

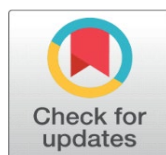
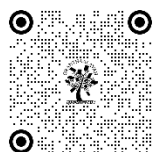
EVALUATING AUTHENTICITY OF CRAFT AND CRAFTSMANSHIP IN THE INDIAN CRAFTS

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ABSTRACT

The handicraft industry's expansion has been hindered by several factors, including the lack of awareness and training among craftspeople and their inability to command higher prices for their products based on the unique selling proposition of being "Hand Crafted." These craftsmen's ability to charge premium rates was further hindered by competition from comparable products offered in other areas or nations that unfairly profited from the reputation of these distinctive products but discounted the inherent authenticity of the craft. The artisans felt that there was no future for them because they could not support their families with their crafts, which demotivated them. Nonetheless, artisans can set fair pricing for their authentic goods since they can prevent piracy by exercising their IPRs to the fullest extent possible.

The craftspeople must also recognise that standards for quality and how they are measured might vary across time and space. Goods that were legal in the past are now prohibited. For instance, ivory, which was once widely utilised, is now completely banned. Similar to how certain nations forbid the use of plastic, many other limitations and encumbrances are enforced globally. It has been difficult for the craftspeople to stay up to date. In several global rejections of handicraft products, the lack of the stamp of authenticity makes these goods likely to be rejected. Artisans need to reconcile to the fact that there is an urgent need to recognise the accurate picture where cheap imitations are challenging their genuine articles. They need to take cognisance of the fact that they should be agreeable to putting their items through extensive testing and inspection processes to determine their quality so that they can obtain the accurate valuation and cost for their hard work and their exquisite artistry in turning out such breathtakingly beautiful works of craftsmanship for posterity.

Keywords: Handicrafts, Craft, Craftsperson, Artisans, Rejection, Authenticity, Products, Genuine

1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of Indian handicraft exports during the previous five years is depicted in Fig. 1.3. The export of handcrafted goods is predicted to reach a staggering value of five billion US dollars by 2025–2026, according to a report by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH). Exports of handcrafted goods are showing favourable trends. India exported handicrafts worth 3.6 billion US dollars to countries worldwide in 2016–17. Additionally, it stayed the same in 2017–18. It then increased to US\$3.7 billion in 2019–20. Primarily due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the export of handcrafted goods fell somewhat to 3.6 billion US dollars in 2019–20 and then again to 3.5 billion dollars in 2020–21 (Indian Handicrafts Industry & Exports, 2024).

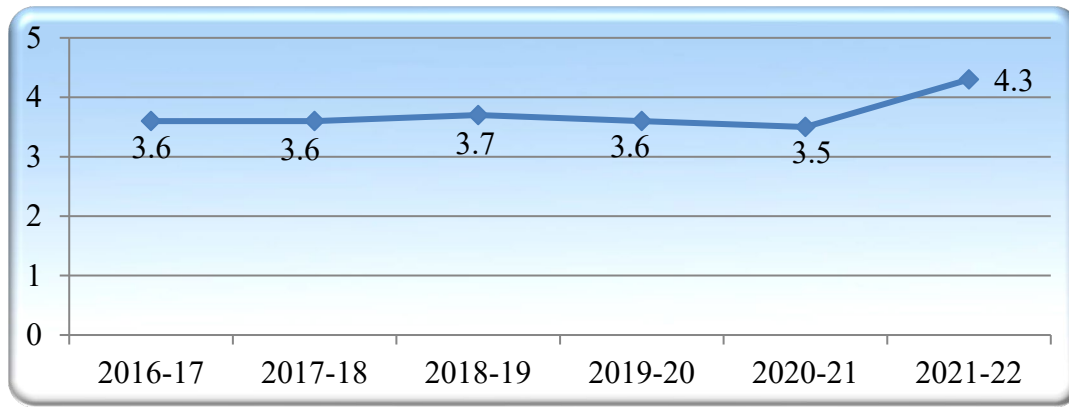


Fig. 1: Export of Indian handicraft products (US Dollars in billions)

Sources: Researcher's compilation from the report of Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH) #excludes data on the export of carpets

Although India's handicraft industry has a limited market share worldwide, it has room to grow. Experts in the market predict that the handicraft sector expanded more quickly than it did the year before. The demand for handcrafted goods is growing every day. Even so, it sends one-third of its export proportion to the United States market, which had a global market value of 647.57 billion in 2020 and is projected to increase by 10.9% in 2022–2027. This industry has to create new, more sustainable, and fair value chains from earlier value networks. With the help of technology, artisans must modernise. Policymakers may find this study helpful in better understanding the efficacy of India's handicraft industry and improving its performance.

