

Awareness and Perception of Traditional Textiles among Indian Urban Youth

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Abstract

India is a melting pot of varied textiles. Each textile, belonging to a different Indian state, narrates the story and characteristics akin to it. Once considered to be heirloom possessions, today these incredible pieces have lost their acceptance and existence in the young population. This study aims to assess the awareness and perception of traditional textiles among youth. A descriptive study was conducted among Delhi-based respondents (n=350), aged 18-24 years residing in urban areas. Quantitative data was collected by administering the digitized structured questionnaire. Appropriate statistical analysis was done. Findings echo the need to educate youth about traditional Indian textiles and make them aware of these. An increase in their knowledge will result in better appreciation, acceptance, and incorporation of these in the modern-day wardrobe of the young population.

Keywords: Awareness; Perception; Traditional textiles; Urban; Youth Introduction.

India has been known worldwide for its rich and incredible handcrafted indigenous textiles. These have long-established roots dating back to the Indus Valley civilization (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016). Traditional Indian textiles carry cultural, social, and emotive values, with distinctive characteristics of designs and colours (Bhatnagar, 2005; Deepshikha and Yammiyavar, 2019; Dongerkery, 1951). These are produced by artisans belonging to a community or a region who have inherited the production skills from their ancestors, verbally or by practice. An amalgamation of their knowledge, creativity, and skillful hands has produced a myriad of textiles, each owning its very individualistic and fascinating identity. In comparison to other countries throughout the world, Indian textiles offer diversity due to the range of materials used, techniques of production

followed by motifs and designs incorporated, and colours and products made. In addition to being incomparable, these are the most suited to the Indian environment (Anand, A. and Sekhri, S. 2022).

Over the years, traditional Indian textiles have constantly evolved and adapted themselves in response to society's lifestyle to make themselves perennially relevant. In this process, these have encompassed both historic techniques of production and modern innovations that have been developed and modernized by the community from which it comes. Despite its evolution, Indian textiles still resonate with the unique characteristic akin to it to contribute to the identification of its production region, artisans, colour palette, designs, and technique of production. Based on their production technique, many authors have classified these finest Indian textiles as woven, embroidered, tie-dyed, and painted-printed which can be witnessed throughout the country (CBSE, 2014; Gillow and Barnard, 1991).

Despite its adaptability, versatility, sustainability, and other innumerable advantages, it has been seen that over the years many Indian textile "works of craft" are vanishing and are proceeding toward slow death. According to the UN, over the past 30 years, the number of Indian artisans has decreased by 30%. Various studies have reported that textile-based handicrafts are being ignored by the youth (Bindra, 2017). One of the reasons quoted is the easy availability of mechanically produced goods. Machine-made fast fashion products have impacted consumers' purchasing behaviour (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). Lesser value, pocket-friendly apparel, and fashion accessories have become a necessity of life, especially for the youth. Moreover, the easy availability of mass-produced apparel goods has developed a "use and throw" ideology in young consumers. Fashion consumers have been targeted by textile industries who compete to sell "Fast Fashion" merchandise to young consumers at very reasonable prices (Johansson, 2010). Since machine-made apparel and accessories are quickly owned, consumed, and discarded, even quicker than their possession, these products have lost their charm and value to their beholders. Such mass-produced fast fashion products have stimulated consumerism, influenced consumers to buy easily available and widely visible fast fashion products, and have therefore led to over-consumption (Eriksson and Karlsson, 2014). Understanding the "throwaway fashion" ideology, especially among young females, global brands such as Zara, Benetton, Forever 21, H&M, and Topshop, are now designing fast-fashion goods to have a short lifecycle and are selling fashion products at low competitive pricing to gain huge profits (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006).

