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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE HANDLOOM INDUSTRY: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WEAVERS OF MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

India traditionally being an agrarian economy has strong dominance of agriculture and allied activities since post-independence days. Handlooms has not only being a crucial sector for economic development but always displayed the rich socio cultural diversity of India. Handloom industry the second largest employment generator in rural India after agricultural, is contributing significantly in Exports too. However, it is going through tough times in the recent past due to internationalization and globalization, when the modern power looms started dominating the traditional industry. As per the Third handloom Census, the industry that generates 77% employment for women has observed an overall decline in the employable weavers from 65.5 lakhs (in 1995-96) to 43 lakhs (2009-10). With the continuous efforts of government to revive the sector through skill development programs and financing activities to increase the productivity and marketing the sector is lagging behind. The study focuses on identifying the challenges and weakness of the sector to suggest a prescriptive solution. To accomplish the objective we have narrowed down by emphasizing on world famous Maheshwari and Chanderi handlooms of Madhya Pradesh, to assess the state of weavers and structural issues. Thus, it relies on both primary and secondary data to suggest remedial measures in a globally competitive market.

KEYWORDS

handloom, heritage, revive, micro finance, government schemes, marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The diversity of Indian culture that reigns in multifarious aspects has always showcased Handlooms as one of its unique possession. Since pre independence days it has been the second largest employment generator employing 81.8% and 57.6% women in rural and urban areas respectively bridging the gender gaps along with improving the financial status of women. However, the race of economic and political might have not spared the country with the entry of industrialization, which automated the manufacturing to produce large volumes of standardized goods. This left the fate of handloom industry at the misery of industrialist and compensation packages of state.

The Textile sector based on the differentiation of modern technology, capital, volume can be classified primarily into Handlooms, Power looms and the Mill segment competing for the same market share. As of the total handlooms work force 76 % (29.08 lakh weavers) constitute the adult workforce (in their productive years) out of which 64 % are full time engaged (61.2% in rural and 80.4% in urban) in weaving and rest in allied activities. But to utter disappointment 29.4 % had never gone to schools and only 6.9% attended school after high school limiting their knowledge on modern technical and marketing skills. The various financing, skill development and differentiated policy schemes of Government to appraise and restructure the sector have gone unnoticed. However acknowledging the potential of employment generation and generating foreign reserve apart from fulfilling the fuelled domestic consumption demand, with the changes in demographics and lifestyle in Indian Subcontinent government is persistently trying to research and come with concrete productive solutions.

Madhya Pradesh known for the rich handlooms of Maheshwar and Chanderi, employed skilled artisans of Surat and Malwa was significantly promoted during the reign of the Holkars by Rani Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar for gifting beautiful weaved sarees to her friends and relatives. The rich intricacies, natural dyes and organic fabric dispersed nationally and internationally conversing the taste of elite and aristocrats. However, a dramatic decline in Post-independence days prompted the Holkar Lineage deeply connected with it since inception, to form Rehwa Society in 1979 for revive the dying heritage apart from giving employment opportunities to the people working in hands with Government. Currently M.P. has 14761 weavers (4331876 weavers in India) and 3604 handlooms (2377331 handlooms in India) that reflects the myriad situation where most of them are working independently or under master weavers without any looms. The number of engaged weavers residing in rural areas have declined dramatically and migrated to urban areas looking for other jobs to earn higher steady income. There is also a sharp fall in weavers under 18 years opting to choose this profession due to minimal earnings and no social security benefits. The dearth of credit indebtedness and strong dominance of the modernized power looms on the Indian Textile market has posed a major threat on sustainability and profitability of the overall Indian Handloom Industry and handlooms of Madhya Pradesh are facing the brunt of same.

INITIATIVES OF INDIAN GOVERNMENT

The Third Handloom Census (2009 – 10) prompted the Government into action realizing the significant contribution of handlooms in exports and GDP after the decline number of weavers will enhance the economic and social problems. It came out with many schemes to uplift weavers and looms to bring sustainability and profitability within the sector. Few of them are :

