

## Evolving Motives for Fair Trade Consumption: A Qualitative Study on Handicraft Consumers of India

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**KEYWORDS** Contradictive. Culture. Globalization. Inclusive. Sustainability

**ABSTRACT** Research on fair trade consumption, particularly on handicrafts, has been scarce in India. Globalization further complicates the understanding of their consumption patterns, which needs to be studied. This paper qualitatively explored the consumer motives and values towards handicraft consumption and their development in contemporary society. An online survey, some mall intercept interviews, and an online sentence completion test were conducted for data collection. Content Analysis was performed with the help of software for qualitative data analysis. Findings suggest that due to globalization, young consumers have become more individualistic and world-minded while older consumers have remained utility and culture oriented. A new factor, contradictive aspect emerged from this paper, which has been attributed to the effects of globalization. So far, studies of consumer behavior lacked paradoxical perspective on consumption of handicrafts. This paper dealt with those paradoxes and developed a concept towards conscious consumption of handicrafts for sustainable development of society.

### INTRODUCTION

Handicrafts are unique objects which play a vital role in a developing and multi-cultural country like India. They represent cultural traditions and symbolize the heritage of creativity, aesthetics, diversity and craftsmanship. They also help in sustaining local economies as well as the environment (Pearce et al. 2010; González-Pérez et al. 2013; Hadjichambis et al. 2015). Craft industry in South Africa has been strategically recognized as contributing factor to sustainable development (Makhitha 2014). Along this context, it would be interesting to note that handicrafts have been considered as fair-trade products (Andorfer et al. 2015; Bardh and Carlsson 2015; Child 2015). Being fair trade products, their market can provide an alternative model of development that transcends the popular trickle-down economics (Lintin 2012). In spite of being so vital, these products suffer from dwindling demand due to stiff competition faced by industrial products (Menon 2010; Jahan and Mohan 2015; Srivastav and Rawat 2015). Scholars have recognized that success of handmade products depends on proper

synchronization of their production with the consumer tastes (Ghouse 2012; Nagori and Saxena 2012; Kumar and Rajiv 2013; Makhitha 2014). Application of the knowledge of consumer behavior would immensely benefit the demand side of the handicraft sector.

From the perspective of fair trade consumption, research has been focused mainly around concepts like willingness to pay and attitudes towards such products. Few studies deal with underlying motives for purchasing them (Ladhari and Tchegnina 2014). However, such studies have mainly focused on commodity food products like coffee, cocoa, bananas etc. Consumption motives towards fair trade products like handicrafts are further scarce. A review on fair trade consumption showed that most of the research on fair trade consumption has been carried out in western and developed countries and thus seems to present a cultural bias (Andorfer and Liebe 2011). Research on fair trade consumption in India is scarce, let alone studies on handicraft consumption. From the perspective of research on consumption strictly of handicrafts, few studies have been conducted in India. Rani and Bains (2014) and Dasgupta and Chandra (2014) merely reviewed the consumer behavior towards handicrafts. Gopal et al. (2013) and Dasgupta and Chandra (2015) researched on profiling of handicraft consumers. Bal and Dash (2010) and Dasgupta and Chandra (2015) analyzed consumer

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behavior of handicrafts quantitatively. These studies did not explore qualitatively into the consumer motivations, values and emotions revolving around handicraft purchases. Other studies, which dealt with motives, emotions and values, were carried out outside India, so, they might not reflect the real picture of Indian consumers of handicrafts. Anthropologists have warranted the need for studies in social sciences that deal with country specific realities (Venkatesh 1995, 2015). Also, consumer behavior due to globalization has become further complex which calls for further exploration (Cleveland et al. 2009) Therefore, to explore these untapped complexities around handicraft consumption motives, a qualitative research seemed appropriate to the researchers. Exploring such consumption complexities is crucial for improving the handicraft market, and aid in sustainable development.

