

# Role of Online Technology for COVID Resilience among Handicraft Artisans

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## Abstract

The handicraft sector is the second highest source of employment and sustenance after agriculture for craftspeople and artisans who comprise the third largest economically weaker section in India. The onset of COVID-19 in 2020 disrupted the entire system with an estimated two million in the handicrafts sector who lost their jobs, leaving them vulnerable. Government initiatives and organizational interventions by autonomous bodies and NGOs endeavored to rejuvenate the sector by building resilience to support and facilitate the craft practitioners. Constraints of offline meetings and physical store transactions have been in contrast to the undisputed influence of the internet as the most viable mode of connecting the makers and buyers. With reference to turnwood lacware craft of toy making in the Channapatna cluster of Karnataka, this article discusses the upsurge in internet use during COVID indicating increasing resilience among the craftspeople and artisans as they recognized the potential of facilitating e-commerce through digital transactions in online markets by reaching out to maximum consumers and support groups through the social media, as well as web and mobile platforms. Research methods include participant observation and interviews of craftspeople and experts from three organizations, namely EPCH—a non-profit organization that supports artisans for overseas trade, Artisans Pride—an NGO that trains and supports the craftspeople, and Channapatna Crafts Park—a registered society that includes representatives from the state government, trade promotion organizations and manufacturer-exporters to preserve, support and increase artisanal skills for higher employability. In spite of training artisan groups in the use of select apps for online financial transactions to increase the volume of their business, experts were of the opinion that after the completion of training, artisans do not practice the applications of their learning. It is concluded that the understanding and expectations of quick solutions and immediate financial gain may not necessarily be feasible, and that resilience to persist with the application of training inputs for business expansion, is imperative.

**Keywords:** Channapatna toys, craft organizations, online technology, digital marketing, resilience

## Introduction

India has more than seven hundred crafts that are identified with specific regions or tribes and reflect the culture and traditions of those communities (Ranjan and Ranjan, 2009). By definition, a craft is considered either as being decorative in nature or of everyday use, and therefore, most handicraft products are placed in the category of non-essential items (Pati, 2020). In the final report of International Symposium on Crafts and the International Market: Trade and Customs Codification, handicraft is defined as 'Products that are produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains a most substantial component of the finished product. The special nature of the artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetics, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant' (UNESCO, UNCTAD and WTO, 1997). Handicrafts provide employment and sustenance to craftspeople who comprise the third largest segment among the economically weak in India (Pati, 2020). Though fragmented, the Indian handicraft industry has seven million regional artisans and over 67 thousand exporters and export houses dealing in art and craftsmanship in the domestic and global markets (IBEF, 2021). Export Promotion Council Handicrafts (EPCH) reports that handicraft exports from India increased by almost 2 percent annually to USD 3.39 billion in 2020 (ibid.). However, this is a small percentage of the global market for handicrafts which is predicted to grow to USD 514.92 billion during 2021-2025, progressing at a CAGR of 13 percent during the same period (Technavio, 2021). The under performance of the Indian handicraft industry has been attributed to various causes such as lack of technical and market knowledge, and not fulfilling the requirements of the mainstream market (Nagori and Saxena, 2012). Disadvantages stemming from the inability to leverage internet reach, lack of knowledge about quality standards, inefficient planning, inadequate packaging, and lack of after sales services weaken the sector (Banik, 2017). Despite several initiatives and schemes by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, the pre-existing challenges of the handicrafts sector were aggravated by the spreading pandemic. The nationwide lockdown in early 2020 to curb its spread, impacted the MSMEs in terms of unavailability of raw materials, reduction in productivity, lack of financial support and liquidity crunch resulting in the closure

of many small and medium enterprises (Tripathy and Bisoyi, 2021). An estimated two million in the handicrafts sector lost their jobs during the pandemic (Satsangi, 2020).

