

PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION AND DESIGN DEVELOPMENT IN HANDICRAFTS: a study of artisans at Khetikhan and Logaghat (Uttarakhand, India)

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Artisans; Clusters; Training program; Marketing; Khetikhan & Lohaghat.

Abstract

Introduction

In India, the arts and handcraft sector is the second largest employer (Roshni Balaji, 2019) and stretches from towns to remote areas in the country in the form of craft clusters dominated by poor income earning options and a near-absence of innovativeness (Das, 2015). Uttarakhand, just like other Indian states, houses numerous forms of crafts. An interaction with the Uttarakhand Handloom and Handicraft Development Council (UHHDC) officials highlighted that the artisans of Khetikhan and Lohaghat of District Champawat (Uttarakhand, India) needed exposure to new designs and products to redefine their craft as per market demands. The artisans here have been practicing the craft of knitting and crochet and have ancestral roots but are restricted to primitive products and materials.

Upon a pilot study among the artisans, it was observed that they have willingness to learn and work on newer designs and materials. It was observed that they needed guidance to bring out diversification in their work. Thus, the present study was carried out through a training program for the artisans in these clusters under UHHDC. The objectives of the study were to develop new products, to make artisans good in making these products and to make them learn various social media channels.

Methodology

The research was done as observational study by being with the artisans throughout the training program and by helping them to develop the designs. A semi-structured interview of the stakeholders and Focus Group Discussion among the artisans were also conducted. The responses from the interview and the discussion were used to analyse the study objectives.

Findings and Analysis

During the research study, it was observed that the artisans were enthusiastic to bring diversification in their craft practices and participated willingly in the training. The designs and product categories taught were decided based on the market survey and regular demand based. It covered categories from men, women and kids apparels and accessories. Initially, the artisans were made to practice new designs on wool as it is familiar to them and later, were made to develop them on cotton yarns. Moreover, getting exposure to various social media channels like Instagram, Facebook and Email Marketing made the learning more interesting for them.

Majority of the artisans were very comfortable with the new designs and materials while a few had to put extra effort. While learning about social media channels was of major interest to them, they showed willingness to learn more about them. They tried using these channels by using their own devices and even clarified their doubts wherever needed.

Conclusion

From the impact analysis of the training and from the research study carried out, it can be concluded that the artisans in the regions are open to development of their craft in terms of designs and products. The analysis shows interest of artisans to pursue craft making in new forms. Not only are they ready to present new products to the market, the introduction to social media marketing has opened channels to reach a larger audience.

Introduction

In India, the arts and handicraft sector is the second largest employer (Roshni Balaji, 2019) and stretches from towns to remote areas in the country in the form of craft clusters dominated by poor income earning options and a near-absence of innovativeness (Das, 2015). Uttarakhand, just like other Indian states, houses numerous forms of crafts. Uttarakhand Handloom and Handicraft Development Council (UHHDC) officials under their study of Khetikhan and Lohaghat (District Champawat, Uttarakhand) region highlighted that the artisans here needed exposure to their craft practices to redefine it as per market demands. The artisans here have been practicing the craft of knitting and crochet and have ancestral roots but are restricted to primitive products and materials.

UHHDC observed the willingness of the artisans to learn and work on newer designs and materials. They showed need for guidance to bring out diversification in their work. This need of the two regions to explore new designs and products led to the study i.e. development of training program for product development and diversification and its implementation. The objectives of the study were to develop new products, to make artisans good in making these products and to make them learn various social media channels.

The research was conducted by being with the artisans throughout the training program and by helping them to develop the designs. It utilizes analysis of the training and observational study to derive outcomes. A semi-structured interview of the stakeholders and Focus Group Discussion among the artisans were also conducted. The responses from the interview and the discussion were used to analyse the study.

