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Preservation of Indian Traditional Crafts: Role of Digital Technologies and Social Media in Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT:

Indian traditional crafts are an important part of the country's cultural heritage and textile traditions. They reflect the knowledge, skills, and artistic practices that have been passed from one generation to another. However, changing consumer preferences, machine-made products, and limited market access have created new challenges for many artisan communities. This study examines how digital technologies and social media can support the preservation, promotion, and revival of Indian traditional crafts while contributing to sustainable development. The study is based on secondary data collected from government reports, research articles, official publications, and digital platforms. Information from the Ministry of Textiles, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), and other published sources was analysed along with observations of online craft promotion. The findings indicate that digital platforms have improved the visibility of traditional crafts, created new market opportunities, and increased consumer awareness of handmade products. At the same time, the study identifies the need for better digital skills, stronger branding, wider market access, and continued institutional support to ensure that India's rich craft traditions remain economically sustainable and culturally relevant for future generations.

Keywords: Indian Traditional Crafts, Cultural Heritage, Textile Traditions, Digital Technologies, Social Media, Sustainable Development, Handicrafts, Digital Preservation

Introduction

India has a rich tradition of handicrafts and handloom textiles that reflects its history, culture, and regional diversity. Every region of the country has developed its own craft traditions based on locally available resources, climatic conditions, social customs, and artistic skills. These crafts are not only objects of beauty but also represent the identity, beliefs, and way of life of the communities that create them. Textile traditions such as Patola, Tangaliya, Banarasi brocade, Chanderi, Kanchipuram silk, Pashmina, Ikat, Kalamkari, and Kantha embroidery have been preserved for centuries through the knowledge and experience of artisan families. These crafts continue to represent India's cultural heritage while providing employment and livelihood to millions of people.

Traditional crafts have always played an important role in the Indian economy. The handicraft and handloom sectors generate employment in rural and semi-urban areas, particularly for women and small artisan groups. Most craft products are made using manual skills, natural fibres, and locally available materials, making them environmentally friendly and sustainable. Unlike mass-produced goods, handmade products carry uniqueness, craftsmanship, and cultural value. Every woven fabric, embroidered textile, or handcrafted object tells a story of its origin, tradition, and the artisan who created it.

Despite their cultural and economic importance, many traditional crafts are facing serious challenges. Machine-made products, changing fashion preferences, urbanization, and the growth of fast fashion have reduced the demand for handmade products. Younger generations are often reluctant to continue traditional occupations because of low income, irregular employment, and limited market opportunities. Many rare craft techniques are gradually disappearing as experienced artisans retire without passing their knowledge to the next generation. The lack of proper documentation and limited awareness among consumers further increase the risk of losing valuable traditional knowledge.

At the same time, technology has opened new opportunities for the craft sector. Digital photography, three-dimensional documentation, virtual museums, online marketplaces, and social media have made it possible to preserve, promote, and market traditional crafts in new ways. These tools help document weaving methods, embroidery techniques, motifs, dyeing processes, and artisan stories, creating permanent records that can be used for education, research, and cultural preservation. Digital platforms also allow artisans and craft organisations to connect directly with buyers, reducing dependence on middlemen and expanding their reach to national and international markets.

Social media has become an important medium for influencing fashion trends and consumer choices. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube allow designers, artisans, fashion brands, and craft entrepreneurs to present traditional crafts to a wider audience. Consumers today are

not only interested in the final product but also in the story behind it—how it is made, who makes it, and what cultural values it represents. As a result, many traditional textiles are finding new recognition among young consumers who prefer products that are handmade, sustainable, and ethically produced.

Indian fashion designers have also played a major role in bringing traditional crafts into contemporary fashion. By combining age-old weaving and embroidery techniques with modern silhouettes and design ideas, they have created products that appeal to present-day consumers while preserving traditional craftsmanship. Government initiatives such as the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, One District One Product (ODOP), Handloom Mark, India Handloom Brand, and Vocal for Local campaign have further encouraged the promotion of indigenous crafts in domestic as well as international markets. These efforts have helped improve the visibility of Indian crafts and strengthened the identity of many artisan communities.

Although several studies have discussed digital preservation and the influence of social media on fashion separately, limited research has examined how these two areas together can support the revival and long-term sustainability of Indian traditional crafts. There is a need to understand how digital technologies, contemporary fashion trends, and cultural preservation can work together without affecting the originality and authenticity of traditional craftsmanship.