Resilience, defined as the 'ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change' (Merriam-Webster dictionary) was evinced by the Indian crafts practitioners who coped with the national hazard of COVID-19 by adopting new ways to continue in their traditional profession with more effective marketing through online technology. The upsurge in internet use during the pandemic indicated the increasing resilience among the craftspeople and artisans as they recognized the potential of facilitating e-commerce through digital transactions in online markets by reaching out to maximum consumers and support groups through the social media, as well as web and mobile platforms (Sekuloska and Erceg, 2019). Artisans have the adaptability to new skills which, combined with strong family and community ties, motivates them to have a resilient attitude towards challenges (Muyiwa, 2020). Adaptation to the culture of 'new normal' was a widespread response during the nationwide lockdown in India from March 2020. It ushered in a new way of life prompted by diktats for social distancing and COVID protocols that necessitated significant adjustments in daily activities. A United Nations Policy Brief claims that the digital transformation already taking place prior to the COVID-19 crisis and the exponential increase in e-commerce has created new jobs and income earning opportunities which have the potential to spur house hold income, lift people out of poverty, and increase resilience of rural communities (Deganis, Haghian and Tagashira, 2021). Online technology comprising social media for personal and business connections, online transactions like UPI and Wallets, e-commerce platforms for the purchase of products, and digital marketing for selling products through websites and mobile applications (Ghosal and Prasad, 2019), offered solutions maintaining the mandated protocols. While urban India was more amenable to adopting online technology due to the availability of related information and infrastructure, rural India lacked adequate access to it (Biswas, 2021). Craft clusters need digital tools for product development with marketing and online sales for rural India to target a long-term recovery plan and make the cluster resilient to such unpredicted situations (Khatib, 2021). As handicrafts are practiced primarily in rural India, the question arises whether online technology is widely accepted and can increase the resilience of craftspeople during the situational constraints of the pandemic. This study was undertaken to understand the role and relevance of online technology for craft practitioners in the rural handicraft sectors in supporting their businesses.

## Role of Facilitators

A review of organizational interventions and government stimulus packages for the craftspeople and artisans, as well as the role of the internet during the pandemic-induced constraints was undertaken.

### *Private and government interventions*

In 2020, several individuals and organizations contributed their efforts towards improving the condition of craftspeople and artisans. The Government of India increased export incentive rates through the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS) from 5-7 percent to help exporters recover their investment costs (IBEF, 2021). Financial stimuli provided by the government and the Reserve Bank of India offered ways to address this situational disadvantage by introducing long term funding schemes by banks to lend money at reduced rates, issuing loan moratoriums for six months and providing other financial support measures for relief to the sector. For the *karigar*<sup>1</sup> and the weaver, a substantial part of whose business being dependent on offline *haat*<sup>2</sup>, faced supply chain disruption causing a disconnect between the makers and customers. Three months after the nationwide lockdown, e-commerce giant Amazon India waived off its fees for the artisans, weavers and women entrepreneurs for 10 weeks. This was part of the company's stand for handmade initiative to help over one million entrepreneurs including 0.8 million craftspeople, artisans and weavers from the Amazon Karigar program and more than 0.28 million women entrepreneurs from the Amazon Saheli program. Partnership with other online businesses increased the efficacy of these initiatives enabling customer demand for the locally crafted, handmade products from Karigar and Saheli sellers as well as a curated selection of products for women, by women (Amazon, 2020). Creative Dignity, an online volunteer movement of various stakeholders including over 500 diverse creative producers, small enterprises, practitioners, and civil society organizations across India built an ecosystem by mobilizing funds for rehabilitation of the craftspeople and artisans, and rejuvenation of the crafts sector. This was achieved by listing diverse and dispersed sector of the practitioners and their product categories on its website thereby enabling a direct connect between individual consumers and organizations. The Creative Dignity website also includes manuals for artisans and novice entrepreneurs to learn online business methods including photography of finished products, making online payments, developing catalogues and promotional materials, and promotion and sales on social media. Tilfi is a digital-first brand that identified a new market segment of luxury e-commerce leveraging the beauty and cultural heritage of traditional craftsmanship

of Banaras handloom sarees, Indian apparel and fabrics through a design narrative that resonates with Indian and global markets (Chawla, 2021). Supported by fund-raising platform Give India, to generate financial support for sustained livelihoods of artisans during COVID-19, Tilfi also pledged 15 percent of its sales proceeds to help craftspeople and artisans in the remote villages of Uttar Pradesh. Habba.org is an online marketplace for artisans based on the philosophy of self-reliance encapsulated in the objective of Atmanirbhar Bharat using technology to generate consumer demand for goods worth INR 1000 million. This platform has attracted consumers through its promise of honest and transparent pricing, authenticity certification, rural employment opportunities and enhanced customer experience through films and sample boxes for touch and feel (Biswas, 2021).