The designs and product categories taught were decided based on the market survey and trend analysis of various fashion brands. It covered categories from men, women and kids apparels and accessories. The training brought out diversification in materials used, designs made and tools used. Moreover, the artisans were exposed to various social media channels like Instagram, Facebook and Email Marketing.

From the impact analysis of the training and from the research study carried out, it can be concluded that the artisans in the regions are open to development of their craft in terms of designs and products. The analysis shows encouragement in artisans to pursue craft making in new forms. Not only are they ready to present new products to the market, the introduction to social media marketing has opened channels to reach a larger audience.

A major limitation under the study was language barrier as all the artisans spoke their regional language and the other limitations were less understanding about the area and unpredictable communication gap with the target artisan.

Literature Review

Millions of people in India make their living by producing traditional handicrafts using traditional skills and knowledge (Ghosh, 2012). This industry has been one of the major parts of India's economic development strategy since independence (Sheikh & Tiwari, 2014). Today,

the handicraft industry occupies a position of strategic importance in the economic structure due to its significant contribution in terms of generating employment, revenue and exports (Sheikh & Tiwari, 2014). Handicrafts made through pottery, weaving, knitting, woodwork, etc. have low energy and infrastructure requirements. According to an IMARC group report, handicrafts are blooming in India due to low capital investments. The sector is one of the largest employment generators in Indian and accounts for a significant share of the country's exports (Masur & Agarwal, 2021). Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the union budget 2021 proposed the exemption on import of duty-free items as an incentive to exporters of handicraft items to give a boost to the sector. Mega cluster scheme and Marketing support and service scheme are two of the schemes developed for empowering handicrafts.

Customarily, craft businesses are family-owned, so artisans work with their relatives in all stages of the craft work and share the income. These crafts are as a rule sold locally where they are created or in encompassing districts as artisans don't offer their items overseas (Ratten and Tajeddini, 2017). Some of the studies (Ghosh, 2012; Marques et al, 2018) conclude that the diversification and development in handicrafts are responsible for development in the sector, moreover aiding entrepreneurial development.

Talking about the training artisans, Craft Training Institutes through providing courses on crafts are indirectly preserving, practicing and promoting the traditional crafts. These institutes are not only encouraging the youth to take up and pursue the crafts education but are also supporting the local crafts and helping in the revival of the local economy. Craft training institutes are also playing a crucial role in promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment in crafts (Karra, 2020).

Studies like Sheikh and Tiwari (2014) show that the skill development and training programmes which are organised by the government or any other private organisation are very helpful in the generation of employment, production and economic growth, and provide very large amounts of sales and exports to India, as well as the state's economy. They also recommended that before introducing the new product it is essential to first go for test marketing in order to discover faults and omissions therein. Thus, training and developing new and existing skill, semi-skilled and unskilled man force in order to update them for flexible business environment becomes necessary (Sheikh & Tiwari, 2014).

Methodology

The study was conducted to prepare a training program for artisans of Khetikhan and Lohaghat (District Champawat, Uttarakhand) looking into current market trends, developing new products based on these trends and making artisans practice these products till they become saleable. It also makes them learn various social media channels.

The research methods adopted were exploratory research, descriptive research and observational study. The research techniques adopted was survey method, focus group discussion and the tools used for the research were depth interviews and discussion guide. The process was divided into four parts:

1. Stakeholders interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted among the stakeholders of the region to understand the condition or status of the cluster. The interview was done with a set of open-ended questions.

2. Developing the training program

The training program was developed by the designer at Uttarakhand Handloom and Handicraft Development Council (UHHDC). The inspiration was taken from the study of ongoing trend and market survey done by UHHDC. Senior designer at UHHDC looked into the condition of the region and the craft, compared it with the outcomes of the market survey and developed look board, color palette and designs for the artisans to learn during the training program.

3. Implementing the training program

The training program was implemented with the help of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and District Industries Center (DIC), Champawat with the team of UHHDC. The duration of the training was two months. The implementation followed the time and action plan as prepared by the senior designer and the designer in-charge from UHHDC. During the course of the training, the artisans were taught about various social media platforms. Furthermore, a focus group discussion was also conducted to understand their mindset regarding product development and diversification.

