

Digital Museums and Hybrid Models of Craft Studies during COVID-19

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Abstract

Museums are spaces that cater to the basic need to archive the impalpable, substantial, and social legacy. With technological intervention, museum practices have expanded their roles from spaces housing static evidence of cultural history to a dynamic living record of human stories. While the pandemic compelled museums to stop in-person visits, online archives have been instrumental in re-enforcing their presence by encouraging online searches by online visitors, research scholars and students. The article's objective is to explore the suitability of these digital spaces for craft studies, particularly in restricted access settings during COVID-19. A case study of the modalities of craft research and documentation studied by NIFT Kolkata students in the Nanor *Kantha* craft cluster of Birbhum district, West Bengal, through a hybrid teaching-learning model facilitates the understanding of the practitioner community of this embroidery during the pandemic.

Digital documentation of *Kantha* in online sites and archives of digital museums in India and abroad is explored as a valuable resource in the larger objective of this study. Facilitation of primary data collection in a hybrid mode required on-site interventions by the faculty mentor using interviews of artisans, observation notably, and translation of Bengali to English and Hindi for the understanding of the students who viewed the live interaction online from their homes. A questionnaire was also administered to the students to assess their perception of the effectiveness of digital museums. It emerges that a combination of customized hybrid models of crafts research supplemented by documented resources in online museums facilitates the content and extent of learning in craft studies even during pandemic restrictions. Conclusions are drawn on the modalities of reinvigorating museum archives in India for a wider audience.

Keywords: Digital museum, craft archives, online research, hybrid model, *Nakshi Kantha*

Introduction

Almost 95,000 museums were affected by the pandemic in 2020 with nearly 90 percent shut down and many being let out for other purposes (UNESCO Digital Library, 2021). The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has expressed concern that several museums may not open in the future (ibid.). The traditional definition of a museum 'as a building in which interesting and valuable things (such as paintings and sculptures or scientific or historical objects) are collected and shown to the public' (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.) has given way to a more comprehensive definition by the Museums Association, the UK which states that museums' enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning, and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard, and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society. 'This definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art as well as museums with historical collections of objects. Museums are not merely spaces where artefacts are collected and displayed but repositories of human experiences. Socio-cultural environments unfold through curated exhibits that are not inert but carry embedded commentaries on foreign influences and in digenous identity, revealing historical information about cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. Museums are not only repositories of tangible cultural heritage to be preserved, studied and shared with the public, but they also have a significant role in supporting intangible cultural heritage embodied in traditions of the local craft communities (Pontsioen, 2020). Handmade artifacts reveal historical information about values and traditions by recounting ethnocultural narratives of nationalities and regionalities, viewed and interpreted through the lens of self-identification of museum visitors with the community and nation.

The increase in the volume of visitors who explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment may not be sustainable as such spaces are meant to preserve and safeguard artefacts and collections for future generations (Straughan, 2019). The museum's role in cultural and creative sectors and its support of and positive impact on several sectors, including education in response to incremental demand for cultural content streaming, cannot be overstated. Museum spaces can be opened up to organize events and workshops to facilitate the demonstration of craft processes by artisans for visitors, which can contribute to the sustainability of the crafts sector (Golding and Modest, 2013). The Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art Culture & Design, Honolulu, has approximately 4,500 objects and cultural resources in ceramics, wood, glass, and textiles from several countries including Africa, Central Asia, South East

Asia and India. The webinar organized by the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, the University of Toronto on 'The Museum's Role in Amplifying and Sustaining Craft and Making'(2021) initiated conversations on the contribution of museums to the development and promotion of the craft heritage sector through exhibitions, publications, and commissions. This substantiates the expansion in the role of museums to include human stories along with its traditional role of archiving the tangible heritage of communities. The Gurusaday Dutt Museum in Kolkata housed a valuable collection of 3,300 folk art and craft exhibits for everyday use, including an impressive collection of *Kantha* in various forms, some being heirlooms dating back to undivided Bengal. This museum organized workshops to motivate the *Kantha* artisans to return to their traditional embroidery practices. However, the artisans discontinued the embroidery as the expected finesse of the intricate motifs was too time-consuming and, therefore, commercially unviable. The museum closed in 2018 due to logistics and administrative reasons.

Museums value artefacts as evidence preserved with utmost care and progressively researched, accumulating anecdotal and visual worth. As institutions of learning, museums are not limited by physical spaces to define them. If museums are to continue to play a supportive role by documenting and preserving indigenous practices of communities, they need to expand viewer accessibility by introducing either virtual or online galleries. Though occasionally used interchangeably, the difference between virtual and online museums needs explanation. According to ICOM, virtual museums can act independently or as the digital footprint of a physical museum while maintaining the authoritative status. Virtual museums are also committed to public access to knowledge embedded in the collections, systematic organization of their display, and their long-term preservation. Anindya Sen opines that "...virtual museums have immense potential to be a game-changer by making the collections accessible and relevant across all age groups and geographies while opening up new revenue streams as well" (Sen, 2021). A digital museum is an exhibition platform that utilizes computer and information technology, on which cultural relics and historical collections can be preserved and displayed in digital format as one of the primary outcomes of digital curation (IGI Global, n.d.).