Other handicraft e-commerce platforms such as GoCoop, iTokri, Amazon Karigar, AuthIndia, The Craft House along with Okhai, FabIndia, Karagiri, and Kankatala supported online sales. GoCoop created training opportunities in photography which was a requirement for being listed in their online exhibition titled 'Go Swadeshi'. The attempt was to identify new markets in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, United Arab Emirates and Singapore, under the campaign 'Vocal for Local' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Kaushal, 2021). Brahmaputra Fables in Assam, an integrated platform for artisans and weavers trained local people to make Gamosa masks using locally available materials to be given as gifts during the Bihu festival instead of the traditional scarves, under the 'Gift a Mask' campaign (Mathew, 2020).

### ***Role of the internet***

Speaking at a virtual session titled 'Recrafting and Tailoring Artisanal Practices for a New Digital Economy' in 2020, fashion designer Ritu Kumar, with the founder and president of Dastakari Haat Samiti, Jaya Jaitly discussed the situational crisis in the crafts sector and possible solutions. The need to position and market handmade products in a premium category is essential so that consumers would be willing to pay higher prices for their value (Kaushik, 2020). NGOs and Trust organizations are emphatic that this sector needs support in terms of working capital, health insurance, social security, Goods and Service Tax (GST) relief, lower interest rates, corporate or bulk orders, and better logistics to combat the pandemic. However, meeting the objective of increasing sales is possible only by reaching out to a wider range of consumers through online marketing, designing and cataloguing (Pati, 2020; Kumar and Rajeev, 2019). A case study of handicrafts MSME in Mauritius revealed that Facebook was the most widely

used social networking website for artisans to connect with social and business circles, and reach out to potential consumers (Gobin, et al, 2017).

During the pandemic, suggestions for increasing resilience in the face of unexpected challenges in the handicrafts sector included financial support, consumer accessibility, feasibility studies of new markets, design development and networking. However, the primary need was to use the internet efficiently. India is the second largest online market after China with an estimated 749 million internet users in India in 2020 expected to increase to 932.22 million in 2022 and reach 1.5 billion users by 2040 (Basuroy, 2021). The study also states that despite strong internet penetration in urban as well as rural India, internet literacy and technological know-how is poor. The handicraft sector needs to be supported by inputs in website management, e-commerce, listing processes and digital marketing. The number of users of social networking sites increased during the ongoing pandemic. The Union Information Technology Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad informed that WhatsApp is the most used app in India (Chakravarti, 2021). Familiarity of artisans with social media platforms do not necessarily indicate their awareness of its potential for facilitating digital marketing (Agarwal, 2019). While online business transactions are increasing, the question remains whether the handicraft sector can leverage the considerable reach of online sites to gain visibility and increase sales.

This review shows that the constraints of offline meetings and physical store transactions are in contrast with the undisputed influence of the internet as the most viable mode of connecting makers and buyers. This raises questions on the extent of use of internet awareness among handicraft practitioners in the smaller clusters in India and the impact of digitization and online technologies during the lockdown and other locational constraints of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. To identify how online technologies can be used to address the needs of craft practitioners to increase their business and relevant training requirements, a study of the turn wood lacware cluster in Channapatna, Karnataka was undertaken. Channapatna is a small township with an estimated two thousand craftspeople whose livelihoods stem from making handcrafted toys, home decor and corporate gifts. This cluster was identified for three reasons: several years of doctoral research in this cluster, proximity of the cluster location enabling travel and interaction with the craft practitioners during the pandemic, and the availability of adequate infrastructure related to the internet to ascertain its optimal use by craftspeople and artisans.