Such mechanized mass-produced products have endangered awareness, acceptance, popularity, and usage of heirloom traditional Indian textiles among future generations. According to the study conducted by Pargai D. and Rani A., (2016), the lack of awareness about Indian textiles among youth is becoming a bottleneck in retailing and marketing of these and hence there is a need to create awareness tools that can sensitize the young consumer to purchase the textile handicrafts. The market research report by NHDC Ltd. (2016) suggests that the lack of promotion of handloom products specifically apparel has led to minimum awareness and interest within the young generation which is leading to very limited usage of these. Anand, A. and Sekhri, S. (2019) in their study suggested that no appreciation and a lesser understanding of the hand skill of craftsmen amongst the present consumer set has decreased the demand for such products. In the earlier days, traditional textiles were far away from falling prey to fast pace changing fashions and were not considered a mere fashion commodity. However, presently a drastic change has been observed in the apparel and accessories consumption pattern of Indian people especially urban Indian youth due to the increasing influence of Western culture, and rapid changes in fashion, accelerated by growing access to information through social media. With paced lifestyle, the wardrobes of youth are flooded with branded "Fast Fashion" machine-made apparel and accessories (Ranavaade, 2019). Changed consumption behaviour, dwelling attitude of "looking for cheaper substitutes" and "use and throw ideology" has endangered awareness, acceptance, and usage of sustainable heirloom traditional textiles among India's young population which has resulted in a vicious circle and is gradually leading to the extinction of these (Khatoon, 2016). Formerly this impact was gradual, almost imperceptible, and was limited to specific circles of the elite members of the country. But with growing means of communication and social media, this process seems to be ever increasing showing apparent variations and transformations.

Objectives

To study the awareness about traditional textiles among Indian urban youth residing in Delhi

To assess the perception of traditional textiles among youth residing in urban areas of Delhi

Methodology

1. **Research design:** The present study has a descriptive research design aimed to document awareness and perception of traditional Indian textiles among urban youth residing in Delhi.
2. **Sample Selection:** From the cluster of private and government co-educational institutes in New Delhi, ten colleges (five private and five government) were selected purposively. Educational institutes which were catering to one gender only as well as the ones which were already teaching the courses in the research area were excluded. Based on a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques the respondents, aged between 18-24 years, studying various courses from the educational institutes were selected. Respondents residing in urban areas of New Delhi and belonging to the upper and upper-middle socio- economic class formed part of the sample. Care was taken to have an equal proportion of male and female respondents to overrule disparity regarding the representation of respondents in the sample.
3. **Sample size:** Based on Cochran's sample size formula, the total sample size calculated was 400 respondents (200 males and 200 females) for data collection.
4. **Data collection tool:** A pre-tested digitized structured questionnaire was developed in both English and Hindi languages. It was administered online for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two segments. The first segment included questions based on demographic details such as age, gender, occupation, and educational qualification. The second segment was designed to attain information about awareness and perception of urban youth towards traditional Indian textiles and hence included questions on awareness about production technique of these, most popular traditional textiles, source of information about traditional Indian textiles, awareness about quality/product assurance marks used on traditional Indian textiles' products, parameters considered important for selecting Indian textiles, challenges faced by traditional textiles manufacturers and retailers for their acceptance among youth, platforms through which youth would like to receive educational information about these, improvement in adoption of traditional Indian textiles by youth by the endorsement of Indian textiles' products by an Indian icon. Before ad-

ministering the study tool, ethical clearance was taken from the Institutional ethics committee. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was taken for participating in the study. Respondents were assured that the information provided by them will be kept confidential, anonymity would be maintained and information will only be used for re-search purposes.

- 5. Data Analysis:** Out of 400 selected respondents 350 respondents sent back a fully completed questionnaire. Hence, data has been analysed based on responses received from 350 respondents. The data collected were coded, tabulated, and subjected to statistical analysis. Considering the objectives of the study, design, and nature of the data collected, percentages were calculated using MS Excel. The results obtained are presented in the form of graphs according to salient interpretations drawn in light of the objectives of the research.

Results

The general profile of the respondents: Of the total respondents, 62% were aged between 18-21 years, and 38% were aged between 22-24 years. Nearly 43% were male while 57% were female respondents. Most of the respondents were doing graduation (45% approximately) while 30% were in postgraduate courses, and the rest 25% reported to be perusing other professional courses. 72% of the respondents were students while the rest 28% reported being earning as well along with perusing their respective courses.