### Objectives

The objective of the study was to explore qualitatively the emotions, motivations, and values, as guiding factors shaping the behaviors of consumers of handmade products of India and to examine their development in the context of contemporary social change and sustainable development of India. The research questions undertaken to fulfill the objective were as follows: What are the underlying emotions, motives, and values for handicraft consumption in India? How the consumption patterns have developed under the contemporary globalized Indian society? How to conceptualize the consumption patterns towards the context of sustainable development?

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Collection Tools

The data were collected in three subsequent phases through an online survey, some mall-intercept interviews, and an online sentence completion test.

### Procedures

The online survey was conducted to elicit responses regarding the general motivations of people regarding handicrafts. It has been argued that this tool can help explore those attitudes

which are “socially liberal”, since, respondents on an average have been found to live lesser in homes and thus are lesser cautious while giving responses (Kellner 2004). An open-ended questionnaire was sent to 80 select people, out of which 43 responses were received. Four questions were asked of the respondents, which are as follows:

For what purposes do you purchase handicrafts? What guides your purchase intentions? Describe your feelings whenever you see or think about handicrafts. How do you consider handicrafts in association with contemporary society other modern products?

The second phase consisted of some Mall-intercept interviews. This tool was used for a deeper probe into the consumer motivations as voice, intonation, gestures are some social cues which can give richer information about the verbal responses of interviewees (Opdenakker 2006). Open-ended questions similar to the online survey were asked of the respondents. In addition, the Laddering technique was resorted to aid the probing. This technique helps respondents in moving from specific behaviors to broader values (Gutman 1982; Wassenberg et al. 2015). This is done through back-to-back open-ended questions. In other words, the researcher develops the questions based on respondents' answers to the prior question. For example, if a respondent said, “*I buy handicrafts because they are beautiful*”, the researcher might ask, “*Why do you consider them beautiful?*” These questions, ask the respondents to move up the “ladder of abstraction”.

Sometimes, it is difficult to obtain exact information about people's cognition through mere interviews (Haire 1950). Myth, fantasy, and imagination are involved in consumption, but their role is largely neglected and thus, the researchers understood that they should view consumers as having desiring bodies and minds (Ahmed et al. 2015). So, for a deeper probe into the implicit motives, emotions and desires of consumers, a projective technique was used in the form of a sentence completion test in the third phase. Sentences of various kinds (like personification association, imagery association, role-playing, third party projections) were put forth to elicit implicit emotions of the respondents from different perspectives. Sentences in incomplete form were presented to the respondents and they were asked to complete them reading the first halves

of the sentences. Following items were used for the sentence completion test:

I would like others to see my handicraft collection at my home because...., I like to gift hand-made items to my friends because...., If a hand-made flower vase talked to me, it would say...., When I see a handicraft in a store or at a fair, the image that comes to my mind...., If I was a manager at a handicraft and handloom retail store, to increase its selling, I would...., The people who purchase handicraft or handloom products are...., I would like to purchase handicrafts even if they are expensive because....

### Participants

The effects of globalization were needed to be explored in the consumption patterns. Hence, mostly younger consumers were targeted. Also, globalization leads to materialistic and liberal mindsets, the researchers targeted mostly those younger consumers who have access to the internet and belonged to a well-educated background. Their average age was 24 years. However, it was also necessary to compare the findings with the older generations, so that a change (due to globalization) might reflect on the consumption patterns. Therefore, in the mall-intercept interviews, some older people have also been interviewed whose average age was 45 years.

### Sampling

Respondents in all the phases were selected by convenient sampling because for exploratory studies such sampling technique aids researchers to get an approximation of the phenomenon under study without spending much time and money for a random sample (Pla 1999).

### Period of Data Collection

The first phase that is the online survey was conducted from 19<sup>th</sup> April 2014 to 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014. The second phase that is the Mall-intercept interviews were conducted from 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2014. The third phase that is the sentence completion tests were conducted from 11<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2014.

