**A STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND IT’S IMPACT ON MARKETING OF HANDICRAFTS PRODUCTS OF ASSAM**

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**Abstract**

Social media is a tool that allows users to build networks and groups of contact to manage relationship and friendship and also to create a personal brand. It includes popular networking sites, Facebook, twitter, Instagram and others.

Social media is a medium to socialize and get interacted to the society through words, pictures or videos at a lower cost. It helps to establish a company’s reputation, brand image among its potential consumers, supporters or readers.

One most vital importance of social media on marketing is it has huge opportunities to get the enquiries being made by spectators converted in positive sales and also there are chances of further conversations from some other viewers on social media sites in near future.

Assam has a flourishing handicrafts business. Assam is renowned for the production of some wonderful silk. The state produces superior quality silk called ‘Pat’ and ‘Muga’. Moreover, weaving and embroidery are counted as major handicraft industry in the state. Cane and bamboo are also used here exquisitely to make beautiful handicrafts. In addition, terracotta products of Assam are also good examples of beautiful crafts.

***Keywords: Social Media, Marketing, Customers, Products.***

**Introduction:**

 Social media is a technology which helps an individual or an organisation to share their ideas, opinions, information and related details in an online platform to promote their thinking and get connected with the society at large. It is a tool that allows users to build networks and groups of contact to manage relationship and friendship and also to create a personal brand. It includes popular networking sites, Facebook, twitter, Instagram and others. As per Wikipedia – “social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks. The term social in regard to media suggests that platforms are user-centric and enable communal activity. As such, social media can be viewed as online facilitators or enhancers of human networks – webs of individual who enhance social connectivity.”

 According to Tuten and Solomon (2015), “Social media are the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities”. Basically, it is the websites and applications people use every day to share content with other users.

 Previously the use of social media was limited to maintain relationships, personal contacts and friendship. But in today’s world it has it’s own place in the field of marketing and has become a new best friend too. As the most populous country, in recent years, India’s social media landscape has experienced significant shifts. The top 5 social networking sites used in India, viz., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn.

**Review of Literature:**

Iblasi (2016), Use of social media in e-marketing has been encouraged as there is a great impact of using social media websites as a marketing tool on purchasing decisions; as it attracts a large portion of the society. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube draws the attention of the audiences and have a significant impact on purchasing decisions. Thus, firms need to invest its ideas in these websites as a marketing plan.

Senthikumar. V. (2020), Social media is trying to fill the gap by making a smooth interaction to between marketers and consumers as fast as possible. With this it can overtake the other functional areas of marketing to a large extent.

Guha, Anirban et.el., (2021), In their study on, “The social media marketing strategies and its implementation in promoting handicrafts products: a study with special reference to Eastern India”, focus on the promotional part of the Indian handicraft products through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Second, the study measures the effectiveness of social media marketing activities (SMMA) relating to handicraft products on brand awareness, brand image and brand equity. Third, this study also measures the impact of brand awareness and brand image on brand equity and consumers’ purchase intention and further brand equity on consumers’ purchase intention of handicraft products.

The findings of this study showed that SMMA relating to handicraft products had a very strong impact on creating both brand awareness and brand image in the social media environment. Additionally, this study also exhibited a positive and significant impact of brand awareness and brand image on brand equity and consumers’ purchase intention and further brand equity on consumers’ purchase intention of handicraft products in the social media environment.

The outcome of this research will definitely motivate the handicraft industry to have a strong social media presence on various platforms for promoting their products across India and outside. Further, the promotional activities in various social media platforms will help in creating awareness about the handicraft products and give brand recognition among other industrial competitive brands which will consequently lead to an increase in the demand for these products.

Patra (2021) The handloom products of Odisha still have demand in the present technology-driven society and modern market. The perceptions of respondents are positive towards handloom products due to quality and durability. The E-market is promoting the handloom products on the online platform which leads to more popularity.

Dutta & Radha (2022), In their study, “AN ANALYSIS ON MARKETING OF PRODUCTS BY BAMBOO CRAFTSMEN IN ASSAM”, This article is a modest attempt to analyze the marketing strategies followed by the selected craftsmen of the bamboo handicraft sector in Assam. It also includes various products produced by the respondents, and challenges they have experienced in marketing of their products. This article is entirely based on primary data collected directly from selected rural bamboo craftsmen and secondary data collected from various sources like government websites, portals, record books and journals.

Neelesh Kohli & Vandana V. Trar (2022) Social Media Marketing greatly influence the sales of crafts business. It is found to be time-saving, labour-saving and cost effective. It is one of the most effective and efficient method for the promotion of various products and services, along with gathering valuable information on varied products available in the market.

**Objective of the study:**

The main objective of the study is to learn the impact and role of social media in marketing and how the marketing of handicraft products of Assam be expanded through social media.