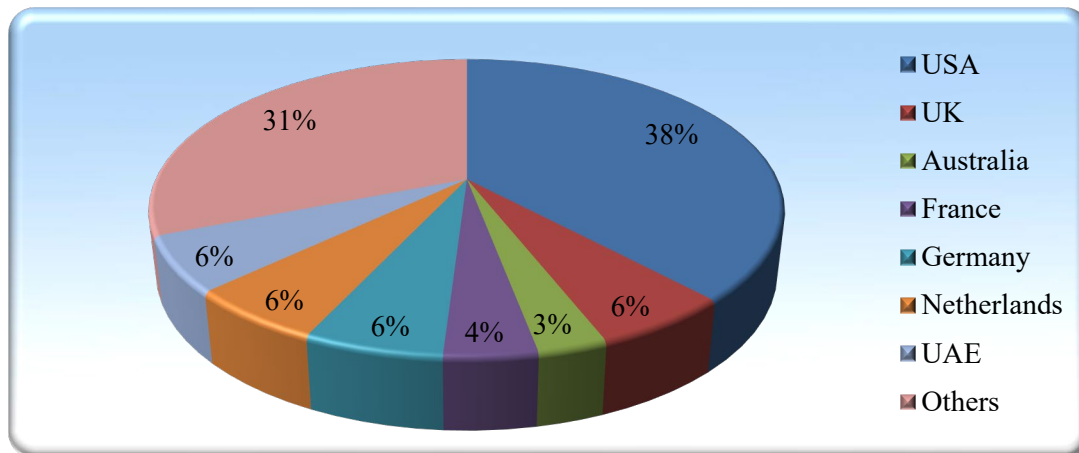


Fig. 2: Export of Indian handicraft products in 2020-21 (country-wise share in percentages)

Sources: Researcher's compilation from the report of Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH)

2. INDIAN HANDICRAFTS POSITIONING IN THE WORLD

India is renowned for its rich cultural history. Nowhere else in the world has such a vast legacy and blending. This diversity keeps us together and allows Indians to share the world's well-known depth of craftsmanship. India is a beautiful country full of interesting art. While there are many well-known crafts from each state, some of the most famous handicraft manufacturing hubs are in Tamil Nadu, Saharanpur, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Kashmir.

Based on data compiled by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), exports from India were first documented in 1986–1987. Up until 2016, however, exports of Indian handicrafts demonstrated a significant uptick, indicating the significance and respect the country has gained worldwide over the previous 35 years.

Most craft workers adhere to age-old patterns and designs that they have used for years and do not wish to play around too much with them. Yet, artisans are modifying their creations to suit the rapidly shifting tastes of customers better and make them more appealing and competitive in international marketplaces. Making the crafts more practical than ever is a primary goal. Most of the articles from the past are almost obsolete today. A dressing table, hand mirror, or a meticulously crafted cigarette, betel leaf, or even spittoon container was among the elegant cooking utensils, dishes,

trays, and decorative little stools used earlier. These objects vanished into obscurity as times and habits evolved. Most of the globe has adopted a minimalist lifestyle. People's lives have changed.

Indian artisans have tried to change the circumstances and improve their trade. Some artisans have attempted to create a fusion product of two or more Geographical Indication [GI] protected crafts to create innovations (Singh and Datt, 2023). They believe the new designs will be more cost-effective and would probably have more takers among the younger age groups, who look for trendy designs and new looks. The new designs range from Indian to international themes with the latest in home and lifestyle accessories. The artisans have taken on the challenge of the new emerging needs of their clientele and have changed their product range and design accordingly.