4. Analysing the training program and other research techniques

It was done by undertaking the stakeholders' interview, focus group discussion among the artisans and the observational study done during the training program by being with the artisans for the duration of two months.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis

From the stakeholders interview, it was observed that the region of Khetikhan and Lohaghat have been practicing knitting and crochet from several generations. A few non-governmental organizations and independent businesses have commercialized the products prepared but the craft still lacks accessibility to raw material and markets. The major reason for this as observed in the interview was lack of knowledge of market trends, new materials and promotional tools.

With the motive to develop and diversify the products and to teach social media tools to the artisans, UHHDC organized the training program for the duration of two months simultaneously in these two regions. The program was guided by Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and District Industries Centre (DIC), Champawat. The senior designer at

UHHDC was responsible was designing the whole training program while the program was implemented by designer in-charge by living with the artisans in their region for the duration.

Initially, the senior designer conducted a market survey for understanding the market demands and studied various fashion brands for upcoming trends. In addition, various journals and books were considered for understanding design and color forecasts. As the outcome of the above, the material type for training, color pallets (Figure 1 and 2), the look board (Figure 3), training schedule (Table 1), tool kit (Table 2) and designs (Figure 4) were decided. As the training focused on preparing products ranging from garments to accessories for kids and adults, both wool and cotton yarns were chosen as the raw materials for initial phase of the program. It was also planned to use another material if the artisans get equipped with using these two yarns.



Figure 1. Wool yarn color pallet



Figure 2. Cotton yarn color pallet



Figure 3: Look board for the training program

Phase	Task
Phase one (First two weeks program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic knitting practice with design no. 1,2,3 • Bags and accessory design 1,2,3
Phase two (From week third to sixth week)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice of design no.4,5,6,7,8 • Bags and accessory design 4,5,6,,7,8
Phase three (Last two weeks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice on design no. 9 with leftover raw material • Mix match colour combinations on left over raw material by exploring small knitting designs ofhand gloves , socks, and other accessories + fishing /packaging /tagging /coding of the prototypes

Table 1: Schedule of the training program



Figure 4: Designs for the training program

Tool Kit	
Aluminium Knitting needle with 6 to 12 Flat Knob (25cm)	Notepad
Crochet set	Pen
Fabric scissor	Tool box
Thread cutter	Thimble Finger cap for sewing protection
Measuring tape	Face mask and sanitizer
Sewing needle set	Thread ripper

Table 2: Tool kit for the training program

The training program was implemented with the help of the master artisans assisting the session. Meanwhile discussion guide was prepared for focus group discussion for which four groups of artisans were made with each group having 11 artisans. The discussion was completed in two days lasting for forty-five minutes and one hour for each group. The time and action plan (Table 3) for the program can be seen in the following table:

Week	Task
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making artisans practice basic designs 1 and 2 ● Lecturing artisans on personality development
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting with artisans design 3 ● Conducted activity and lecture for artisans on Personality Development - Team work
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting techniques with artisans design 4 and 5 ● Preparing products and focusing on their finishing from wool yarns ● Conducted activity and lecture for artisans on Personality Development – Extempore
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting techniques with artisans design 6 ● Preparing products and focusing on their finishing from wool yarns ● Practice session for artisans on Personality Development - Introduction oneself
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting techniques with artisans design 7 ● Conducted activity and lecture for artisans on Dimensions of Personality Development ● Conducting Focus group discussion for two groups
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting techniques with artisans design 8 ● Lecture on Social Media Handling (Facebook and Instagram) and use of Email
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting techniques with artisans design 9 ● Conducting Focus group discussion for remaining two groups
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing crochet and knitting techniques with artisans with left over material

Table 3: Time and action plan

The product making process during the training program always begun with discussion between the master artisans and the designer for deciding the product type, the age group for which it will be prepared, measurements for the age group are confirmed and suitable material type and quantity is decided. The measurements are based on the size chart prepared during preparation of training program by the senior designer at UHHDC. The first piece of every design was prepared by the master artisans to check the accuracy of decided parameters.

