotion, and

retailing of handcrafted goods in Banaras will be chosen through the technique of purposive sampling.

- **Sample Size:** About 100 people responded, guaranteeing a range of viewpoints from craftsmen who use and do not use internet networks.

Literature Review:

Digital Platforms' Function in Business Growth:

Academic and industrial research have extensively demonstrated the revolutionary potential of digital platforms in extending business opportunities. By connecting producers and customers worldwide, digital platforms like social media and e-commerce websites have democratized market access (Smith et al., 2020). By removing geographical restrictions, these platforms allow small companies and craftspeople to connect with a wider audience without the need for expensive middlemen. According to Gupta (2021), websites such as Etsy, Amazon Handmade, and Instagram give business owners access to marketing resources, direct consumer interaction, and efficient payment methods. Additionally, by offering data and insights, these platforms help firms better understand consumer preferences and industry trends.

Obstacles for Small-Scale Craftspeople:

Effective use of digital platforms is a major barrier for small-scale artists around the world. One of the main obstacles is low digital literacy, since many craftspeople are not proficient in using digital tools for marketing and sales or navigating online markets (Das & Singh, 2022). Their capacity to compete in a global economy that is becoming more and more online is hampered by the digital divide. Inadequate supply chain infrastructure and expensive shipping are two logistical obstacles that make scaling operations and completing international orders even more difficult. Additionally, it is challenging to distinguish out and draw clients because to the intense rivalry on digital platforms, where craftspeople from other nations display comparable goods. These difficulties show that in order to empower craftspeople, focused actions are required, such as training courses and encouraging laws.

Online shopping and handicrafts:

E-commerce platforms have completely changed how Indian handicrafts are marketed and sold, giving craftspeople access to new markets and clients around the world. According to Kumar (2019), websites like Etsy have become into essential resources for craftspeople, providing a worldwide platform for exhibiting their goods. By avoiding conventional middlemen, these platforms enable artists to interact directly with customers and increase their profit margins. E-commerce platforms, however, frequently lack specialized assistance for small firms, despite their advantages. High listing fees, platform regulations, and the lack of specialized instruction are problems for many craftspeople. They are also unable to fully utilize these channels due to problems including cultural misrepresentation and insufficient promotional resources. Closing these gaps is essential to long-term growth.

Cultural Storytelling and Promotion:

By allowing companies to integrate cultural narrative into their campaigns, especially for artisan products, digital platforms have revolutionized marketing. According to Patel and Verma (2020), digital storytelling enables craftspeople to engage clients more deeply while preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. Craftspeople build deep relationships with customers by educating them about the craftsmanship, symbolism, and history of their products, which raises the perceived value of their offers. Artists can tell their stories with images, videos, and descriptions thanks to platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and Etsy. This strategy not only increases consumer involvement but also promotes cultural awareness and appreciation around the world.

Case 1: A Rajasthani pottery artist

An impressive 200% increase in exports was attained in just two years by a Rajasthani pottery artist who effectively used Etsy to grow their business. The artisan offered engrossing tales about the cultural relevance, age-old methods, and artistry of their ceramics by incorporating social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. Engaging posts and excellent images not only drew in foreign shoppers but also developed a devoted following. While social media interaction promoted trust and individualized relationships with clients, the artist used Etsy's analytics tools to comprehend market trends and improve listings. This example demonstrates how e-commerce and digital storytelling can enable traditional craftspeople to expand globally and engage in cross-cultural interactions.

Case 2: An Assamese Handloom Weaver

By using Instagram as their main marketing tool, an Assamese handloom weaver revolutionized their business and secured significant international bulk orders. The weaver highlighted the fine craftsmanship and cultural value of traditional Assamese designs by using the opportunity to display their distinctive handwoven textiles. Boutique owners and textile enthusiasts were among the global audience that the weaver drew in with visually appealing posts and captivating anecdotes. The craftsman established credibility and trust by answering client questions directly and providing behind-the-scenes looks at the weaving process. Utilizing Instagram's features, such as reels and hashtags, increased awareness even more, proving that social media can be a potent instrument for small craftspeople looking to break into foreign markets.

Case 3: A Keralan Bamboo Craftsman

By joining Amazon's "Karigar" program, which supports traditional Indian handicrafts, a bamboo maker from Kerala saw notable growth. Scaling operations and increasing sales were made possible by the program's capacity to present handcrafted bamboo products to a worldwide audience. The craftsman increased product visibility with Amazon's help by using targeted

marketing campaigns and carefully chosen groupings. However, operational effectiveness and customer satisfaction were hindered by logistical issues including expensive shipping and delays. Platform fees and commission schemes also presented challenges for the craftsmen, lowering profit margins. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the program showed how programs designed specifically for artists can promote expansion, so long as financial and logistical obstacles are successfully removed.