- ❖ Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for all medium and small scale enterprises without any guarantee / annual service fee upto 85 % extended to banks.
- ❖ Loan Waivers of overdue loans and revival of handloom cooperative societies for working capital needs / Term Loans at interest rates of 6 % for 3 years and margin money assistance upto Rs 10,000 per weaver for individual weavers, Self Help Groups, Joint Liability Group and Master weavers under Revival Reform Restructure Package.
- ❖ Financial Assistance for developing workshop sheds, technological assistance, etc. upto 80 % from central Government, 10 % from state government and rest from SHG's, NGO's under Mudra scheme of PNB Bank.
- ❖ Introduction of Hathkargha Samvardhan Sahayata (HSS) to help weavers improve quality and productivity through a Public Private Partnership Model (PPP) for supplier's assistance and technological upgradation of looms with upto 90% financial assistance directly to beneficiary account Information, education and communication including Bunker Facilities extended through business correspondents via Banks, NGO's and others.
- ❖ Setting Up a Corpus Fund for establishing Yarn Depots under NHDC upto Rs 5 lacs Financial assistance to ensure uninterrupted yarn supply to Weavers.
- ❖ State level enforcement wing to monitor the activities to safeguard the interest of weavers ensuring infrastructure, technical and managerial aids.
- ❖ Establish Common Facility Centre with administrative offices, internet, Storage rooms, dyeing unit, training centre, Yarn godowns, wrapping section and rest for all the weavers in a block.
- ❖ Block level Cluster development for sustainability in highly competitive market and formulating development schemes for product development, Designing, Marketing, Credit Assistance, Training, and other managerial assistance.
- ❖ Comprehensive Handloom development scheme that has merged the Integrated Handloom Development scheme (IHDS), Diversified Handloom Development Scheme (DHDS) and Marketing and Export Promotion Scheme (MEPS) under the 12th plan for holistic development of handlooms and weavers.

MEASURES TAKEN BY MADHYA PRADESH GOVERNMENT

Apart from measures taken by the central government, the State government is also working effortlessly to improve the living standard of weavers of Madhya Pradesh through various financial and non-financial schemes apart from increase the productivity and ensuring quality assurance. It tied up with independent

designers and institutes like NIFT for developing a strong market presence and increasing the marketing skills of weavers. The government collaborated with banks, cooperative societies for ensuring supplies through yarn depots, credit / marketing assistance and other purposes like technically upgrading the looms, etc.

It is persistently providing seamless support to weavers through Cluster development, Marketing & distribution, Design intervention and financial assistance. It has added a lot of thrust to the knowledge repository for ecological tourism and economic independence of weaver households. In 1961 they started with exclusive handlooms and handicraft showroom displaying arts of M.P " Mrignaynee " providing a platform to weavers. Crisp an Indo German conglomerate of MP Government also organizes periodic training programs of design and development. Later, It started the e procurement and export oriented units to take care of design development, marketability and documentation. It holds Exhibitions, Trade Fairs in prominent cities and rented few permanent places like Bhopal Haat to display handlooms on ongoing basis without any fees from weavers.

The Rehwa society of the Holkar dynasty is also working persistently since 1978 to protect the lineage of Maheshwari sarees. They played a proactive and dynamic role for bringing handlooms not only in apparels like sarees, suits but to home furnishing and accessories too like bags, bed-sheets, table cloths, cushion covers etc adding a modern contemporary touch to households. They identified the changes in lifestyle owing to socio cultural factors and brought aesthetic changes to handlooms. The continuous efforts of the Rehwa society and the government has made it a global name crossing the borders of Madhya Pradesh to various domestic (Mumbai, Delhi etc) and International markets (France, UK, Germany etc).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to create an understanding of the dilemma that has led to decline in usage of handloom textiles and its weavers. Many socio cultural and economic factors have gradually created a myriad of vicious problems for the centuries old traditional heritage industry. It a minuscule step to ascertain the challenges and opportunities faced by the Handlooms industry by drawing broad interpretations from the feedback of weavers of Madhya Pradesh.

The study tries to identify the problem from two ends i.e the behavioral and cultural changes by interviewing the consumers of different age groups and their preference for purchasing handloom products. While at the other end we question the weavers to know their awareness level towards government schemes, support systems, financial assistance, photo id cards, technical and marketing assistance, skill development projects etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Bhopal host to numerous handloom exhibitions, training programs and outlets likes Mrignaynee, Bhopal Haat was selected for data collection. The Data enumeration and interpretation is based on data collected through interviewing 50 weavers exhibiting their art in community hall in Bhopal in festive season. While we framed structured questionnaire among 150 respondents of different age groups to analyze the changes in preferences and opinion of people towards Handlooms. We relied on Secondary Data collected available both online and offline like Handloom Census report 2009-10, Directorate of Handlooms, and other Union and state government data were taken to support the study for drawing broader interpretations. Since both the Quantitative and Qualitative data was used for data analysis. Chi Square test was applied on consumer data while percentages was used on data collected from weavers to suggest relevant measures.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

