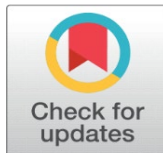
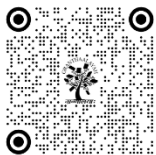


DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE HANDICRAFTS INDUSTRY IN DELHI/NCR: POST-COVID DYNAMICS AND SALES PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic posed severe challenges to the handicrafts industry, compelling many enterprises to explore Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a means of survival and growth. This study investigates the role of ICT in marketing handicrafts within the Delhi/National Capital Region in the post-pandemic period. Employing a cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 234 artisans and enterprises through a structured questionnaire. The analysis, conducted using reliability tests, descriptive statistics, and multiple regression techniques, focused on the impact of digital marketing, social media, and e-commerce platforms on sales performance. Findings reveal a strong positive relationship between ICT adoption and improved sales outcomes, underscoring the crucial role of digital channels in helping artisans recover and expand their businesses after COVID-19. The study offers valuable insights for artisans, entrepreneurs, marketers, and policymakers on how ICT can be leveraged to enhance market visibility, increase revenue, and ensure long-term sustainability of the handicrafts sector.

Keywords: Post-COVID Dynamics, ICT, Delhi/NCR Region, E-commerce Platforms, Social Media Marketing, Digital Marketing Strategies



1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to the global handicrafts sector, disrupting traditional modes of marketing and sales that relied heavily on physical marketplaces, exhibitions, and tourism. With lockdowns, restricted mobility, and sharp declines in foot traffic, artisans and small enterprises faced significant losses in income and visibility. In this environment, the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) emerged as a vital strategy for continuity, innovation, and long-term sustainability. Scholars such as Kumar and Singh (2021) and Chatterjee and Kar (2020) highlight how ICT tools—including e-commerce platforms, social media, and digital marketing techniques—have enabled artisans to reconnect with customers and sustain business operations during and after the pandemic. In the post-pandemic period, Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), well known for their cultural diversity and vibrant handicraft traditions, have witnessed a notable shift towards digitalisation. Increasingly, artisans and small businesses are leveraging platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Facebook, and Instagram to showcase and sell their products. This transition not only cushioned the immediate impact of the pandemic but also provided long-term opportunities for expanding customer reach, enhancing brand visibility, and creating new revenue streams (Gupta & Arora, 2022). Evidence suggests that integrating ICT into handicraft marketing significantly boosts sales performance, with artisans using online platforms reporting up to 30% higher sales compared to those relying solely on conventional

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methods (Kumar & Singh, 2021). Social media, in particular, has transformed market dynamics by opening access to global audiences and fostering direct engagement with buyers across borders (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). However, this digital transformation has not been without challenges. Barriers such as low digital literacy, high initial investment in digital infrastructure, and unstable internet connectivity continue to hinder wider adoption, especially among traditional craftspeople (Rao & Joshi, 2021). Additionally, the need for new skills and adaptability in digital marketing poses further difficulties. Against this backdrop, the present study explores the role of ICT in reshaping the marketing of handicrafts in Delhi/NCR in the aftermath of COVID-19. By examining the relationship between the adoption of ICT tools and sales performance, this research seeks to provide insights into how digital channels can contribute to the growth, resilience, and sustainability of traditional craft industries. The findings are expected to benefit artisans, entrepreneurs, researchers, and policymakers interested in supporting the digital transition of heritage-based industries in the post-COVID era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 epidemic caused major problems for the handicrafts industry, which relies on traditional techniques and small markets. A transition to online platforms was required due to the sudden end to physical marketplaces and tourists, the principal avenues for selling handicrafts. This literature study delves into the marketing of handicrafts in the Delhi/NCR area, specifically looking at how ICT plays a role. It also investigates previous studies that have looked at the pros, cons, and tactics for using ICT in this industry.