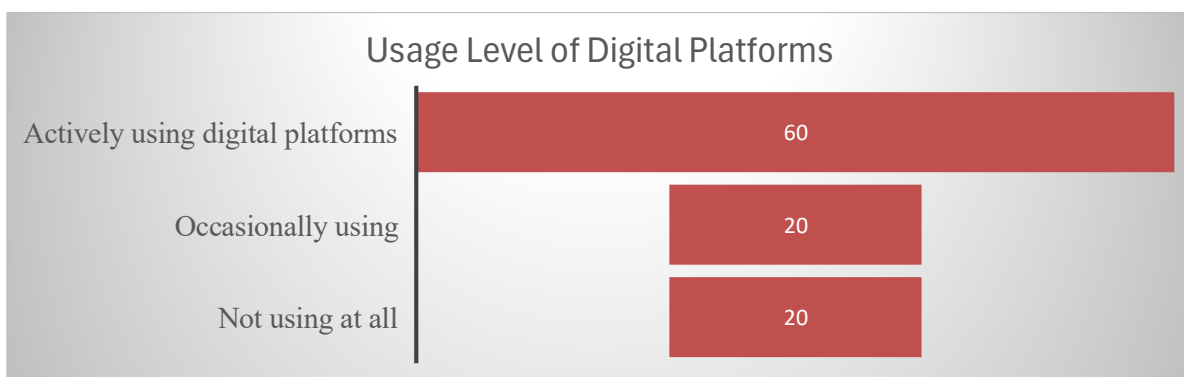
Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Hypothesis I:

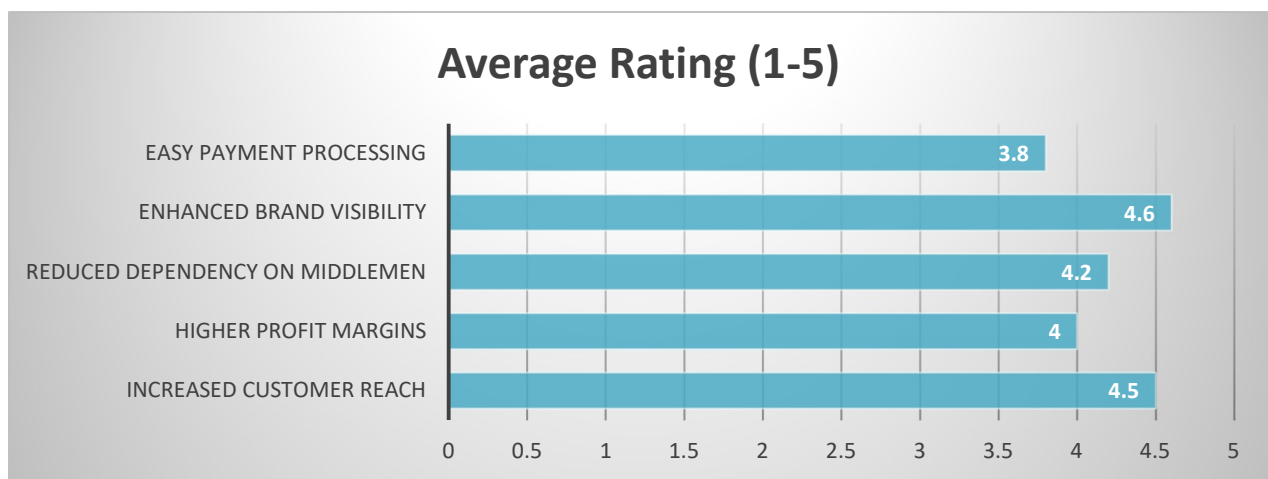
H0: There is a negative impact of digitalization on Global reach of Handicraft businesses in Banaras.

H1: There is positive impact of digitalization on Global reach of Handicraft businesses in Banaras.