India had being for producing the finest textiles globally since its golden days before the British Colonization. The textile industry has been the second biggest employment contributor after the agricultural sector, where handlooms employee 27.83 lacs (almost 87% households in rural areas) and a significant women workforce as per NCAER, 2010 is in a dilapidated phase with declining number of weavers since Independence. Under the British rule it experienced tremendous changes, "When India became its major raw material source of cotton. When Yarn came from a distance and had to be bought yarn dealers and financiers became necessary, and as the average weavers had little credit, the industry fell more and more into the grip of middlemen. Thus the independence of most weavers disappeared and a great majority of them came to work for mahajan either on contract or wage basis." report of Fact Finding Committee (1942:6).

Establishment of Development Commissioner, Handlooms and setting up Weaver's Service Centre, IIHT's, NHDC in 1970's slowly initiated the resurrection process, focusing on resource development and increasing exports through marketing and financial assistance. However the growth of the sector is faced by many hiccups due to uneducated and unaware weaving class facing the problems of marketing, documentation and other social problems. Most of the Weavers are still using the Traditional Pit Looms reporting Back Pain, Joint pains and breathing problems caused by dust of raw materials. (Sinha.S, Credit Support to Handloom Weavers – Problems and Prospects, NABARD Student Internship Scheme 2016-17.) Dr. Rachna Goswami and Dr. Ruby Jain in their research "Strategy for Sustainable development of Handloom Industry" highlighted the problems identified from most of the weavers of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh & Tripura as making low quality products with limited or no market exposure. Most of the weavers were not aware about the latest market trends thus making the outdated products which consumer didn't purchased. The distribution channel was also inadequate. As per their research statistics, weavers were that they were unaware about market trends (54%), lack of innovative designs (76%), looms were not upgraded (70%), yarn was not of required count (20%) and lastly poor quality yarn (54%). Thus supply of yarn and marketing continues to be a major constraint for handloom industry.

Government initiative of Health Insurance Scheme & Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana apart from other financial and non-financial assistance have covered only handful weavers thus a more comprehensive and integrated outlook is the need of hour to bring profitability back to sector. A Report on market research for promotion of India Handloom Brand submitted to NHDC by Majestic MRSS recognizes the need of developing India Handloom Brand as premium brand of superior fine fabric and unparalleled uniqueness using digital media campaigns to target both the weavers and customers for creating unique touch points. Declaration of National Handlooms Day on 7 th august 2015 and India Handlooms brand is a step towards endorsing the quality of handlooms and creating awareness among Younger Generations for the rich cultural heritage of India and importance of this sector for socio economic development along with boosting tourism and exports.(Note on Handlooms Sector - 30 th Dec 2015, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India).

LIMITATIONS

The study is restricted to a small group of respondents both weavers and customers of Bhopal. The Limitation due to paucity of time and resources had restrained it to a narrow scope however the scenario may be different for the other regions giving a different interpretation. Thus it is a reflection of a small group of respondents of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh which mirrors the broad problems generalizing the topic. Thus it has a large scope of further enrichment in the other regions or same with different factors.

FINDINGS

There is a tremendous change in the outlook of consumers that has led to change in their preferences and frequency of purchase fuelled by socio cultural changes and urbanization. Majority of the people under 30 yrs are purchasing readymade apparels from branded outlets.

The growing inclination of youth for western civilized culture has made handlooms occasional purchases worn on special days like in marriages or festivities. 78 % feel the quality and designing is high(very good) but 54% felt the price and maintenance is also high within the age group of 30- 45 years.

However there is sharp contrast between the age group 18-30 yrs and people above 45 yrs as 91 % of gen x perceives its quality and organic colors and intricate designs as priced possessions available at reasonably low price and low maintenance passing it from generation to generation. While only 23 % of people from 18- 30 yrs know of its characteristics and intricate skilled work and are of opinion that it requires high maintenance (dry cleaning, fabric conditioning, moth protection, ironing etc).While 68 % feel it's expensive from other branded modern and ethnic wear having more elaborate collection of designs, colors, easy to wear and maintain.

The Chi Square test shows a significant difference between the age group and preferences for handlooms accepting the alternate hypothesis at 5% level of significance, degree of freedom 2.

