

Weaving Heritage into Fashion: An Experiential Approach to Tourism

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Abstract

India is a land of incredible diversity, where every 200 kilometres reveals distinct changes in clothing styles, accents, cuisines, and lifestyles. This cultural tapestry offers a rich and alluring experience for travellers, yet many of these treasures remain undiscovered. While India is renowned for its monumental and religious tourism, the country's fashion heritage remains largely unexplored as a potential catalyst for experiential tourism. With the Indian travel industry projected to grow significantly, surging from US\$ 75 billion in FY 2020 to US\$ 125 billion by FY 2027 (IBEF, 2024), tapping into unexplored domains like fashion heritage tourism could unlock substantial economic opportunities. This study identified regions such as Kutch (Gujarat), Majuli (Assam), and Pochampally (Telangana), known for unique crafts like Bandhani, Muga silk, and Ikat weaving, documenting the challenges faced by artisans and evaluating their potential to drive fashion heritage tourism. A survey conducted with 250 participants across India, comprising Gen Z and Millennials, explored differences in interest and awareness in fashion and heritage tourism, using t-ratios for analysis. Findings suggest that shopping and experiential tourism are primary motivations for visiting these destinations, highlighting the rich cultural narratives and socio-economic benefits of promoting these crafts. The study offers insights into developing sustainable heritage tourism by understanding underexplored crafts, supporting the preservation of traditional skills, and improving artisan livelihoods. Additionally, it provides strategic recommendations for policymakers to create targeted marketing campaigns and infrastructure improvements, fostering a more inclusive and diversified tourism sector.

Keywords: Fashion, tourism, culture, diversity, art and crafts, sustainability, heritage tourism

Introduction

India's diverse fashion and cultural heritage weaves a rich tapestry of traditional and contemporary styles, reflecting the country's history, geography, and cultural diversity. From vibrant Gujarat sarees to intricate Kanchipuram weaves and luxurious Varanasi silks, this heritage offers a unique window into India's cultural past and present. This living tradition not only showcases artistic and craft traditions but also draws tourists from home and abroad, creating a powerful synergy between art, culture, and tourism that bolsters India's textile industry and regional economies.

The impact of this interconnection is evident in tourism statistics across various regions. For example, Rajasthan, which led domestic tourism with 54.5 million visitors in 2021 (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2022), sees its textile sector contributing 15%, which amounts to 1.7 lakh crores to the industrial output. This highlights how the state's rich textile heritage plays a crucial role in attracting

visitors and boosting the local economy. On a national scale, textile and handicraft purchases comprise 20-25% of tourist expenditure (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2024), underscoring the significant role that traditional craftsmanship plays in driving tourism revenue.

This substantial contribution exemplifies how tourism, recognized as a powerful driver for socio-economic progress, aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It promotes economic growth, job creation, and cultural heritage preservation while minimising environmental impact, particularly through the promotion and sale of traditional handicrafts and textiles to tourists. This alignment is reflected in global tourism indices and India's growing tourism numbers, with India ranking 39th out of 119 on the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI), which emphasizes sustainability and inclusivity (World Economic Forum, 2024).

India's tourism sector has seen significant growth, with Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) rising to 6.44 million in 2022, a 321.54% increase from 2021. Domestic tourism surged to 1,731.01 million visits in 2022, up 155.45% from the previous year, while foreign tourist visits reached 8.59 million, marking a 714.26% increase (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2022). This growth is exemplified in destinations like Varanasi, where textile heritage has become a major attraction for both domestic and international tourists.

Varanasi's tourism now extends beyond traditional sightseeing, offering immersive experiences such as visits to old silk-weaving houses. The State Tourism Department's planned Heritage Walk, showcasing weaver's colonies in Ramnagar and Madanpura District, responds to tourists' growing interest in exploring the weaver's trail and learning about Banarasi sari weaving. This integration of textile heritage into tourism itineraries not only preserves local craftsmanship but also boosts Varanasi's tourism economy by offering unique, culturally rich experiences (Top News Network, 2016). Such initiatives demonstrate how the promotion of traditional crafts and textiles can contribute to sustainable tourism development, aligning with global sustainability goals while driving economic growth and cultural preservation.