Arts and crafts have always been one of the most popular ways to exhibit their creativity. The forms of representations have evolved throughout time, but the ingenuity and craftsmanship have endured to enchant us, and handicrafts have been a primary source of their portrayals. These works of art are made traditionally, with their ancestors passing down the procedures of making these crafts, which bear the hallmark of an area or a certain group of people, to the current generation. Another feature of handicrafts is that, because machines do not manufacture them, the term "mass production" is not connected with them. Furthermore, in India, the majority of those engaging in this trade are women from scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, and other religious minorities. The handicraft industry is predominantly an unorganised sector that employs over 7 million people, most of whom live in poverty and are members of the economically and socially disadvantaged sections of society. Despite their struggles, these artists from various parts of India ensure that their products are distinctive to their locality and culture. Though Indian craftsmen's goods are exquisite and well-received worldwide, they face several challenges that limit their ability to expand.

The makers of handicrafts and potential buyers are not in communication with one another, resulting in the producers being uninformed of their customers' preferences (S Banik, 2017). Another important obstacle in this industry is the presence of intermediaries, who prohibit artisans from earning to their full potential, despite the fact that clients pay highly for their products (R Pathak, 2017). Crafts are purchased or processed by customers as a means of self-expression. Craft consumption, according to C. Campwell (2005), entails the application of "talent, knowledge, judgement, and passion" to the production of something "created and designed by the same person." Craft enthusiasts enjoy crafts that are manufactured using traditional methods and display their ingenuity in these one-of-a-kind works of art (A Klammer, 2012)⁴². Consumer participation in the creation of various works of art in order to satisfy their need for self-expression is fairly widespread (K.T. Tian, 2001). Prior to this, it was shown that a connection must be made between craft producers and their intended audience. Indian handicrafts, which are mostly made by hand, have a business opportunity in the worldwide market because of the growing demand for handmade goods. The artisans that make these magnificent pieces of art are almost often from low-income or otherwise disadvantaged communities.

2.1. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HANDICRAFTS SECTOR

Artisans have faced serious financial difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the handicrafts sector. The epidemic caused local markets to close and visitors to stop, which led to a significant drop in sales and revenue for artists, according to research by Nayak and Mishra (2021). The need for new forms of advertising to support those working in the handmade goods industry was brought to light by this upheaval.

Worst possible timing for craftsmen and weavers: the handicrafts industry has taken a major hit due to a declining economy, increasing unemployment, lower expenditure, and the pandemic-induced lockdown. Weavers and artisans, who make up the third biggest group of the impoverished, are in a very precarious position. Despite campaigns like

"vocal for local" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat," their situation remains mostly unnoticed as the majority of their goods are deemed "non-essential." The photograph beautifully captures the tenacity and perseverance of artisans as they toil away in a humble workshop, surrounded by their handiwork, despite the hardships they face.

2.2. BACKGROUND OF DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

According to the European Commission (2015), "digital entrepreneurship" is when people launch new businesses or give old ones a makeover by using cutting-edge digital tools and resources. All things related to the introduction of new goods and services via the internet and the digitisation of current business processes in private and public organisations fall under this category. Entrepreneurs, with their can-do spirit and willingness to take risks, are the ones who come up with new ideas, design groundbreaking goods, and eventually bring them to market. There are a lot of doors that might open for owners of handicraft businesses that are willing to embrace strategic innovation via digital platforms. According to Armstrong

(2006), platforms serve as "two-sided markets" where buyers and sellers come together to do business. According to Ojala et al. (2018), digital platforms provide a consistent framework for hosting different types of services. Some examples are listening to music on Spotify or iTunes or renting out a house in another country via Airbnb. These digital platforms are crucial for the creation and distribution of value. Startups are able to provide supplemental products and services because to the expansion of digital platforms, which encourages innovation (Gawer, 2009). Figure 1 from Yadav et al. (2023a) shows the progression of digital and innovative entrepreneurship from conventional to social entrepreneurship and finally to digital and innovative entrepreneurship. It goes on to show how drivers and impediments affect this three-stage entrepreneurial growth.