### Data Analysis

Inductive content analysis was used for data analysis which is a systematic approach to ana-

lyzing qualitative data based on the Grounded Theory approach. According to this approach, codes (open codes) are generated from the data and later conceptualized into categories (axial codes) and themes to develop a theory (selective code) (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Allan 2003; Charmaz 2008; Lowe et al. 2015). In order to operationalize the analysis, a software package called Atlas.ti was used which is a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package (Alagbaoso 2014). Qualitative research with the aid of CAQDAS becomes more time saving, more effective in terms of project management, its processes can be more transparent and replicable, hence more credible (Hwang 2008; Foley and Timonen 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Content Analysis effectively resulted in numerous open codes and their corresponding axial codes. Table 1 shows the list of all the codes that were developed by the code manager of the Atlas.ti project. The table shows how the codes are thematically linked, how grounded or frequent the codes are, how dense or strength of codes are and the higher order codes which were developed based on thematic linkage of particular codes. The higher order codes have been considered as the factors of handicraft consumption. Among these eight factors, the aesthetic aspect has been considered most significant factor by both frequency and depth of codes. Price and uniqueness have the highest code frequencies, which meant that these two variables were the prime considerations for most of the respondents. The utilitarian aspect was also found to be a significant factor, followed by the cultural aspect. The sustainability aspect was a moderate factor. The contradictory aspect was found to have the least frequency but was important in terms of strength.

Aesthetic aspect was the most influential factor among the respondents for handicraft purchase. Most of the respondents reported about its artistic value, uniqueness, and beauty. One of the respondents commented:

*"I like handicrafts because they are unique, beautiful and have artistic value"*

Many previous studies reported similar factor for handicraft purchase (Hu and Yu 2007; Bal and Dash 2010; de Silver and Kundu 2013; Paraskevaidisa and Andriotis 2015; Dasgupta

**Table 1: List of codes and themes and their properties**

S. No.	Codes	Grounded/ Frequency	Frequency (%)	Density/ Strength	Strength (%)	Themes	Higher order codes		
1	Beautiful	9	34	4	24	Is an attribute which shows the aesthetic side of handicrafts	Aesthetic aspect		
2	Decorative	6		3					
3	Artistic	7		1					
4	Fashionable	3		1					
5	Unique	20		3					
6	Smooth Finishing	1		1					
7	Memory of travel experience	1	7	2	11			Is an experience which brings a change in taste	Novel experience
8	Blend of modernity and tradition	4		1					
9	Creative	5		3					
10	Craftsmanship	4	5	2	5			Is a feeling of appreciation of skills and talent	Artisan Linkage
11	Encouraging talent	3		1					
12	Soulful	2	7	2	7	Is a feeling of naturalness	Nature linkage		
13	Natural	4		1					
14	Simple	3		1		Is an attribute which is beneficial for the sustainability of environment and society	Sustainability aspect		
15	Eco-friendly	4	10	2	16				
16	Biodegradable	6		3					
17	Socioeconomic benefits	3		2					
18	Social change	1		2					
19	Ethnic	3	12	1	11	Is a feeling of belongingness to a native culture	Cultural Linkage		
20	Cultural Preservation	6		2					
21	Traditional	2		1					
22	Native	1		1					
23	Nostalgia	4		1		Is an a personal economic benefit	Utilitarian aspect		
24	Useful	3	24	3	16				
25	Reasonable price	20		2					
26	Quality	3		1		Is a contradictory perception	Contradictive aspect		
27	Comfortable	2		2					
28	Attractive offers	1		1					
29	Class	1	2	3	13				
30	Expensive	1		1					
31	Unmanageable	1		1					
32	Dull	1		1					
33	Jealousy	1		1					

Source: Author

and Chandra 2014, 2015). However, why handicrafts are considered to be unique and beautiful could be explored in depth in relation to the other factors discussed below.