3. INDIGENOUS CRAFTS AND THE CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY

Genuineness's place in the tourism industry: Sincerity is a well-known but hazy concept, particularly in travel literature, according to Steiner and Reisinger (2006). This mixed legacy of intellectual, psychological, and spiritual ideas tends to obscure its meaning, reflecting its complex past. In the tourism industry, the issue is exacerbated by the fact that authenticity is frequently understood in two different ways: either as the sincerity or reality of objects or events or as a quality of people that denotes being loyal to one's essence or actual self.

Original materials are becoming less visible and used, and this tendency also diminishes their intrinsic potential to make a significant contribution to the museum's success. Since original artefacts are authentic, they provide museum visitors with unique and meaningful experiences that make them valuable. This is rooted in the human tendency to gravitate towards and value the real in various circumstances. Whatever perspective one may take on material culture—sociological, anthropological, psychological, or otherwise—the allure of authenticity and the original experience is firmly entrenched at its foundation.

4. AUTHENTICITY IN QUALITY FOR CONSERVATION OF INDIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRADITIONS

Since quality is an essential component of GI products, it cannot be compromised. The owner of GI may request in writing from registered users that he is always open to having the Quality Control (QC) team inspect his GI product manufacturing facility. Tight adherence to conventional manufacturing and making practices is also an integral component of the GI quality control system. Therefore, the inspection method used during the GI registration procedure would guarantee the items' quality criteria. Its export value will increase with its brand and economic worth in the market thanks to the GI registration. The existing artisans still have a long way to go before they understand that the goal of every inspection and authentication process is to increase the worth of their products rather than to serve any exploitative purpose. They must realise that quality control is a significant factor in their items' marketability.

In addition to GI, Certification Marks ensure that predetermined quality requirements are adhered to. The Ministry of Textiles' proposed HANDICRAFTS MARK will outline the minimal quality requirements for various crafts. The issue is that underprivileged artists cannot maintain themselves while focusing on their current work of art since they lack any other source of income (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2016).

Craftspeople are now experimenting with simpler designs that can be produced more quickly thanks to the intervention of NIFT and NID Designers in craft clusters, which results in higher output and better productivity. The agents and wholesalers demanded stricter delivery dates and higher-quality final items in quick order. Regarding production, members of the artisan family who previously worked at a leisurely pace now tend to work longer hours. They are now working with greater seriousness as well. Consequently, there has been a noticeable rise in the primary craftsman's production and the family's supporting labour output.

Research initiated by UNCTAD has shown that people are ready to pay more for goods with accurate GI registration (Natarajan, 2008). Some goods, like handicrafts, are not agricultural, but a study by the UN agency showed that people are willing to pay up to 10% more for GI-registered goods. One thing that most Indian artists who work on a small scale don't understand, agree with, or even know about is this fact.

A critical part of Craftmark's plan to sell its products is to take part in trade shows. Members of Craftmark who have registered can show off their goods at many foreign fairs, such as the New York Gift Fair and the India Foreign Gift and Handicraft Fair. They can also show off their goods at many national exhibitions and Melas. Because of these participations, there are now a lot of possibilities and buyers. People in Australia, Turkey, South Africa, Germany, and the USA made orders and asked questions. However, these orders would have to be carried out with the required strict quality rules.

As part of their program to help and promote GI, the Textile Committee and the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) also let makers of GI-protected crafts take part in Textile and Crafts fairs around the world, such as Fashionista, the China Gifts and Handicrafts Fair, the Milan Fair, and others. Fifty-four per cent of the total interviewed artisans were second-generation and formed the largest category of respondents under this classification. The second largest category of respondents was twenty-seven per cent and belonged to those who were third-generation artisans. Eleven per cent of the respondents have been practising this craft for over three generations. The lowest number, which is eight per cent, were first-generation artisans.

