

Digitalizing The Sambalpuri Handloom – A Study on Undivided Sambalpur District of Odisha

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Abstract:

The state of Odisha is always a pioneer in Textile Sector mainly in Handloom and also in Handicraft. It always remained prominent in producing World famous products like “Katki saree”, “Sambalpuri Saree”, various silk sarees, Tassar Saree, Tie-dye, Bomkai Cotton, glossy khanduas, “Gamchas”, furnishing and Handicrafts. Sambalpuri sarees are major tribute to the traditional handlooms of Orissa. The handloom products of Western Odisha can attract and cater to a large number of consumers if it gets a digital platform to showcase its products. We are in an age of online shopping and it is not limited to the urban population. So the present study briefs about creating a digital roadmap for handloom products of Western Odisha and its benefits to the weavers. The rural population of Undivided Sambalpur district should be technology literate and they should be provided with the e-business, so as to empower them through the digitalisation facility and catering the requirements of the weavers.

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Introduction:

Handloom is the next largest economic activity after agriculture. It is a traditional hand weaving culture which symbolizes the age old weaving practises in India. Indian Handloom industry is as aged as civilization by itself. It acts as a backbone of Indian culture with a huge variety of designs, printing techniques, weaving art and materials used. Indian handloom has created and inspired people from all over the world, Phulkari from Punjab, Chanderi from Madhya Pradesh, Ikats from Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, Tie and Dye from Rajasthan and Gujarat, Daccai from West Bengal, Brocade from Banaras and Jacquard from Uttar Pradesh are some of the jewels that have been dazzling all over the world. India stands number one in the global scenario of handlooms which possess 85% (3.90 million) of the world installed capacity. Nearly 23.77 lakhs handlooms provide direct or indirect

employment to 43.32 lakhs weavers and allied workers, of which 36.33 lakhs workers stay in rural areas and 6.98 lakhs workers stay in urban areas and 77.90% are women (Das, 2016). This is in view of secondary data available and perception of the policy makers. But when it comes to the practicality of handloom's position in Indian scenario, it is facing a deep crisis, caught in a diabolical circle of low productivity and wages, unable to hold on a competitive edge in the competition from the powerlooms, raising cost of inputs and production, shrinking markets and lack of adequate state support. With every possible challenge, handloom industry still is a pioneer, showcasing the aesthetic and cultural boon for India.

The emerging issues in Handloom Sector have been studied by various researchers and investigators to figure out the main issue areas and extensive

literature reviews has been done to conceptualize their views. Elavarasi Janardhan (2008) identified the major issues faced by the artisans of India, he singled out the market shifts, lack of demand, seasonal constraints, middlemen involvement and space unavailability are some of the reason out of the numerous number of issues. As per the reviews of the literature it could be stated that one of the biggest problems for handlooms' is the fierce competition with the powerlooms. The preferential treatment given to powerlooms has led to the decrease in the competitive spirit of the handlooms. Lack of stable and constant market demand is again a setback which this sector suffers from. In spite of regular interventions of government on supply side, the improvement and current condition is still weak. Generalised and non specific schemes and policies have added more to the woes of the weavers. Again insufficient budget, lack of proper infrastructure, upgraded looms, lack of new technologies are some of the other problems which is faced by the handloom industry. There are marketing related issues like lack in availability of market information, lack of awareness about product features, insufficient promotion and advertisement, lack of quality standardization, improper management of handloom logistics, unable to exploit export potentiality, weekly haats are some of the issues which needs to be addressed along with the other issues.

Literature Review:

1. Malhotra (2015) has conducted a study entitled "Empowering Women through Digital Technology: An Indian Perspective" to highlight the position of women in newly emerging areas of information technology, different ways in which information technology has benefitted the working women class and the impact of IT in rural women empowerment.