Figure 1

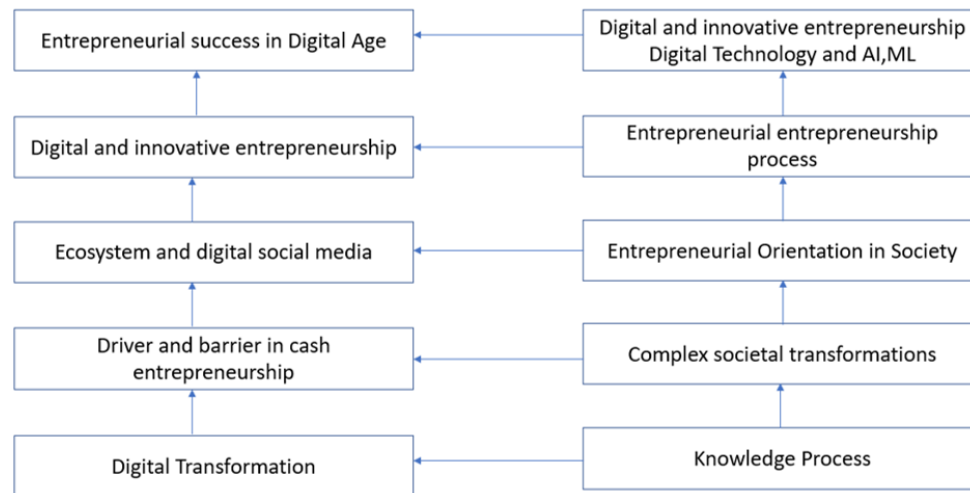


Figure 1 Digital and innovative entrepreneurship in the Indian handicraft sector after the COVID-19 pandemic: challenges and opportunities

2.3. ADOPTION OF ICT IN HANDICRAFTS MARKETING

With the growing adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the handicrafts sector has gained unprecedented opportunities to reach consumers and facilitate sales through digital channels. Tools such as e-commerce platforms, social media, and digital marketing strategies are increasingly forming the backbone of modern promotional campaigns for artisans and small enterprises. Studies indicate that online marketplaces have substantially enhanced the visibility and accessibility of handicraft products. For instance, Singh and Kumar (2021) reported that artisans selling on platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart achieved sales growth of around 25% compared to those relying solely on traditional marketing approaches.

Equally transformative has been the rise of social media as a marketing medium. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram have enabled craftsmen to showcase their products globally, build online communities, and engage directly with customers in real time. According to Chatterjee and Kar (2020), the integration of social media into marketing

practices has significantly boosted both sales performance and brand recognition in the handicraft industry. Their study highlighted that businesses utilizing social media marketing recorded up to a 30% increase in sales and customer interactions compared to those not engaging with these channels.

2.4. BENEFITS OF ICT ADOPTION

The handicrafts industry stands to gain a great deal from the marketing mix that includes ICT. To begin with, it eliminates the need to set up shop in different markets, making it easier and cheaper to reach a wider audience (including customers all over the world). Siddiqui Jamshed (2013) outlines a paradigm for ICT adoption in Indian SMEs; globalisation has had a significant influence on the current business landscape. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are the most in need of being informed about technological advancements and shifting trends. Second, creatives can learn about their customers' tastes and preferences through digital platforms' data analytics tools, which allows them to better personalise their goods and advertising campaigns (Gupta & Arora, 2022). Third, information and communication technology technologies improve operational efficiency by facilitating improved inventory management and streamlining the sales process (Rao & Joshi, 2021). The significance of information and communication technology (ICT) in the growth of SMEs is crucial. ICTs are channels that combine telecommunications and computer technology. In terms of multitasking, growing client base, increasing productivity, reducing costs, working remotely, making quick and accurate decisions, and allowing cooperation, SMEs require ICT-based solutions