Despite this growth and success in places like Varanasi, India's fashion heritage potential in tourism remains largely underexplored on a national scale. There is significant opportunity to integrate these cultural assets into the broader tourism narrative, attracting culture-seeking travellers through a variety of experiences. Textile tours, fashion festivals, and craft villages could be developed and promoted in other regions, mirroring the success seen in Varanasi. These experiences not only preserve traditional crafts but also support local economies, further enhancing the connection between fashion heritage and tourism development.

Government initiatives like the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and Incredible India 2.0 campaign are developing themed tourist circuits and promoting India's cultural richness globally (Gupta, 2019). These initiatives support the integration of fashion heritage into tourism experiences.

This study examines the varying levels of interest in immersive and experiential tours showcasing India's cultural heritage, focusing on differences, particularly between Generation Z and millennials in fashion and heritage tourism, and between male and female travellers in shopping tourism. The research aims to identify these demographic variations, evaluating the necessity for targeted marketing approaches, and assessing the demand for tailored tourism offerings. By analysing these demographic disparities, the study seeks to provide insights that could inform more effective approaches to promoting and delivering cultural heritage experiences in India's tourism sector. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer preferences and behaviours, potentially leading to more tailored and successful strategies in cultural tourism development and marketing.

Exploring the preferences of the new age tourists and travellers will allow tourism stakeholders to design and market fashion heritage tours that cater specifically to these demographics. India's fashion heritage offers a unique avenue for tourism, blending traditional crafts with modern design to appeal to diverse audiences. By tailoring experiences, operators can engage different age groups and genders, from Gen Z travellers learning ancient embroidery to Millennials exploring contemporary ateliers.

This study focuses on three key regions with unique and underexplored textile arts: Kutch in Gujarat, known for its Bandhani; Majuli in Assam, famous for Muga silk; and Pochampally in Telangana, renowned for Ikat. These regions showcase immense potential for tourism development centred around their distinctive fashion heritage.

By leveraging these unique textile traditions, India can significantly enhance its competitiveness in the global tourism market. The Indian government's "Adopt a Heritage" project plays a crucial role in this endeavour. Led by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), this initiative invites private and public sector "Monument Mitras" to enhance heritage sites. It aims to improve visitor experiences by providing essential amenities and modern features at cultural landmarks (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2023). This project could have textile heritage sites, creating a more immersive experience for tourists interested in India's fashion legacy.

Integrating fashion heritage into broader tourism strategies not only capitalises on India's rich cultural assets but also contributes to the overall growth and sustainability of the tourism industry. It ensures a sustainable growth trajectory by weaving together cultural preservation, economic development, and unforgettable tourist experiences. By focusing on these unique textile regions and supporting them through government initiatives, India can create a new niche in cultural tourism. This approach not only preserves traditional crafts but also creates economic opportunities for local communities, ultimately solidifying India's position as a top cultural tourism destination that offers authentic, diverse, and engaging experiences for visitors from around the world.

Rationale of the study

India's tourism and hospitality sector has emerged as a significant contributor to the country's economic growth. As of 2019, India ranked 10th globally in terms of travel and tourism's contribution to GDP, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The sector's economic impact reached US\$ 199.6 billion in 2022, with projections indicating continued expansion. The industry is poised for substantial growth, with forecasts suggesting an annual increase of 7.1%. The WTTC's Economic Impact 2023 report noted a 5.9% growth in India's Travel and Tourism GDP contribution (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2024). By 2028, the sector's contribution to GDP is expected to reach US\$ 512 billion, up from US\$ 178 billion in 2021. Additionally, it's anticipated to generate approximately 53 million jobs by 2029 (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2024).