2. Gupta and Arora (2015) have conducted a study entitled "Digital India: A roadmap for the development of rural India", which focuses on the positive impact of Digitalization of Indian economy

on the growth and development of rural Indian sector. The study concludes that the outcomes of Digital India should be in creation of Wi-Fi locations for people, creating job, universal phone connection, high speed internet, Digital inclusion, E-services, e-Governance, Digitally motivated people, National Scholarship Portal, Digital locker system, e-education, and e-health making India to be pioneer in IT solutions.

3. Bhalerao and Humbe (2018) in a study entitled "Social Media- A tool for empowering women working in handloom industry" understands and analyses the influence of social media on 'women' working in handloom industry. The study further uses 100 respondents from Aurangabad city for asking the questionnaire, and the findings reveal that, there are multiple benefits of social media for women working in handloom sector and have a great impact on sell of these products.

4. Santhanamuthu and Manickam (2012) have undertaken a study entitled "The impact of Digitalization in Rural India" to examine the benefits of telecommunications on the social and economic developments of rural India. The study provides substantial evidence about the benefits that aroused from the application of telecommunications in various fields of rural sector.

5. Malecki (2003) conducted a study entitled "Digital development in rural areas: potentials and pitfalls" to examine data for the USA regarding the "digital divide" and admittance of residences and businesses, which is likely to suggest that all is (or will soon be) well. The paper also gives hand on data on aspects of digital infrastructure in pastoral America, including point of presence and digital telephone switches, which suggest that there major shortcomings in rural countryside communities.

6. Jain and Basu (2018) in their study "Digital empowerment for handloom cluster : The case of

digital cluster development program in India” evaluated the Wireless for Communities (W4C) model that is being administered by Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) and the Internet Society (ISOC) in handloom clusters in India. The study foresees how digital literacy would affect the lifestyle and income levels of traditional handloom clusters in India.

7. Humbe (2012) has conducted a study entitled “Role of social media in marketing of handloom products” which mainly focuses on the use of social media in marketing of handloom products and the benefits that is achieved by reducing marketing expenses, developing awareness of handloom products, increasing sales, providing details regarding market place and exposure towards handloom products.

8. Kar and Bhuyan, (2012) have conducted a study named, “Integrated Handloom Cluster Development in Odisha: A case analysis of Bargarh cluster”, explaining the value chain, the structure and composition, system and practises, operations and economy and socio- cultural attributes of the cluster. It also briefs out the Indian scenario and Odisha scenario of handloom industry, description and competitive advantage of Bargarh cluster and its SWOT analysis.

9. Mohapatra, (2014) have penned down a paper named, “A Management Approach to Sambalpuri Sari with a sign of Cultural Facets”. The paper culminates with the findings and suggestion that to keep the Sambalpuri sarees art in tact we have to find out the possible ways how the weavers will get fair wages.

10. Panwar (2017) conducted a study entitled “Digital India: Scope and challenges” to highlight the necessity for developing constructive attitude towards the digital India among the mass so that they can keep themselves updated of the latest technologies and embrace it as a positive step for

development. The paper briefs about the advantages, scope and challenges of digitalisation and concludes with some suggestions to make digital India more successful in its endeavour.

11. Priyadarsini and Vijayaratnam (2016) has conducted a study “Digitalization of India: Smart villages towards Smart India” to discuss about the different components of Digital India and its nine pillars, adoption of “look at villages” policy and the smart villages driving towards smart India and the pre-requisites of a smart village cluster.

12. Kaul and Mathur (2017) has undertaken a study “Impact of Digitalization on the Indian Economy and requirements of financial literacy” to identify the hurdles in the implementation of various programmes to make India financially literate and strategies to enforce these policies effectively and efficiently. The study was exploratory and quantitative in nature and the sources for secondary data were like special investigation team, report, newspaper and RBI websites.

13. Roy (2013) conducted a study named “E-commerce in silk industry of Assam: A critical study” to know the benefits of E-commerce in an organisation and to provide an overview of silk industry in Assam. The study enumerates the importance and impact of E-commerce and also lists some of the limitation that electronic commerce faces during practical applicability.