Analysis of the results obtained on various components of the questionnaire is as below:

- 1. Opinion about Traditional Indian Textiles:** Approximately 59% of the respondents (n=208) were aware that traditional Indian textiles are products made by traditional techniques using hands. While nearly 31% (n=109) responded that these are products made by mechanized production techniques using machines and approximately 9% (n=33) respondents were uncertain (*Fig. 1*). Thus 59% of respondents were aware that traditional hand-crafted products use traditional manual techniques for product making.

100

50

300

260

150

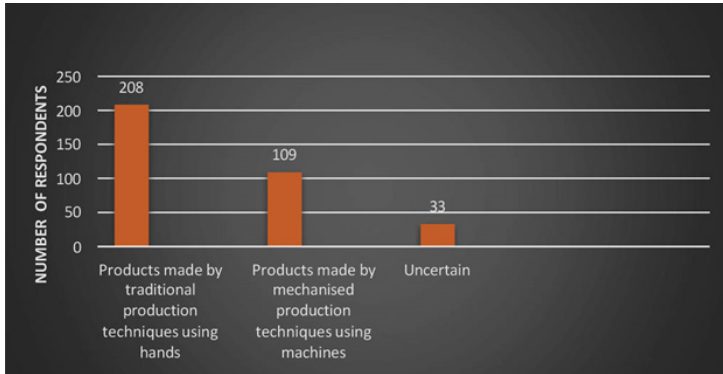


Figure 1: Opinion about Traditional Indian Textiles

2. **Most known traditional Indian textiles:** Respondents were asked to name any three traditional textiles of India that they know about. Khadi received the maximum responses (20%) followed by phulkari (17%), pashmina (14%), chikankari, kalamkari, and chanderi (10% each), ikat (7%) and Banarasi (6%) while 6% could not recall the name of any Indian textile (Fig. 2).

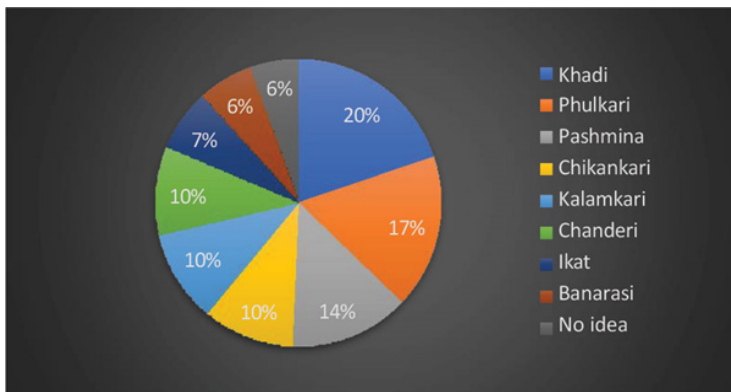


Figure 2: Most known traditional Indian textiles

3. **Source of information about traditional Indian textiles:** Nearly equal numbers (50%) of the respondents reported social media and friends/family to be their source of information about traditional textiles (Fig. 3). This was followed by school textbooks (48%), exhibitions (35%), informative tags on the products (32%),

etc. The least preference was given to advertisements on T.V. or radio (19%) to be the basis of their information.

