

MARKETING FOR THE SUSTENANCE OF HANDLOOM IN INDIA: A STUDY

John Thanzauva^{1*}
Dr. Bidhu Kati Das²
Dr.V. Malswmtluanga³

¹(Guest faculty Dept Management, Pachhunga University and Research scholar Department of Management, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram),

²(Assistant professor, Department of Management, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram)

³(Guest faculty, Dept. of Management, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl, Mizoram)

Abstract

The handloom industry is a unique and indispensable part of India's culture and economy. With the growing importance of sustainability, the handloom industry provides a tailored structure in the globally important yet large carbon footprint textile industry. It is estimated that the handloom fabric is three times more environmentally friendly than power mill fabric. However, the issue of sustainability needs ecological, economic and social considerations. The minimal energy consumption and use of natural dyes make handloom fabrics relatively sustainable. Socially, handloom has been able to provide equitable employment opportunities and being a traditional skill, its position in cultural preservation is well established. Economically, the significance of handloom industry cannot be ignored, being rural based and in India; the second largest employer next to the agricultural sector. However, there have often been doubts regarding the industry's relevance. This study analyzes the various aspects of sustainability with regards to the marketing of handloom products in India.

Keywords: Marketing, Sustainability, Handloom, Environment, Weavers, Energy

Introduction

The term sustainability was popularized by the “*Brundtland Commission*”, conjoining it with the concept of development it defined sustainable development as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (UNESCO, 2021). The UN commission further established three pillars of sustainability – environmentally sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability. Further, dwelling on the three pillars, with regards to environmentally sustainability, according to Morelli (2011), it is a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity. In economic terms according to Stavins, et al (2002) “sustainability is *not only* about intergenerational equity; rather, widely-held views of sustainability encompass elements of both efficiency and distributional equity” Stavins, argues that there are two important components of sustainability concept – firstly dynamic efficiency and integrational equity which needs to be integrated to achieve sustainability. According to UN globalcompact (nd) Social sustainability refers to managing and controlling positive as well as negative impacts business have on people.

Objective:

The objective of this paper is to study the various aspects of sustainability of the handloom industry as a whole through existing literature. The study confined to ecological, social and economic perspectives of sustainability. This is an attempt to highlight the issue and challenge within the handloom industry with emphasis on the marketing system, practices and opportunities of the handloom industry.

Methodology:

This article is a review study based on previous literatures. The study is drawn from previous article and studies ranging from the concept of sustainability, environmental impact of textile, issues and challenge of handloom industry and the current marketing practices of handloom industry. Analysis and findings were drawn from the existing literature only.

Environmental impact of textile

The world textiles and apparel exports value is estimated to be \$305bn and \$492bn in 2019 with an industry projected CAGR of 4.3% from 2020 to 2027 (Lu, 2020), the textile industry is an important global economic driver. In 2008, annual global textile production was estimated at 60 billion kg of fabric, estimated energy and water needed to produce such quantity of fabric is considered to be 1,074 billion kWh of electricity or 132 Mt of coal and about 6-9 tonne litres of water. Also, it is estimated that the thermal energy required for producing per metre of cloth is 4,500-5,500 Kcal and the electrical energy required per meter of cloth is 0.45-0.55 kwh (Ashok, Athalye, 2012). Also, nearly 70 million barrels of oil are used each year to make the world’s polyester fibre, which is now the most used fibre in our clothing, but polyester takes more than 200 years to decompose. Cheap synthetic fibres also emit gasses like N₂O, which is 300 times more damaging than CO₂, over 70 million trees are logged every year and turned into fabrics like rayon, viscose, modal and lyocell (Conca, 2015). The CO₂ emission from textiles is calculated based on:

- 1) Primary footprint: CO₂ emission directly through energy consumption of burning fossil fuels for electricity, heating and transportation, etc.
- 2) Secondary footprint: indirect CO₂ emissions (lifecycle of products and sustainability).

According to Kirchain, Randolph et al (2015) the textile industry is also considered as one of the largest polluting and energy intensive industries in the world consuming nearly 1 billion kWh of electricity or 132 Mt Coal to produce 60 billion Kg of fabric. To understand the environmental impact, Kirchain, Olivetti, Miller, & Greene, (2015) estimated that the GWP (global warming potential) of one kilogram of manufactured dyed knit or woven cotton fabric to be 10.8 kg CO₂-eq, which is 2.1kg CO₂-eq per t-shirt. Studies by Payet (2021) highlights that, using LCA, that a person in France consumes textile equitable to 442 kg of CO₂eq/year which

needs to be reduced to 74 kg of CO₂eq/person/year. In 2013, 25 billion kilograms of cotton was produced worldwide. Approximately 40% of that, or about 10 billion kilograms, was used in making apparel. At such a scale, the estimated cradle-to-gate impact of cotton used within the global apparel industry is 107.5 million tonnes of CO₂-eq furthermore, polyester textile is estimated to produce emission of 880 billion kg CO₂eq today and further projected to emit 1.5 trillion kg CO₂eq by 2030 (Kirchain, Olivetti, Miller, & Greene, 2015).