**Methodology:**

 The present study is descriptive in nature and for collections of data and analysis, various research papers, journals, articles; books and governmental websites have been used.

**Social Media and its impact on Marketing:**

 Modern era/ world is the era of globalisation, change and technology. In response to this, business throughout the world is changing its organisation, way of working and use of technology, business processes are redesigned. The major change in mode of business is emergence of e-business, e-commerce and outsourcing. Business activities comprise of industry, commerce and trade. So, e-commerce means conduct of industry, trade and commerce activities through internet. The e-business includes carrying on planning, organising, marketing, production etc. electronically through internet.

 In this era of innovation, e-business is an extension to the whole world. Almost every individual has an access to internet in their smart phones having 4G/ 5G services. The rapid growth of internet among the individuals in our society has been a signal for using internet as a marketing tool and its an opportunity for every business enterprise to attract consumers and change their perception through social media marketing. Social media can bridge the gap between marketers and consumers, by continuous interaction with knowledgeable clients and spectators in a fast way of communication.

 Marketing is a societal process through which the individual and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, freely exchanging products and services of value with other (Philip Kotler). In the words of Kotler and Zaltman: “Social marketing is the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs designed to influence the acceptability of social ideas and that embeds planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research considerations.” Social media marketing is the latest trend that evolved in past few years when it started ruling online communication. It is a kind of internet marketing that uses different social media platforms for achieving marketing and advertising objectives. It involves sharing of content, videos, and images for advertising and sales reasons. Internet marketing techniques adopted by business to focus on targeting the right audience and consumer online brand related activities. (Neelesh Kohli, 2022)

 Social media is a medium to socialize and get interacted to the society through words, pictures or videos at a lower cost. In the field of marketing, it is a blessing and in this era of globalisation its impact is abundant. It helps to establish a company’s reputation, brand image among its potential consumers, supporters or readers. It not only provides a platform to marketers to showcase their products/ services to the customers without any geographical -boundaries; but also makes a chance to listen to customers’ ideas, suggestions and grievances. In simple words, social media is a place which is used for communicating and interacting with the consumers which they are looking for. Social media marketing is gaining importance to small businesses because it reaches a large number of targeted consumers within a short span of time and with vey less efforts. It is also cost effective. It helps business to interact to their customers directly using various interactive ways such as Polls, Questions and Answers etc. There is a chance for consumers to get interacted with other consumers for getting various information which they need and also on the other side, can share their own views and experiences on various products or services they have already used. Along with these, social media also creates an opportunity to get valuable information on which customers are interested and what do they feel about marketing of the products or services on social media.

 One most vital importance of social media on marketing is it has huge opportunities to get the enquiries being made by spectators converted in positive sales and also there are chances of further conversations from some other viewers on social media sites in near future. “Every post you make on a social media platform is an opportunity for customers to convert. When you build a following, you’ll simultaneously have access to new customers, recent customers, and old customers, and you’ll be able to interact with all of them. Every blog post, image, video, or comment you share is a chance for someone to react, and every reaction could lead to a site visit, and eventually a conversion. Not every interaction with your brand results in a conversion, but every positive interaction increases the likelihood of an eventual conversion. Even if your click-through rates are low, the sheer number of opportunities you have on social media is significant.” (Walid Nabil, 2016)

**Handicraft products of Assam:**



 The word handicrafts are made by two words hand + craft. Hand means by made of hand or using simple tools in making of any item, ad craft mean a unique expression that represent a culture, tradition and the heritage of a country. That mean handicraft is a unique expression by using art on any item. Handicraft is also known as artisanry, which mean a type of work where useful and decorative devices are made completely by hand or using simple tools. The term handicraft is most frequently used for the 'art and craft". Art and craft work is not only a matter of happy but also creating useful as well as creative work for people, using natural materials and traditional techniques (Ms. Chanchal Khurana, 2011)

 Handicraft is the activity of making decorative or useful objects by hand. People who manufacture handicraft goods are known as crafts people or artisans. They rely on manual skills to produce handicraft goods. The finesse and exquisite workmanship of a wide variety of craft products of ancient Assam earned universal acclamation, as is evident from many literary and historical records. In all branches, craftsmanship like weaving and sericulture, or metal, ivory, wood, leather, clay, cane, bamboo works and the like, the reputation of Assamese artisans was equal to that of the craftsmen of other parts of contemporary India. Historical evidence bearing on Assamese old-time industries are not scanty and references that we have in historical and other literature of Assam are sufficient to point to a high standard of industrial efficiency that the people obtained in Assam in early times.