While the growth of tourism in India presents numerous opportunities, it also brings significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability. Forkpa et al. (2023) highlighted a critical issue facing many popular Indian tourist destinations known as overcrowding. This phenomenon not only leads to environmental degradation and increased waste but also puts a strain on local resources, potentially undermining the very cultural and natural attractions that draw visitors in the first place.

To combat these challenges, sustainable tourism practices are being implemented across the country. These initiatives often involve local communities, providing them with employment opportunities and helping to preserve their cultural heritage. Education and awareness programs play a crucial role in this

process, targeting both tourists and residents to foster a collective understanding of responsible tourism practices. (Forkpa et al., 2023)

These efforts align perfectly with the promotion of local products, which stands as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism. Shopping tourism has become an inseparable part of travel experiences, often influencing destination choices and even serving as a primary motivation for trips (UNWTO, 2014). In India, Srivastav (2017) emphasizes that shopping tourism not only provides economic benefits to artisans and their families but also plays a crucial role in preserving and revitalizing traditional arts and crafts. It creates employment opportunities, acts as a marketing tool for destinations, and contributes to the empowerment of marginalized craftsmen communities. This holistic approach not only enhances the visitor experience but also ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed more equitably, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Building on this, Mehrotra (2019) emphasized the role of 'Pro-Poor Tourism Strategies' in sustainable community development. By focusing on sectors like handicrafts, these strategies create employment opportunities that can effectively combat poverty while preserving traditional skills. The importance of understanding tourists' awareness and perceptions of handicraft products cannot be overstated, as it provides valuable insights into how these items are viewed by potential buyers, ultimately shaping marketing strategies and product development.

Sustainable tourism has emerged as a powerful force for cultural preservation and exchange, offering a multitude of socio-cultural benefits that extend far beyond economic gains. As Mitra (2021) observed, this form of tourism serves as a bridge between diverse cultures, fostering understanding and enrichment through meaningful interactions. By encouraging the continuation of local customs and traditions, sustainable tourism plays a crucial role in safeguarding the unique heritage of communities worldwide. The impact of sustainable tourism is particularly profound in countries with rich cultural legacies, such as India. Menon et al. 2021 highlighted that for many travellers, cultural experiences are not just an add-on but often the primary motivation for choosing India as their destination. Even when cultural tourism isn't the explicit focus, it inevitably becomes an integral part of the visitor's journey, woven into the fabric of their Indian experience.

India's rich cultural heritage is particularly evident in its artistic traditions, especially in textiles and fabric art. The country's fabric art history spans over 5000 years, featuring techniques such as resist dyeing, hand painting, embroidery, and brocade (Das, 1992). One specific example of this heritage is Bandhani, an ancient art that began about 5000 years ago in the state of Gujarat and Rajasthan. (Acharya and Samani, 2017)

Bandhani is majorly practised in the Kutch region of Gujarat, India, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse craft traditions. These crafts, often specific to villages, are categorised into eight main groups across the district including Bandhani, embroidery, weaving, block printing, batik, wood carving, copper bell making, rogan art, pottery, and leatherwork. While some Kutch artisans have achieved international recognition, many, especially those in remote villages, face significant challenges (Priyadarshi & Patel, 2019).

Despite the global appreciation for Kutch's handicrafts, the economic reality for many artisans is stark. Priyadarshi and Patel (2019) highlight that numerous craftspeople in remote areas struggle with economic hardship and lack of social recognition. Many earn only Rs. 5000 per month, a meagre sum that fails to reflect their years of dedication and skill. This economic disparity has led to a concerning trend of occupational shift, with the younger generation increasingly reluctant to continue these traditional crafts.