The majority of the weavers approximately 67 % are working independently or for local master weavers instead of being part of clusters / groups who are mostly school drop outs with limited means of financial and technical resources. They had highly limited marketing and knowledge sharing skills thus rendering a majority of 62 % people unaware or partially aware of government schemes. 71 % are depended on money lenders, master weavers cooperative societies and so for raising finance which is consumed mostly for personal reasons like education fees, medical expenses, household expenditure instead of productive purposes. A Minority that belong to large clusters / groups are aware of government aids and credit support programs of nationalized banks. Thus only a handful are eligible to apply for Handlooms Brand of India a recent initiative of Union Government. The scheme of weaver identity cards run by government to identify the weavers and provide them financial and non-financial aids like technical support, easy credit availability, procurement of yarn, trainings are seldom known to few. The lack of awareness and procedural delays have left the problems of weavers unaddressed forcing them to migrate to urban areas for other jobs leaving the weaving skills to die gradually.

SUGGESTIONS

The Handloom Sector, which caters to creatively skilled but economically weaker class of people. Being the catalyst of rural economy the government should bring some innovative measures then just providing only the financial measures or facilities to limited few. The major setback for the government measures is unawareness about majority of the schemes among the weavers and their accessibility as they are uneducated and ignorant of digital media. Handlooms sector face lack of marketing and promotions basically due to absence of a strong Handloom Brand and Quality assurance. The sheen of handlooms among customers is declining due to internationalization of Indian Culture that has brought remarkable change of taste and lifestyle among Indian women.

Due to restricted access to modern means of communication, resources and transportation the majority of weavers find difficulty in loan documentation, managerial works like marketing etc. The Government should aim to bring *Cost Leadership* in procurement of material, facilities like product design and development, dyeing centre, packaging centre, yarn depots, training centre etc should within the territorial and financial accessibility of weavers.

Consolidation of small groups into clusters to eliminate internal competition and sharing of resources on a large scale.

Use of e Governance and e networks for supplying and monitoring the benefits of various schemes to direct beneficiaries.

Mobile Training Camps / Workshops through trainers, business correspondents moving in different cities on regular basis to impart training, marketing assistance, managerial or bank assistance to avail loans, charting project reports, general financial literacy etc.

Government should introduce use of ICT Tools (computer, television) for creating awareness among weavers about various concessional schemes and non-monetary programs. As most of the weavers find difficulty in attending training workshops due to loss of daily wages apart from fees so allowances along with placements, entrepreneurship activities and post training backups should be used to encourage skilled weavers.

A public Private Partnership model could be developed reaping support of some private retailers, e retailers, franchisees who look after the changes in trends, demands, design, accounting and marketing along with supplying the raw material to weavers for harnessing their weaving skills enhancing their economic social position.

In current Globalized world, differentiating the Brand plays a strategic role in creating value and long-term customers. Design Institutes awarding diploma, certificate courses or degrees at reasonable fee structure along with few scholarships students chosen through pan India Competition to create Designs, Quality and Fabric at par with world known brands.

Introduction of various uses of handlooms in accessories, furnishing, etc. in a range of colors, designs and prices to make it more affordable and convenient.

Focusing on the clientele, the age group, purchasing power and choice as per the changing scenario and utility will reap in not only the existing but additional customers too.

Brand Ambassadors like Narendra Modi, Amitabh Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra and other dignitaries could be roped in for promoting and creating awareness for the use of handlooms among next generation.

Technology and globalization has customized the world and customer relationship management plays a crucial role so both the aspects should be taken care through professional and private support in domestic and international markets.

Various sectors of economy have consolidated to provide value add on services to delight the customers so the cultural integration of handlooms with tourism sector to promote its rich heritage on prominent tourist destinations along with hotels, airports can be a game changer.

CONCLUSION

Emerging trends of globalization has shaken up the roots of the traditional heritage of handlooms, that is competing with the automation and standard quality products both from domestically and international players too. This had a huge impact on employment and living standard of people dependent over it but Indian Economic Growth rate and exports too. Government had taken many measures to enhance the competitiveness of the handlooms by ensuring steady supply of raw materials and other resources at subsidized prices along with training, marketing and other assistance. However being the roots of the sector belongs to rural, uneducated and marginalized people that is still not ventured to find out the grass root problems. Thus it will some more time and persistent efforts of government along with social groups to put the things in right frame by working amongst them for them.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Year	Target MUS\$	Achievement MUS\$	Handloom Exports In Rupees term (In Crore)
2009-10	NA	278	1252.80
2010-11	300	350	1574.95
2011-12	500	535	2653.95
2012-13	400	520	2811.97
2013-14	602	372	2233.11
2014-15 April 14	460		151.83 148.14 (Apr 13)