14. Sawhney (2016) has undertaken a study entitled “Make in India and its Economic impact on the Indian Handloom Sector” to understand the “Make in India” vision with respect to the handloom sector and how it might play a productive role in uplifting this sector. The paper presents a brief analysis of the manufacturing sector in India and the textile sector, with a comparison of share of cloth production of handloom and powerloom industry respectively. At

last the study concludes with the challenges faced by the handloom industry and how “Make in India” initiative can overcome some of them.

15. Tripathy, (2009) prepared a report on “Odisha handloom: Problems and Perspective”, to find out the problems and perspectives of Odisha handloom. Handloom being a decentralised sector there are number of problems, due to inadequate finance, illiteracy of weavers and lack of interest of entities that are responsible for the development of handloom sector. There are number of obstacles and problems in measuring the effectiveness of planning and controlling activities. The problems of handlooms and their link with the problems of growth and development are not yet acute enough to crystallise in positive remedial measure.

Odisha Ikat:

Odisha (previously known as Orissa) is one among the 29 states of India. Located in eastern India, it is surrounded by the states of West Bengal to the north-east, Jharkhand to the north, Chattisgarh to the west and north-west and Andhra Pradesh to the south. Odisha has 485 kms of coastline along the Bay of Bengal on its east, from Balasore to Ganjam. It is the 9th largest state by area, and the 11th largest by population. It is also the 3rd most populous state in terms of tribal population. Odia is the official and most widely spoken language, around 36.6 million odia speaking people according to 2016 census.

Textile of Odisha is a reflection of its cultural ethos with intricate weaves giving it a personality of its own. The thread work, motifs and vibrant colours make them rich and desirable that can turn heads, make an unmistakable style statement also be passed down for generations, making it a prized heirloom. ‘Odisha Ikat’ also known as “Bandha of Odisha”, is a resist dyeing technique. Since 2007, the “Bandha of Odisha” has been geographically identified. It is a process of tie-dyeing the warp and weft threads, so that designs on the loom prior to weaving can be created. Because of its design process, it has been

called “poetry on loom”. This process of weaving has remained forte of Western and Eastern region of Odisha, produced by community groups called Bhulia, Kostha Asni and Patara. Among the many villages, Mankedia in Balasore or Mayurbhanj district, in western Odisha it is woven in Barapalli, Remunda, Jhiliminda, Mahalkata, Singhpalli, Sonepur, Patabhadi, Sgarpali, Tarabha, Birmaharajpur, Subalaya, Kendupali, Jaganathpali and Kamalapur of Bargarh and Sonepur district and Badamba, Nuapatna, Manjabadha, Narasinghpur, Tigiria of Cuttack district, are some of the prominent ones where these art of weaving is practised. Some of the popular designs are:

