

Weaving Culture / Cultural Weaving: The Behavioural Science of Buying Indian Clothes

Anaya Khara

Step by Step School, Noida, India
Email: [anayakhara05\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:anayakhara05[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: *India has emerged as a key site for the growth of the fast fashion and high fashion industries, with increased globalisation. At the same time, trends in consumer behaviour show that both Indian and global consumers prefer brands that connect with local cultures in a non - exploitative manner and are mindful of sustainability. Therefore, Indian brands are now able to proudly display authentic culture and effectively compete in the local and global markets. This paper examines the intersection between culture and branding and analyses negative manifestations of this, such as cultural appropriation and insensitivity towards marginalised communities. However, there have been several positive examples of brands approaching fashion through a grassroots lens and empowering the communities and artisans involved in the production of the clothes. This paper elaborates upon the practices of these brands and concludes with recommendations for further research into the field of 'glocalised' fashion and sustainability.*

Keywords: Global, Appropriation, Glocalisation, Artisans, Brands

1. Introduction

The interplay between culture and branding is a fundamental aspect that influences consumer perceptions and behaviour. Culture and branding are inherently intertwined, with each exerting a significant impact on the other. This relationship highlights the importance of understanding how these two elements interact and shape consumer attitudes and actions (Shukla, 2023). In contemporary times, there has been a notable surge in the recognition of the significance of culture in the realm of branding, alongside an increasing emphasis on the imperative of ethical practices within the fashion industry (Shukla, 2023). This is also premised on promoting a sense of shared values and beliefs between brands and consumers, in an effort to move beyond consumerism and create a larger connection.

The concept of intracultural appropriation has gained prominence in recent years, highlighting the significance of upholding and safeguarding cultural heritage within branding strategies (Travaglino and Drury, 2020). India as a massive emerging global market and producer, is a key site within which to position the conflict between economic growth, increase in technological capability, and the simultaneous presence of cultural appropriation which has given rise to a multitude of ethnic clothing brands – while some brands are rooted in local culture, some capitalise on clothing trends in a manner which is ignorant of caste, gender, and extant power politics (Jani, 2020). The examination of the role played by these brands in preserving, exporting, and communicating India's diverse cultural heritage has become imperative in order to understand and pose solutions for how the growth of fashion and consumer behaviour does not adversely impact marginalised communities and local artisans (Jani, 2020).

This research paper aims to delve into the practices employed by Indian clothing brands that prioritise hyperlocal and culture - specific weaves. The paper examines the intricate relationship between modernization, consumer behaviour, and potential solutions to address the

exploitation of local cultures. It poses policy recommendations, measures for brands to adopt for the promotion of cultural sensitivity, and further areas for research in this changing landscape.

2. Background

The topic of cultural appropriation, specifically in the context of traditional knowledge and clothing brands, has emerged as a highly debated and controversial subject in contemporary globalised society. The phenomenon of brands appropriating cultural elements has become a subject of concern, as it has sparked debates regarding issues of misrepresentation and exploitation (Olorunfoba, 2020). Consequently, there has been a growing demand for ethical branding practices in response to these concerns. This has also led to the need for both the public and brands to separately assess each case of apparent appropriation in order to draw the appropriate conclusions. In order to portray cultures (and their attitudes surrounding their intellectual property) more properly in these procedures, the fashion industry in particular needs to figure out the best approach to do so (Olorunfoba, 2020).

In addition, the phenomenon of 'glocalization' has gained significant attention as a prominent branding strategy in the context of heightened globalisation and connectivity. The present discourse emphasises the utmost importance of acknowledging and valuing local customs and principles when formulating marketing strategies, particularly in nations characterised by cultural diversity, such as India (Martinroll, 2014). The process of being culturally aware and paying attention to local preferences includes glocalization. Global brands typically insist on maintaining their successful formula in every market they enter. In the end, it is these frameworks that have contributed to the strength of these brands. However, these brands frequently overlook the underlying power that motivates customers and their purchasing decisions in a variety of industries in the process of dominating the market and standing firm against conventional methods (Martinroll, 2014). Therefore, when

emerging regions enter the global economy, a certain adaptation of present products and services together with new innovations are crucial for global businesses to succeed.

In recent years, Indian brands have recognised the significance of incorporating elements of 'Indian - ness' into their branding strategies as a means to cultivate a distinct identity within the global market (Alves, 2022). By leveraging the diverse and culturally rich heritage of the nation, these brands aim to establish themselves as unique entities in the international arena. The Indian cultural legacy is one that is receiving increasing attention internationally. India's position in the international market has seen a positive change, since Indian brands are marketing in a more globalised manner, highlighting the quality of their products, local crafts and skilled workmanship, lower costs of production, governmental support, and authenticity of sourcing designs (Alves, 2022). However, the controversies around Indian clothing brands, cultural appropriation, and exploitation of local artisans will be examined in the following section of this paper.