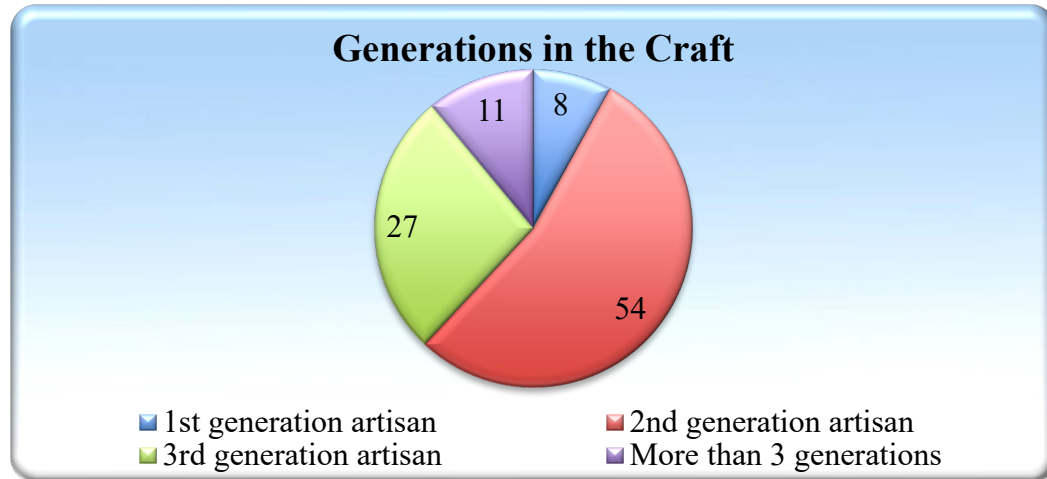


Fig. 3: Generations In The Craft

The maximum number of respondents, fifty-four per cent of the total interviewed artisans, were second-generation artisans. They were walking in the footsteps of their fathers, who had adopted this craft as part of a community dedicated to practising it. The second largest category of respondents, twenty-seven per cent, were those artisans taking forward this craft well into the third generation. Eleven per cent of the respondents have been practising this craft for over three generations. They gave enriching insights into this craft being a tribal format of fabric printing or jewellery creation. The researcher gathered rich insights into the development of this craft since Hindustan attained independence. There were heart-rending descriptions of how families started from scratch and were now full-fledged empires which influenced market conditions and fashion statements, exploring international frontiers and adapting to new techniques and technology. A mere eight per cent of the respondents were first-generation artisans who an uncle or an aunt inspired; some belonged to a family where the father had expired, and an uncle practising this craft had aligned the eldest son or daughter into this craft to keep that family kitchen warm and the family fed. In rare cases, the daughters had been educated in fashion institutes in Jaipur and returned to their hometowns to imbibe 'swadeshi' crafts into their lifestyle. They were experimental and boldly took risks. They were digital media savvy and adapted to social media platforms to promote this craft.

Table 1: Working Style

Sr. No.	Working Style	Percentage	Frequency
1	Individual	43	165
2	Age Cohort	7	26
3	Stages of Craft dependant	32	120
4	Craft Fabrication	4	15
5	Working Group	6	23
6	Associated with Craft	8	31
	Total	100	380

Table 1 presents the different types of working style of the artisans.

These were divided into six different categories for convenience of classification. These categories of working style are described below:

1. Individual working style which means either one, a combination of a few of these or all of these together: Analytical, Driven, Focused, Rational, Methodical and Goal-Oriented.
2. Age cohort: The age-period-cohort model is a theoretical model that aims to explain how society changes. In this model, variation over time is thought to occur because of the simultaneous operation of individual ageing, period influences, and generational (or cohort) turnover.
3. Stages of craft dependant: This is a seven-stage process and is detailed below:
 Stage 1: Mastering the tools
 Stage 2: Learning the good practices
 Stage 3: Forming a point of view
 Stage 4: Telling a story through the design
 Stage 5: Collaborating at multiple levels
 Stage 6: Building personal connections
 Stage 7: Growing the business
4. Craft fabrication means producing design-sensitive, complex or large-scale works of art using various tools and technologies that may require more than one person's contribution.
5. Working group means that these artisans function best as part of a group. This professional working style is also termed as 'cooperative'. Such artisans share the complete responsibility for any task they undertake. They focus on critical feedback, bounce all inputs off each other and enjoy working together on projects.
6. Associated with craft means that an artisan creates something exceptional with original and unique tools. This is typically associated with a handmade product made by a craftsman who engages in art as a hobby or as a source of creative outlet.
7. The status of current appreciation of the craft is that the authenticity of the craft is not recognised - this was observed by twenty-seven per cent of the respondents. This was followed by twenty-three per cent saying that locals do not purchase it. While nineteen per cent of the respondents said that procuring genuine raw material is a challenge, eighteen per cent said that the craft is only tourism-oriented, and lastly, thirteen per cent of the respondents mentioned that authentic handicrafts were losing out in the face of cheap alternatives.