 Present handicrafts industries in Assam: -

1. Bell Metal Industry of Sarthebari –

The Bell Metal industry of Sarthebari, is one of the traditional artisan-based industry of Assam, famous for its artistic bell metal products. The main articles produced here by the artisans are - Utensils such as “kanhi” (dish), “bati” (bowl),” ban bati” (bowl with stand), “ghoti” “Koloh” (water vessel); Utility items such as “bota” (used for offering prasad and betel nut), “sorai” (used for religious purpose and to offer gifts to respected person), “tema” (box to keep ornaments & betel nut); and items used for musical and religious purpose. The handicraft items produced by the artisans of Sarthebari are sold not only in the state of Assam but also in the entire north eastern states including two foreign countries viz. Nepal & Bhutan.

1. Brass metal –

Brass Metal craft is located almost all parts of the state apart from Hajo in Kamrup district of Assam. The skill of artisans who worked on metals in the past is well proved by the existing remains of a copper temple at Sadiya and copper plates issued by the rulers. Copper and brass cups of Goalpara district known as Kansas are products of Assam of great significance.

1. Fireworks Craft in Barpeta –

This is a household product and located nearby residences. Apart from the hired labour, the family members of the units extend their help to produce some secondary products like making Bamboo Charkha, producing jute ropes, paper roll making, etc. The work sheds, store and processing rooms are very small, so they prefer to use traditional hand tools like hand pounding machine (dheki/ural), kerahi, hammer etc. The production is mainly dependent on various festivals, mostly during Durga puja to Dipawali period.

1. Craft on Jute Diversification –

Assam is the 3rd largest jute producer in the country and jute production is concentrated in the districts of Darrang, Barpeta, Goalpara, Dhubri, Nagaon & Morigaon. Some of the major products are Jute bags, braided articles, Cap/Hats, table mat, foot mat, carpet, loom base jute-cotton fabrics, etc.

1. Bamboo, Cane, Sitalpati Craft

Bamboo base craft is now mainly a household industry and occupies an important place among the handicrafts of the State. The very high demand for various bamboo products, such as, mats, baskets, fishing contraptions, etc., in every rural household. Jaapi is one of the world-famous products made of bamboo, which signifies our rich cultural heritage. Sitalpati is one of the popular products of handicraft industries of Assam which is used as a mat in many houses of Assam, mostly during summer seasons.

1. Water Hyacinth –

Water hyacinth is normally available in beels, road side ponds etc. In Assam, there are two major river systems: Brahmaputra and Barak and beels are situated along the tributaries of these two river systems.

1. Areca Nut Leaf –

It is used to manufacture bowls and plates of different shapes and sizes which is completely eco-friendly, biodegradable and hygienic.

1. Jewellery Craft –

Barpeta is famous for the traditional Assamese jewellery of Assam. As per records, Assam has nearly 50,000 unregistered jewellery units.

1. Pottery –

The pottery industry of Assam is famous in Dhubri district, Hajo in Kamrup district, Majuli in Jorhat district. Due to import of plastic goods, metal utensils etc. pottery industry of Assam is losing its place.

1. Craft from dry Tea Bushes –

Various decorative products including table top are made from tea bushes.

1. Wood Carving –

Wooden rhinos, elephants, decorated pieces of wall hanging etc. are some of the wood carving activities by our local artisans.

1. Decorative Candle –

Making decorative candles is Assam is a concept which started a few years back.

(Source: industriescom.assam.gov.in)

**Marketing of handicraft products of Assam:**

 Assam has a flourishing handicrafts business. Assam is renowned for the production of some wonderful silk. The state produces superior quality silk called ‘Pat’ and ‘Muga’. Moreover, weaving and embroidery are counted as major handicraft industry in the state. Cane and bamboo are also used here exquisitely to make beautiful handicrafts. In addition, terracotta products of Assam are also good examples of beautiful crafts.

 Two areas have been studied as present scenario of marketing of handicraft products of Assam:

1. Assam CM Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma approved “Handicraft Policy of Assam 2022” for facilitating growth and development of craft-based industries. The Governor of Assam notified the policy which came into force with effect from 1st, February, 2022 and will remain in force for a period of 5 years. One of the important objectives of this policy is to provide market linkage/ online market place for sale of such products using IT. Along with it; as a part of marketing strategy, signing of MoU with the Tourism Department to allow sale of handicrafts at/ from all its wayside amenities centres and tourism properties.

