

Hurdles to handicraft marketing for artisan entrepreneurs in an emerging economy

Hurdles to
handicraft
marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – Crafts embody the history and heritage of their country of origin and can play an essential role in the country's socioeconomic development by providing significant job opportunities for the rural population. This article investigates the significant challenges that artisan entrepreneurs face when creating, communicating and selling handcrafted goods to potential customers in emerging economies. This study attempted to rate the impediments based on their severity using the voices of artisan entrepreneurs.

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative data analysis was followed to identify the leading causes of the artisans' pain points. In the first phase, empirical observations were gathered through focus group discussions with artisan entrepreneurs, and the identified factors were quantitatively ranked using the analytic hierarchy process in the second phase.

Findings – The mixed-method research assisted in identifying the primary constraints affecting the efficient and effective operation of the artisan-driven small handicraft business. This study identified six factors that were ranked based on the voices of artisan entrepreneurs during the survey, as barriers to effective handicraft marketing.

Originality/value – Few studies on the handicraft industry have sought to explore the issues faced by artisan businesses holistically. The voices of artisan entrepreneurs were gathered for this study to identify and rate the present obstacles influencing the functioning of small handicraft firms in emerging nations. Handicraft marketing will become more effective and efficient if these barriers are removed.

Keywords Handicraft marketing, Emerging economies, Artisan entrepreneurship, Sustainable livelihood, Analytic hierarchy process (AHP)

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Handicraft products carry a cultural legacy passed down through generations (Yang *et al.*, 2018) and are important for developing and under-developed countries because agriculture and handicraft industry provide livelihood for the majority of the population (Akram, 2022). The growth of handicrafts helps rural economic development by creating small businesses that use local skills, raw materials and indigenous technologies (Meera and Vinodan, 2022). The artisans prepare different handcrafted products using their skills and sell them to others; this can be considered artisan entrepreneurship (Ferreira *et al.*, 2019). Artisan entrepreneurship is important for its significant social and economic impact (April, 2022) and has generated sustainable interest among researchers, practitioners and policymakers (Dana and Salamzadeh, 2021; Ramadani *et al.*, 2019).

In developing nations, the handicraft industry employs socially and economically disadvantaged people, making it a micro-enterprise (Shafi *et al.*, 2022). In this context, the Indian handicraft sector is a substantial small industry that employs marginalized and



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underprivileged people, helping to reduce poverty and economic inequality (Yadav *et al.*, 2020). This industry belongs to the informal economy, accounting for 60% of India's GDP and 90% of its workforce (Sinha, 2010). 80.7% of the artisans are from the backward socioeconomic section of society, residing in remote areas (Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, 2022). Nearly 70% of India's population, as per the 2011 Census report, lives in rural areas (The Hindu, 2016), of which more than 70% depends on agriculture and allied activities (Tanwar and Bhardwaj, 2022). With land being a scarce resource and rural areas suffering from challenges like poor infrastructure, lack of financial and market access, and unemployment (Aggarwal, 2013), developing entrepreneurial activities is required (Tanwar and Bhardwaj, 2022). Artisan entrepreneurship is one such option which this study explores. As suggested by Igwe *et al.* (2019), our study defined artisan entrepreneurs as owners of small handicraft enterprises that are typically family-owned, informal and run by family members or a few employees.

Entrepreneurship studies have primarily focused on the importance of economic capital (Drakopoulou Dodd *et al.*, 2016). However, researchers have suggested that artisan entrepreneurship, due to its promising context, should also study other resource constraints (Pret *et al.*, 2016; Pret and Cogan, 2019). In India, literature has discussed artisan entrepreneurs' various challenges covering handicraft clusters' specific issues (Yadav and Mahara, 2018; Pant and Pandey, 2015), distribution challenges (Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016; Pathak *et al.*, 2017), lack of market knowledge (Dalal *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2018). The sector's challenges—raw material sourcing, craft production, marketing and distribution—have been studied in isolation. Little empirical evidence exists to identify artisan entrepreneurs' resource constraints in an integrated way covering the whole process starting from manufacturing to the sales process. The resource-based view (RBV) theory explains how business owners can use their resources and skills to grow (Dollinger, 1999). However, resource constraints have been shown to hinder the Indian handicraft sector (Dalal *et al.*, 2023; Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016; Yadav *et al.*, 2020). Artisan entrepreneurs are found to utilize the available resources to create opportunities (Pret and Cogan, 2019), thus exhibiting a bricolage perspective (Baker and Nelson, 2005). Though bricolage activities can enable entrepreneurs to overcome resource constraints, this can also force the firm into a “self-reinforcing cycle of activities,” limiting growth (Fisher, 2012). Identifying resource constraints and ranking them by severity can help the handicraft sector and artisan entrepreneurs grow through resource and action mapping. However, there is a dearth of studies on artisan entrepreneurship that addresses this issue. This research intends to address the gaps described above and formulated the following research questions that can improve the handicraft small businesses' marketing results:

- RQ1. What are the key challenges and barriers artisan entrepreneurs face in producing, communicating and distributing handicraft products to potential target groups?
- RQ2. How each of the major challenges that are causing obstacles to the growth of the industry is perceived by the artisan entrepreneurs based on their severity?

This study adopts a mixed-method research approach to answer these research questions. An extensive literature review of artisan entrepreneurs' marketing and value creation challenges and outcomes from the focus group discussions (FGDs) in first stage address RQ1. Similarly, RQ2 is being addressed by analyzing and ranking the structured responses of the artisan entrepreneurs using the analytical hierarchy process (AHP) in stage two. The study aims to help handicraft industry stakeholders, government and non-governmental organizations focus on the highlighted constraints while establishing a robust business model. This will improve the functioning of the Indian handicraft industry and provide sustained income for artisan entrepreneurs. After the literature review, the methodology section analyzes the artisan entrepreneurs' voices using qualitative and quantitative methods, discusses the findings and implications, and concludes with limitations and future research directions.