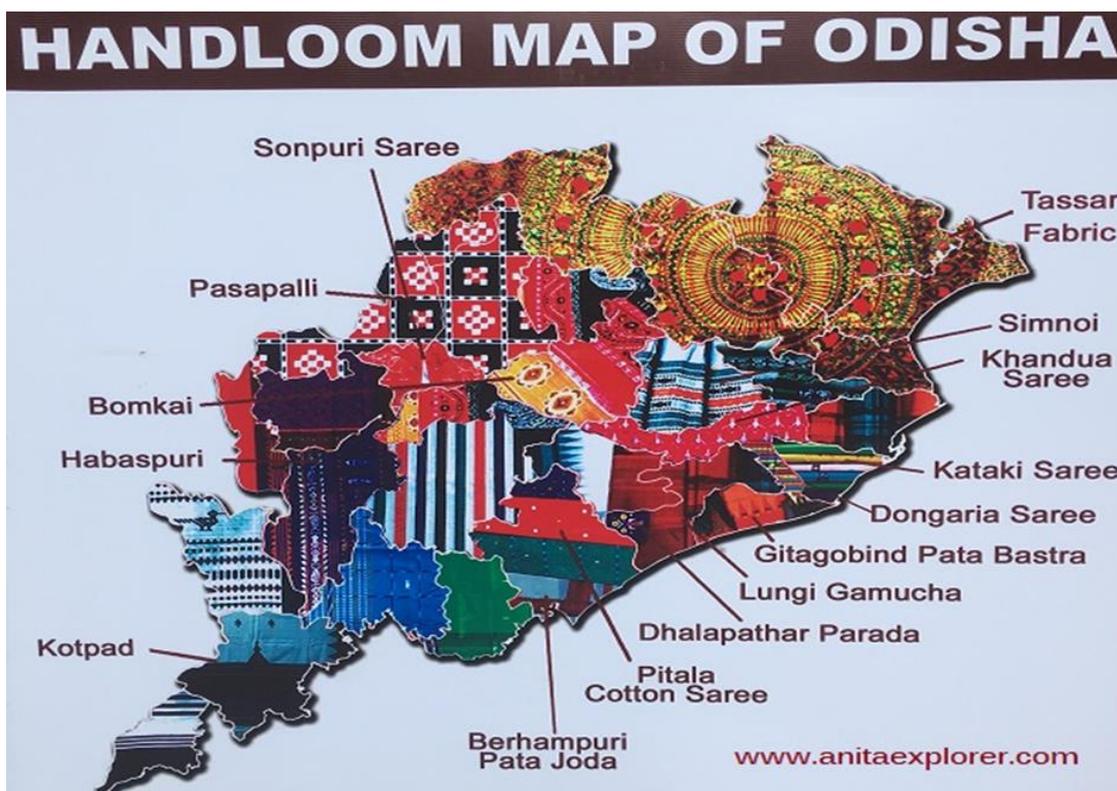
1. Sambalpuri Ikkat – Reflecting the bandha style of craft. Sambalpuri fabrics range from geometric patterns to landscape, potrates and other motifs such as sankha(shell), chakra(wheel) and variety of phula(flower).
2. Bomkai Cottan – Woven by the adept artisans of Sonepur districts, Bomkai is a handloom fabric that has an attached GI tag and is also called the “Sonepuri” fabric. Bomkai sarees are quite popular among connoisseurs and are must-haves for an enviable saree collection.
3. Berhampuri Paata – Also called “Phoda Kumbha”, Berhampuri Paata too boasts of a GI tag and is famous for its temple shaped designs along the border and pallu portion. This paata has another distinction, it is draped around Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra in Puri Jagannath Temple.
4. Khandua Paata – Khandua paata is noted for the text of Gita Govinda etched on it. Traditionally red or orange in colour, this colour are procured naturally from sal trees. This fabric too, is a registered GI and originated in Cuttack and Maniabandha.
5. Kotpad Cotton – Woven by the tribes of Kotpad village in Koraput, this fabric with a GI tag is renowned for being dyed organically. Vegetables are used to obtain the

required colours with black and maroon being the major dyes.

6. Habaspuri – Kondha weavers of Chicheguda in Kalahandi district interwine magic with Habaspuri, one of the major cotton-based textiles of Odisha with fish, flower and temple motifs. It has also been registered under GI.
7. Saptapar/Pasapali – Celebrated for its prominent double ikat checkerboard pattern. Saptapar is famously known as “Pasapalli”, attributed to Bargarh district in Odisha. An intricate pasaa (chessboard) pattern in contrasting colour is its most striking feature.