3. Discussion

The exploitation of Indian artisans by luxury clothing brands and the garment export supply chain has given rise to significant controversies. Numerous reports have shed light on the adverse working conditions and meagre remuneration endured by artisans, thereby exerting a detrimental impact on the brand reputation of these esteemed luxury labels within the realm of conscientious consumers (Schultz et al, 2020). Reports have highlighted bad working conditions and inhumane working hours, as well as unfair wages and child labour in violation of labour laws, by fashion brands using India as a location for production (Aggarwal, 2020). While brands have taken measures to come together and agree on a set of standards for the usage of local artisans and the establishment of fair labour practices, there remain gaps in the implementation when it comes to high fashion brands (Schultz et al., 2020). This has also impacted these brands negatively both among Indian and global consumers, as these practices and issues have come to light.

As consumers become more conscious of their purchasing decisions, a discernible shift in preferences towards brands that endorse local crafts and support artisans has been observed. In recent years, Indian consumers have demonstrated a heightened awareness and concern for sustainable and ethical practices. This shift in consumer behaviour has led to a significant transformation in their preferences, particularly favouring brands that prioritise the support of local crafts and artisans. The existing body of research has demonstrated that there is a discernible inclination among consumers to pay a higher price for sustainable and ethical clothing. This inclination serves as an indication of increasing demand for brands that exhibit alignment with the values held by consumers. Studies have also found that the purchase intention of sustainable apparel in cities is significantly influenced by environmental knowledge, environmental attitude, and perceived consumer effectiveness (Triphena and Aram, 2023).

Amid ongoing controversies surrounding ethical practices and engagement with artisans, as well as changing consumer behaviour, brands such as FabIndia, have emerged as noteworthy examples of upholding ethical standards and fostering hyperlocal connections. The success of FabIndia can be attributed to its effective strategy of rewarding and empowering local artisans, which in turn has contributed to its profitability and garnered positive resonance among consumers, particularly the youth (Tandon, 2016). It accomplishes this by establishing mechanisms that support timely payments, infrastructure, access to technology, and quality standards for India's rural artisans in addition to encouraging equitable compensation for them. The craftsmen who work with the retailer are also given access to finance and raw materials by Fabindia. Since it collaborates with them through several associations, the company's interactions with these artists are extremely regional (Tandon, 2016). The merchant has direct relationships with both lone craftsmen who operate out of their homes and groups of artisans as well as rural NGOs and organizations that have access to a supply of materials for crafts. Fabindia uses a bottom - up structure for compensation. When hand - making a particular cloth or item, it asks artists how much it will cost them in terms of their time, energy, talents, and raw materials and compensates them accordingly (Tandon, 2016).

In 2007, Fabindia established supplier regional communities (SRCs), which were community - owned businesses self - managed by a collection of craftsmen, weavers, and craft workers in a specific geography. These SRCs "offered artisans joint ownership of resources and access to common facilities, " according to a case study by INSEAD (Tandon, 2016). Additionally, it created new handicrafts and trained craftspeople. The SRC made it possible for Fabindia to develop a standardized system for production and delivery control as well as to centralize its supply capacity rather than deal with single - loom weaver units (Tandon, 2016).

In recent years, numerous brands have embraced a grassroots approach as part of their business strategy. This approach entails a strong emphasis on hyperlocal products and the preservation of traditional handicrafts (Agarwal, 2021). By adopting this approach, these brands aim to connect with local communities, promote cultural heritage, and support local artisans through sourcing fabric and crafts responsibly, establishing cooperative structures that also serve to empower artisans and women, by providing gainful and non - exploitative employment. Some brands of this nature are Okhai, Good Earth, the Indian Ethnic Co, Tjori, and Eco Tasar, as well as the House of Anita Dongre (Agarwal, 2021). The adoption of a grassroots approach by various brands is a response to the growing demand for authentic and locally sourced products. Consumers are increasingly seeking unique and meaningful experiences, and they value products that reflect the cultural identity of a specific region. As a result, brands have recognised the importance of incorporating hyperlocal elements into their product offerings (Triphena and Aram, 2023).