## Research Methods

The methods used in this study stemmed from the objective of identifying the level and impact of online technology used in the Channapatna cluster during COVID-19. This included non-participant observation and interviews of professionals in select organizations and Channapatna lacware craft practitioners. The objective was to generate data on the current infrastructure availability and provide insights to their attitude towards internet use. Subsequently, 35 artisans identified through convenience sampling were interviewed to record their opinions and attitudes towards online technology. Experts were selected from three professional organizations that have been, for decades, engaged in developing and supporting this cluster through design inputs, skill training, provision of infrastructure, marketing facility, and exhibition platforms. These organizations were Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)—a non-profit organization that supports artisans for overseas trade, Artisans Pride—an NGO based in Channapatna that trains the craftspeople and supports them through exports of turn wood lacware toys, and Channapatna Crafts Park—an organization set up by government and non-government organizations to support artisans to avail of infrastructure required in the making of this handicraft. The experts were interviewed on the strategies adopted and the use of online technology by their respective organizations.

## Channapatna Cluster

Located between the metropolitan towns of Mysore and Bengaluru, Channapatna is a small township located in the district of Ramnagara, Karnataka spread over 13 square kilometers with a population of 72,000 people. An estimated 3000 traditional artisans in Channapatna are engaged in the production of lacware toys, a handicraft with two hundred years of history. Channapatna is referred to as *Gombegala Ooru* in *Kannada*<sup>3</sup> (*trans.* Toy Town) for its eponymous products comprising toys, home and office décor and jewellery of lacware. Channapatna handicrafts are made of timber from the local Aale or Hale tree (*Wrightia tinctoria*) which is also known for its medicinal properties. Lac is the resinous secretion of a species of lac insects, of which the most cultivated one is *Kerria lacca*. In the lacware process, the lac is melted, mixed with colors and converted to sticks to coat the wood using the turn-wood technique on basic speed lathes. Later dried palmyra leaves are used to polish the lac on wood to give a characteristic smooth and shiny finish. As the materials and processes are eco-friendly, they are suited primarily for making children's toys. Channapatna toys have a Geographic Indication tag issued by the Geographical Indication Registry under the

Department of Industry Promotion and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

Several stakeholders are involved in the value chain:

- Craftspeople and artisans who are the product makers in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled categories with skills in turning, lac coloring, assembly, cleaning and packaging;
- Mind workers who make decisions on the final product output which includes designers, organizations and business channels;
- Vendors of raw materials include lac vendor, machine vendor, blacksmith/toolmaker, transporter, and the forest department for wood;
- Bridgers who facilitate activities including the government, self-help groups, and non-government organizations;
- Retailers and wholesalers of the product.

However, interactions amongst the stakeholders being largely informal, makes it difficult to gather previous data for comparative analysis.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (United Nations) document repository (FAO, 2013), there are over 1500-2500 male and female craftspeople and artisans with varying skill levels categorized as skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled engaged in this craft sector. There are three types of units in Channapatna:

- Household units: Family members including men, women and children make products in their homes using either electricity-operated or hand-held lathes. Alternatively, some hire power-lathes from the Karnataka Handicrafts Development Corporation (KHDC). Most are self-employed and sell their goods at outlets such as retail shops or export units of the KHDC.
- Small scale enterprises: These enterprises are set up in the homes of craftspeople with a minimum of 4 to 10 lathes. Hired laborers work on piece rate basis. These enterprises sell their products directly to exporters, working through agents or the KHDC.
- Medium scale enterprises: These are generally established or owned by exporters in Channapatna. The minimum turnover is INR 0.3 million and employs artisans



on wage or piece rate basis. Specifications describing the desired products are given by the exporter with a strict focus on quality (ibid.).