Western Odisha extends from the Kalahandi district in the South to the Sundargarh district in the north-west. Districts of Sambalpur, Bargarh, Nuapada, Bolangir and Sonapur are also included in Western Odisha. Its boundless geographical area, showcase a great degree of cultural importance among the mass. The traditional Sambalpuri saree in its cotton and silk versions is a captivating fabric from the tribal belt of Odisha. Sambalpur- in the state of Odisha, India is famous for its Sambalpuri variety of cotton and silk sarees, using Ikat patterns or the tie-dye

method in their making. The fabric silk has lustre, strength, smoothness and soft feel, plus its elasticity and desirable quality to acquire most colours and shades making it all the more appealing. Silk is soft, smooth, airy and very comfortable for all-day wear, apart from the grandeur that it provides. The Sambalpuri saree is made from cotton, silk, or tussar woven on a handloom. It is very popular among saree lovers across the country. Varieties of Sambalpuri saree includes Sonepuri, Saptapar (pasapalli), Sachipar, Udiaan-taraa, Panchavati, Bomkai, Barpalli, Baptaa and Paradaa sarees, all of which are popular. These sarees are named after their place of origin and commonly known as “Paata”. Paintings on tussar saris portray Mathura Vijay, Rasallila and Ayodhya Vijay get their inspiration from Raghurajpur Pattachitra paintings. A unique method of tie-dye known as “Bandha” is used to weave Sambalpuri sarees. These saree’s possesses fast colours, therefore, the older is the saree brighter is the colour. Apart from sarees western Odisha handloom also showcase some masterpiece in form of bed sheets, dhotis and dress materials.



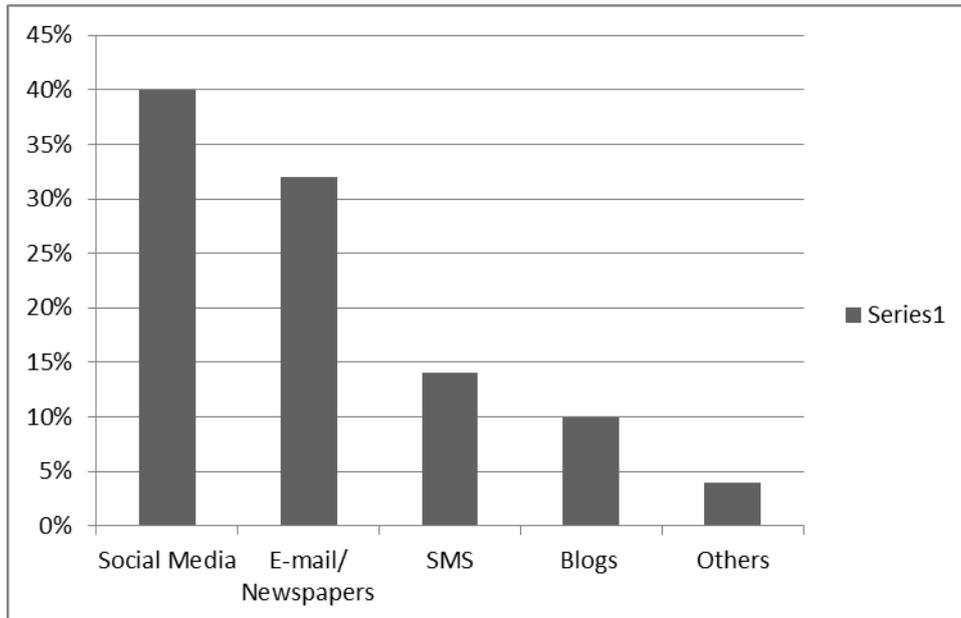
Digital Interventions in the Handloom sector of Western Odisha:

Information and communication technologies (ICT), mainly the internet connectivity, can solve two of the handloom industry's most genuine problems—namely, access to market and lack of awareness (Jain et.al 2017). Most of the handloom production is concentrated in villages, so the cost of marketing in national and international markets is hampering due to the transportation hurdles. This becomes a limitation which likely increases the cost of the product, when it reaches the ultimate buyer. Again this creates a perception among the possible buyers that handloom products are for those who have an expensive taste. Sale of the product online could reduce the cost of brick-and-mortar store and would be reachable to a wide number of customers. It will also build a communication channel between the producers and customers, which will otherwise help the weavers to know the demand and interest of their customers (Jain et.al 2017).