Literature review

The present state of the Indian craft industry

India is a multicultural nation with a vast population of over 1.4bn. Though social structure and cultural values constrained entrepreneurship in India initially, efforts by various Indian leaders, government and non-governmental institutions have been able to inculcate entrepreneurship spirit among the Indians (Dana, 2000). According to a report by the market intelligence firm CB Insights, India ranks fourth in the world in terms of the number of unicorns (startups with more than \$1bn in market capitalization) despite resource constraints in terms of scaling their operations (Bhagavatula *et al.*, 2019).

One of India's most significant small-scale businesses is the handicraft sector (Yadav *et al.*, 2020) which involves over 7 million craft producers, mostly living in lower socioeconomic strata of the society (Ministry of Textile, Government of India, 2022). These artisan businesses exported Rs.126.04bn in handicrafts from India in FY 2021, up from Rs. 34.63bn in FY 2011; Statista (2021). Though this shows increasing global acceptance of Indian handicrafts, it is less than 2% of the world's handicraft market (Mitra *et al.*, 2018). Indian handicrafts must address micro-level requirements to expand globally (Jadhav, 2013). One such micro-level need is enhanced communication between customers and craft producers to understand the market better (Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016). Singh *et al.* (2015) found that "social market separation" hindered handicraft market growth. The success of the handicraft and cultural product-related business model relies on long-term relationships between marketing enterprises and rural micro-entrepreneurs (Naghiu *et al.*, 2005).

The Indian government has initiated different training programs for Small and Medium Enterprises (Patton *et al.*, 2000), including the Indian handicraft sector. The schemes launched for this sector cater to the artisan entrepreneurs' social, technological, marketing and financial needs. Kumari (2016) identified poor awareness of these schemes among the artisans. This illustrates that while Indian handicrafts have considerable potential and acceptability in global markets, their operations need to be revamped to have a substantial position in the global handicraft industry. The sector must be proactive and create competencies to thrive in the fast-changing market.

The resource-based view and artisan entrepreneurship

The resource-based view (RBV) derives from Penrose's landmark work on "the theory of firm development" (1959). Penrose saw the company as a collection of various internal resources that allow organizations to distinguish and succeed. Wernerfelt (1984) suggested assessing firms from the resource side rather than the product side since their physical, human and organizational resources can improve their efficiency and effectiveness. According to the resource-based viewpoint, a company's valuable, unusual and distinctive resources and capabilities create a more significant competitive edge (Barney, 1986, 1991). Companies can be viewed as "resource bundles" comprising of tangible and intangible assets that can be combined or developed to produce distinctive competencies (Barney, 1991). Raw materials and infrastructure for product manufacturing, storage and distribution are examples of tangible resources in the handicraft sector. The craftsmen's craftsmanship might be regarded as an intangible resource. This resource is distinctive, precious and difficult to reproduce, which may lead to higher performance in the handicraft sector if properly utilized and supported by resource-based theory.

Artisan entrepreneurs are "individuals who produce and sell products or services which possess a distinct artistic value resulting from a high degree of manual input" (Ratten, 2022, p. 1). Artisans' self-employment can be considered 'necessity-based entrepreneurship' because other employment options are either absent or unsatisfactory (Eijdenberg *et al.*, 2015; Ratten, 2023). Under such a setting, artisans maximize the utilization of the available

resources and use their skills, passions and traditions (Ferreira *et al.*, 2019) to deliver products to their customers, demonstrating a bricolage perspective. Bricolage theory (Baker and Nelson, 2005) helps entrepreneurs to work in a resource constraint environment (Desa and Basu, 2013) but tends to limit business growth (Fisher, 2012). A strong network means that firm settings have strong collaborative and interdependent relationships with ecosystem members, giving them more options to acquire varied resources (Song *et al.*, 2016; Chau *et al.*, 2018). Sound, flexible and pro-poor policies and regulations are essential for reducing poverty and supporting economic growth, giving people access to the markets and resources they need to live sustainably (DFID, 1999). This research seeks to discover resources affecting the handicraft sector's performance. Hence we think the resource-based viewpoint is suitable. This study examines handicraft ecosystem dynamics and trends to enhance firm performance and boost artisan entrepreneurs' profitability by identifying resource constraints and ranking them by severity. Addressing the most severe constraints first is most likely to benefit the sector and artisan entrepreneurs.

Communication and distribution challenges

The Indian handicraft industry falls under the unorganized or informal sector, contributing to nearly 83% of the total employment in India (National Sample Survey Organization, Government of India, 2014). In the informal sector, inefficient sales and distribution channels prevent acceptable pricing (Sodhi and Tang, 2014). Craftspeople at the bottom of the social ladder sell goods and services in the unorganized sector (Dey, 2018; Shah and Patel, 2017). They struggle with marketing and distribution (Dash and Mishra, 2021; Kumar and Rajeev, 2013), which restricts the extent of their market and profitability. As technology has transformed the way entrepreneurs work (Ratten, 2019), the Internet could be one such enabler for these craftspeople. The Internet is vital for organizations since it allows them to communicate with their customers and learn about their requirements and preferences (Migiro and Ocholla, 2005).