The turn-wood lacware sector in Channapatna works in an interlinked system. Work orders are usually generated by medium scale enterprises from exporters, long term domestic clients, or from their online platforms. Local stores also place job orders with small-scale units. Government/autonomous organizations also inform them about relevant exhibitions and retail outlets. Both medium and small enterprises may occasionally subcontract the manufacturing work to household units to be assembled and finished on the premises of the latter. Though household units are capable of making their products, they face difficulty in effectively marketing them.

### **Organized Industry and Handicrafts Sector in Channapatna**

Channapatna's GI tag in turnwood lacware and global recognition notwithstanding, the craft faces competition from cheaper Chinese products and plastic alternatives. Woodturning and lac coloring require considerable practice, infrastructure and investment which causes insecurity and demotivation for the continuation of craftspeople in this profession especially when sales are low. To keep their micro-enterprises afloat, craftspeople also work on flat woodwork instead of woodturning. The most important consideration is to extend the reach of the handicraft to a wider market and generate higher income for its practitioners and related organizations (Munshi, 2019). During the nationwide lockdown, the Channapatna toymakers found themselves out of work as they could not reach out to the domestic markets in the area, and nor had contact outside their townships for selling their handicrafts. Under these strained conditions, some organizations stepped up their efforts to provide respite. To understand the current situation, primary data was generated through interviews conducted with professionals from three major organizations namely Export Promotion Council of Handicrafts (EPCH), Artisan Pride and Channapatna Crafts Park.

#### ***Export Promotion Council of Handicrafts***

Established in 1986-87, EPCH is a regulatory body and a non-profit organization under the Companies Act to promote and support artisans and retailers of handicrafts. EPCH took the onus of creating opportunities through available Government schemes, State Government support and various similar programs (EPCH, 2021). EPCH and Development Commissioner – Handicrafts (DC-H) had worked on a project involving design, technical upgradation, promotion and marketing under the scheme of Integrated Design and

Technology Upgradation. In an interview with the author, Ms. P.L. Sreedevi, Regional Officer and Project Coordinator at EPCH informed that EPCH had undertaken a study of global markets in the USA, Canada, UK and Europe notably France, Germany and Italy, as well as domestic markets in the domains of real estate, tourism and e-commerce. A project spanning four months to support artisans create modern toy collections, included 40 participant Channapatna artisans who learnt about conducting market surveys, incorporating color and design trends to guide product development, product categorization and pricing. These new products were displayed at the Channapatna railway station sponsored by the Ministry of Railways to reach a wider consumer base. In this case, videos and documentaries documenting the process were uploaded online to create awareness about the craft and the makers. Though the workshop/project was completed satisfactorily, it was observed that due to constraints of the pandemic, the outcomes of this initiative lacked the intended impact. EPCH plans to organize a series of such events with professional designers empaneled with DC(H) with increased product variety that would also be available online. Apart from fairs and seminars, an online exhibition is planned for international customers.

### ***Artisan's Pride***

Artisan's Pride, formerly known as Maya Organic, is an organization with an online marketing wing—Fairkraft Creations. During an interview with the author, the Head of Design, Mr. K. Murali, and Production Manager, Ms. Shaheda informed about the engagement of the organization with the lacware crafts practitioners in Channapatna for twenty-five years. The objective of its organizational interventions is to organize the artisans into self-help groups for sustenance of livelihoods. This requires focused skill training in accordance with the clients' requirements most of which are export orders from UK and USA, with limited orders for the domestic market through Amazon. Long-term associations with international clients ensured continued business orders that provide work to the artisans.

As export orders are required to be completed before Christmas, additional efforts are made to meet the demand. However, due to the nationwide lockdown, courier agencies and retail outlets were impacted and previous consignments remained unsold. In spite of all efforts to meet the requirements of long-time customers, cessation of international trade resulted in the inability of Artisan's Pride to adhere to its deadlines for shipping of the handicrafts. Its experience of selling products online to domestic markets before the onset of the pandemic continued to do well, but offline sales and