In other parts of India, such as Majuli Island in Assam, offers a compelling case study of traditional crafts and their potential role in sustainable tourism development. Bordoloi and Das (2023) highlight Majuli's deeply rooted weaving traditions as an integral part of the local cultural fabric and economy. Weaving is ubiquitous across the island, with looms present in every household regardless of caste, creed, or social background. This cultural practice is not only a tradition but also a significant economic driver, with weaving cooperatives like 'Rengam' providing employment opportunities for local women and fostering increased community participation in weaving activities over time. The island's weaving industry is further distinguished by Assam's unique Muga silk, known for its distinctive golden yellow colour (Paul & Jena, 2017). This local specialty adds to Majuli's cultural richness and potential appeal to tourists interested in traditional crafts.

Beyond its weaving traditions, Majuli Island possesses substantial untapped tourism potential, particularly in river-based activities. The island boasts a unique blend of demographic, cultural, religious, and natural resources that could make it an ideal destination for river tourism (Bordoloi and Das, 2023). However, this faces significant challenges. The island's tourism development is constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited transportation and accommodation options, poor communication facilities, power shortages, security concerns, and the absence of a comprehensive tourism policy.

Similarly, the ikat textiles of Pochampally in Telangana, offers significant potential for tourism development. Pochampally, recognized as one of the best tourism villages by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2024), showcases the intricate artistry of ikat weaving. However, the preservation of this cultural treasure faces considerable challenges.

Greeshma et al. (2023) highlights the difficulties confronting Pochampally weavers, including fierce competition from power looms and inadequate wages. These factors not only threaten the survival of the craft but also discourage younger generations from pursuing this traditional art form. The situation in Pochampally reflects a broader issue facing many rural artisan communities across India.

These communities, rich in traditional crafts and cultural heritage, often struggle with economic challenges and lack of recognition. However, their unique skills and products present an opportunity in the context of rural tourism. Jha (2021) established that tourism experiences in rural areas are now an essential part of the modern tourism experience, offering potential for social integration, international understanding, and sustainable human development. For artisan communities in these regions, rural tourism could serve as a vehicle for poverty alleviation, job creation, environmental regeneration, and the advancement of women and other disadvantaged groups.

To address these challenges, Kar and Sahoo (2016) highlight the growing interest in leveraging rural tourism as a means of economic development and cultural preservation in India. Rural tourism is envisioned as a catalyst for generating employment and sustainable livelihoods for local communities, reviving old arts and crafts, and reducing poverty while preserving rural Indian culture.

Tourism, particularly sustainable and rural tourism, serves as a vital bridge between preserving cultural heritage and fostering economic development. Studies by Jha (2021) and Varma (2023) demonstrate that tourism revitalizes rural economies, creates employment, and maintains ancient artisanal practices. It provides a platform for authentic cultural exchanges, enriching visitors' experiences and instilling pride in local traditions.

The WTTC's projections underscore tourism's significant contribution to India's GDP and job market. Thoughtfully implemented, tourism can address rural poverty, cultural erosion, and environmental degradation, transforming remote villages into vibrant centers of cultural exchange and economic activity.

Ultimately, sustainable tourism stands as a cornerstone for inclusive growth, balancing economic progress with the preservation of India's rich and diverse cultural landscape.

One promising strategy within this context is the concept of experiential tourism. Varma (2023) describes this as a form of tourism that offers travellers opportunities for cultural, social, and emotional enrichment through authentic experiences. Also known as "immersion travel," this approach could potentially provide a win-win solution for both local artisans and visitors.

This study focused primarily on Gen Z and Millennials (born 1980-2010) for fashion heritage and cultural travel interests due to their significant influence on India's tourism industry. These generations represent a substantial portion of India's population, entering their prime earning years (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, 2022). According to a Morgan Stanley report (2017), India was projected to have the largest millennial population globally by 2022, with about 410 million millennials.

The choice to study these age demographics is further justified by recent research indicating that Millennials and Gen Z are reshaping the tourism landscape with their preferences for unique and authentic experiences. A study by Robaina-Calderín (2023) highlighted that Millennials and Gen Z travelers prioritize immersive experiences and cultural engagement over traditional activities especially when it comes to museum tourism, aligning with Sofronov's (2018) observation that Millennials seek new experiences. This trend underscores the importance of understanding their travel preferences and behaviors to shape the future of tourism in India.