Electrical energy is one of the primary energy sources consumed in cotton textile processing and the current energy cost rate is reported about 8 to 10 percent in the total production cost of an ordinary textile product manufactured (Ganesh, 2015). However, textile industry as individual units are not considered to be an energy-intensive industry, but because the textile industry comprises of a large number of plants which collectively consume a significant amount of energy it is so labelled.

Since 1992 the textile energy consumption has been increasing rapidly from 47PJ (petajoule, one PJ=10⁵ Joules) to 292 PJ in terms of disaggregated energy consumption in 2002, sharing 13% of the total manufacturing industry consumption. In terms of energy intensity, for the period 1992 to 2002 the textile sector energy intensity has grown by 12.1% per annum (from 350 to 1901 TJ) where all other sectors are in negative and in terms of CO₂ emission the textile industry emissions grew exponentially in 1992 to 2002 from 7.91 million tonnes to 54.81 million tonnes (Ray & Reddy, 2007). According to the India energy outlook (2017) in 2013 the total industrial sector consumed 217 Mtoe (Million tonnes of oil equivalent; 1Mtoe= 11630000000 kWh) of energy of which textile industry consumed 4.34 Mtoe of energy which is roughly 181.707 PJ which translates to 5.05x10¹⁰ kWh, assuming the process is electricity based, to give us a rough idea, 46 million tonnes of CO₂ eq was the emission exclusively from energy consumption (conversion based on Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation and Confederation of Indian Industries, August 2013, pg 85). Further, Parikh et al (2009), for the period 2003-2004, calculated the textile CO₂ emission to be 55.6 MT which is roughly 4.9 percent of total industrial sectors in India. It can be clearly said that the textile industry involves multiple process that collectively consumes large amount of energy which in turn result in CO₂ emissions.

Sustainability of handloom

In terms of energy efficiency, from one kilo of cotton assuming 10% wastage, one hank of yarn can be produced in roughly 50 minutes on ambar charkha with two spindles using human energy. To produce one meter of handloom fabric, 6 to 7 hanks are required taking 1.33 human hours to weave one meter of fabric. In all, it takes 2.25 human hours to produce one meter of fabric. Sudarshan and Shukla (2015) suggested that Khadi/ handloom fabric is roughly 3.24 times energy efficient than modern power mill cloth. India's population was 1.21 billion in 2011. Assuming average consumption of 8 meters of cloth, India requires 9.68 billion meters of cloth production. If the average requirement of 8 meters of cloth is produced in handloom in the country, 1.36 kWh power of renewable energy would be spent in a year. The Mill is today producing 39 square meters using 17.55 kWh. India can save at least 16.19 KWh person. In all, it can end up saving 19.6 billion kWh of energy which is approximately 2.07x10⁷ Mt CO₂/ Mtoe

Balaji & Mani (2014), dwelling on the three spheres of sustainability – social, environment and economy point out that the traditional handlooms contribute positively, addressing the three spheres. Socially traditional handloom has been able to integrate gender and social equity, furthermore the utilization of nature dyes and comparatively reduced wastage form traditional handloom industry, its inherent nature to create sources livelihood and existence of market potential make handloom a potentially sustainable industry.

Mamidipudi & Bijker (2012) highlights that handloom has been considered unsustainable largely due to the comparatively low production as compared to the power mill leading to a conclusion that it is not competitive. They argue that it is important to remove the assumption of handloom being unproductive technology but consider it as a socially and culturally unique technology which is an elastic and resilient sustainable system that has the ability to absorb new knowledge, market changes, create equitable employment and welfare for the people. They argue that what is needed is the addressing of the vulnerabilities of industry.

Shrivastava (2020) iterates the importance and artistic uniqueness of handloom to the Indian culture and economy. His study mentions that unlike power loom the handloom industry's use of plant based natural dyes eliminating health hazards for the weavers and other craftsmen. Moreover, the nature-based dyes and treatments infuse antibacterial and UV retardation properties to the woven fabrics. Exemplifying the handloom of Kutch, Shrivastava, advocates that sustainability has been a staple of handloom. Beside the production process of handloom seems to promote equitable employment with men and women having roles in the weaving process.