Since handicrafts are cultural products, the factors associated with culture as expected were found to be significant in the content analysis. Associating with other modern products, respondents commented about various cultural associations. Some comments were about simple feeling of nostalgia. For instance, a respondent commented:

*“Handmade ethnic products make me nostalgic about my childhood days”*

Some other comments showed a strong attitude of ethnocentrism in response to the question on how they considered handicrafts in association with contemporary society. For example, a respondent commented:

*“Our culture is losing ground and it has so much to offer to the world in terms of utility and our heritage, so we must protect them”*

Older consumers gave more ethnocentric comments compared to the young consumers. These findings are in consensus with earlier studies (Belk and Groves 1999; Chang et al. 2008; Hyun 2015). It can be related to Schwartz's conservation values (Schwartz 2012). The rise of eth-

nocentric values in globalized times is pertinent as found in earlier studies (Cleveland et al. 2009; Cleveland et al. 2015; Dasgupta and Chandra 2016).

Respondents were very much concerned about the utilitarian aspect of the handicrafts. They wanted them to be useful at home having some quality. Most importantly, they wanted them at a reasonable price. Most of such respondents belonged to middle-class homemakers so it is easier to understand their rationale behind such motivations. It can be argued here that the effects of globalization have not much affected the older generation.

Some of the young respondents reported that they looked for novel experience depicting a blend of modernity and tradition in handicrafts. One of the respondents commented:

*"I look for innovative ideas behind the handicrafts and how the past can be linked to present to make handicrafts more creative"*

Creativity, curiosity, freedom, and independence have been associated with Schwartz's self-direction values (Schwartz 2012). Earlier studies found that ethical consumption is related to self-direction values (Shaw et al. 2005; Doran 2008; Ladhari and Tchegnina 2014). A recent study found that Indian young consumers could be targeted better by providing innovative handicrafts that portray individuality (Parthasarathy et al. 2015). It shows how globalization has increased the acculturation of individualistic values among Indian youth (Dasgupta and Chandra 2016). However, interestingly, materialistic values can co-exist with consumer ethnocentric values (Cleveland et al. 2015). This is why some of the young respondents too expressed ethnocentrism.

Some of the young respondents associated their purchase motives with environmental and socio-economic sustainability. From their comments, the researchers can infer that they were interested in making the world greener and more sustainable by purchasing handicrafts. For example, a respondent said:

*"Whenever I purchase handicraft I feel that I contribute to making this world green, sustainable and pollution free"*

A respondent who happened to be professional photographer commented:

*"Handicraft and handloom production is decentralized, thus, help prevent concentration of power through the accumulation of wealth"*

Such an outlook reflects an educated and world-minded perspective according to which decentralization is a means to achieve a democratic end. The idea of sustainability is similar to universalism value (Schwartz 2012). Earlier studies found that consumers of fair trade are motivated by universalism values (Shaw et al. 2005; Doran 2008; Darian et al. 2015). Although Indian consumers have become more individualistic and their universalism values have decreased in the past decade owing to the acculturation of western education materialistic philosophies through globalization (Parthasarathy et al. 2015), it seems that such reports would not be consistent with fair trade products.

Benevolence value has been understood as a motivation to enhance the lives of those with whom one is closely acquainted (Schwartz 2012). Some of the comments reflected benevolence towards artisans, particularly by those respondents who have been closely associated with them. For example:

*"As I have been intimate with various artisans, I should encourage and motivate them within my capacity"*

This is in consensus with the fact Indian consumers in the past decade, although have become more individualistic have not left generosity (Parthasarathy et al. 2015). Even from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, it has been understood that human nature is fundamentally altruistic (Szalavitz 2012) and people feel good and get self-satisfaction by showing generosity (Dawkins 2006; Parthasarathy et al. 2015).

Exhausted from the mechanistic way of life, an urban consumer seeks to go back to nature and remain in the 'simple old days'. The researchers used a role playing question, a variety of third party projection in the sentence completion test and found an interesting comment depicting the nature linkage of a respondent. The researchers asked: If a handmade flower vase talked to you, what it would say to you? The respondent said:

*"Look, I'm so beautiful. Do you see the plastic vase over there? It is so boring and you know the story of its birth? You would not want to know that. I was born from the clay of happy land and by hands of ever smiling potter"*

This is similar to what MacCannell (1973) reported about alienating modern tourist who, having lost connections from the natural and pristine world and has been in the quest for the same

which they found in other objects which are not yet touched by modernity.