For shopping tourism specifically, the study examined gender differences. This focus on gender demographics is supported by several key findings that gender can influence the types of products tourists are interested in purchasing, making it a crucial factor in shopping tourism research. The economic significance of this aspect was highlighted by Timothy (2005), who noted that shopping could account for up to one-third of tourist spending in some destinations.

By studying gender-specific patterns and preferences in shopping tourism, the research aims to inform more effective marketing strategies and help optimize retail offerings for tourists (Rosenbaum & Spears, 2005). This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in the context of tourism shopping.

Research Aims and Objectives

To compare and analyze the acceptance levels of immersive and experiential tours showcasing India's cultural heritage between Millennials and Gen Z, and to examine and evaluate the differences in interest levels towards shopping tourism focused on Indian art and craft between women and men.

Research Objective 1

To compare and analyse the acceptance levels of immersive and experiential tours showcasing India's cultural heritage between Millennials and Gen Z.

Research Objective 2

To examine and evaluate the differences in interest levels towards shopping tourism focused on Indian art and craft between women and men.

Research Design and Procedure

The subsequent sections offer a detailed analysis of our statistical findings for each hypothesis, providing insights into how demographic factors influence preferences for cultural experiences and art-centric

shopping within the tourism sector. It focused on two primary objectives: comparing acceptance levels of immersive fashion cultural tours between Millennials and Gen Z and examining interest levels in art and craft shopping tourism between women and men.

To gather data, an online survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire distributed to 250 participants across India. Age-wise, the sample was diverse, with 44% falling in the 18-27 age range. This age group is commonly denoted as the Gen Z for individuals born between 1995-2009. The second age group was millennials, from age 28-43, representing 35% of participants. Millennials refer to individuals born between 1980-1994 (Howe & Strauss, 1992). The remaining 21% comprised individuals 48 years and older. The individuals within this age group are denoted as the Gen X (Coupland, 1991).

The gender distribution comprised 51% (127) of the sample, while females accounted for 49% (123). In terms of occupational demographics, the sample was primarily composed of employed individuals, who made up 75% of the participants. Students constituted the second-largest group at 18%. The remaining 7% was divided among self-employed individuals and homemakers.

The researchers employed a random sampling method, ensuring an unbiased selection process. Likert scale was used (1 denoted very likely; 2 denoted likely; 3 denoted neutral; 4 denoted unlikely and 5 denoted very unlikely) for assessing items measuring acceptance of Fashion heritage tours and interest in shopping tourism.

To investigate the differences in interest and awareness in fashion heritage tourism and shopping tourism in India, two key hypotheses were formulated –

Hypothesis I

Millennials and Gen Z vary on acceptance towards immersive and experiential tours showcasing India's cultural heritage.

Hypothesis II

Women and Men vary on interest levels in shopping tourism focused on Indian art and craft.

For data analysis, the study employed independent sample t-tests to compare the means of their dependent variables between demographic groups. This included descriptive statistics, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, and effect size calculations to determine the magnitude of any significant differences. All participants were informed about the study's purpose and gave consent, with data anonymized to protect privacy. This approach facilitated in gathering meaningful data on consumer preferences and behaviours, contributing to the evolving understanding of experiential tourism and consumer behaviour in India's cultural tourism sector.

Results

These results gave insights to understand the nuances of consumer preferences and indicated potential strategies for marketing and promoting fashion heritage tourism and shopping tourism in India to specific demographic groups.

An independent sample t-test was done to compare differences between the variations of willingness portrayed by Gen z and Millennials in Fashion heritage and experiential tourism as well as by males and females in shopping tourism.