revenue generated primarily from exports ceased completely. Findings of a study by UNCTAD (2020) showed that digital models fostered resilience in the handicraft sectors where making masks, PPE and gloves ensured the survival of the makers. On a similar note, Artisan's Pride helped local artisans who faced loss of livelihoods by training them in mask-making so that they could generate income from their homes. As a conscientious organization committed to the cause of helping craftspeople even during the lockdown when machinery and raw materials could not be accessed, Artisan's Pride enabled them to work from home. Eighty women were supplied with fabrics for making masks, supported by local industries or purchased with existing funds. Almost one hundred thousand home-made masks were sold through WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. The organization also received donations to support the artisans' families. Give India and Azim Premji Foundation facilitated the distribution of dry ration kits worth INR 2500 to each of the six hundred craftspeople. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the 'Vocal for Local' initiative and gave impetus to crowd-source innovative toys and games for Toycathon during the second lockdown in August 2020 to support the toy industry. While Artisan's Pride has a retail store in Bengaluru, in recognition of the influence of branding through storytelling and facilitating the association of products with their aesthetic and ecologically benign qualities, it leveraged the reach of its online presence, which triggered business enquiries and business orders through its homepage, Instagram and Facebook handles. Interestingly, there was no difference in the prices in offline and online mode of sales. However, there are some challenges in an online system:

- Those who purchase crafts online are mostly repeat consumers familiar with the product and quality.
- There are higher chances of return when products are purchased in online mode.
- Though customers prefer the 'Cash on Delivery' system, sellers face difficulty as the possibility of return is higher due to transit damages, or storage of the product in warehouses for a long time for which the cost is borne by the latter.
- Selling through e-commerce platforms poses challenges for the seller who is required to have a sizeable inventory in their warehouse.

However, Artisan's Pride is of the opinion that the online mode can generate resilience among the craftspeople.

- Online networking facilitates more views of an individual's work; this increases brand value and creates higher sales opportunities.

- A comprehensive and detailed plan with logistic details can guide the artisans towards higher sales and thereby, profitability.
- Reaching out through messenger marketing using WhatsApp and Facebook is a more personalized approach without high financial implications.
- While a company/MSME may not need to focus on creating followers on social media, an individual artisan can reach out to a wider audience through the social media that can lead to business orders.

### ***Channapatna Crafts Park***

Spread across 14 acres, the Channapatna Crafts Park (CCP) is the first one of its kind in India. It is a registered society with representation from the Department of Industries & Commerce, Government of Karnataka, Karnataka State Small Industries Development Corporation Limited, Visveswaraya Trade Promotion Center, Karnataka State, and six manufacturer-exporters to facilitate the artisans and their business partners. This park was established to preserve, support and increase artisanal skills for higher employability. Several organizations share a common facility Center with state-of-the-art woodworking machines. The CCP undertakes export orders and employs trained craftspeople and artisans, and hence, most online work is undertaken by its administrative staff. In an interview with this author, Ms. Sreekala Kadidal, Director CCP informed that though there were enquiries regarding the Toycathon press note, these did not translate to tangible work orders. The Government of Karnataka has been the primary supporter of handicrafts during the pandemic. With the market gradually regaining momentum, the CCP has taken this opportunity to develop training modules for online marketing by the artisans. However, the envisaged benefits have not reached Channapatna and therefore, this cluster has had to resort to stitching masks or has turned to alternate professions. Proactively leveraging online technology to generate business for the artisans, some organizations, SHGs and NGOs in Channapatna have been considering increased use of the internet for future opportunities.

Data generated through interviews indicated that craft organizations use online platforms for increased business for themselves and the artisans. EPCH created videos and documentaries to spread awareness but the training was done in the physical presence of artisans. Artisan's Pride has organized the artisans into SHGs. While the organizations agreed that the Channapatna cluster needed to prioritize the adoption of online technology, no training had been conducted on online methods of marketing, nor had new infrastructure been created.

These three organizations are of the opinion that online interactions would be favorable for the artisans and craftspeople. However, as no online training has been conducted, it is not possible to draw any inferences.

## **Use of Online Technologies by Artisans**

To study the impact of internet and online technology on the livelihoods of craftspeople and artisans in Channapatna, target respondents were identified on the basis of convenience sampling. The sample population comprising 7 females and 23 males in the age group of 25-45 years were the earning members of their families. They were able to read, write and sign in their mother tongue, Kannada.