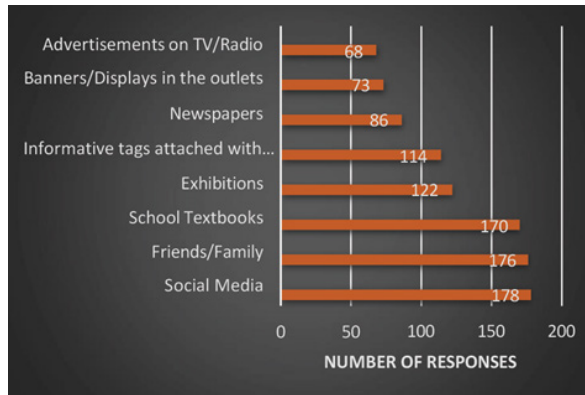


Figure 3: Sources of information about traditional Indian textiles

- Awareness about quality/product assurance marks used on traditional Indian textiles products:** When respondents were tested for their awareness about quality/product assurance marks used on traditional textiles' products, approximately an average of 44% correct responses were received (Fig. 4). 32% of the respondents identified Khadi India Mark correctly, followed by 27% silk mark, and 16% handloom mark while 13% identified the Craft mark correctly, and the least correct response was received for Indian Handloom Brand Mark.

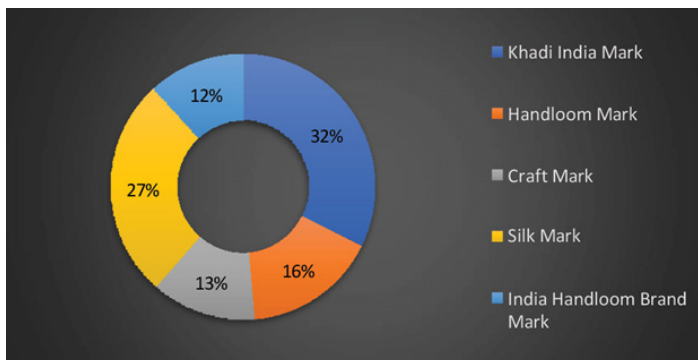


Figure 4: Awareness about quality/product assurance marks used on traditional Indian textiles products

5. **Most important parameters for selecting traditional Indian textiles:** Respondents were asked about the most essential parameter that they consider important when buying traditional Indian textiles. Affordability was considered (approximately 56%) to be the most essential parameter for buying Indian textiles (Fig. 5). This was followed by superior quality (53%), durability (49%), and suitability to lifestyle/climate (47%). The least essential parameters considered for selecting traditional textiles were sustainability, uniqueness of the product, and pride in Indian products (average 33%).

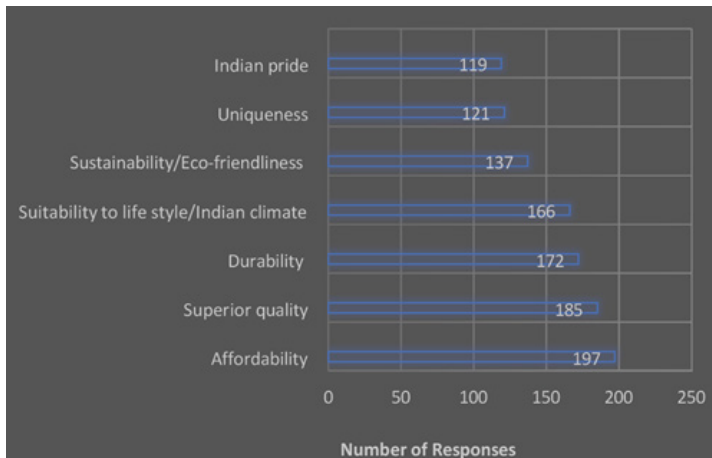


Figure 5: Most important parameters for selecting traditional Indian textiles

6. **Biggest challenge faced by traditional textiles at present for their acceptance among youth:** 40% of the respondents (n= 143) reported lack of awareness and knowledge about traditional textiles as the primary challenge being faced by these for their acceptance in the target age group (Fig. 6). This was followed by other factors such as lack of branding (19%), 13% for unacceptance in the peer group, unaffordability (12%), unavailability in local markets (7.5%) while low priority on government's policy was least considered factor.