TABLE 2

B7: DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT (18 YEARS AND ABOVE) HANDLOOM WORKERS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employment status	Number of workers			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Independent workers	2,173,343	178,279	2,351,622	67.2	29.0	61.1
Under master weavers/private owners	907,855	391,146	1,299,001	28.1	63.6	33.8
Under institutions	151,027	45,185	196,212	4.7	7.4	5.1
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 3

B6: DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT (18 YEARS AND ABOVE) HANDLOOM WORKERS BY TYPE OF WORKERS

Type of worker	Number of workers			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Weavers	2,522,121	386,659	2,908,780	78.0	62.9	75.6
Allied workers	710,104	227,951	938,055	22.0	37.1	24.4
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 4

B3: DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT (18 YEARS AND ABOVE) HANDLOOM WORKERS BY GENDER

Gender	Number of workers			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Male	588,171	260,302	848,473	18.2	42.4	22.1
Female	2,644,054	354,308	2,998,362	81.8	57.6	77.9
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 5

B1: DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL HANDLOOM WORKERS BY AGE GROUPS

Age group	Number of workers			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Less than 18 years	400,931	84,110	485,041	11.0	12.0	11.2
18-35 years	1,818,593	310,027	2,128,620	50.1	44.4	49.1
36-45 years	752,574	139,998	892,572	20.7	20.0	20.6
46-60 years	529,654	123,901	653,555	14.6	17.7	15.1
Above 60 years	131,404	40,684	172,088	3.6	5.8	4.0
Total	3,633,156	698,720	4,331,876	100.0	100.0	100.0

X

TABLE 6

NUMBER OF ADULT (18 YEARS & ABOVE) HANDLOOM WORKERS BY NATURE OF ENGAGEMENT (2009-10)

State	Location	Full time	Part time	Total
MADHYA PRADESH	Rural	3,556	358	3,914
	Urban	8,361	906	9,267
	Total	11,917	1,264	13,181

TABLE 7

B5: DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT (18 YEARS AND ABOVE) HANDLOOM WORKERS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level of education	Number of workers			Per cent distribution		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Never attended school	931,324	199,121	1,130,445	28.8	32.4	29.4
Below primary	402,961	84,754	487,715	12.5	13.8	12.7
Primary	574,365	127,244	701,609	17.8	20.7	18.2
Middle	782,295	100,248	882,543	24.2	16.3	22.9
High school/secondary	328,493	63,347	391,840	10.2	10.3	10.2
Higher secondary	155,269	23,907	179,176	4.8	3.9	4.7
Graduate & above	52,186	12,867	65,053	1.6	2.1	1.7
Others	5,332	3,122	8,454	0.2	0.5	0.2
Total	3,232,225	614,610	3,846,835	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 8

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING WHETHER THEIR CHILDREN INTERESTED IN TAKING UP HANDLOOM AS PROFESSION (2009-10)

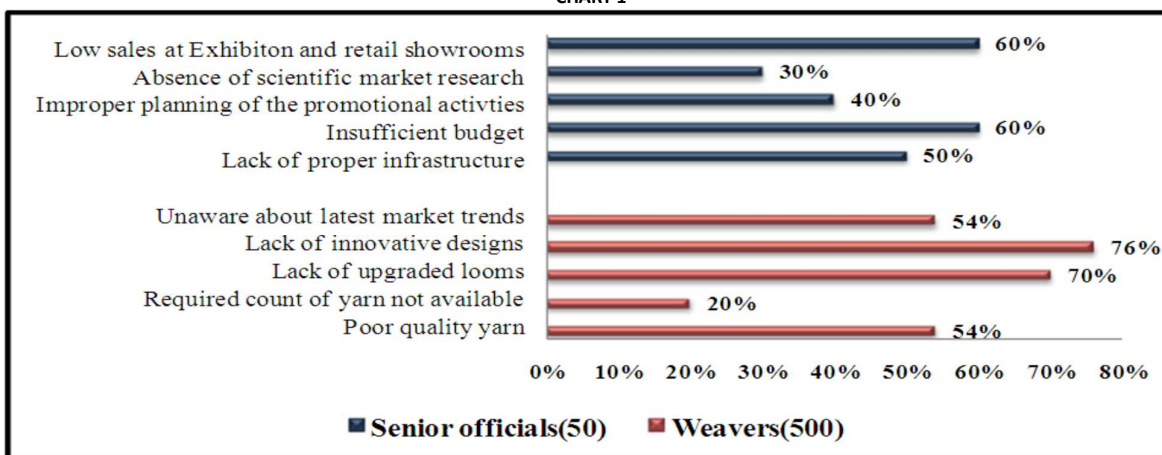
State	Location	Yes	No	Don't know	Not applicable	Total
MADHYA PRADESH	Rural	486	868	879	373	2,606
	Urban	1,936	1,452	2,442	255	6,085
	Total	2,422	2,320	3,321	628	8,691