The handicraft supply chain and business results

Supply chain management (SCM) uses the resource-based view argument to examine significant hurdles and smoothen resource movement to produce sustainable value (Narimissa *et al.*, 2020) that applies to the handicraft small business too. Improvements on the supply side of the system are needed to expand market growth and provide a steady supply for customers and merchants (O'Connor and Rice, 2013). A good raw material procurement strategy is important for effective SCM (Agrawal, 2014; Mukhamedjanova, 2020). The right quality and price of raw materials help make quality products available at the right price. Fawcett and Waller (2015) suggested the importance of "culture," "infrastructure," and "regulation" for understanding the purchase behavior of the customer segment while designing the supply chain for the segment of poor producers and customers. Infrastructure could play an essential role in creating effective value chains that will boost the economic development of countries (Naghiu *et al.*, 2005). Al-Shboul (2017) discussed how "delivery dependability" and "time to market" mediate the infrastructural architecture and SC nimbleness. Technologies have helped in easy coordination between different members of the SC, leading to cost and time reduction in the movement of goods across the SC (Arenkov *et al.*, 2019) and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of SCM (Yee *et al.*, 2020). The importance of raw material procurement, robust infrastructure and the role of technology in the effective functioning of the SC has been recognized through literature. A few aspects specific to the handicraft sector, such as the existence of middlemen, lack of market knowledge of the artisans and lack of efficacy of different government schemes for the handicraft sector, also was acknowledged.

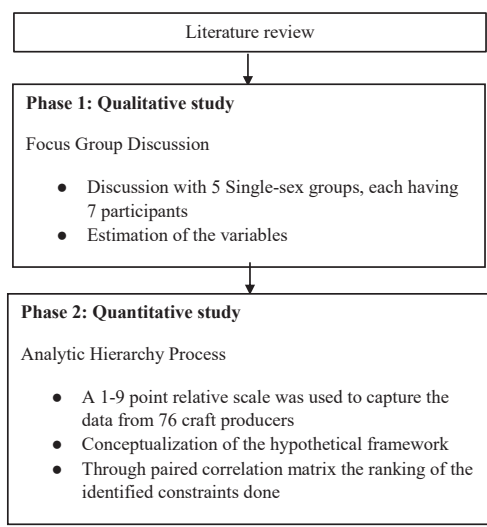
Methods

In this study, we used a two-phase mixed-method approach to identify the problems impeding the efficient operation of the handicraft business by hearing the artisan entrepreneurs' voices. Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) defined mixed-method research (MMR) as research using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to collect data, analyze it and make conclusions. MMR contributes to greater soundness by validating the two (qualitative and quantitative) data sets and provides a full picture of the study by employing both research approaches (Doyle *et al.*, 2009). The current study not only identifies the constraints faced by artisan entrepreneurs across the handicraft value chain using a qualitative approach, but it also validates and ranks the obstacles using a quantitative method, providing a complete picture and answering the research questions.

This study was first initiated to gain insights from the experiences of artisan entrepreneurs. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were deemed appropriate for this purpose since they represent the participants' experiences, attitudes and the reasoning for those views (Mishra, 2016). The first phase's contributions, combined with literature support, aided in identifying the primary difficulties confronting the entrepreneurs. The quantitative study used the AHP (Saaty, 1980) and ranked the elements based on the voices of the artisan entrepreneurs to validate the findings on a bigger cross-section of the artisans. In accordance with the mixed-method design matrix suggested by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), the current study employed a sequential, equal-status (Qualitative Quantitative) mixed-method research design. Figure 1 depicts the research flow used in this study to address the research questions.

Phase 1: focus group discussion

Data collection method. A focus group interview is a group discussion on a specific theme (Krueger, 1998), which this study used to identify artisan entrepreneurs' constraints that are preventing the handicraft sector from performing effectively. The ideal FGD participant count has been debated. Though a smaller group size is desirable (Bloor *et al.*, 2001), the main



Source(s): Authors own creation

Figure 1.
Research flow

goal should be theoretical saturation on the issue (Krueger, 1998). To this, five single-sex focus groups with seven participants each were formed for the discussion. Vaughn *et al.* (1996) suggested that same-sex groups lessen discomfort and distractions among participants caused by opposite sex. Thirty-five artisans (21 males and 14 females) participated in the FGDs. As 47.4% of the artisans involved in the Indian handicraft sector are female (Ministry of Textiles, 2012), a similar representation in the FGDs were also considered. The artisans were contacted at handicraft fairs in the Indian state of West Bengal from December 2020 to February 2021, where there is an amalgamation of artisans involved in producing different crafts. Table 1 provides a breakup of the participants.

The FGDs continued for 57 min on average and were audio-taped. Each session began with an introduction and a discussion topic. The ground principles were discussed because it was a novel concept for the craftspeople. It was underlined that participants’ open and honest input would be greatly appreciated, as their views were critical to the research effort. Furthermore, the artists were assured that their contributions to the discussion would be used purely for the study and would not be shared with anybody.

The discussions were conducted along with a broad understanding of the industry supported by literature and previous interactions wherever applicable. To probe further into the different aspects of the handicraft SC, specific questions were asked to the participants. Many a time, one participant’s view was often reinforced by others and active engagement occasionally revealed new dimensions. The questions were simple and concise in the local language so that everyone understood. The recordings of the discussions were transcribed later. It was a challenging task, as identifying comments for specific participants was not possible in many instances.

Estimation of the variables. The extensive literature review and FGDs have been instrumental in identifying the different variables that may influence the effective operation of the Indian handicraft industry, either directly or indirectly. Table 2 lists these dimensions and attributes.

All the above elements are related and highlight the issues in the Indian handicraft business. The following major gaps have been identified from the discussions.