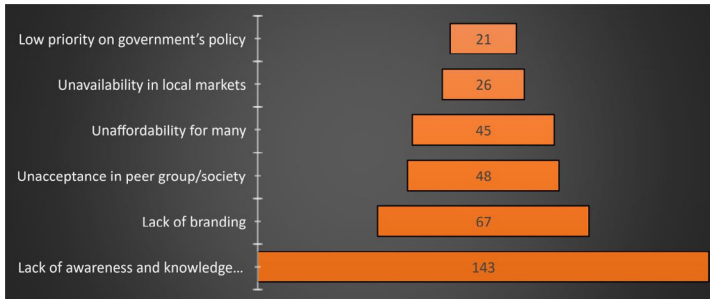


Figure 6: The biggest challenge faced by traditional Indian textiles at present for their acceptance among youth

- Connection with traditional Indian textiles if their characteristics and production techniques are known:** Respondents were asked if they would connect better with traditional Indian textiles in case, they are aware of its characteristics and production techniques (*Fig. 7*). 36% of the respondents felt that sometimes it might help them to connect better with it, 33% responded often while 26% reported they would always connect better with traditional textiles. A very small proportion (5%) reported that knowledge about the characteristics and production techniques of Indian textiles will not connect them to it.

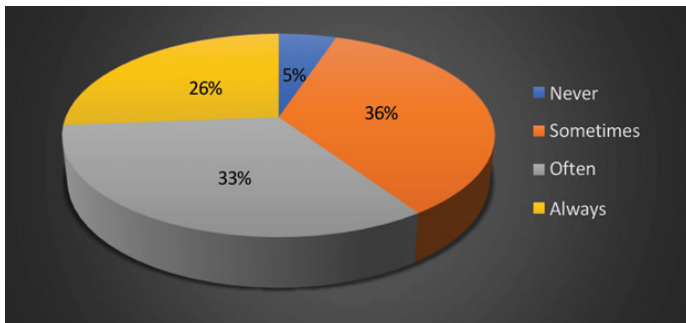


Figure 7: Opinion about “Connection with traditional Indian textiles if their characteristics and production techniques are known”

- Platforms through which youth would like to receive educational information about traditional Indian textiles:** Most popular platform reported by one-fourth (25%) of the respondents was so-

cial media for receiving educational information about traditional textiles (Fig. 8). This was followed by an equal percentage of 14% for workshops/seminars, fashion shows and newspapers/magazines as educational platforms. An equal weightage was given by the respondents to platforms like hoardings/banners/displays in outlets, and informative tags on products. Radio/T.V. was reported to be the least preferred platform for receiving educational information in this area.

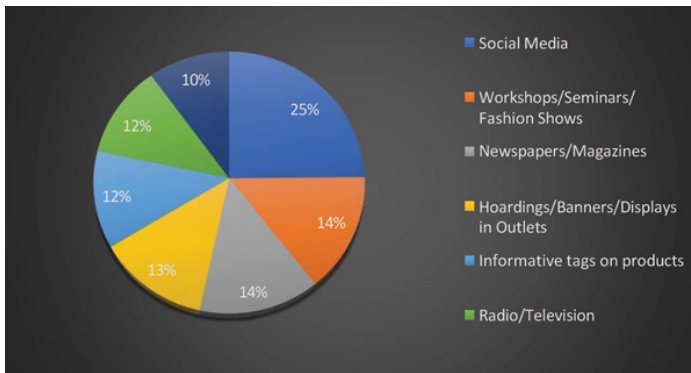


Figure 8: Platforms through which youth would like to receive educational information about traditional Indian textiles

9. **Endorsement of traditional Indian textiles' products by an Indian icon improves its adoption in the youth:** Respondents were asked if the endorsement of Indian textiles' products by an Indian icon will help improve its adoption in the youth (Fig. 9). 43% (n=152) agreed that it will help, nearly 22% strongly agreed while 27% remained neutral. A very less proportion of respondents (approximately 7.5%) disagreed and felt it will not improve.