Two important support services of Handicraft Policy of Assam, 2022 under sectoral development for handicraft products are:

1. Infrastructure: Lack of infrastructure is the restriction for development of handicrafts sector of the State. Proper infrastructure shall be developed in clusters and strategic locations by Government in association with private partners to provide Common Facilities Centres (CFC), Marketing Hubs, Craft Villages, Export village, Training Centres, etc.
2. Brand Building: Government shall initiate measures to branding "Craft of Assam" by registration of a common logo, publicity through print, electronic and social media, opening of dedicated web portal, tied up with National and International online portal for selling of craft items, encouraged to setting up of souvenir shops nearby Tourist destination, etc

Two important fiscal incentives available under this policy for marketing of handicraft products are:

1. Marketing assistance towards issuance of Advertisement in print/electronic/social media shall be reimbursed up to 50% subject to a maximum ceiling of ₹30000 per annum for a period of three years.
2. Online marketing: One- time financial assistance up ₹30000 shall be provided for development of web portal/App for online marketing of products.
3. AGMC Ltd. and ARTFED Marketing are the two leading organisations in handwoven textiles and handicraft sector working exclusively for the marketing of these products. They work on introducing new product lines, searching niche market and also due importance is given to every aspect which will lead to create a superior customer value and satisfaction. So as to meet the needs and wants of customers at different levels, AGMC and ARTFED are taking steps for adequate services and programmes. Presently various steps are being taken for creating and sustaining employment opportunities in handloom and handicraft sector. This will lead to provide more income to people living in rural areas, which will result in improving socio-economic status of handloom weavers and artisans. For increasing market share of handloom and handicraft products in global market special emphasis is given to the market potentiality of products of Assam and North-eastern region. The department has also given to rapid technological upgradation, encouragement of capital investment, various incentive schemes, development of existing human resources for future growth prospects. National Handloom Expo, Special Handloom Expo, District Level Event, Craft Bazar, Gandhi Shilpa Bazar, Handicraft Expo, Sourcing Show etc. are organised by AGMC and ARTFED every year Under Market Promotion Programme and Market Support Scheme.

**Role of social media in marketing of handicraft products:**

 The handloom and handicraft sector has got a unique in our economy resulting to upliftment of economic conditions of our artisans and craftsmen provided due importance is given in this sector. For boosting up the marketing of handloom and handicrafts products through e-commerce is one of the priorities of Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. In this era of globalisation, handicraft products of Assam still have a distinct place in the national and international level. Products such as Jaapi, wooden decorative pieces, decorative candles, bamboo items etc. are famous which creates a rich cultural heritage of our state. Productive publicity through and adequate channel or media will help to sustain in this competitive market and increase its market share abundantly. These handloom products can be marketed in online platform so as to reach a large number of potential buyers at a short span of time. They can be made popular through digital market.

 In this techno-savvy world, almost every individual has an easy access to internet facilities through smart phones. People in every corner of the society are well familiar with social media sites, viz., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. This can play a significant role in promoting various products produced by our artisans and craftsman. Artisans are already familiar with the benefits of e-marketing, but it is found, that, due to lack of technical support, time constraints adequate steps are not implemented in this area of marketing.

 Marketing of products in social media helps to build trust and loyalty, reach new audiences along with engaging existing audiences. Today a buyer along with brand listens to real people, experiences of their peers etc. Facebook, WhatsApp is user friendly apps for all age groups which helps in easy interaction. It is cost effective along with having a variety of features for its audiences. Thus, if the handicraft products are marketed through these apps or some other place of e-marketing, it will benefit the artisans and craftsman to showcase their creativity and innovation to the society in large.

**Findings and Suggestions:**

1. Upgradation and proper channel of marketing will provide scope for the promotion of artistic achievement and creativity that has been suppressed in rural areas.
2. Handicraft industries facilitate mobilisation and utilisation of local resources which might otherwise remain unutilised. This helps in tapping resources like entrepreneur skill and small savings especially in rural areas.
3. Handicraft industries are such small-scale industries set up in rural areas. Their development may result in rural reconstruction, sustained growth and removal of regional disparity.
4. Use of online platform, i.e., social media and other marketing websites will help in publicity of the products and ultimate and potential customers can be reached easily within a short period of time.
5. AGMC Ltd. and ARTFED are the two leading organisations in Assam contributing exclusively towards the development and marketing of handicraft products of Assam. Fairs and workshops are also arranged on a regular basis as a marketing scheme.
6. Handicraft Policy of Assam, 2022 launched by our Chief Minister, in the year 2022 is purely meant to focus on handicrafts items of our state. For the marketing of the products, the policy has given due importance in online market place so that the products can be sold using IT. The policy also claims to provide financial assistance for the development of web portal/ App for online marketing of products.
7. Online is a place where posts go viral within a few moments. So, one has to be cautious before sharing any information in social media platform. Thus, it becomes the utmost duty of the traders to have adequate knowledge in the field of e-marketing prior to doing business with the help of social media or other marketing websites.

**Conclusion:**

 Assam is famous worldwide for its rich cultural heritage. The handicrafts and handloom industries of Assam contribute a lot to the society with its creativity and artistic skills. The handweavers, craftsmen, artisans of Assam including other North Eastern states are imaginative and innovative in its true sense. The handicraft sector is labour intensive and if proper marketing linkages are provided, it will not only contribute to economic growth and development of the region but also will help to reduce the migration of labourers from rural areas to urban areas. This will also contribute to balanced regional development of our country.

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