The present study attempts to examine the relationship between Indian traditional crafts, digital preservation, and changing fashion trends. It explores how technology and social media can help preserve traditional knowledge, increase market opportunities, and encourage sustainable growth of the craft sector. The study also highlights the importance of maintaining cultural identity while adapting to changing consumer preferences. By bringing together traditional craftsmanship and modern communication technologies, this research aims to suggest practical approaches for preserving India's rich craft heritage for future generations.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the significance of Indian traditional crafts in preserving the country's cultural heritage and textile traditions.
2. To analyze the role of digital technologies and social media in the preservation, promotion, and revival of Indian traditional crafts in the contemporary fashion industry.
3. To suggest strategies for strengthening the sustainable development and global recognition of Indian traditional crafts while preserving their cultural authenticity.

Literature Review:

Traditional crafts have attracted the attention of researchers from different disciplines because of their cultural, economic, and artistic importance. Earlier studies have mainly focused on craft preservation, artisan livelihoods, digital documentation, sustainable fashion, and the growing role of social media in promoting handcrafted products.

Rana (2024) examined the use of digital technologies such as 3D scanning and virtual reality for preserving Indian traditional crafts. The study highlighted that digital documentation can protect valuable craft knowledge, improve accessibility, and create educational resources for future generations. However, the author also pointed out challenges related to technology adoption, ethical concerns, and long-term maintenance of digital archives.

Singh and Gupta (2023) studied the contribution of India's handloom sector to rural employment and sustainable development. Their findings showed that traditional weaving practices continue to support local economies and preserve cultural identity. The study recommended greater policy support, skill development, and market access to improve artisans' livelihoods.

Sharma (2022) explored the relationship between traditional Indian textiles and sustainable fashion. The research observed that increasing consumer awareness of eco-friendly products has created new opportunities for handmade textiles. The study also suggested that collaboration between designers and artisan communities can improve the market value of traditional crafts without affecting their originality.

Kumar and Patel (2021) analysed the role of e-commerce platforms in promoting Indian handicrafts. The study found that online marketplaces have expanded the customer base for artisans and small enterprises. At the same time, it emphasized the need for digital literacy, product branding, and quality assurance to remain competitive in global markets.

Mishra (2020) examined the impact of Geographical Indication (GI) registration on Indian handicrafts. The research concluded that GI protection strengthens the identity of traditional crafts, increases consumer confidence, and creates better economic opportunities for artisan communities. However, awareness about GI products among consumers and producers still remains limited.

Utami and Dewi (2024) investigated the influence of social media on the creation of fashion trends. Their study found that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest have changed the way fashion trends are created and shared. The authors reported that influencers, user-generated content, and digital marketing play an important role in shaping consumer preferences and increasing product visibility.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explained how social media has changed communication between businesses and consumers. Their study showed that digital platforms provide opportunities for organizations to build stronger relationships with customers through active participation and continuous interaction.

Kim and Ko (2012) examined social media marketing in the luxury fashion industry. The authors found that regular interaction with consumers through digital platforms improves brand awareness, customer satisfaction, and purchase intention. Their work highlighted the growing importance of digital communication in the fashion business.

Godey et al. (2016) studied the influence of social media marketing on luxury brands across different countries. The research concluded that digital engagement positively affects brand image, consumer trust, and buying behaviour. The findings also emphasized the importance of visual storytelling in fashion promotion.

De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) analysed the effectiveness of Instagram influencers in fashion marketing. The study found that influencers with high credibility and meaningful engagement have a stronger impact on consumer attitudes than those with only a large number of followers.

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) explored how Instagram celebrities influence young consumers. Their findings showed that authenticity, trust, and personal connection are major factors affecting purchasing decisions. Consumers were more likely to follow fashion recommendations from influencers whom they considered genuine.

Research Methodology:

The present study is based entirely on secondary data collected from published and publicly available sources. A descriptive and analytical research design has been adopted to examine the relationship between Indian traditional crafts, digital preservation, and changing fashion trends.

The required information was collected from research articles, books, government reports, journals, conference papers, museum archives, craft documentation, and official websites of organizations working in the field of handicrafts and handlooms, such as the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Ministry of Textiles, UNESCO, Crafts Council of India, and other academic databases. Published reports related to sustainable fashion, digital technologies, and social media marketing were also reviewed to understand recent developments in the craft sector.

Along with the literature review, observational analysis was carried out using secondary sources. Digital platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, online craft exhibitions, designers' collections, artisan websites, and e-commerce platforms were observed to understand how traditional Indian crafts are presented in contemporary fashion and how digital media influences consumer awareness and market visibility. The observations were limited to publicly available information and visual content.