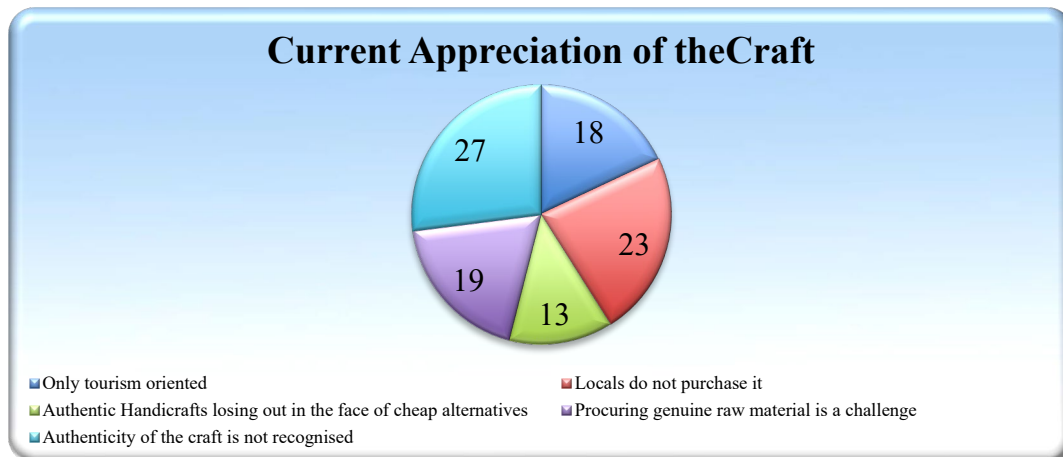


Fig. 4: Current Appreciation of The Craft

The authenticity of the craft was not recognised by twenty-seven per cent of the respondents. They supported their observation with situations wherein the customer was only concerned with the cheaper cost of the machine-made product. Earlier, the art patrons were willing to pay a ransom for these rare creations, but now the customer only went for the blingy, duplicate 'look-alike' products. This reason was followed by twenty-three per cent saying that locals do not purchase it. It is as if the locals want what is American and European and have no interest in the local product. Many of them gave the example that the McDonald burger was much more popular than the 'daal-baati-churma', a local creation. Nineteen per cent of the respondents said that procuring genuine raw materials is a challenge, and eighteen

per cent said that the craft is only tourism-oriented. Outsiders had more attraction for these creations and mostly tourists endorsed these goods to take back a souvenir or keep a token of memory of their visit to Rajasthan. Lastly, thirteen per cent of the respondents mentioned that authentic handicrafts were losing out in the face of cheap alternatives.

Indeed, authenticity remains an issue of debate as its tangible and intangible nature and components cannot be delineated in terms of sustainable and concretised fragments that may comprise authenticity. The scope of authenticity is vast and beyond the purview of this current research. There is tremendous scope for further research to provide end-to-end authentications and certification of authenticity once the parameters governing the genuineness of an article of handicraft are determined. Additional research would be required to ensure that each craft lays down its credentials so that adequate grounds can be prepared for authentication. Once all the crafts have been covered, only then would it be possible to suggest an umbrella agency for the authenticity establishment of the crafts of India.