Middlemen and master weavers have played a very crucial role in the handloom industry. Handloom

weaving being a exhausting and laborious process, weavers have little say on the pre and post-production process. Middle men acts as correspondent in transmitting the trending designs, colours, and interest of the consumers to the weavers (Jain et.al 2017). He is also a contact of selling and buying point but due to the lack of information and improper marketing channel, weavers end up in getting a small scale of return on their products. Use of information technology, digital platforms and social media, might make it easy in eliminating the middlemen from the process. Weavers could directly access the digital and social windows to showcase their handloom products and to know the latest market trends related to those products. Digital literacy could bring down the hassle of physical travel or cost of setting up a store or selling point. Online presence of weavers would provide them with new freedom, independence and control, liberty and empowerment for self-development. Internet or Information technology has transformed both the local and global communication to a larger level. Now a day's internet does not only mean sending e-mails, on-line shopping etc, it has become more

about blogs, face book, My Space, Whatsapp, YouTube, twitter, Instagrams etc.



Source: Octane Research, 'Digital by Default- Digital India 2017: Marketing trends and forecast

Above graph shows that 40% of respondents believed that social media updates were the most influential digital activity for engaging consumers. Social media marketing has become the most widely used digital marketing tool in India. Around 68% of the respondents in the above survey agreed that digital marketing would increase in the coming years.

In view of the growing importance of information technology, Government of India has come up with many encouraging schemes for the upliftment of weavers. The Government has signed around 20 MoUs with E-commerce companies, so that the weavers would get a digital platform to sell their products without any intervention of middlemen. The Government of India has started a promotional campaign for the 'India Handloom' Brand. The campaign seeks to make handloom products inspirational, especially among the younger generation, by instilling in them a sense of pride in wearing handloom products. As a part of this, the brand 'India Handloom' has entered social media. The social media presence is aimed at connecting with customers, especially youth, in promoting high

quality handloom products under the umbrella of the 'India Handloom' brand. It would help build customer awareness about the brand and carve a distinct identity for it. With this aim the Government of India has joined hands with online retailer Flipkart, which has its largest customer base in India. It is providing online marketing platform to the handloom weavers and craftsmen of our country. Myntra officially launched its CSR initiative in association with the Union Textile Ministry, to work directly with weavers and elevate their economic stature.

However, as far as the availability of information technology is concerned it has progressed, but it becomes inadequate when taken in terms of handloom industry's requirements. There are many villages which are lagging behind in internet connectivity and digital infrastructure development. According to the studies conducted across the country, only 8% of the total rural population has internet connectivity. Weavers in western Odisha are still rely on the traditional methods of marketing, depending mainly on the 'mahajans' who provide them with raw materials and tools and take the

responsibility of selling the products in markets. Government outlets are another active player in selling of handloom products. With large demand of Sambalpuri handloom, the weavers are not appropriately paid for the labour they put into these master-piece. Digital Empowerment or Digital literacy could act as a catalyst to increase their production and income. Online platforms could act as a basic marketing tool for handloom products. Handloom sector of Western Odisha can use digitalization programmes to provide their own identity and products or services they offer.

Research Method:

To understand how digital literacy would impact the socio-economic conditions and income levels of traditional handloom clusters in Western Odisha we did field investigation of two diverse but prominent handloom clusters in Western Odisha. For the present study, a questionnaire has been distributed among 500 respondents (weavers) of Bargarh and Sonepur district of Western Odisha, asking mainly about the digitalization of Sambalpuri handloom and their perception towards digitalization. Furthermore, in order to have more precise knowledge about the presence of Sambalpuri handloom on the online platforms\ e-commerce sites, we studied 23 online

shopping sites dealing with handloom sarees and dress materials.

Results and Discussion:

The questionnaire that was administered to the 400 respondents had been grouped and clubbed to form 6 broad categories, i.e.