The collected information was examined using qualitative content analysis. Similar themes from different sources were grouped under broad categories such as cultural significance, digital preservation, social media promotion, sustainable fashion, artisan livelihoods, and market challenges. The information obtained from different sources was compared to identify common findings, existing gaps, and emerging trends.

The study does not involve surveys, interviews, questionnaires, or experimental investigations. Therefore, the findings are based on the interpretation of published literature and systematic observation of existing digital platforms. Although the study relies on secondary data, the use of multiple credible sources improves the reliability of the analysis and provides a broad understanding of the current status of Indian traditional crafts in the digital age.

Analysis and Observation:

The analysis is based on secondary information collected from the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), UNESCO publications, and publicly available digital platforms. The observations focus on three major areas: the present status of Indian traditional crafts, the role of digital platforms, and the changing market for handcrafted products.

Growth of the Handicraft Sector

The Ministry of Textiles reports that the handicraft sector continues to be an important source of employment and export earnings. Handicraft exports reached ₹45,282.38 crore during 2023–24, showing that Indian handmade products continue to have strong demand in international markets despite competition from machine-made products. The Ministry also notes that government schemes have improved product development, marketing support, and artisan participation in domestic and international exhibitions.

Government Support for Artisan Communities

The Ministry of Textiles has introduced several programmes under the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and Development Commissioner (Handlooms) to strengthen artisan livelihoods. These programmes provide support for design development, skill upgradation, cluster development, marketing assistance, and participation in trade fairs. During 2023–24, the Ministry also sanctioned more than 150 workshops and seminars for the handicraft sector.

Digital Presence of Indian Crafts

An observation of official websites, online marketplaces, and social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest shows that traditional crafts are increasingly presented through visual storytelling. Designers, artisan groups, museums, and government organisations now use digital media to explain weaving processes, natural dyeing techniques, craft histories, and artisan stories. Many online stores also provide information about the geographical origin and production process of handmade products.

Contemporary Fashion and Traditional Crafts

An observation of fashion collections presented by leading Indian designers and textile brands shows that traditional techniques such as Ajrakh printing, Ikat, Kalamkari, Patola, Chikankari, Tangaliya, and Kantha embroidery are increasingly used in contemporary garments, accessories, and home furnishings. Rather than reproducing traditional products, designers are adapting these techniques for present-day lifestyles.

Export Trends and International Demand

According to the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), India's handicraft exports have grown steadily over the past decades. The Council has expanded from only 35 members in 1986–87 to more than 9,100 members in 2024–25, reflecting the increasing scale of the sector. Recent export data also indicate strong international demand for hand-printed textiles, wood crafts, embroidered products, and home décor items.

The observations suggest that Indian traditional crafts are entering a new phase where cultural heritage and digital technology are working together. Government support, digital marketing, and increasing consumer interest in sustainable products have created favourable conditions for the craft sector. At the same time, issues such as limited digital literacy among artisans, uneven market access, weak branding, and inadequate documentation continue

to affect many traditional crafts.

The future growth of Indian crafts depends not only on preserving traditional skills but also on improving digital communication, product innovation, design collaboration, and direct access to national and international markets. These areas require continuous support from government institutions, educational organisations, designers, and the craft industry.

Official Reports:

The analysis is based on secondary data collected from the Ministry of Textiles, the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), UNESCO publications, and observations made from digital platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, official craft websites, and online marketplaces. The data cover the period from 2019–20 to 2023–24, allowing changes in the sector to be examined over five years.

Ministry of Textiles, Annual Report 2024–25

The export data show that Indian handicrafts maintained a stable international market even during and after the COVID-19 period. Exports increased sharply in 2021–22, followed by a moderate decline in 2022–23. During 2023–24, exports recovered and crossed ₹45,000 crore. This pattern indicates that handmade products continue to receive international demand. The gradual recovery also reflects the increasing preference for sustainable and handmade products in global markets.

Financial Year	Export (₹ Crore)
2019–20	37,069.59
2020–21	39,490.37
2021–22	49,385.12
2022–23	44,126.80
2023–24	45,282.38

Table 1- Export of Indian Handicrafts

Ministry of Textiles Annual Reports

Production has increased over the years despite disruptions in the supply chain. The highest production was recorded during 2021–22. This suggests that artisan communities adapted to changing market conditions by using online marketing, digital exhibitions, and direct sales through e-commerce platforms.

Financial Year	Production (₹ Crore)
2017–18	43,288.17
2018–19	50,606.00
2019–20	49,537.53
2020–21	52,524.35
2021–22	65,745.58

Table 2- Handicraft Production

Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)

The continuous increase in membership indicates growing participation by exporters, manufacturers, and artisan enterprises. More businesses are entering the handicraft export sector, suggesting confidence in international demand. It also reflects wider acceptance of Indian handmade products in overseas markets.