For the first Hypothesis, Millennials and Gen Z differ significantly on their acceptance levels towards immersive and experiential tours showcasing India's cultural heritage. For $t(165.525) = 5.781, (p < .5) df$

was adjusted as Levene's test was significant and equal variances are not assumed, with a small effect size ($d = .774$). The effect size is moderate, and the difference is significant, thus, the alternate hypothesis is accepted, and null is rejected. Also, Gen Z ($M = 4.541$, $SD = .788$) exhibit a slightly higher acceptance as compared to Millennials ($M = 4.016$, $SD = .390$).

For the second hypothesis, Males and females differ significantly in their interest levels in shopping tourism focused on Indian art and craft. For $t(3.317)$, ($p < .05$), the df was adjusted as Levene's test was non-significant and equal variances are not assumed, with a low effect size ($d = .466$). Though the effect size is small, but the difference is significant, thus, the alternate hypothesis is accepted, and the null is rejected. Also, for Males ($M = 1.100$, $SD = .301$), interest levels in shopping tourism focused on Indian art and craft is more than Females ($M = 1.000$, $SD = .000$).

Discussion & Implications

Fashion heritage tourism emerges as a powerful tool for uplifting artisan communities and bolstering the Indian economy. By forging direct connections between craftspeople and global consumers, it has the potential to increase demand for authentic, handcrafted textiles, thereby enhancing artisans' incomes and social recognition. This niche sector can attract investments in local infrastructure and amenities, improving the quality of life in artisan communities while preserving traditional skills through intergenerational knowledge transfer. On a broader scale, it diversifies India's tourism offerings, attracting high-value cultural tourists and extending their stays, thus boosting foreign exchange earnings and job creation across the tourism value chain.

The study's findings, which reveal higher interest among Gen Z in fashion heritage and cultural tourism and male participants in shopping tourism, reflect changing consumer trends and values. Gen Z's heightened awareness of sustainability and authenticity likely drives their interest in traditional crafts and experiences. The unexpected higher male participation suggests a shift in fashion interests and a growing appreciation for cultural heritage, challenging conventional gender norms in fashion consumption. These results underscore the potential of fashion heritage tourism to not only preserve cultural traditions but also to appeal to emerging market segments, amplifying its positive impact on artisan communities and the broader economy.

Marketing Strategies

The research reveals significant opportunities for tailored marketing approaches in fashion heritage tourism. Gen Z shows higher receptivity to immersive cultural experiences, suggesting campaigns should emphasise interactive and technologically enhanced aspects of cultural heritage tours for this demographic. For Millennials, marketing could focus on the educational value and authenticity of experiences. Regarding shopping tourism, gender-specific marketing should highlight diverse aspects of Indian art and craft, potentially emphasising craftsmanship and heritage for men, while showcasing design innovation and cultural significance for women, all while avoiding stereotypes. These strategies should be applied to promote the unique textile traditions of regions like Kutch, Majuli, and Pochampally, emphasising authentic, hands-on experiences such as weaving demonstrations and workshops.

Implications for Tourism

The varying preferences between generational cohorts and genders present opportunities for diversifying India's tourism offerings. Tour operators can develop more targeted packages, incorporating cutting-edge

technology like virtual and augmented reality for Gen Z-focused tours, while offering more structured, in-depth experiences for Millennials. This tailored approach could lead to increased engagement, longer stays, and higher spending, ultimately boosting the economic impact of cultural and shopping tourism in India. Fashion heritage tourism has the potential to drive economic development in rural areas like Kutch and Majuli, while simultaneously contributing to cultural preservation by creating demand for traditional crafts.

Infrastructure Development

To support the growing interest in immersive cultural experiences, particularly among Gen Z, infrastructure improvements should focus on integrating technology into heritage sites. This could include developing interactive museums with AR exhibits, creating tech-enabled artisanal hubs, and establishing well-designed, Instagram-worthy shopping districts for handicrafts. Additionally, investing in robust digital infrastructure to support virtual tours and online shopping experiences could cater to the tech-savvy preferences of younger generations while also appealing to Millennials' desire for convenience. These enhancements should be coupled with improvements in basic infrastructure such as transportation links, accommodation facilities, communication networks, and power supply, particularly in remote areas like Majuli. Such developments would not only benefit tourists but also significantly improve the quality of life for residents.