- (1) Quality handicrafts require the right quality raw materials at the right price. The production process will be hampered if these input materials are unavailable or inconsistently supplied. New technologies can help the sector operate more efficiently by producing products cost-effectively and according to market needs. This constraint is grouped under the “production and operational challenges”.

Craft	Male	Female	Total	Remarks
Terracotta and clay dolls	2	2	4	Terracotta – a special type of earthenware, prepared from reddish-colored clay
Handicrafts made from jute	4		4	
Handicrafts made from bamboo	4		4	
Handicraft made from brass	3		3	Dhokra – A special metal casting method
Dhokra	4		4	
Mats		4	4	
Patachitra		4	4	Patachitra – Painting on clothes using natural dyes
Handlooms	4	4	8	
Total	21	14	35	

Table 1.
Participant details for
the focus group
discussions

Source(s): Authors’ own creation

				Hurdles to handicraft marketing
Sl. No	Variables	Description	Sources	
1	Procurement of raw materials issue	The quality, price, and availability of input materials all have an impact on the final product's quality and price. The artisans' difficulties in this regard were highlighted by FGD	Agrawal (2014) , Mukhamedjanova (2020) , Suryaningrat (2016)	
2	Poor infrastructure support	Transportation infrastructure, electrical availability, communication, storage, and packaging are a few aspects that are critical for the efficient operation of the handicraft SC, which is lacking presently	Al-Shboul (2017) , Fawcett and Waller (2015) , Naghiu et al. (2005)	
3	Lack of knowledge on usage of technology	Technology may aid in the productive and efficient operation of handicrafts and small businesses. The use of the internet and other new technologies in business operations can significantly improve the functioning of the handicraft sector	Arenkov et al. (2019) , Migiro and Ocholla (2005) , Yee et al. (2020)	
4	Sales and distribution challenges	The presence of several intermediaries makes it difficult for craftspeople to obtain the best price for their products. Furthermore, customers are unable to obtain the appropriate products at the appropriate pricing	Dash and Mishra (2021) , Dey (2018) , Kumar and Rajeev (2013) , Pathak et al. (2017) , Singh et al. (2015) , Yadav and Mahara (2018)	
5	Lack of proper market knowledge	Market feedback and understanding customer needs are critical for producers to develop craft products that meet the preferences of their target customers. Artisans being alienated from the market acts as a major deterrent for the handicraft sector	Kumari and Srivasatava (2016) , Singh et al. (2015) , Sodhi and Tang (2014)	
6	Requirement of technical and economic support	Periodic assistance from the government and other institutions can assist craftspeople in becoming aware of new manufacturing methods and technology in order to accommodate to changing customer tastes. Furthermore, economic support in the form of loans or subsidies might help the handicraft sector thrive because craftspeople are from the lower socioeconomic strata of society	Kumari (2016) , Patton et al. (2000)	
Source(s): Adopted from the literature review and FGD; Authors' own creation				Table 2. Dimensions and attributes

- (2) Artisan entrepreneurs have a market and customer knowledge gap. Craft producers may combat this by staying in touch with customers. The existence of middlemen in the distribution channel is another major challenge for the artisans not getting the

JSBED right price for their work. Thus, “marketing and distribution challenges” is the second identified gap.

- craftsmen, the Indian government's efforts to improve this sector have yet to yield significant gains (Kumari, 2016). Adequately teaching artisan entrepreneurs for better business management will result in long-term and profitable benefits. So, "business growth and sustainability challenges" is the other highlighted gap.

Phase 2: analytic hierarchy process

Thomas Saaty's (1980) AHP is a common decision-making process used in many sectors such as supply chain, logistics and training to access strategy and performance (Sipahi and Timor, 2010). This process evaluates alternatives based on numerous criteria to help decision-makers define priorities, particularly for intangible alternatives (Brunelli, 2014). A relative priority scale is used in AHP to collect data on how respondents favor one attribute over another. These responses serve as the foundation for a matrix from which weights and sequences can be constructed using normalization techniques. AHP can thus provide a model to validate the weights and sequences, resulting in superior fact-finding for any strategic decision-making. The data was collected using a 1–9-point relative scale (see Table 3), the interpretation of which is presented in Table 4.

Data were collected between November 2021 to January 2022 through a survey, implementing the AHP-based questionnaire related to the implication of SC challenges. The directions obtained from the literature review and FGDs helped in the identification of the variables utilized in the survey. The empirical data was collected from 76 respondents. [Tables 5 and 6](#) provide a summary of the respondents. After gathering the data, the geometric mean of each individual component was calculated to develop the AHP matrices, which were then normalized.

Table 7 provides the format for paired correlation comparative opinions based on the voices of the artisan entrepreneurs. Likewise, opinions for the other variables were collected, namely lack of knowledge on usage of technology, lack of proper market knowledge, sales and distribution challenges, the requirement of technical and economic support, procurement of raw materials issue and poor infrastructure support.

Paired correlation matrix for SC difficulties outcomes is given in [Table 8](#) and [Table 9](#).