2.5. CHALLENGES IN ICT ADOPTION

While the adoption of ICT offers remarkable opportunities for the handicraft sector, several barriers continue to hinder its widespread integration. A primary challenge is the limited level of digital literacy among artisans, which restricts their ability to effectively navigate and utilize modern online platforms and tools. Many craftspeople, particularly those from rural areas, also face the persistent issue of unreliable or inadequate internet connectivity, making digital engagement difficult (Mishra & Sinha, 2021). Another significant constraint lies in the financial burden associated with adopting ICT. Small-scale artisans often lack the resources to invest in the necessary digital infrastructure, such as websites, online storefronts, or paid marketing tools. Moreover, the recurring expenses of maintaining an online presence—through activities like digital promotions, logistics management, or platform fees—pose additional challenges (Rao & Joshi, 2021). These infrastructural, economic, and skill-related barriers collectively slow down the sector's ability to fully harness the benefits of ICT adoption.

2.6. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING ICT ADOPTION

Numerous approaches have been suggested as potential solutions to these problems. Artisans may acquire the skills to make good use of digital platforms via training programmes that emphasise digital literacy and the use of ICT technologies. In order to help the handicrafts industry embrace ICT, both governmental and non-governmental organisations may provide crucial financial assistance and resources (Kumar & Singh, 2021). In addition, Gupta and Arora (2022) found that when artists, enterprises, and digital platforms work together, they may build an ecosystem that helps crafts marketing via ICT expand and stay afloat.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There have been tremendous possibilities for craftsmen and enterprises in the Delhi/NCR area to market and sell handicrafts abroad via the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in recent years. To broaden their audience and simplify sales with features like inventory management, payment processing, and customer assistance, more and more artisans are turning to e-commerce platforms. These platforms range from the more well-known Amazon and Flipkart to more recent ones like Craftsvilla,

Etsy India, Ajio, and Meesho. Marketing and sales on social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, but also on newer platforms like WhatsApp Business, Pinterest, and YouTube, may increase traffic, improve content creation, and streamline customer interactions. Thanks to digital marketing tactics like search engine optimisation (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, email marketing, and influencer marketing, artisans can now reach a wider audience and have a

stronger online presence. This has given them the opportunity to compete on a global scale while still preserving their cultural legacy.

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The researchers in this study used a cross-sectional design, which involves taking a snapshot in time to gather information from a subset of the population. The approach eliminates the necessity for collecting data over an extended period of time in order to examine the correlations between the variables (ICT usage and sales performance) as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2



Figure 2 Mindmap of Research Methodology

3.2. DEVELOPMENT OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The demographic information, views on the use of ICT tools, and their effect on sales performance are the primary data points that will be collected by the questionnaire. In order to measure replies, it incorporates structured questions that use a Likert scale.

3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The gathered data on the use of information and communication technology tools and sales performance in the Delhi/NCR region's handicraft industry will be analysed extensively in this research using SPSS 27. According to respondents' demographics and views on ICT tools and sales performance, descriptive statistics will provide a synopsis of the data. The internal consistency of the questionnaire questions evaluating ICT tool use and its influence on sales will be assessed by reliability analysis, which employs Cronbach's alpha. To find out how different information and communication technology (ICT) tools (e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, etc.) affect sales performance, we'll use regression analysis, more especially multiple regression, to look at the predictors' statistical significance and the model's overall fit using R-squared. Findings from these studies will shed light on the post- COVID dynamics of handicraft marketing in the Delhi/NCR area by revealing how much of an impact ICT adoption has on sales results for craftsmen and enterprises.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents in this study focused on ICT tool usage and sales performance in the Delhi/NCR handicraft sector. The table categorizes respondents by age, gender, educational level, and type of handicraft business. Regarding age distribution, the largest group falls within the 18-24 years category (22.6%), followed closely by those aged 45-54 years (22.2%). Gender distribution shows a slight predominance of females (53.8%) over males (46.2%). Educational levels are diverse, with artisans/craftspersons comprising 24.8% of respondents, followed by managerial/executive roles (20.5%), and a significant portion categorized under "Other" (16.7%). With a combined total of 14.1% of the sample, pottery/ceramics and woodcraft enterprises dominate the handicraft employment landscape. Jewellery (12.0%) and metalcraft (14.1%) follow closely behind. In order to comprehend the use of ICT tools and their effect on sales performance in this particular industry, it is necessary to have a thorough grasp of the respondent characteristics, and this demographic breakdown does just that.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents of Study