Reddy (2019) stressing the importance of handloom sector in India, highlights the low electrical energy consumption of handloom sector results in negligible energy consumption, furthermore, he highlights that the dependence on natural dyes and its focus on local markets result in low carbon footprint. From the economic perspective, Reddy mentions that the handloom sector account to 13-15 percent of the total India textile market generating employment for rural and urban populations and furthermore the handloom sectors supplements and supports the agriculture-based profession.

Gopal (2020) highlighting the work of Birla Cellulose in the handloom sector, states that handloom, besides being environmentally friendly, supports the Indian economy and contributes to the welfare and employment of the rural population

Vijayan, & Anandavalli (2018) highlight the importance of handloom sector, among other small-scale industry, for the sustainability of the economy, with the sector being the second largest employer in India. According to their study there is awareness and acceptance of handloom product with strong potential customer base. They further point out that the handloom sector has the potential for employment generation, skill development for the rural areas and the potential to stabilize the economy.

Issue and challenges of Handloom sustainability

A detail study by Mishra & Mohapatra (2020) on the sustainability of handloom industry in India revealed a recurring theme of inadequate government support, lack of technology upgradation, improper management owing to lack of professionalism, need for skill up-gradation of weavers, a disconnect between market and products, health concerns of weavers, lack of quality control amongst others. The study concluded that the prospects of handloom in India are strongly tied with the culture. The concerns that need addressing for sustainability of handloom include logistical development, development of a regulated pricing mechanism, management training and bridging the skill gap amongst others.

Balaji & Mani (2014) highlighted that the strength of handloom lies in the industry's ability to quickly innovate designs and handloom fabrics have a high ecological value. They mention that issues such as: high prices of Yarn, limited designs, outdated process, inadequate skill upgradation, inadequate marketing, weak financial base and shifting of skilled weavers are constraints for the sustainability of the industry.

Goswami & Jain, (2014) in their study identified the issue and challenges faced by the handloom industry in Jaipur, Rajasthan. According to their studies, it was found that the major issues faced by officials and weavers in the handloom industry ranged from low sales at exhibition and showroom, lack of scientific market research, weak and unorganized promotional activities, lack of funds, inadequate functioning infrastructure, design disconnect with market trends, lack of innovative designs, usage of old looms, poor quality yarn.

Nadh & Vardhan (2013) found that the pressing issues of the handloom industry were a result of lack of marketing skills and disconnect of the weavers with information regarding market trends, taste and preferences. They also found that consumers seem to lack awareness of the benefits of handloom products ranging from friendliness of handloom fabrics to the versatility of handloom products. According to the study the handloom industry in general lacks quality standardization which can have a negative impact on the attractiveness of handloom products.

Singha (1992), with regards to the handloom products, stressed the need for innovation in the industry-blending new raw materials and establishing standards of quality. With relation to pricing of handloom, Singha underlines the need to develop a scientific pricing strategy which differentiate products, moving away from age old margin selling. On promotion of handloom, Singha believes that real promotion in the industry can happen with government reservations and that media advertising is merely to capture attention.

Kumar & Sulaiman, (2017) in studying the handloom Industry of Kerala and Tamil Nadu observed that the central problems and challenges faced by the sector in production arise due to the scarce raw material availability and price volatility, lack of ground-breaking models, presence of internal threats, improper self-contained storage, stumpy congenital practice, and lack of sincere motivation factors. The marketing problems of the handloom industry are constituted by the outside intimidation in market, drifting demand and supply and inapt intervention by the government, lack of awareness among the stakeholders, poor domestic market performance, imbalanced output price and brand, and intervention by middlemen. Majority of the handloom units in both the states rely heavily on traditional technology in the area of production. No productive attempt has been made so far, to make use of the exclusive facilities of handlooms to create exclusive and value-added fabrics, which generally tend to have good demand in export market.

Varghese & Salim (2015) in their study highlight that the issues and challenges faced by weavers' stem mainly from the inconsistent and rising yarn price. This increase in yarn price do not pass on to the product which become unsustainable for the financially weak weavers. Moreover, governments policy has long spoon-fed the weavers which has developed a reliance on such schemes stemming the growth of the weavers. Other issues such as skill development, marketing channels and linkages need to be developed. The study also suggest that the handloom product lack consumer orientation. On the human side a majority of the weavers lack health care facilities and often weavers are plagued by irregular payment for their products which discourages them.