Analysis and findings

The current study began with a literature review and was followed by a qualitative examination. The qualitative inquiry has provided an opportunity to investigate the true

The scale used for collecting data from respondents for AHP analysis

	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Attribute 1																		Attribute 2
Attribute 2																		Attribute 3
Attribute 3																		Attribute 1
Source(s): Authors' own creation																		

Hurdles to handicraft marketing

Intensity of importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective
3	Weak importance of one over another	Experience and judgment slightly favor one activity over another
5	Essential or strong importance	Experience and judgment strongly favor one activity over another
9	Absolute importance	The evidence favoring one activity over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation
2,4,6,8	Intermediate values between the two adjacent judgments	When compromise is needed
Reciprocals of the above non-zeros	If an activity(i) has one of the above non-zero numbers assigned to it when compared with another activity (j), then “j” has reciprocal value when compared with “i”	
Source(s): Authors' own creation		

Table 4.
The interpretation of the scale

Craft category	District	State	Count of respondents	Table 5. The breakup of respondents location-wise, craft-wise
Metalwork	East Bardhaman	West Bengal	12	
Clay work	Nadia	West Bengal	10	
Clay work	Deoghar	Jharkhand	10	
Cane and bamboo	Ranchi	Jharkhand	12	
Stone carving	Puri	Orissa	12	
Handloom	Birbhum	West Bengal	10	
Handloom	Bhubaneswar	Orissa	10	
Total			76	
Source(s): Authors' own creation				

Dimension	Definition	Frequency
Age (Yrs)	20–30 years	33
	30–40 years	23
	40 years and above	20
Education level	Illiterate	13
	Primary	46
	Secondary	15
Years in the profession	Graduation	2
	Less than 10 years	16
	10–20 years	43
Average monthly income (in INR)	20 years and above	17
	Less than 8,000	11
	8,000–15,000	56
	More than 15,000	9
Source(s): Authors' own creation		

Table 6.
Demographic breakup
of the respondents

problem aspects. The AHP-based quantitative study presented in the second phase of this current study highlighted the set priorities and alternatives based on many criteria that are posing problems to the handicraft sector in India.

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Table 7.
Sample of paired
correlation opinion
format

Production and operational challenges	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Marketing and distribution challenges
Marketing and distribution challenges	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Business growth and sustainability challenges
Business growth and sustainability challenges	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Production and operational challenges

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 8.
Paired correlation
matrix for SC
difficulties outcomes
(Set-1)

Attributes	Production and operational challenges	Marketing and distribution challenges	Business growth and sustainability challenges
Production and operational challenges	1	α_{12}	α_{13}
Marketing and distribution challenges	$1/\alpha_{12}$	1	α_{23}
Business growth and sustainability challenges	$1/\alpha_{13}$	$1/\alpha_{23}$	1

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 9.
Paired correlation
matrix for SC
difficulties outcomes
(Set-2)

Attributes	Lack of knowledge on usage of technology	Lack of proper market knowledge	Sales and distribution challenges	Poor infrastructure support	Procurement of raw materials issue	Requirement of technical and economic support
Lack of knowledge on usage of technology	1	β_{12}	β_{13}	β_{14}	β_{15}	β_{16}
Lack of proper market knowledge	$1/\beta_{12}$	1	β_{23}	β_{24}	β_{25}	β_{26}
Sales and distribution challenges	$1/\beta_{13}$	$1/\beta_{23}$	1	β_{34}	β_{35}	β_{36}
Poor infrastructure support	$1/\beta_{14}$	$1/\beta_{24}$	$1/\beta_{34}$	1	β_{45}	β_{46}
Procurement of raw materials issue	$1/\beta_{15}$	$1/\beta_{25}$	$1/\beta_{35}$	$1/\beta_{45}$	1	β_{56}
Requirement of technical and economic support	$1/\beta_{16}$	$1/\beta_{26}$	$1/\beta_{36}$	$1/\beta_{46}$	$1/\beta_{56}$	1

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Results and discussion of the FGDs (phase 1 study)

The discussions yielded various insights into the current state of the Indian handicraft sector. Below is a summary of the topics posed and the primary outcomes that emerged from the discussions:

“is sourcing raw material is an issue for you?”, “is the price of the raw material the only concern or there are other issues?”, “do you all think that you can maintain consistently good quality products?”

The price, availability and quality of raw materials were considered important resource constraints as also highlighted by [Dalal et al. \(2023\)](#). Bulk procurement to compensate for high prices was mentioned by five artisan entrepreneurs in two discussions. Multiple participants expressed their inability to avail discounts during bulk purchases due to their financial conditions. One such statement from an entrepreneur dealing in jute crafts was

We have limited money, so going for bulk purchase is out of the question . . . in fact because of the relationship I have developed with my jute supplier over the years, sometimes I am allowed a few days credit and that is the maximum benefit I can think of.

“how well connected are your villages to the main town?”, “do you have a continuous electric supply in your villages?”, “do you face issues in packing and storing your finished products before they are sold off?”, “Have you heard of the internet, data, or used any such thing?”

[Al-Shboul \(2017\)](#) has highlighted the importance of infrastructure for efficient operation of the SC. During the discussions, respondents mentioned poor road connectivity, an erratic supply of electricity and an almost nonexistent warehouse and packaging facility. Though new technologies have changed the way entrepreneurs work ([Ratten, 2023](#)), the responses of the artisan entrepreneurs in the FGD suggested their limited awareness of the Internet and its application to their business, but mobile telecommunication was regarded adequate by most. The response of an artisan entrepreneur dealing in “dokhra” crafts reflects the state of infrastructure.

We live in a remote village, and during every rainy season, we find ourselves cut off from the other places . . . this affects our livelihood . . . we cannot travel due to poor road and transport facilities and Dokhra vendors also cannot come over to buy our products.

“how do you sell your products?”, “do you think that you get the right price for your products always?”, “how feasible do you think is it to sell to the customers directly?”

All the participants unanimously accepted that intermediaries played a vital role in selling their crafts, as highlighted by earlier studies ([Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016](#); [Pathak et al., 2017](#)). On raising the point on profits earned at the fairs compared to selling to the middlemen, artisans accepted it was substantially more in fairs. The artisans agreed that selling directly to customers was possible only at fairs. Given here is a narration of a patachitra artist highlighting this aspect.