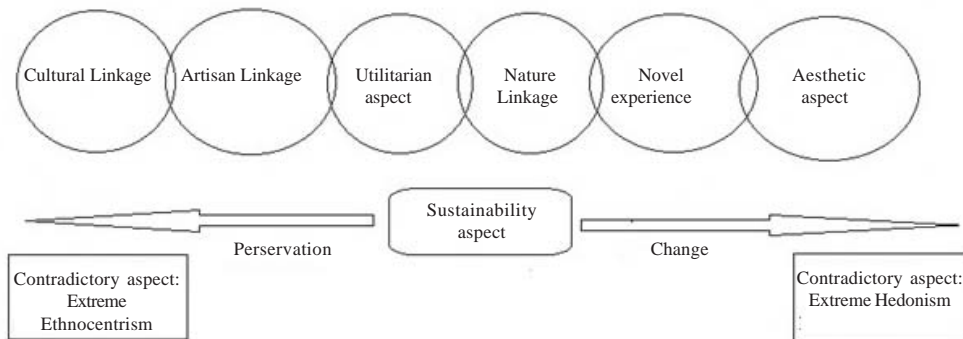
Some of the respondents showed contradictory preferences. On one hand, they showed concern towards preserving the environment from polluting modernity; but on the other hand, they preferred hedonistic aspects too, which are driving forces of modernity. On one hand, they wanted to feel connected to their roots to restore the community life, which they have lost from the individualism of the market forces, but at the same time, the same individualistic forces, which isolate them from the community, trap them. This became clear when a respondent said that his neighbors feel jealous when the researchers asked him how they feel about his handicraft collection (a third party projection for eliciting disguised feelings). Similarly, the researchers faced with comments like; *“handmade clothes are unmanageable”*, *“they are expensive”*, *“they are dull”* which contradicted utilitarian aspects in other comments like; *“handmade clothes are comfortable”*, *“handicrafts are cheap”*, *“they have smooth finishing”* and *“I like their sobriety”*. These observations made the researchers assume that the pattern of handicraft consumption is paradoxical at times.

Post-modern theorists, acknowledge consumption experiences as fragmented and oxymoronic at times where there is a lack of commitment to any central theme (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). This is not difficult to understand if some of the trends of contemporary India are observed. It can be noted that the increasing use of technology and the internet has allowed a vast amount of information exchange and expression of self. The virtual spaces on the internet have become the voice of the voiceless. Rebellion against the dominant and mainstream culture becomes powerful in social media. Conflicting

thoughts create clutter in the web pages of Facebook and Twitter. However, many marketers see this as an opportunity and soon the rebellion itself is marketed as a mainstream culture (Baudrillard 1975). Fads are created out of conflicting subcultures and paradoxes penetrate in the culture as overlaps, blurring the distinct boundaries of ethnicities. The existence of paradoxes might be useful to maintain diversity, but their presence might pose a threat to sustainable causes. Critical postmodernists consider the postmodern conditions as results of the excesses of modernism or “late capitalism” who are critical of the unhealthy consequences of these conditions such as excessive commodification and lack of empathy towards social injustice and seek to transcend them (Jameson 1991; Venkatesh 1995). A dialogue for refinement of values is deemed necessary to transcend the highhandedness of postmodernism as well as uniformity of modernism (Falzon 2006). Therefore, the researchers further dealt with the contradictions by conceptualizing a model that might give a balanced view of the paradoxes.