Usage Level	Frequency	Percentage
Actively using digital platforms	60	60%
Occasionally using	20	20%
Not using at all	20	20%



Benefit	Average Rating (1-5)
Increased customer reach	4.5
Higher profit margins	4
Reduced dependency on middlemen	4.2
Enhanced brand visibility	4.6
Easy payment processing	3.8



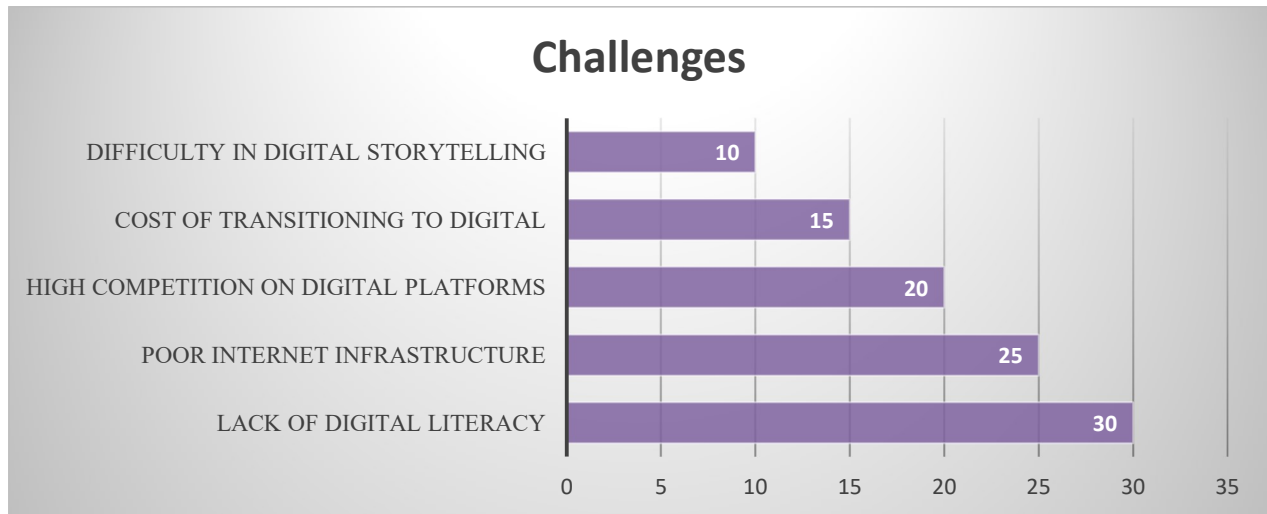
Interpretation:

The graphic highlights the tremendously beneficial effects of digitisation on the international reach of Banaras region handicraft companies. These companies have increased their global market presence by utilising digital tools and platforms, demonstrating how digitisation can improve visibility, consumer access, and overall business success.

Hypothesis II:

H0: There are not any challenges, applying digitalization in the handicraft sector.

H1: There are several challenges, applying digitalization in the handicraft sector.



Interpretation:

The graphic illustrates the difficulties that handicraft companies face as a result of digitisation, highlighting the fact that a major problem is a lack of digital literacy. This suggests a critical need for focused training programs to give craftspeople the fundamental digital skills they need to successfully traverse platforms and use digital technologies to expand their businesses.

Strategies:

Shared Platforms:

Handicraft companies can band together to develop a common digital platform, such a cooperative website, to market and sell their goods around the world. They can save individual costs and gain from combined marketing and operational efficiency by combining their efforts. Their competitive position in the global market is strengthened, visibility is increased, and collaboration is encouraged.

Shared Contract for Digital Platform Handling:

A collective agreement with a tech-savvy expert can assist a collection of companies in effectively managing digital platforms. By combining their resources, they can all afford professional help with managing both individual and group operations. This cooperative strategy lowers operating expenses while guaranteeing efficient platform administration, improving overall company productivity and online visibility.

Use of Subscriptions:

Making use of digital platforms' subscription policies can greatly expand a company's global reach and growth. These memberships frequently give users access to cutting-edge tools, analytics, and marketing capabilities, which help companies grow their clientele, increase the

visibility of their products, and optimise workflows—all of which contribute to thorough 360-degree business development in a cutthroat worldwide marketplace.

Appropriate Training:

Businesses can improve the digital competency of their personnel by providing targeted upskilling programs and appropriate training using a variety of approaches. Organisations can enhance consumer interaction, streamline operations, and maintain competitiveness in the quickly changing digital market by providing staff with the skills they need to operate digital platforms effectively.

Conclusion:

Digital platforms serve as conduits between Indian artists and clients around the world, revolutionising the country's handicraft industry. These platforms give craftspeople the chance to present their distinctive works to a wider audience, boosting demand and visibility. However, customised interventions are essential for long-term growth. Programs like digital training improve craftsmen's technology skills, and logistical assistance guarantees smooth international product delivery. Platform providers and policymakers must collaborate to address issues including infrastructure, digital literacy, and market access. Craftspeople can flourish in a supportive environment, protecting India's rich cultural legacy and boosting the world economy.

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