1. Awareness of digital technology will help you in providing with another dimension of sales.
2. Sales can be increased with digital marketing.
3. Technology should be made available for betterment of weavers.
4. Investing under E-commerce schemes will be fruitful.
5. Schemes like Skill India, Start-up Odisha, Make-in India will give a platform for entrepreneurship.
6. If given the opportunity are you interested in using the E-commerce platform?

The questions listed above are the summarized form of the questionnaire. The respondents have answered in 'Yes', 'No' and 'I don't know'. A percentile has been taken of every statement representing the answer. And these percentages are shown in Table No.1 given below:

Table No.1: Awareness of weavers towards digitalization of Sambalpuri handloom

Sl.No		Yes	No	I don't know
1.	Awareness of digital technology will help you in providing with another dimension of sales.	68%	10%	22%
2.	Sales can be increased with digital marketing.	27%	12%	61%
3.	Technology should be made available for betterment of weavers.	45%	13%	42%
4.	Investing under E-commerce schemes will be fruitful.	27%	32%	41%
5.	Schemes like Skill India, Start-up Odisha, Make-in India will give a platform for entrepreneurship.	8%	6%	86%
6.	If given the opportunity are you interested in using the E-commerce platform?	56%	18%	26%

Source: Primary data from 500 respondents (weavers)

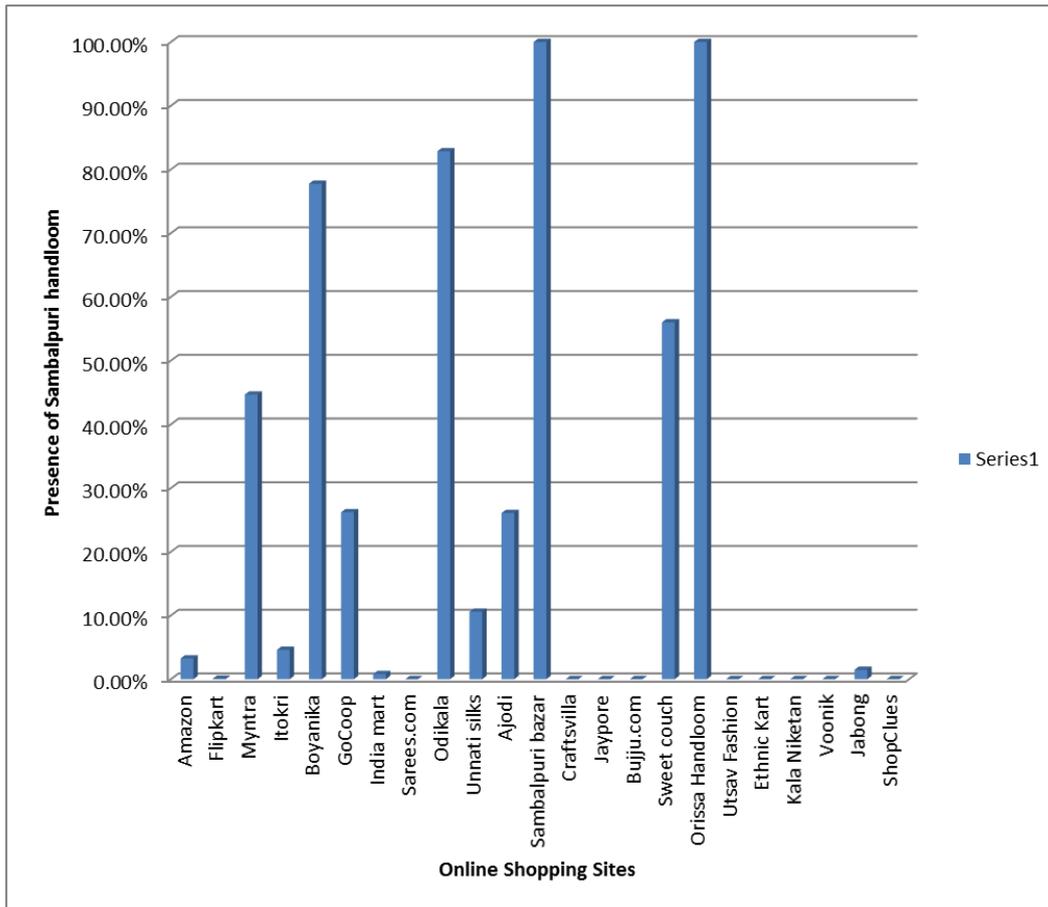
It is clear from the above table that weavers, if made aware of digital technology, they can use it as an alternative method of selling their products. But at the same time 61% of the respondents have said they have no idea about digital marketing. The use of digital marketing in the handloom industry can help to reach out more customers geographically. By reaching out more customers, the business can improve its marketing strategies and create brand awareness and brand equity.