**Conceptual Model**

The researchers acknowledged the fact that consumption pattern of handicraft is not without contradictions, and it’s tough task to find consistency in it. No matter how perplexing it is, the goal of the researchers is to simplify the paradoxes. Adopting the viewpoint of critical postmodernists, the researchers tried to formulate a concept that would find a direction of sustainability amidst the contradictions. The conceptual model has been visualized as a linear Venn-diagram exhibiting a continuum with two opposing directions that are preservation and change (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. The Conceptual Model**

Source: Author

The continuum shows that all the factors influence the consumers in such a way that no clear demarcation can be drawn from them. At the extreme left side of the continuum, the variables falling under cultural linkage exhibiting ethnocentrism pertains to the conservation of the cultural values and at the extreme right, the variables falling under aesthetic aspects (like uniqueness, fashionable etc.) pertains to openness to change. Both the extremities also depict contradictory aspect, which seems to obstruct the sustainable aspect. When the aesthetic aspect is extremely favored, hedonic emotions like snobishness, jealousy for others develops which can hamper culture, utility as well as nature. On the other hand, too much affinity towards culture fosters ethnocentrism, which can hamper aesthetic and utilitarian values, thus, being reactionary withholding modernity and change. The extremity of either aspect is balanced by utilitarian aspect and nature linkage at the center of the continuum. When this balance is attained, sustainability aspect finds prominence. Utilitarian aspect relates to practical issues of life that require the adoption of modern values along with cultural ones. Similarly, nature linkage keeps him from becoming too much materialistic, it is somewhat associated with handicraft purchase criteria for some consumers, and the researchers realize this from the following comment by a respondent:

*“People inclined to aid poor people with possibly eco-friendly or less materialistic/consumerist mindsets are the ones who like to purchase handicrafts”* Contemporary handicrafts have the potential to maintain the balance among culture, aesthetic, and utilitarian values. They can be designed to suit the consumer needs while maintaining the sustainability aspect. Crafts have already been associated with a social movement known as craftivism aimed at bringing greater good (Greer 2007, 2014; Levin et al. 2008). Littrell and Dickson (2010) have also stressed about the possibility of economic development and well-being through the fair trade of crafts. McGowan (2009) also hinted about how consumption of crafts can help in development of the society.

### CONCLUSION

Handicraft consumers were found to be motivated by sustainability aspects, cultural as-

pects, utilitarian aspects, cultural aspects, novelty seeking aspects, artisan linkage, contradictory aspects and nature linkage. Aesthetic aspect was the governing factor. Globalization seems to have affected the young consumers more than older consumers of fair trade. Young consumers seem to have been influenced by individualism and world-mindedness and benevolence while older consumers have remained utility and culture oriented. Results reassert that globalization increases materialism, world-mindedness as well as ethnocentrism. Some contradictory views also emerged from this paper. So far, studies of consumer behavior lacked paradoxical perspective on purchase criteria of handmade products. This study dealt with those paradoxes and opened up a new perspective altogether to ponder upon for future research. A dialogue for establishing sustainable values within the paradoxes seemed necessary to the researchers which could transcend the uniformity of modernism as well as high-handedness of postmodernism.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The content analysis used in this study prepares the ground for a comprehensive quantitative study. The robustness of the conceptual model can be increased by revisiting it from an objective approach. Research on values and attitudes like Schwartz's value model and the Theory of Planned Behavior can be combined and studied in the context of sustainable consumption of handicrafts. In addition, theories from related fields of study like sustainable tourism, prosumption, craftivism can be integrated into such research. The governments can be significantly aided by such research in strengthening the market for handicrafts. The local artisans and their clusters can benefit too as they can incorporate the consumer preferences explored from such research in the designs of the handmade products and make them marketable. Policy makers can find an alternative approach towards social change wherein nexus of artisans and conscious consumers are kept at the center of development policies in place of large corporations. By and large, the findings can be useful for inclusive development programs of the society.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was based entirely on qualitative inquiry thus lacks generality. The sample size

could have been larger to give richer results. An ethnographic study could have yielded richer exploration.

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**Paper received for publication on July 2015**  
**Paper accepted for publication on March 2016**