My patachitras are appreciated by the people and they are ready to pay for my work . . . they bargain a little, but still the price that I get for my works is far more than when I sell them to middlemen.

“do you think that you can produce products as per the tastes of your customers?”, “how frequently do you interact with your customers to understand their preferences?”, “do you think that there can be better ways to produce your goods that will be more productive?”

Knowing the customers’ needs and producing goods as per their preferences is essential for any business. The uneasy feeling was palpable when the moderators wanted to understand the awareness level of the artisan entrepreneurs for their customers. Literature has also highlighted this as a constraint for the Indian artisan entrepreneurs (e.g. [Dalal et al., 2023](#);

Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016; Yang *et al.*, 2018). One of the comments from artisans involved with bamboo crafts actually summarizes the plight of these craft producers:

When I come to such fairs, I get a feeling that the customers are not readily accepting my bamboo crafts . . . they come and go away . . . only a few stops to enquire and purchase.

According to focus group discussions, the producers prepared crafts based on their understanding and inherited knowledge. The craft production process was also a hindrance because they were unaware of new methods and technologies for efficiently making crafts. The artisan entrepreneurs agreed that the presence of middlemen hampered their ability to communicate with their clients.

Are you aware of the different government schemes? Have you availed of any of these schemes? If not, then why? If yes, how do you think you have benefitted?

The government has launched several schemes for the handicraft sector, to uplift the socioeconomic condition of the artisans. The discussions revealed a lack of awareness among artisan entrepreneurs regarding these schemes, which affirms Kumari’s (2016) findings. In one FGD, a male artisan described his experience when he went to a bank to apply for a loan for his handicraft business and how he felt helpless amid regulations and paperwork.

I remember the day when I visited the bank for getting some loan for my small business . . . but looking at the papers and processes that they were asking for, I actually fled the scene.

Results and discussion from quantitative analysis (phase 2 study)

As per the research hypothetical framework given in Figure 2, the study has tried to demonstrate how the different key components are affecting the dimensions that are creating obstacles to SC growth for the handicraft industry.

Cooper *et al.* (1997) suggested an SCM framework that encompassed most, if not all, business operations such as new product development, finance, marketing and sales, as well as material and information flow management. This study attempted to provide a comprehensive view of the handicraft value chain through a literature analysis and focus group discussions, identifying three significant difficulties confronting the sector. These gaps are mostly connected to product production, marketing, and distribution and having a sustainable plan for business growth and profitability. A deeper dive into these obstacles (refer Table 2) was conducted to identify particular issues associated with the handicraft

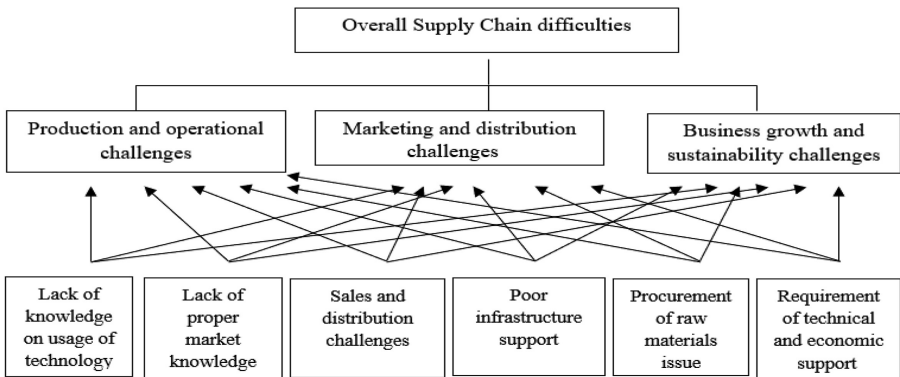


Figure 2.
Hypothetical
framework to analyze
SC challenges

Source(s): Authors own creation

sector's supply chain. These highlighted variables include the artisan entrepreneurs' lack of information about their customers, a poor understanding of how to use technology to boost efficiency and difficulties with sales and distribution of their products. Other obstacles include a lack of infrastructure, difficulties obtaining high-quality raw materials at reasonable prices and the need for assistance from external entities such as the government or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to deal with issues such as finance and training to improve output at work.

Model validation

The current research has followed some specific steps to gather and analyze the data that have been stated as follows:

Stage 1: The responders' trade-off judgments related to different variables identified through FGD and literature review were plotted in the paired correlation matrix (Table 8 and Table 9). This was based on the questionnaire that was used for the survey. The cell values, α_{ij} and β_{ij} , given in the matrixes (Table 8 and Table 9) speak of the responders' opinions and judgments. Similarly, residual cells in the paired correlation matrix represent the opposite opinions and judgments ($1/\alpha_{ij}$ and $1/\beta_{ij}$).

Stage 2: In this stage, the consistency of the model was tested based on the responders' opinions and judgments. This check for consistency was done through consistency ratio (CR), consistency index (CI) and random index (RI) as prescribed by Saaty (1980).

$$\text{Consistency Ratio} = \text{Consistency Index} / \text{Random Index}$$

CI is calculated as $(\lambda_{\max} - N)/(N-1)$ where N denotes the number of measurements and λ_{\max} represents the greatest eigenvalue.