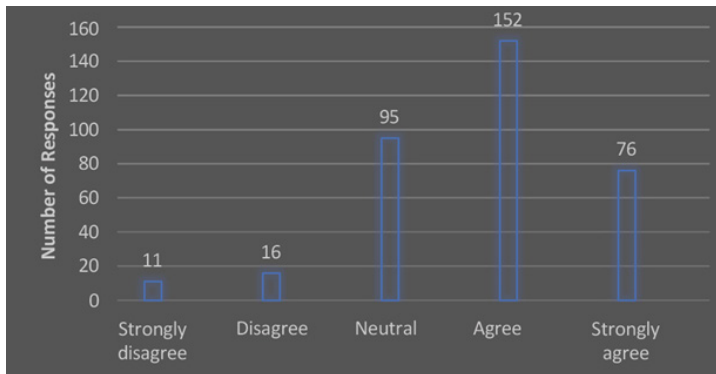


Figure 9: Opinion on “Endorsement of Indian textiles’ products by an Indian icon can improve its adoption in the youth”

Summary

Almost 60% of the study population was aware that traditional Indian textiles are handmade using traditional techniques. Khadi (20%) was found to be the most known traditional textile among the respondents. It was closely followed by phulkari (17%). 50% of the respondents reported social media, family, and friends as the primary source of information for getting information about Indian textiles. Further, an average of 44% correct responses were received regarding the identification of quality/product assurance marks seen on traditional Indian textiles products. Out of all Khadi, the India mark was most known among the respondents (32%) while the India handloom Brand was found to be least known among the study group (12%). The majority of the study population (56%) reported affordability to be the main factor considered for buying traditional Indian textiles while the least essential parameters were sustainability, uniqueness, and pride in Indian textile products. Additionally, the maximum number of respondents in the study group (40%) reported that lack of awareness and knowledge about traditional textiles as the primary challenge being faced by Indian textiles for its acceptance. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Pargai D. and Rani A., (2016) according to which the lack of awareness about Indian textiles in youth is becoming a bottleneck in retailing and marketing of these and hence there is a need to create awareness tool which can sensitise the young consumer to purchase the textile handicrafts. The majority of the respondents reported that they sometimes or often connect better with traditional textiles if they are aware of their characteristics and production techniques. One-quarter

of the study population wanted to receive educational information about traditional Indian textiles through social media while television/radio was reported to be the least popular source (10%). Most of the respondents (n=228) felt that endorsement of traditional textile products by an Indian icon will help improve its adoption in the youth.

Discussion

- Evidence suggests that although youth, aged between 18-24 years, is aware of the meaning of traditional Indian textiles but there is a dearth of information regarding the range of textiles produced all over India. Very selective textiles, which may be due to their presence in the markets, are associated with traditional Indian textiles in the target population.
- Youth, aged 18-24 years, relies more on social media and hence, awareness about various types of traditional Indian textiles should be disseminated through this platform.
- Word of mouth spread by friends and family can help in educating youth about incredible Indian textiles to arouse their interest in it.
- Although the government has tried to work on the quality and assurance of handmade traditional Indian textiles by launching the India Handloom Brand logo in 2015, it has still not made its identity among young consumers. And hence, more work needs to be done to popularise it.
- The present age group places importance on affordability, quality, durability, and suitability to their lifestyle while buying traditional Indian textiles products. However, this age group is least concerned about sustainability, uniqueness, and Indian pride. Traditional textiles follow sustainable practices in their production thereby giving the least carbon footprint and are produced using eco-friendly materials. It is the need of the hour to adopt such products that do not cause harm to our planet. Uniqueness in each product is the key factor that makes it different from mass-produced machine-made products. This needs to be emphasized in young consumers. Moreover, taking pride in products "Made in India" needs to be inculcated in the Indian youth population who are getting influenced by low-cost, fast fashion westernized apparel and accessory products at a very fast pace.

- Findings echo the need to lay focus on educating the youth about traditional Indian textiles to make them aware of these. An increase in their knowledge will result in appreciation of these, will improve their acceptance and this might lead to their incorporation into the everyday lifestyle and modern-day wardrobe of the young population.
- Social media is the most popular platform that should be used extensively for disseminating educational information to youth aged between 18-24 years.
- Indian icons can help generate interest in traditional Indian textiles and they must be involved for the betterment of the adoption of these among youth.

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