It was noted that out of every seven women, three of them did not possess a smartphone. On the other hand, the men possessed smartphones ranging in price from INR 4000-20,000. Two male artisans who owned high-end phones and personal vehicles, were also adept with accessing the internet on their smartphones. Most of them were aware of the word 'data' rather than 'internet'. Although they did not clearly understand what 1 GB data meant, they could equate it to with one movie a day, half an hour of local teleserial, news, browsing YouTube and other related activities.

They used their phone primarily to take photographs of their families and friends. The artisans said that sometimes they clicked products that they had made but possessed only basic photography skills or did not have good cameras or enough phone memory to store images. They were not aware of saving images in any other digital space, and therefore, there were times when they were unable to take photographs until their phones had been cleared of previous data.

All respondents stated that they used their phones primarily for calls, 70 percent used it for social media, over 80 percent used it to watch videos on YouTube, and all the artisans with smartphones, used WhatsApp to send images and texts. About 25 percent used Amazon or online services to buy products but were unsure of the process of selling their products online. For the artisans, online purchases and e-commerce were synonymous with 'Amazon'.

All respondents agreed that a phone is the only gadget they possess to take advantage of the internet but only 2 percent had internet access at home. They also agreed that their children or younger siblings were avid users of the internet and continuous consumers of Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube. However, they were not sure of the depth of awareness of the platforms among the younger generation. Most of them

used WhatsApp but were not aware of all the features or its business application. The younger generation was familiar with Facebook but was unaware of Facebook Store. About 50 percent had Facebook accounts and only 25 percent knew how to make language changes in the application. Only 2 percent were aware of Instagram and Twitter but did not use either of them.

The experts and artisans pointed out that a significant aspect emerging from pandemic restrictions was the use of Digital Wallets and UPI with Paytm and Phone Pe as the most widely used apps. Some also used Google, Amazon and Airtel wallets. However, in UPI, Google Pay and BHIM by the Government of India were popular. The artisans felt that they no longer had to queue up at ATMs and their bank visits were limited to KYC updates. They expressed eagerness to learn more about technologies and apps related to online financial transactions for increasing the volume of their business. However, experts were of the opinion that even after the completion of training, the artisans do not practice application of their learning. Furthermore, they need to be Counseled that expectations of quick solutions and immediate financial gain may not necessarily be feasible, and that resilience and persistence with application for training inputs for business expansion, is imperative.

## Conclusion

The case study of the practitioners of turn-wood lacware of Channapatna discusses the initiatives of private organizations and autonomous bodies, and the national commitment of the Government of India to support the craftspeople and artisans by strengthening their resilience during COVID-19. The practitioners' resilience was reflected in their positive adaptation to this craft despite exposure to adverse experiences, lockdown constraints and ensuing economic slowdown through online technologies. Though they were able to access data on their smartphones and handle social media at a basic level, they had not explored its potential sufficiently for their professional growth. The artisans need to be apprised of the immense potential of online technologies for readiness to face future challenges and to be directed to the appropriate channels of digitally available information. The reach of the internet can facilitate understanding of global consumer preferences based on which products can be developed. Craft organizations and other external bodies can help build training modules based on the elementary knowledge of digital marketing, that can aid the artisans to use the applications more effectively for their professional growth. This would need training in basic applications of WhatsApp Business and Facebook Store, along with basic photography techniques on smartphones such as creating backdrops,

saving images and uploading photographs of their products that can enable them to expand the product reach beyond local markets to a larger online customer base. This will enable direct communication with vendors and Government agencies, and thereby reduce their dependence on middlemen. The adeptness of the younger generation of craftspeople in handling smartphones and social media platforms leads to the inference that it may be easier to train them in online marketing and networking strategies which may gradually build craft community resilience in the Channapatna cluster. Results of the training and time required to gauge its impact offer scope for further study.

## Notes

1. Hindi for a craftsman, artisan
2. Hindi for local open-air market
3. Language spoken by most people in Karnataka

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