Eigenvalues are the scalars associated with an immediate course of action of numerical values (or a network correlation)

$$\lambda_{\max} = C_{JM1} \times R_{PM1} + C_{JM2} \times R_{PM2} + C_{JM3} \times R_{PM3}$$

λ_{\max} : Maximum eigenvalue of a matrix

C_{JM1} : First column total of the responders' opinions matrix

R_{PM1} : First row mean of priority matrix

C_{JM2} : Second column total of responders' opinions matrix

R_{PM2} : Second row mean of priority matrix

C_{JM3} : Third column total of the responders' opinions matrix

R_{PM3} : Third row mean of priority matrix

By following the same process other matrix values were calculated.

Then the method as prescribed by Saaty (1980) was followed and square relatives of responders' opinions were calculated. Similarly, the random consistency index (RI) was checked (refer Table 10).

In this model CR is 0.0975 (refer Table 11) which is less than 0.10, which signifies the model's robustness as prescribed by Saaty (1980).

Consider $[Ax = \lambda_{\max}x]$ where A is the comparison matrix of size $n \times n$, for n criteria, also called the priority matrix, x is the Eigenvector of size $n \times 1$, also called the priority vector, λ_{\max} is the Eigenvalue, $\lambda_{\max} \in \mathbb{R} > n$, to find the ranking of priorities, namely the Eigen Vector x.

Table 12 displays a normalized paired correlation matrix based on survey responses for the various factors associated with SC challenges in the Indian handicraft sector. The identified constraints have been ranked, and the artisans' top challenge is a lack of knowledge about how to use technology. The lack of proper market knowledge, followed by the requirement of adequate infrastructure support to conduct business effectively, has highlighted artisan entrepreneurs' realization that they need to be in contact with their target customers and markets to remain competitive and relevant. The need to access high-quality raw materials at reasonable prices for craftsmen to manufacture items that meet market demands has put procurement of raw materials in fourth place. The need for economic and technical assistance at position five may be attributed to a lack of awareness among craftsmen about various government schemes and training programs run by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Another possible reason is that respondents believe that access to government programmes is laborious and time-consuming (as highlighted by some respondents during the FGD); the other variables, if mitigated, may have a greater and

Table 10.
Random consistency
indices (RI)

N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	0	0	0.58	0.9	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49
Source(s): Authors' own creation										

Table 11.
CR

λ_{\max} =	6.605	n =	6
CI =	0.121	CR =	0.0975
Source(s): Authors' own creation			

Table 12.
Normalized paired
correlation matrix for
the SC difficulties
outcomes related to
handicraft SC

Attributes	Lack of knowledge on usage of technology	Lack of proper market knowledge	Sales and distribution challenges	Poor infrastructure support	Procurement of raw materials issue	Requirement of technical and economic support	Weight	Rank
Lack of knowledge on usage of technology	0.2146	0.3254	0.1314	0.1918	0.2374	0.1426	0.2072	1
Lack of proper market knowledge	0.1223	0.1855	0.124	0.2864	0.2113	0.2005	0.1883	2
Sales and distribution challenges	0.1474	0.1349	0.0902	0.1195	0.027	0.2147	0.1223	6
Poor infrastructure support	0.2071	0.1198	0.1397	0.185	0.2375	0.2064	0.1826	3
Procurement of raw materials issue	0.1254	0.1217	0.4636	0.1081	0.1387	0.114	0.1786	4
Requirement of technical and economic support	0.1833	0.1127	0.0512	0.1092	0.1482	0.1218	0.1211	5

Source(s): Authors' own creation

faster impact on their business. The selling and distribution challenge is ranked sixth, indicating that if the other restrictions are addressed, the current distribution challenge of middlemen will cease to exist as a key constraint.

The study identified the key impediments to the efficient and successful operation of the Indian handicraft sector and genre-specific dimensions. Table 13 explains the aggregated hierarchical effect, which quantifies and ranks production and operational challenges, marketing and distribution challenges, and business growth and sustainability challenges as first, second and third respectively, based on the identified six constraints. The above table shows that production and operational challenges are impacted by all the six core challenge areas, wherein poor infrastructure support, lack of knowledge on the usage of technology and lack of marketing knowledge are the top three contributors. For marketing and distribution challenges, poor infrastructure support, lack of proper marketing knowledge, and sales and distribution challenges can be considered the foremost constraints among the six identified ones. The analysis of this article has depicted that business growth and sustainability challenges are affected largely by a lack of knowledge on the usage of technology, procurement of raw materials issues, and requirement of technical and economic support from among the major six identified challenge domains. Bhagavatula *et al.* (2019) highlighted poor infrastructure as a major hurdle for Indian entrepreneurs and the study paints a similar picture for the Indian artisan entrepreneurs. According to the study, artisan entrepreneurs must utilize technology for their benefit, just as it has positively influenced other entrepreneurial initiatives, as indicated by Ratten (2019). Proper market knowledge is also important for the artisan entrepreneurs to be able to cater to the market needs and grow as highlighted in previous studies (Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016; Singh *et al.*, 2015; Sodhi and Tang, 2014).