After the accessories are attached to the product, quality check is carried out initially by the master artisans for improvements to be made by the artisans. While the final inspection was done by the appointed designer and improvements were conveyed to the master artisans for implementation. Any raw material requirements, design changes, process of making products, check for defects and quality or any other instant modifications were the responsibilities for the designer.



Figure 5: Few processes undertaken by artisans during product making

There were various changes brought to the existing designs and product categories of the craft. The specifications that were considered while formulating and conducting the training program are summarized (Table 4) in the table below, while some products prepared during the training can be seen in Figure 6:

S. No.	Specifications	Before Training Program	After Training Program
1	Technique of craft making	Mostly knitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knitting • Crochet
2	Yarn type	Wool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wool and Cotton
3	Kids category	Cardigans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardigans • Baby frocks
4	Teenage	Poncho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tops • Poncho

5	Adults category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardigans • Sweaters • Poncho 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tops • Shrug • Sweaters • Cardigan
6	Accessories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socks • Caps • Scarf • Stoles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby headbands • Baby blankets • Kids toys • Kids pillow • Socks • Caps • Sling bag • Stoles • Scarf • Unisex collar (casual and formal)
7	Designs		
	Fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straight • Flare • Rectangular
	Neckline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • V-neck • Round 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • V-neck • Round • Turtle • Round • Square
	Collar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese 	
	Sleeves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full • Half • Raglan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Johnny • Cowl • Full • Half • Balloon • Flare
	Placket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front • Shoulder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front • Shoulder • Open

Table 4: Summarization of various specifications before and after the training program



Figure 6: Products prepared during the training program

The artisans were also given guest lecture sessions on personality development. This included explanation on dimensions of personality and activities for building teamwork, introducing oneself, extempore and other individual and group level activities for personality development of artisans by practical means. Institution like RSETI (Rural Self Employment Training Institutes) were part of undertaking personality development section of the training program.

Focus group discussions were also carried out during the program, the responses to which show that the artisans do not feel difficulty in asking for clarifications while learning new tools. They are dependent on contracts and bulk orders for income generation. Very few artisans have exposure of markets through their respective organisations. They enjoy trying new things and can be more creative as they have good imagination.

The artisans also show interest towards entrepreneurship. They state that they lack moral and financial support when it comes to starting their own venture. They become emotional when it comes to their families not supporting them. They wish the government could help them and guide them through applying for loans, getting trained and becoming capable to be entrepreneurs.

From the observational study, it was observed that the artisans are professional when there is work involved. They are persistent to work in schedule. They showed willingness to learn new designs and readily accepted product diversification and development. They sought excitement and were interested to learn new things. They kept calm in stressful situations, are optimistic, and have stable mood.

The artisans were also tutored regarding various social media channels for marketing purpose. They were also taught about mailing address and its uses. This section of the training program was not a part of planning but was incorporated by DIC, Champawat in order to open market opportunities for the artisans. It sessions were carried out using presentation method while demonstration was done using an actual smartphone. The major features undertaken for

practice were mentions, tagging, writing a caption, open/private accounts, messaging, increasing reach, etc. The presentation was done using images from Home, Phonebook, Search, Profile, Privacy and other segments of the platform. The artisans were made to try these features on their personal devices as well. As a result to this, several artisans showed their social media presence after the training program concluded. Most of them used them as a platform to display their products while a few made them a private account. A few social media accounts of the artisans can be seen in Figure 7 to know the level of understanding of artisans.