However, a key factor that should not be ignored is the delta between consumer desire and choice in the Indian context. Despite the textile industry's excessive use of precious

resources, there is a shift in consumers' consumption behavior towards more sustainable patterns across a range of diverse contexts, yet sustainable apparel has yet to become a mainstream trend (Triphena and Aram, 2023). Therefore, further research in the field must also focus on the capitalisation of sustainability and culture in such a manner that it is blocked off to the population – in turn defeating the purpose of cultural connection.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the dynamic relationship between culture and branding plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer perceptions and behaviour, and ethical branding has been key to consumer decision - making with the increased adoption of social media and awareness for social causes and exploitation by the fashion industry. The intricate interplay between these two factors has been widely recognised as a significant determinant in shaping consumer attitudes toward products and services. Extensive research has demonstrated that cultural values, beliefs, and norms greatly impact how individuals interpret and respond to branding strategies. One key aspect of this interplay is the influence of cultural values on consumer preferences and decision - making processes. Cultural values, such as individualism or collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, significantly shape consumers' perceptions of brands. In contemporary times, the significance of ethical branding practices has witnessed a notable surge owing to the prevailing concerns surrounding cultural appropriation and exploitation. (Senthil, 2023) The Indian clothing market presents a lucrative opportunity for brands that prioritise sustainability, respect for local practices, and engagement with artisans. To achieve success in this market, brands must align their strategies with these key factors (Senthil, 2023).

This paper has explored the significance of sustainability, respect for local practices, and engagement with artisans in the context of the Indian clothing market. Sustainability has emerged as a critical consideration for consumers in recent years. With increasing awareness about environmental issues, consumers are actively seeking out brands that prioritise sustainable practices. In the Indian clothing market, sustainability encompasses various aspects such as the use of eco - friendly materials, ethical sourcing, and responsible manufacturing processes. Brands that adopt sustainable practices not only contribute to the preservation of the environment but also appeal to the growing segment of conscious consumers in India.

Respect for local practices is another crucial factor that can determine the success of brands in the Indian clothing market. This can be observed through the impact of brands like FabIndia on local artisans and bridging the gap between current trends and local culture without engaging in cultural appropriation, thereby being effective preservers and communicators of cultural heritage (Jani, 2020). The Indian clothing industry is currently experiencing a significant shift towards sustainability, which brings forth a range of challenges and opportunities. The integration of ethical practises and the recognition of cultural heritage by clothing brands have the potential to not only cultivate a favourable

brand image but also play a significant role in safeguarding India's rich and varied cultural heritage within the global fashion industry.

References

- [1] Agarwal, Palak. "5 brands that are empowering artisans across India and keeping India's traditional handicrafts alive". *SMB Story*. May 26, 2021. <https://yourstory.com/smbstory/indian-brands-artisans-traditional-handicraft-products>
- [2] Aggarwal, Asmita. "Indian artisans getting a raw deal?". *Deccan Chronicle*. March 15, 2020. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/lifestyle/fashion-and-beauty/150320/indian-artisans-getting-a-raw-deal.html>
- [3] Alves, Glynda. "Why homegrown brands are flaunting their Indianness abroad". *Economic Times Brand Equity*. August 10, 2022. <https://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/business-of-brands/why-homegrown-brands-are-flaunting-their-indianness-abroad/93461662>
- [4] Jani, Aastha. "Our 'Ethnic/Tribal' Printed Clothes May Reek Of Cultural Appropriation, Here's Why". *Feminism in India*. September 16, 2020. <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/09/16/ethnic-tribal-printed-clothes-reek-of-cultural-appropriation/>
- [5] Kumar, Ramesh S. "Culture as a Brand Anchor". *The Hindu Business Line*. January 20, 2018. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/catalyst/culture-as-a-brand-anchor/article8677964.ece>
- [6] Martinroll Company. "Branding And Culture – The Strategic Winning Combination". *Martinroll*. March 2014. <https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/strategy/branding-culture-strategic-winning-combination/>
- [7] Oloruntoba, Modupe. "Vogue. me Investigates: The State Of Cultural Appropriation & Why It Needs To Change". *Vogue*. January 26, 2020. <https://en.vogue.me/culture/vogue-investigates-state-of-cultural-appropriation/>
- [8] Sankar, Senthil. "The sustainable fashion market in India: An overview". *The Times of India*. April 7, 2023. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/the-sustainable-fashion-market-in-india-an-overview/>
- [9] Schultz, Kai; Paton, Elizabeth; Jay, Phyllida. "Luxury's Hidden Indian Supply Chain". *The New York Times*. March 11, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/style/dior-saint-laurent-indian-labor-exploitation.html>
- [10] Shukla, Utkarsh. "Role of Culture in Branding." *Tutorials Point*. March 31, 2023. <https://www.tutorialspoint.com/role-of-culture-in-branding>
- [11] Tandon, Suneera. "Half a century and 55, 000 artists later: Fabindia's journey from rural crafts to high-end stores". *Quartz*. September 12, 2016. <https://qz.com/india/775968/fabindias-found-success-by-rewarding-local-artisans>
- [12] Travaglino, Giovanni A., Drury, Lisbeth. (2020). Intracultural Appropriation Theory. In: *The Secret Power of Criminal Organizations*. SpringerBriefs in

Psychology. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44161-6_3

- [13] Tryphena R, Aram IA. Consumer perception on sustainable clothing among urban Indians. *Journal of Engineered Fibers and Fabrics*.2023; 18. doi: 10.1177/15589250231168964, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/15589250231168964>