Demographic Details	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1. Age	18-24 Years	53	22.6%
	25-34 Years	47	20.1%
	35-44 Years	43	18.4%
	45-54 Years	52	22.2%
	55 Years and Above	39	16.7%
2. Gender	Male	108	46.2%
	Female	126	53.8%
3. Educational Level	Artisan/Craftsperson	58	24.8%
	Business Owner	41	17.5%
	Managerial/Executive	48	20.5%
	Marketing/Sales	48	20.5%
	Other	39	16.7%
4. Employment Status	Textiles	26	11.1%
	Pottery/Ceramics	33	14.1%
	Jewelry	28	12.0%
	Woodcraft	34	14.5%
	Metalcraft	33	14.1%
	Leathercraft	26	11.1%
	Paper and stationery	24	10.3%
	Other	30	12.8%

4.2. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Table 2 displays the results of the reliability evaluation for the study's variables. With a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.906, the 10-item Sales Performance (SP) scale shows great reliability and a high degree of internal consistency. Another 10-item scale that confirms great reliability is the Use of ICT Tools (UICTT) scale, which similarly receives a Cronbach's alpha of 0.911. These findings indicate that the survey questions evaluating sales success and the use of information and communication technology tools are quite valid for gauging the aforementioned components among respondents from the Delhi/National Capital Region handicraft industry.

Table 2 Reliability Assessment

Sr. No.	Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Remark on Reliability
1	Sales Performance (SP)	10	0.906	Excellent
2	Use of ICT Tools (UICTT)	10	0.911	Excellent

4.3. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Respondents in the Delhi/National Capital Region handicraft industry provided the descriptive data for the variables SP and UICTT (Use of Information and Communication Technology Tools) in Table 3. With an average score of 3.8949 on the Sales Performance (SP) scale, it's clear that people have a favourable impression of the results of sales made via digital means.

Responses concerning sales success show modest variability, with a standard deviation of 0.74923 and a variance of 0.561. With a mean score of 3.7803 on the Use of ICT Tools (UICTT) subscale, enterprises and craftsmen alike have a favourable but not quite overwhelming impression of the prevalence of ICT tool use. There is a little more variation in the answers about the use of ICT tools, as seen by the standard deviation of 0.80532 and variance of 0.649. Using these descriptive data, we can get a feel for the handicraft sector in Delhi/NCR and how its members see and use information and communication technology (ICT) tools in connection to their sales success.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Sales Performance (SP)	3.8949	.74923	.561
Use of ICT Tools (UIC TT)	3.7803	.80532	.649

4.4. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

In order to test hypotheses about the link between UIC TT and SP in the Delhi/NCR handicraft industry, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The findings are shown in Table 4. An R-squared value of 0.814 indicates a statistically significant association in the regression model, suggesting that information and communication technology (ICT) tools account for about 81.4% of the variation in sales performance. With a p-value of 0, the F-statistic of 455.840 is highly significant, indicating that the entire regression model fits the data well.

$SP = 1.032 + 0.757 \times UIC TT$ is the regression equation. With all other factors held equal, this equation predicts a 0.757-unit improvement in sales performance (SP) for every 1-unit increase in the use of information and communication technology tools (UIC TT). Increased sales performance in the handicraft industry is correlated with increasing utilisation of ICT tools, as shown by the statistically significant coefficient for UIC TT ($t = 21.32$, $p = 0.000$). Results like these lend credence to the idea that information and communication technology (ICT) tools have a substantial impact on the handicraft industry's sales performance in Delhi/National Capital Region (NCR), and they shed light on how this sector might benefit from embracing digital technology.