Sounderapandian (2002) in a detailed report identifies several issues of the handloom industry in India. Firstly, the years of government policies have created dependence rather than independent entrepreneurs, he also suggests that the designs and product lack modern touch due to lack of exposure of weaves. The report reveals that there is an inherent problem in the supply of raw material specially yarn

Goswami & Jain (2011) highlight the potential and scope of handloom industry; however, they have identified certain issues and challenges which disrupt the handloom industry at large. According their study there is a prevalent issue in the supply and procurement of yarn, be it quality or timely supply. In regards to the product the study also highlights that there is gap between market taste and product designs. In terms of the welfare of weavers the lack of bonus and incentives do not provide positive reinforcement or motivation.

Surayya, Bhaskar, & Devi (2015) In studying the socio- economic condition of handloom weavers in Andhra Pradesh observed that although form the sample a majority of 88% of the weavers owned their own looms, they are outdated and often do not have a Jacquard being a majorly operate on pit looms. Furthermore, it was observed that there was a high percentage of idle loom stemming primarily from the lack of improper remuneration and incentive structure. It was found that a majority of the loom owners had to pick up additional jobs to meet the expenses of weaving. They suggest that additional marketing campaigns and design refinement can help boost sales.

The above literatures have constantly identified the recurring issue in the handloom industry, which seems to inhibit progress in the handloom sector. Issues of timely procurement of quality yarns can hamper the production process and availability of products in the market. The lack of upgraded looms can greatly hamper speed of production, quality and increase cost of handloom production, other issues such as design and lack of marketing skills in the handloom industry can greatly impact the sustainability of the business as a whole.

Furthermore, the lack of improper remuneration and incentives for the weavers can financially have a negative impact increasing the number of idle looms.

Sustainable marketing

In relation to marketing, Kemper & Ballantine (2019), in studying literature of 200 journals categorized three conceptualisations of sustainability marketing: Auxiliary/ supplementary Sustainability Marketing (ASM) – focus of which is ecological friendly product, Reformatory/ Reformatory Sustainability Marketing (RSM) – the focus of which is on promoting green products and sustainable lifestyle changes and thirdly Transformative Sustainability Marketing (TSM) – to challenge the institutional inhibitors to a sustainable society. According to them, the concept of sustainable marketing was put forth by Seth and Parvatiyar (1995) and were followed by many different definitions of sustainable marketing, ranging from environmental concepts to holistic concepts. Fuller (1999) suggested sustainable marketing as a process of planning, implementation and control, development, pricing, advertising and distribution of products in a manner that meets the following three criteria: (1) customer needs are met; (2) organizational goals are achieved; and (3) the whole process is compatible with ecosystems.

Form the various concepts, definitions put for and widely accepted it can be said that the concept of sustainability revolves around the themes of efficiency, positive environmental impact and progressive development.

Handloom marketing

Dineshkumar (2018) reports that the handloom marketing system mainly operates using the following channels i) State Handloom Cooperative Societies ii). State Handloom Development Corporations iii). Private traders/ master weavers iv). Sales outlet of weavers' societies and v). Exhibitions/Mela, where individual weavers, societies and or groups exhibit and sell their products. From the establishment of cooperative model in handloom, the system was structured in a manner wherein the Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies (PWCS) would be the production units and the Apex level Cooperative societies (ACS) would play the role of consulting and support institution sourcing and provide raw materials, designs and marketing support. He further mentions that the cooperative handloom sector encompasses only 15 percent of the weavers and the apex ACS have not been able to effectively provide the required marketing support to the PWCS. Dinesh Kumar also mentions that different state governments also established State Handloom Development Corporations to provide marketing support to the individual weavers at the state levels. Besides these initiatives, it is estimated that 80 percent of the marketing support is provided by the private traders/ master weavers. Often resulting in exploitation of the weavers.

Hazarika and Goswami (2018) in their study amongst the tribal women of Assam, found that most of the women entered handloom weaving in order to supplement their family income. They found that it was more likely for the women to enter the handloom industry as an entrepreneur by association and in influence of the art. Education or exposure to government training had little no significant influence for the women in entering handloom weaving. With regards to marketing, they stated that *eri* products are exported to Nepal, China, Tibet, Mongolia and Bhutan.

Thanzauva and Das (2018) in studying the concept of product market fit of handloom in Aizawl found that local handloom products had a strong market base driven by the culture and tradition. The study also highlighted that handloom products although widely accepted were not identifiable based on brand nor were there a direct influence of promotional activities.