Year	Registered Members
2019	Around 7,500
2020	Around 7,900
2021	Around 8,300
2022	Around 8,700
2024–25	9,102

Table 3- Growth of EPCH Membership

Observation based on official brand websites, museum collections, artisan pages, and online marketplaces (2025–26):

Among the selected crafts, Banarasi and Chikankari have a strong digital presence and appear frequently in fashion campaigns, designer collections, and online retail platforms. Patola and Kalamkari are also widely promoted through digital media. Tangaliya, although recognised for its heritage value, has comparatively lower visibility. This suggests that several regional crafts still require stronger digital promotion and branding.

Craft	Instagram Presence	E-commerce Availability	Contemporary Fashion Use
Patola	High	High	High
Tangaliya	Moderate	Moderate	Increasing

Banarasi	Very High	Very High	Very High
Kalamkari	High	High	High
Chikankari	Very High	Very High	Very High
Kutch Embroidery	High	High	High

Table 4- Observation of Digital Presence of Selected Indian Textile Crafts

Ministry of Textiles Annual Reports (2019–2025)

Government programmes have increased the visibility of Indian crafts and improved market opportunities for many artisan groups. However, field reports indicate that the benefits are concentrated among well-known craft clusters. Smaller and remote craft communities continue to face difficulties related to digital marketing, branding, and market access.

Scheme	Purpose	Present Status
National Handicrafts Development Programme	Skill development and marketing	Ongoing
National Handloom Development Programme	Support for weavers	Ongoing
One District One Product (ODOP)	District-based product promotion	Expanded across states
India Handloom Brand	Quality certification	Active
Geographical Indication (GI)	Legal protection of traditional crafts	Increasing number of registered crafts

Table 5- Major Government Initiatives for Craft Promotion

The five-year data indicate that Indian traditional crafts continue to contribute to exports, employment, and cultural preservation. Government support, digital marketing, and changing consumer preferences have created favourable conditions for the sector. At the same time, the observations show that growth is uneven across different craft clusters. Crafts with stronger digital visibility and designer collaborations have achieved better market recognition than those with limited online presence.

The analysis also suggests that preserving traditional skills alone is not sufficient. Equal attention needs to be given to digital documentation, product innovation, market communication, and branding. These areas will play an important role in ensuring that traditional crafts remain relevant in the changing fashion industry while preserving their cultural identity.

Government Initiatives for the Promotion of Indian Crafts (After 2020)

1. Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS) – 2021

The Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS) was approved by the Ministry of Textiles on 6 August 2021 for the period 2021–22 to 2025–26. The scheme was introduced to strengthen major handicraft clusters across the country by improving production facilities, infrastructure, technology, design support, packaging, branding, and market access. Unlike earlier programmes that focused mainly on individual artisans, CHCDS adopts a cluster-based approach. It supports the development of Common Facility Centres (CFCs), design studios, raw material banks, testing laboratories, and marketing infrastructure so that artisan communities can work more efficiently.

Major Components of this schemes are -Development of handicraft clusters, Common Facility Centres (CFCs), Design and technology support, Branding and packaging, Market promotion, Infrastructure development. The scheme has helped organised craft clusters improve production quality and market competitiveness. However, many small and remote craft clusters still require similar infrastructure and institutional support.

2. National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP) – 2021

The National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP) was approved on 22 September 2021 and implemented for the period 2021–22 to 2025–26. The programme brings together several handicraft development activities under one framework with the objective of creating sustainable livelihood opportunities while preserving traditional craft skills. The scheme supports artisans through design development, skill training, marketing assistance, research, technology, digital promotion, and infrastructure development.

Major highlights of NHDP are - Marketing Support and Services, Skill Development, Design and Product Development, Research and Development, Direct Benefit to Artisans, Infrastructure and Technology Support. Annual reports of the Ministry of Textiles show that the number of exhibitions, buyer-seller meets, and training programmes has increased under NHDP. The scheme has improved the visibility of Indian crafts, although better digital literacy and wider participation of small artisan groups are still needed.

3. National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) – Revised 2021

The revised National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) came into effect during 2021–22 for implementation up to 2025–26. The programme follows a need-based approach for the integrated development of handloom weavers across India. The scheme provides assistance for raw materials, improved looms, product diversification, design innovation, infrastructure creation, exhibitions, digital marketing, and welfare of handloom weavers.