Table 2: Measuring Authenticity of Craft

S. No.	Status	Percentage	Frequency
1	Genuine raw materials used	8	31
2	Typical style of the craft	13	50
3	Genuine artisans work on the creation	11	42
4	Can be recognised	9	34
5	Techniques used can be verified (eg embedding instead of pasting)	7	26
6	Authentic goods take time to be created and cannot flood the market	14	53
7	Very few genuine artisans left	16	61
8	True authentic craftsmanship speaks for itself	22	83
	Total	100	380

Table 2 presents the facts on how one can measure the authenticity of a handmade craft item. Eight opinions were offered, which were: genuine raw materials used, typical style of the craft, genuine artisans working on the creation, can be recognized, techniques used can be verified (for e.g., embedding instead of pasting), authentic goods take time to be created and cannot flood the market, very few genuine artisans left, and true authentic craftsmanship speaks for itself.

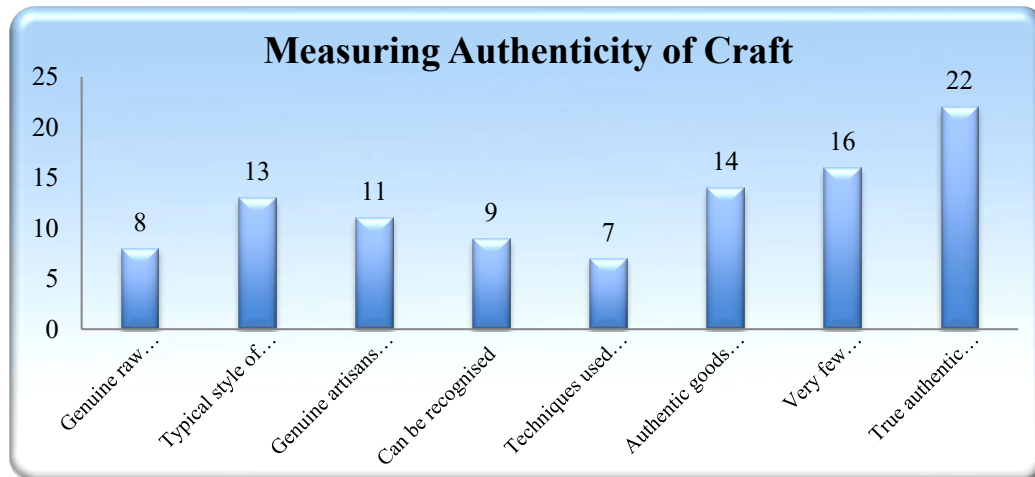


Fig. 5: Measuring Authenticity of Craft

Twenty-two per cent of the respondents said that true authentic craftsmanship speaks for itself, followed by sixteen per cent who said that very few genuine artisans left. While fourteen per cent observed that authentic goods take time to be created and cannot flood the market, thirteen per cent stated that the typical craft style could be seen when you hold the product in your hand. Another eleven per cent noted that genuine artisans work on the creation, and nine per cent said that authenticity could be recognised by observation itself. Eight per cent of artisans said that genuine raw materials are used, and seven percent stated that the techniques used can be verified (eg, embedding instead of pasting).

Among the total number of respondents, twenty-two per cent of the artisans said that authentic craftsmanship speaks for itself and does not need supporting proof. In their local language, they said, “pratyaksh ko pramaannahichahiyehota,”

or what you see before your own eyes, do not need to be substantiated with proof to prove its authenticity. This response was followed by sixteen per cent of the respondents, who mentioned that very few genuine artisans were left as most artisans had resorted to alternative sources of earning a living. While fourteen per cent observed that authentic goods take time to be created and cannot flood the market like cheap Chinese duplicates, thirteen per cent stated that the typical style of the craft could be seen when you hold the product in your hand. Eleven per cent of these artisans mentioned that it is genuine artisans who work on the creation so it does not need to be substantiated further. Nine per cent said that authenticity could be recognized by observation itself. Eight per cent of artisans said that genuine raw materials are used to create this type of work, and so it being authentic is beyond any doubt. Lastly, seven per cent stated that the techniques used can be verified (eg, embedding instead of pasting).