TABLE 9

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS IN DEBT, PURPOSE AND MAJOR SOURCE OF LOAN (2009-10)

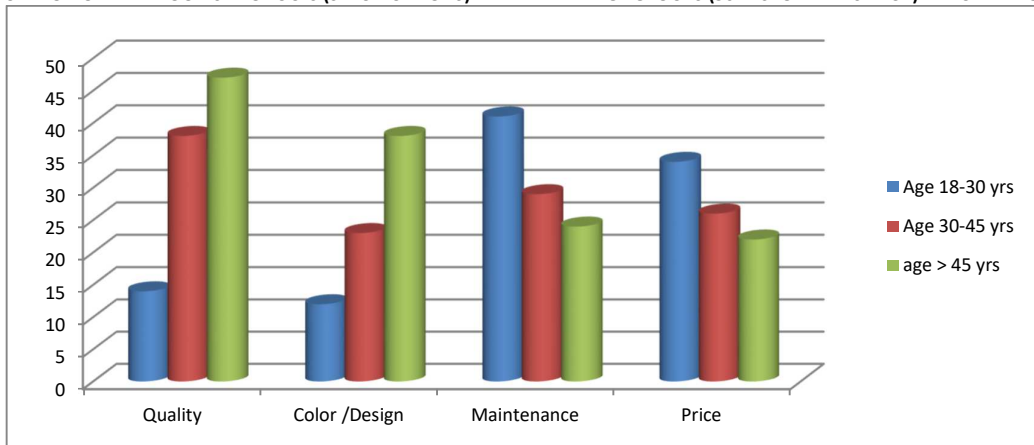
State	Location	Number of household in debt	Purpose of loan			Major source of loan for handloom purpose							
			Handloom	Other purposes	Both purposes	Money lender	Master weaver	Friend/ relatives	Cooperative societies	Commercial bank	SHGs	Traders	Others
Madhya Pradesh	Rural	29	22	4	3	0	0	0	3	18	0	0	1
	Urban	27	6	13	8	2	2	0	1	3	0	0	0
	Total	56	28	17	11	2	2	0	4	21	0	0	1

CHART 1



Source: Dr. Rachna Goswami and Dr. Ruby Jain in their research "Strategy for Sustainable development of Handloom Industry"

CHART 2: PERCEPTION OF HANDLOOMS PRODUCTS (SPECIFICATIONS) IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS (50 RESPONDENTS EACH) IN NUMBER OF CONSUMERS



What is the Preferences of different age groups for purchasing Handlooms in Madhya Pradesh?

Null Hypothesis (H0) : There is no significance difference between the preferences of customers belonging to different age groups for purchasing Handlooms in M.P.

Alternate Hypothesis (H1) : There is a significance difference between the preferences of customers belonging to different age groups for purchasing Handlooms in M.P.

TABLE 10

AGE	Preference for Handlooms		Total
	Yes	No	
18-30 yrs	14	36	50
30-45 yrs	27	23	50
45 & above yrs	41	9	50
Total	82	68	150

Degree of Freedom: (Row -1) (Column -1)

$(3-1)(2-1) = 2$

At 0.05% Significance level

TABLE 11

Actual	Expected	O-E	(O-E)*(O-E)	(O-E)*(O-E) / E
14	27.33	-13.33	177.69	6.501
27	27.33	-0.33	0.109	0.00398
41	27.33	13.67	186.87	6.8375
36	22.67	13.33	177.69	7.838
23	22.67	0.33	0.109	0.004808
9	22.67	-13.67	186.87	8.243
TOTAL				29.428

The Table value of Chi Square Test at degree of freedom 2 at 95% significance level is 5.90 (critical value) while the calculated value is greater than the critical value so we reject the Null Hypothesis and **accept Alternate Hypothesis** that says there is a significant difference between the preferences for purchasing Handlooms amongst different Age Groups.

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With sincere regards

Thanking you profoundly

Academically yours

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