Major Components of this scheme are - Cluster Development Programme, Raw Material Support, Marketing Assistance, Mega Handloom Clusters, Infrastructure Development, Research and Development, Welfare Measures. The revised programme has encouraged several weaving clusters to improve product quality and market access. The inclusion of digital marketing and e-commerce support reflects the changing business environment in the handloom sector.

4. PM Vishwakarma Scheme – 2023

The PM Vishwakarma Scheme was launched on 17 September 2023 to support artisans and craftspeople engaged in traditional occupations. The scheme recognises artisans as skilled professionals and provides support throughout the production and marketing process. It combines skill development, financial assistance, toolkit support, digital transactions, branding, and market linkage under one programme.

Major points focuses in this schemes are - PM Vishwakarma Certificate and Identity Card, Basic and Advanced Skill Training, Toolkit Incentive of ₹15,000, Collateral-free Loans up to ₹3 lakh, Digital Transaction Incentives, Branding and E-commerce Support. The scheme represents a shift from welfare-based assistance to enterprise development. It encourages artisans to improve production, adopt digital practices, and expand their businesses

while preserving traditional skills. Reports indicate a rapid increase in artisan registration after its launch.

5. PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks – 2023

Although the PM MITRA Parks scheme is mainly designed for the textile manufacturing sector, it also creates opportunities for traditional handloom and handicraft industries by strengthening textile value chains, common infrastructure, design facilities, logistics, and marketing support. The scheme promotes collaboration between textile manufacturers, designers, entrepreneurs, and artisan communities.

Major highlights of scheme are - Integrated textile parks, Common infrastructure, Design and innovation centres, Skill development, Investment promotion, Export support. The scheme can create new business opportunities for traditional textile clusters by improving connectivity with modern manufacturing and export markets. However, greater inclusion of handloom and handicraft enterprises will be necessary to ensure that artisan communities also benefit from this large-scale infrastructure development.

Key Findings of the study:

- The study found that Indian traditional crafts continue to play an important role in preserving the country's cultural heritage while supporting the livelihood of millions of artisans. Government data show that handicraft exports increased from ₹37,069.59 crore in 2019–20 to ₹45,282.38 crore in 2023–24, indicating a steady demand for Indian handmade products.
- Digital technologies and social media have improved the visibility of Indian crafts. Crafts such as Banarasi, Chikankari, Patola, Kalamkari, and Kutch embroidery are now widely promoted through websites, online marketplaces, and social media, helping artisans and craft organisations reach a larger customer base.
- Government initiatives introduced after 2020 have strengthened the craft sector. During 2023–24, the National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP) supported 767 domestic and 19 international exhibitions and marketing events, benefiting more than 11,600 artisans by providing opportunities to display and sell their products.
- The study also found that organised craft businesses are increasing. The membership of the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) has grown to over 9,100 members, showing greater participation of exporters and craft enterprises in national and international trade.
- Observation of fashion brands and digital platforms shows that traditional crafts are no longer limited to ethnic wear. Many designers are using traditional weaving, printing, and embroidery techniques in modern clothing, accessories, and home furnishing products, increasing their appeal among younger consumers.
- Despite these positive developments, many artisan communities still face practical challenges. Limited digital knowledge, lack of branding, dependence on middlemen, and low visibility of lesser-known crafts continue to affect their income and market reach.

The study indicates that preserving traditional crafts today requires more than protecting old techniques. Better digital documentation, regular promotion through social media, and stronger collaboration between artisans, designers, educational institutions, and government agencies can help ensure that Indian crafts remain both culturally valuable and economically sustainable.

Suggestions:

- Improve digital skills of artisans by providing regular training on social media, online selling, digital payments, and e-commerce so that they can reach more customers without depending on middlemen.
- Give equal attention to lesser-known crafts through exhibitions, digital campaigns, and government-supported marketing programmes to increase their visibility in national and international markets.
- Encourage collaboration between artisans and design institutions to develop products that meet current market needs while preserving traditional techniques and cultural identity.
- Create a digital record of traditional crafts by documenting weaving methods, embroidery techniques, motifs, and artisan stories. This will help preserve traditional knowledge for future generations.
- Increase awareness of GI-tagged and certified craft products so that consumers can easily identify authentic handmade products and support original artisans.
- Provide better market opportunities for artisans by expanding government-supported exhibitions, buyer–seller meets, and online platforms where artisans can sell their products directly.
- Encourage young people to join the craft sector through skill development, financial support, and entrepreneurship programmes so that traditional crafts continue to grow.
- Review government schemes regularly to ensure that the benefits reach artisans in remote areas and smaller craft clusters, not only well-known craft centres.

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