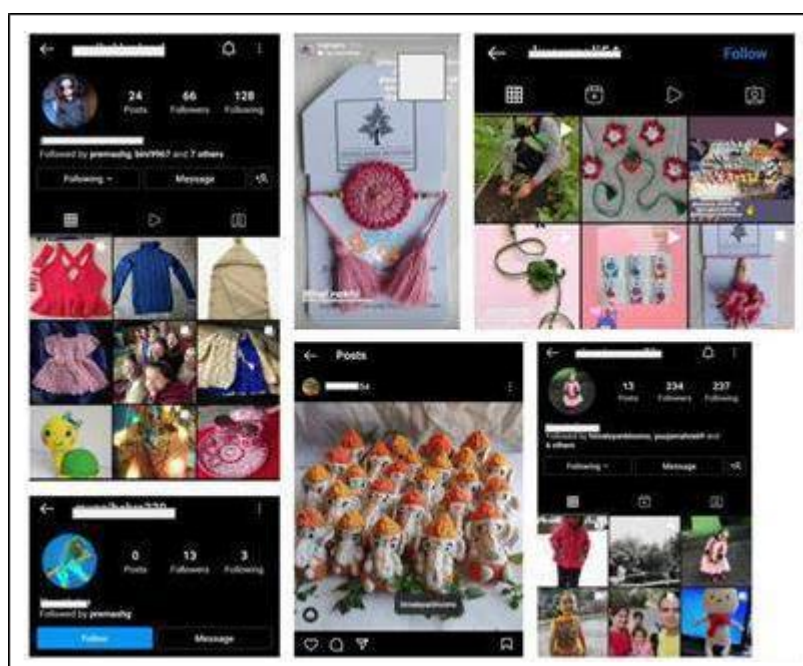


Figure 7: Some public/private accounts of artisans of the training program showing use of tagging and mentions in their feed

Thus, the overall findings of the study including the assessments and activities can be summarized as the following points:

- The artisans accepted product development and diversification
- The training program suited them in all ways
- They felt enthusiastic while modifying the craft
- The raw materials when looked locally, were not available as desired
- The market near the region is under-developed
- The training could have gone advanced if the artisans could quickly learn new designs
- Changes were made to the decided designs and colour palates if and where required mid-way to the training depending on the expertise of the artisans
- Initially, the artisans were made to practice new designs on wool as it is familiar to them and later, were made to develop them on cotton yarns
- Getting exposure to various social media channels like Instagram, Facebook and

Email Marketing made the learning more interesting for them.

- The artisans tried using these channels by using their own devices and even clarified their doubts wherever needed
- The artisans showed inclination towards entrepreneurship
- They state that they lack economic and moral support from their own families
- They wish to seek help from the government regarding the same

Discussion and Conclusion

This research project was aimed at bringing out the product diversification and development aspect of the artisans and their understanding on related objectives. As observed, the artisans can aid in diversifying products as they showed interest in the same. Their pace of learning could be enhanced with regular practice and their related skills could be developed via training programs. Given the opportunity to work with these artisans in their surroundings helped to empathize with them and derive observational conclusions. The training program as observed came out as a very efficient way to develop the craft. The acceptance of the designs and materials by the artisans showed their willingness to compete in the changing market trends.

As artisans are the only people, who could sustain the craft, it becomes essential for them to understand what is changing, why there is change and what can be done further. Entrepreneurship, as observed in the discussion, can aid in widening the reach of the craft to several markets both online and offline. Knowing various social media handling tools thus, further enhances the effort.

As few such programs have been carried out for crafts and clusters in the state of Uttarakhand, other agencies working in this sector can definitely develop similar other projects that focus on the life of artisans in the interior villages of Uttarakhand to promote them, look into their needs and then act in a planned manner. Hence, it is needed that the state and central governments work together in developing and implementing crafts and cluster-based schemes effectively. In this manner, two-dimensional development - the craft and the artisan - of the clusters in Uttarakhand can be achieved.

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