Again schemes like Skill India, Start-up Odisha etc have failed to reach the weavers, with 86% of the respondents replied 'I don't know'. Awareness about these schemes needs to be made from grassroots level so that its benefits could reach the mass.

Still with such adverse output 56% weavers have replied that, with given opportunity they would use e-commerce platform to increase their sale. The marketing strategy of making Sambalpuri handloom digitalized can also help in increasing the sales of handloom products. This would help in improving the life of weavers across Western Odisha.

So when the weavers are taken into account, it could be easily assumed that e-Commerce or digital technology are still at back foot, without gaining much needed importance among the weavers. To get a clearer picture on the digital marketing aspects of handloom products of western Odisha, a survey was conducted by taking top 23 shopping sites particularly displaying and selling Sambalpuri handloom products. The following Figure no.1 shows the presence of Sambalpuri handloom in the e-Commerce platform.

Figure No.1: Presence of Sambalpuri Handloom in Digital Platform



Source: Data consolidation from e-Commerce websites

The above graph clearly indicates that e-Commerce sites which belong to the state of Odisha display and sell more of Sambalpuri handloom rather than other sites which function nationally. Boyanika, Odikala, Sambalpuri bazaar and Orissa handloom are the e-Commerce sites with maximum number of Sambalpuri handloom products and belong to the state of Odisha. Again Myntra, Gocoop, Ajodi and Sweet couch are some of the non-Odisha e-Commerce sites catering Sambalpuri handloom. But maximum popular digital platforms fail to showcase the pride of Odisha. It is now the responsibility of the stake holders to popularize the Sambalpuri handloom in digital world. The above statistics clearly shows that the traditional attire is limited to Odisha. This study gives an idea about the importance of digitalization in today's marketing scenario, the companies and industries should use the combination of both traditional marketing and digital marketing for the development of handloom

sector. These could help them to reach out to more customers and increase the sales and revenue, which could otherwise help in developing the rural economic conditions of the weavers. These will also help the marketers in creating brand awareness and brand image and bringing brand equity in handloom products.

Conclusion:

Many efforts have been made to bridge the digital divide but still the efforts haven't given the desired results. Use of Digital media and social media marketing by Handloom industries could increase awareness about the products. These platforms could actually act as stimulator in boosting the sales of Sambalpuri handloom. The artisans in rural Western Odisha will be motivated through this platform, which will directly connect them to the buyers. Due to the lack of market linkages the weavers are not able to exploit the market potential. This promising

initiative will also motivate the children of the weavers. Thus, they will learn and continue their ancestral talent and tradition by staying back in their rural ancestral homes without migrating to the urban areas for earning their livelihood. By this way they can keep alive the rich tradition of our art and also can pass it on to their next generations.

On the other hand, by the upliftment of the Western Odisha weavers the Odisha handloom industry will also grow and as a result it will add up to the Indian economy too. This will also attract foreign investors to invest in Odisha handloom industry, boosting the prospects of the weavers. This will also lead to increased international exposure to the industry.

The online presence of the weavers will empower them to regain the lost glory of the ancient art and tradition.

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