Discussion and implications

Scholars have found that the handicraft small business has failed to provide economic benefits and socioeconomic transformation for artisans (Dey, 2018; Pathak *et al.*, 2017; Shah and Patel, 2017). This is the reason for the present study conducted in two phases addressing the research questions. RQ1 is addressed in the first phase of the study. In phase 2, AHP ranks the identified constraints, answering RQ2. RBV advises companies to focus on their strengths to succeed and acquire competitive assets (Barney, 1991). This study found that RBV can help the Indian handicraft sector improve supply chain and marketing outcomes. RBV may boost

	Lack of knowledge on usage of technology	Lack of proper market knowledge	Sales and distribution challenges	Poor infrastructure support	Procurement of raw materials issue	Requirement of technical and economic support	Final score	Rank
Production and operational challenges	<i>0.1949</i>	<i>0.1887</i>	0.1615	<i>0.2038</i>	0.142	0.1091	0.1715	1
Marketing and distribution challenges	0.1763	<i>0.1879</i>	<i>0.1825</i>	<i>0.1946</i>	0.1496	0.109	0.1697	2
Business growth and sustainability challenges	<i>0.2791</i>	0.0976	0.1735	0.0404	<i>0.2231</i>	<i>0.1862</i>	0.1672	3

Note(s): The italic figures indicate the top three constraints corresponding to each challenge

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 13.
Normalized pared
correlation matrix for
SC challenges of the
Indian handicraft
industry

sales by making Indian handicrafts more accessible to a wider audience ensuring artisan entrepreneurs' long-term livelihood. Thus, current artisan entrepreneurs' unwillingness to pass on craft knowledge and skills to future generations due to the sector's low revenue potential (Ministry of Textile, Government of India, 2010) would be resolved. All stakeholders in the handicraft business will profit from the artisans' unique craft expertise, an intangible resource for the sector and the mitigation of other recognized resource constraints.

Theoretical contribution

Several studies on the Indian handicraft sector have examined different aspects of the industry, such as sales and distribution (Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016; Pathak *et al.*, 2017), marketing (Kumar and Rajeev, 2013; Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016), cluster-specific (Pant and Pandey, 2015; Yadav and Mahara, 2018) and handicraft export (Ghouse, 2017). There is a scarcity of empirical evidence to comprehensively identify the resource constraints experienced by artisan entrepreneurs across the entire manufacturing and sales process. This study employs an integrated approach to the various issues that artisan entrepreneurs confront. In contrast to previous qualitative studies (e.g. Kumari and Srivasatava, 2016; Singh *et al.*, 2015; Yadav and Mahara, 2018), the current study employed a mixed-methods approach, which provides more comprehensive and insightful results (Doyle *et al.*, 2009). The present study utilizes the Resource-Based View framework, as proposed by Barney (1991), to analyze the Indian handicraft industry. The primary aim is to identify tangible and intangible resources that possess value and have the potential to enhance the competitive advantage of artisan entrepreneurs. To the best of our knowledge, this approach has not been employed for scholarly investigation within this particular field. The bricolage perspective (Baker and Nelson, 2005) is observed among artisan entrepreneurs who operate within resource-constrained environments. However, this approach limits the sector's growth, as Fisher (2012) suggested. Thus, the present two-stage study captures the voices of the artisan entrepreneurs to identify and rank the constraints that need to be focused on to resolve the impediments to the sector's growth.

Managerial implication

To support artisan entrepreneurs, this study identified and addressed their real-world challenges. The research has successfully identified the specific constraints that require attention and resolution to promote the expansion of the artisan sector, by carefully examining the opinions stated by these entrepreneurs. The study underlined the need to actively resolve the identified obstacles rather than passively manage and compromise with the existing resource constraints. Moreover, the present findings may offer valuable insights to practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders involved in the handicraft industry. These insights can be used to develop effective strategies for overcoming identified barriers and maximizing the sector's growth prospects. The growth of the sector will aid in eliminating the unwillingness among artisan entrepreneurs to transmit craft knowledge and skills to subsequent generations, an issue stated in a report by the Ministry of Textile, Government of India (2010). This unwillingness is partly due to the artisan sector's poor profitability possibilities due to the multiple hurdles they encounter. The practice of handicrafts and their associated traditions strongly connect with specific regions' historical and cultural contexts. Hence, by considering the identified constraints within the present study, incorporating the perspectives of artisan entrepreneurs could potentially augment the growth prospects of this industry and yield a significant contribution towards safeguarding the region's cultural heritage, particularly in developing nations. In addition, the research has the potential to enhance the business prospects of handcrafted goods, enabling artisan entrepreneurs to better meet their livelihood needs while simultaneously improving the

community's overall welfare. Various governmental and non-governmental groups are interested in promoting handmade products. These entities can recognize the potential for forming collaborative alliances with artisan entrepreneurs. These partnerships may be established to mitigate the identified limitations that impede the growth of small-scale handicraft industries in developing economies like India and successfully address the limitations identified in this research.

Conclusion

This study shows how artisan entrepreneurs struggle to make, distribute and sell handmade goods to customers, hurting their livelihood. The present research used qualitative and quantitative methods to survey artisan entrepreneurs to identify the main handicraft industry efficiency barriers. Literature review, focus group discussions and quantitative analysis with AHP revealed significant challenges in the handicraft value chain. Product manufacturing, marketing and distribution, and sustainable firm growth and profitability are significant issues in an emerging economy like India. According to the opinions of the artisan entrepreneurs, middlemen, technical inadequacy, market knowledge and accessibility, infrastructural assistance, lack of high-quality raw materials and distribution are the obstacles. While being classified as a microenterprise, the handicraft industry has significant potential for enhancing the livelihoods of artisan entrepreneurs in emerging economies like India. To ensure the success of any handicraft business plan in developing and underdeveloped nations, decision-makers can consider eliminating the identified key obstacles. This will improve the handicraft business's marketing potential and assist preserving ethnic, culture and regional art forms in developing nations.

Limitations and future research directions

The current study focused on the eastern states of India. This can be extended to other parts of India as well as other developed or developing countries, allowing the model to be revalidated and thus generalized. Covering a larger cross-section of artisans may result in a better understanding of the problems that artisan entrepreneurs face, which act as roadblocks to their social and economic development. Future research can be conducted to test the validity of the current research findings in various socioeconomic settings.

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