Table 3: Measuring Authenticity of the Crafts

S. No.	Parameters for Response	Number	Percentage
1	True authentic craftsmanship speaks for itself		22
2	Very few genuine artisans left		16
3	Authentic goods take time to be created and cannot flood the market		14
4	The typical style of the craft can be seen when you hold the product in your hand		13
5	It is genuine artisans who work on the creation		11
6	Authenticity can be recognised by observation itself		9
7	Genuine raw materials are used		8
8	The techniques used can be verified		7
	Total	380	100

Table 3 depicts the percentages of the respondents who gave their perceptions of the authenticity of the crafts they created.

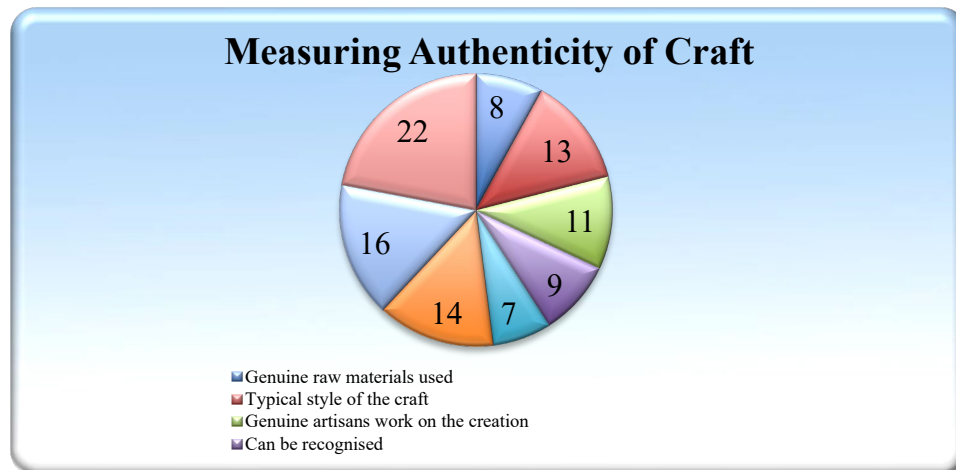


Fig. 6: Measuring Authenticity of the Crafts

Note: To prevent figures from overlapping, the percentages have not been added to the graph. Instead, all the percentages are given in Table -18 above.

Among the total number of respondents, twenty-two per cent of the artisans said that authentic craftsmanship speaks for itself and does not need supporting proof. In their local language, they said, "Prakash ko pramaannahichahiyehota," or what you see before your own eyes, does not need to be substantiated with proof to prove its authenticity. This response was followed by sixteen per cent of the respondents, who mentioned that very few genuine artisans were left as most artisans had resorted to alternative sources of earning a living. While fourteen per cent observed that authentic goods take time to be created and cannot flood the market like cheap Chinese duplicates, thirteen per cent stated that the typical style of the craft could be seen when you hold the product in your hand. Eleven per cent of these artisans mentioned that it is genuine artisans who work on the creation, so it does not need to be substantiated further. Nine per cent said that authenticity could be recognized by observation itself. Eight per cent of artisans said that genuine raw

materials are used to create this type of work, and so it being authentic is beyond any doubt. Lastly, seven per cent stated that the techniques used could be verified (for, e.g. embedding instead of pasting).

Thus, this research adds to the existing knowledge on handmade, place-based crafts that showcase exceptional human ingenuity and craftsmanship. Domestic and international tourists have purchased Rajasthani crafts as gifts to keep a place's cultural legacy alive. According to Soukhathammavong and Park (2019), prior research has confirmed that cultural artefacts should symbolise a location or the surrounding environment.

5. CONCLUSION

From a more pragmatic standpoint, this study offers artisans some advice on revitalising traditional craft by creating unique souvenirs based on local places. Many artisans work as sole proprietors. Therefore, they may require additional funding to keep their companies afloat [Shtudiner, 2018]. One possible solution for artisans struggling to make ends meet while still introducing and disseminating their traditional trade is to sell their wares as souvenirs. Another concept for marketing and branding destinations is creating place significance and satisfaction through souvenirs. To begin, according to Swanson and Timothy (2012), every location has its public perception that it aspires to promote. Craft souvenirs that embody the essence of the destination might aid travellers in understanding the significance of the place through their perception of the souvenirs' importance in shaping their experience.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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