Table 4 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Hypotheses Testing

Variables Entered	R Square	F	P-Value	Unstandardized Coefficients	t	P-Value
Independent Variables: UIC TT	0.814	455.840	0	(Constant) 1.032	7.52	0.000
Dependent Variable: SP				UIC TT .757	21.32	0.000

$$SP = 1.032 + 0.757 \times UIC TT \quad (1)$$

Table 5 Pearson's Correlation of variables

Correlations				
			SP	UICTT
Spearman's rho	SP	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.746**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	234	234
	UIC T	Correlation Coefficient	.746**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	234	234
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Businesses and craftsmen in the Delhi/NCR region's handicraft industry were surveyed to determine their sales performance (SP) and the extent to which they used information and communication technology (ICT) tools (UIC TT). The findings of the survey were presented in a table. The results are explained in great detail here:

4.5. CORRELATION COEFFICIENT

- **SP and UIC TT:** The correlation coefficient between Sales Performance (SP) and the Use of ICT Tools (UIC TT) is 0.746. This value indicates a strong positive correlation between the two variables. In other words, as the usage of ICT tools increases, sales performance tends to increase as well.
- **UIC TT and SP:** Similarly, the correlation coefficient between UIC TT and SP is also 0.746. This symmetry is expected because correlation is a mutual relationship.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this research shed light on important connections between the use of ICT tools and sales success in the Delhi/National Capital Region handicraft industry. Using ICT tool use to explain almost 81.4% of the variation in sales results was uncovered by the multiple linear regression analysis, which demonstrated a substantial positive connection between UICTT and SP. This demonstrates how important it is for companies and craftsmen to use digital channels like social media and e-commerce websites to increase their earnings. The study's measures are further validated by the strong reliability of the Sales Performance and Use of ICT Tools scales (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.90$). These results line up with the latest tendencies after COVID-19, when digital transformation was already crucial for expanding market reach and enhancing operational efficiency. The direct influence of digital strategies on company success is confirmed by the regression coefficient (0.757), which shows that there is a one-unit rise in ICT tool utilisation correlated with a 0.757-unit improvement in sales performance. As a result of the inclusive nature of ICT adoption in this industry, the demographic profile of respondents shows a diversified workforce with strong representation across all age groups and genders. There was a wide range of educational backgrounds, with a significant share working as artisans. This highlights how digital technologies may be used for a variety of tasks in the handcraft business. To put these digital benefits into practice, lawmakers and industry partners should push for more artisans' and companies' use of ICT. To make the transition to e-commerce and digital marketing easier, strategies can include providing infrastructure support and implementing targeted training programmes to raise digital literacy levels.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides strong evidence that the adoption of ICT tools has a significant positive impact on sales performance in the Delhi/NCR handicrafts sector. The multiple linear regression analysis revealed that ICT utilisation explained 81.4% of the variation in sales outcomes, indicating a strong positive relationship between ICT adoption and sales performance. These findings emphasise the importance of online marketplaces and social media platforms as vital revenue streams for small businesses and artisans. The high reliability of the measurement scales further validates the consistency and accuracy of the results. The research also shows that ICT tools are being adopted across diverse demographic and educational groups within the handicraft community. This has important implications for policymakers, industry leaders, and support organisations, who can strengthen digital inclusion by offering targeted skill development initiatives, providing financial assistance, and supporting infrastructure development. Such measures can enable craftsmen to optimise digital marketing strategies and improve their long-term competitiveness in the market. Although the study is subject to certain limitations, such as reliance on convenience sampling and the possibility of self-reported data biases, it contributes valuable insights into the role of ICT in strengthening resilience and promoting growth within the handicraft sector in the post-COVID era. Future research may explore the specific effects of different ICT tools across various sub-sectors of handicrafts and adopt longitudinal approaches to understand the sustained impact of digitalisation over time. In summary, the findings highlight the transformative role of ICT in empowering handicraft enterprises, providing enhanced market access, and supporting their evolution within an increasingly digital economy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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