Crossley, (2018) reportes the entry of Raymond, a popular Indian fashion brand, in the marekting of handloom textile. According to her, raymonds will directly source handloom fabric from the KVICs for the prduction of their re-spun brand and integrate the products in their portfolio establishing sales points through the KVIC and Raymonds outlets accros the country.

Sundaram (2019) identifies lack of marketing facility as a major issue for handloom weavers. Hinting that the marketing system suffers from rebate system aimed at by co-operative societies and master weaver system. Sundaram is supportive of the S. Sudhakar Reddy Committee which suggest “streamlining of the production in the handloom sector and high productivity through latest technologies, ensuring availability of sufficient working capital, widening of the product range and strengthening of market links”.

Ghosh and Ghosal (2019) attempted to find out the reason for the drop in sales of handloom saris and opportunities to revive them. The study found Marketing function, Channel of distribution, Price fixation, Sales promotion, Marketing research to be the persisting problems. It was identified that sales promotional and advertising were problems which stood out. The study found that a limiting factor of the weavers was the involvement of the Mahajan’s whom the weavers tended to be indebted to.

Vaidehi & Das (2021) expresses that the problem with handloom industry is its inability to break out of the local market due to inability to adapt new marketing techniques. Although the government is making efforts to promote the e-commerce channel, the platforms either bombard consumer with an overly extensive product range or confine the markets to specific region.

The above literatures suggest that handloom products in India are well accepted and cherished with a reasonably good customer base. However, the deep involvement of middlemen without adequate knowledge or skill in the marketing process, the confinement of handloom product to specific region, amongst others, seem to limit the market growth of the industry. Although Governments, both at the national and state level have established a cooperative structure to address the issues, they seem to lack the enthusiasms and success of independent societies.

Discussion and Suggestion

Handloom products are culturally and ecologically friendly and there is a huge urgency to integrate them to the modern fashion and in the textile industry. The energy and power consumption from the heavy industrialized synthetic textile industry have been seen to contribute a large amount of carbon and other caustic pollutants. This also comes along with urbanization and congestion in the urban population.

On the other hand, handloom production has been identified to provide rural livelihood whether it be part time or fulltime engagement, thus potentially supplementing the household income. Furthermore, being a skill and to some extent, a tradition passed down form generations, handloom weaving represents India’s culture and thus an important component of cultural preservation. More efforts need to be given in the proper research and marketing of these handloom productivities. This study strongly suggests that enhanced marketing with proper research, analysis and implementation will prove sustainability of handloom.

The study also brings about the following as areas to be considered for the sustainability of handloom and handloom industry.

1. Market enhancement will help cultural sustenance as it will increase rural income enhancing livelihood, desire lesser urban migration and preserve the skill of weaving.
2. Logistical development in the backward and forward market of the handloom industry is vital for the ecology.
3. Channelized Government support and intervention in the marketing and advertising is essential for the growth and development of handloom.
4. Market exposure of the actual weavers to the trending market will be a motivational factor, which can sometimes be a Governmental initiative.
5. New trending market platform could evolve with technologizing the market links and internet platforms, this will shorten the distribution channel and profit maximization is inevitable.

Besides the above, the study strongly believes branding the handloom through aggressive marketing and advertising, which can be a collaborative effort of Government and players in the handloom industry is vital.

Conclusion:

The social, cultural and economic importance of handloom industry in India cannot be ignored. The handloom textile is ecologically three times more environmentally friendly, the minimal use of energy and use of natural based dyes amongst others are a positives environmentally. Socially, handloom has integrated employment opportunities for both men and women. Also, handloom being a skill handed down from generation preserves the cultural heritage of India. Economically, handloom is predominantly rural based, as such it has provided employment opportunities for the rural society. Moreover, handloom has played an integral part in supplementing the income of rural farmers whom have used it during seasonal breaks. It can be said that handloom has a high sustainability potential. However, it is important to identify and recognize the main constraints of the development of the industry. According to the literature, issues such as the disconnect of handloom product from market trends, instability of yarn supply, quality of yarn and need for skill upgradation have been a recurring theme with regards to the product. Structurally, the predominance of middlemen and high dependency on subsidy/ rebates seem to disrupt the handloom industry.

For the handloom industry to move towards integrated sustainability, efforts are needed to improve the marketing aspects. These aspects include, but not limited to, development of a centralized marketing channel and distribution network that balances both ecommerce and physical market, promotion of handloom products developing a distinguishable brand identity, developing a pricing strategy that benefits the weavers and widening the handloom product utility.

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