Economic Benefits and Tourism Diversification

The findings suggest that fashion heritage tourism has significant potential for economic upliftment in India. This aligns with previous research highlighting the economic impact of cultural tourism. By tapping into India's rich textile and craft traditions, fashion heritage tourism can create new revenue streams and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas where many traditional crafts originate. Moreover, this niche can contribute to the diversification of India's tourism offerings and is crucial for sustainable tourism development. Fashion heritage tourism provides a unique angle that combines cultural experiences with shopping opportunities, potentially attracting a broader range of tourists and extending their length of stay.

Cultural Preservation and Tourist Motivations

The study underscores the importance of preserving traditional skills and crafts through tourism. This echoes the assertion that tourism can serve as a vehicle for cultural preservation. Our findings reveal that experiential activities and shopping are key motivations for visiting heritage fashion destinations. This suggests that tourists are not merely passive observers but active participants in cultural preservation, seeking immersive experiences that connect them with India's textile heritage.

Policy Recommendations

Given the strong interest in cultural heritage across demographics, policies should focus on preserving and promoting India's diverse cultural assets. This could involve implementing educational programs to pass down traditional skills, providing financial support for artisans, and creating protected geographical indications for unique regional crafts. Policies should also encourage the integration of modern technology in cultural preservation efforts, aligning with Gen Z's preferences for immersive experiences. Furthermore,

initiatives to support sustainable and responsible tourism practices should be developed, appealing to the environmentally conscious values of both Millennials and Gen Z.

Comprehensive tourism policies for regions like Majuli can be implemented to guide sustainable development. Economic incentives for artisans, especially in areas like Kutch where many earn Rs. 5000 per month (Priyadarshi and Patel, 2019), are crucial to encourage the continuation of traditional crafts. Programs to promote skill transmission to younger generations should be developed to address the occupational shift seen in places like Kutch. Policies supporting the development of cooperative organisations like 'Rengam' in Majuli can also play a vital role in preserving local traditions and providing economic opportunities.

Limitations and Challenges

While fashion heritage and cultural tourism in India's unexplored regions offer immense potential for economic development and cultural preservation, they also present significant challenges and limitations. As these unique destinations like Kutch, Majuli, and Pochampally begin to attract more attention from tourists and developers, it becomes crucial to address the potential pitfalls that could arise from increased tourism activity. These challenges range from cultural and environmental concerns to infrastructural and economic issues, each requiring careful consideration and strategic planning. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, stakeholders can work towards developing sustainable and responsible fashion heritage tourism that benefits local communities while preserving the authenticity and integrity of India's rich cultural heritage.

Cultural Appropriation

There's a risk of tourists misunderstanding or misrepresenting local cultural practices and traditions. This could lead to the commodification of sacred or significant cultural elements, potentially offending local communities and diluting the authenticity of cultural experiences.

Safety and Security

Unexplored areas often lack the infrastructure and security measures found in established tourist destinations. This could pose risks to visitors, especially in remote regions like Majuli, where factors such as poor transportation, inadequate communication facilities, and security concerns already deter potential visitors. Sharma (2016) stated that Safety and security of the tourists are major concerns to develop any kind of tourism in any country. Foreign tourists consider our country as a nation with deteriorating social and political turmoil, government instability and insecurity of life, safety and security of tourist especially women tourists. Moreover, when tourists come to India to enjoy its natural beauty, they are afraid of cheating and harassment at the airport, hijacking on the spots, and the disturbance of the beggars. All these events impede tourists' interest and enthusiasm to explore the rural area of India.

Environmental Impact

Increased tourism in previously unexplored areas could lead to environmental degradation if not managed sustainably. This is particularly concerning in ecologically sensitive areas like Majuli Island, where uncontrolled tourism development could harm the local ecosystem. Verma and Jain (2018) stated that Rural tourism development in India presents environmental challenges. Visitors may overexploit natural resources, heavily impacting the environment. The required infrastructure, transportation, and facilities

for tourism can cause environmental distortion. Infrastructure development may compromise natural beauty, while overpopulation in tourist areas can spoil scenic landscapes. These factors collectively threaten the ecological balance and aesthetic appeal of rural destinations, necessitating careful management to preserve the very attributes that attract tourists.

Limited Infrastructure

India's rural landscape, wildlife, community life, and natural heritage hold significant appeal for foreign tourists. However, the country's rural tourism potential is hindered by underdeveloped infrastructure and insufficient facilities. Many villages lack basic amenities such as all-weather roads and reliable electricity (Sharma, 2016). As noted in the case of Majuli, many potential fashion heritage tourism destinations lack adequate infrastructure. This includes limited transportation options, insufficient accommodation, poor communication facilities, and unreliable power supply, which can significantly hamper tourism development and visitor experiences.

Preservation vs Commercialization

There's a delicate balance between preserving authentic cultural practices and commercialising them for tourism. Over-commercialization could lead to the loss of traditional techniques and cultural significance, as seen in Pochampally where there's been a decline in weaving households due to changing market trends. Conversely, strict preservation might limit economic opportunities for local artisans. The commercialization of culture as local cultural activities and traditions are transformed into tourist attractions and promoted to tourists, tourism can also result in the commodification of culture. Since they are used for profit rather than being appreciated for their cultural significance, this might result in the loss of authenticity and meaning of these behaviours and traditions (Pietrobruno, 2009).

Future Research Directions

To build on the findings, future research could explore the long-term impact of technologically enhanced cultural experiences on tourism patterns and cultural preservation. Investigating the role of social media influencers in shaping perceptions of cultural heritage among different demographics could provide valuable insights for marketing strategies. Additionally, studying the economic and social impacts of gender-specific approaches to shopping tourism could assist in effective promotion of Indian art and craft. Research into cross-cultural comparisons of fashion heritage tourism preferences among international visitors could also yield valuable insights for expanding India's global tourism appeal.

These findings have several implications for tourism planners, policymakers, and businesses in India. First, they underscore the need for collaborative efforts between the fashion industry, cultural institutions, and tourism sector to develop compelling fashion heritage tourism products. Second, they highlight the importance of preserving and promoting India's diverse textile traditions not just as cultural artifacts, but as living, evolving practices that can engage modern tourists.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of fashion heritage tourism on local communities and traditional craft practices. Additionally, comparative studies with other countries known for their textile heritage could provide valuable insights for developing best practices in this emerging niche.

In conclusion, the research highlights the significant potential of fashion heritage tourism in India, particularly in regions like Kutch, Majuli, and Pochampally. These areas, each with unique textile traditions and cultural significance, offer rich opportunities for immersive cultural experiences. Fashion

heritage tourism can drive economic upliftment, preserve traditional crafts, and attract diverse tourists seeking authentic encounters. Addressing challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, cultural appropriation, and environmental impact is crucial. By implementing targeted marketing strategies, promoting sustainable practices, and investing in local infrastructure, India can develop a vibrant fashion heritage tourism sector. This approach promises to enhance the livelihoods of artisans, support cultural preservation, and diversify the country's tourism offerings. Furthermore, integrating modern technology and tailored marketing strategies can cater to the preferences of different demographic groups, ensuring broader appeal. A strategic focus on these elements can lead to increased foreign exchange earnings, job creation, and overall economic growth. The findings underscore the need for collaborative efforts between the fashion industry, cultural institutions, and the tourism sector to create compelling fashion heritage tourism products. Ultimately, this niche can significantly contribute to India's economic development and cultural enrichment, ensuring the sustainability of its rich textile heritage.

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