Digitizing existing collections is a necessary record-keeping activity followed by the circulation of these images for value-addition as it becomes a critical acknowledgement of the artefact's significance. A digital museum is associated with storage, retrieval, and interaction through digital technology. As an image supplier and authentic source

of digitized artefacts, it acts as an electronic playground, allowing museum data and representation to become a resource for new knowledge, especially sought by a pro-active audience. In a digital format, artefacts are displayed online in exclusive virtual galleries, accessible digitally through their websites which cannot be viewed in person by museum visitors. These non-tangible exhibits provide a background for online academic research to understand craft practices in their traditional formats, which are rarely evident in the field survey of craft clusters.

Adaptive Pedagogies in Craft Studies

The institutional commitment of NIFT to craft interventions across India is incorporated in the Craft Research and Documentation (CRD) curricula of all undergraduate programs. The significance of crafts education as cultural heritage education requires understanding and imbibing the identity and ground realities of the craft sector. Enabling students to gain exposure to the facts of this sector at the grassroots level requires the identification of strengths and weaknesses in the craft ecosystem and indigenous processes that define the handmade.

In 2021-22 in keeping with the curricular requirements, twenty-five students of the undergraduate Fashion Communication program of NIFT Kolkata were briefed on the objectives of CRD and the imperative of achieving the mandated learning outcomes with a focus on the traditional craft of *Kantha*. It originated as a women-centric needlecraft practiced by women in their homes, mainly in the rural areas of undivided Bengal and its adjoining states. Recycled from old sarees, usually white cotton with colorful woven borders, these quilts (colloquially *lep*) were typically white with the raw edges bound by colored borders. 5-7 layers of fabric were held together with minuscule running stitches colloquially called *gurirun*, which created the characteristic ripple effect. Initially, a recycled craft born out of need, the *Kantha* gradually evolved into artistic expressions of the makers as the *zamindar* (landlord), and the affluent class commissioned these quilts as gifts. This led to the birth of the famous *Nakshi Kantha*. Deriving its name from *naksha* (designed pattern), these quilts were intricately embroidered using various forms of the running stitch. The designs represented unscaled motifs in various colorful threads drawn out from the recycled borders. The visual grammar of *Nakshi Kantha* was essentially in a storytelling format inspired by everyday life, including flora-fauna, local religions, and customs. This needlecraft was practiced by both Hindus and Muslims in undivided Bengal.

The political divide of the state and influence of religious dictates saw the *Kantha* develop distinctive characteristic styles on both sides of Bengal. As clarified by the Directorate of MSME in West Bengal, *Kantha* is now practiced predominantly by Muslim women in the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Malda, Murshidabad, Purba Medinipur, North 24 Parganas and Kolkata (earlier Calcutta). Commercialization brought product diversification with modification of traditional *Nakshi Kantha* embroidery for contemporary applications. The new motifs are refined and repetitive, differentiating them from the traditional spontaneous and rudimentary forms. Though they continue to be referred to as *Kantha* in a generic manner it may be questioned if the *Kantha* is a quilt or the embroidery form inspired by its decorative version, the *Nakshi Kantha*. In form and function, the modern *Kantha* stitch is a commercial form of the original *Nakshi Kantha*. Interestingly, *Kantha* products made using *Kantha* stitch are often erroneously used interchangeably in several forums, including government websites and documents. Most museums, however, display authentic *Nakshi Kantha* in its traditional quilt form.

The study of a craft, (in this case, *Kantha*) requires field visits by the students to pre-identified clusters. Restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of the highly contagious coronavirus compelled academia to reconsider conventional pedagogies. This included process-based subjects with field studies favoring a shift to online modes of curriculum transaction. Learning in the 21st century is transforming from traditional pedagogies to hybrid formats that aim to expand the avenues of learning that previously focused almost exclusively on face-to-face activities. There is an increased reliance on online resources that can maximize to personalize learning needs. It enables learners to widen their search for additional learning resources for insights transposed to diverse subjects. The need to maintain an uncompromised commitment to education led to the need to investigate whether online interactions and online content in virtual spaces can facilitate subjects that require experiential interactions.

Research Methods

Virtual observation and interview methods were used during this exploratory study, where primary data was collected through personal interviews and questionnaires. A questionnaire was developed and administered online to two batches of fifty students of the Fashion Communication Department of NIFT Kolkata, to examine the role of digital museums in craft research. The key components of the questionnaire were digital research and a hybrid mode of research. The questionnaire was divided into two

types of questions comprising ten closed-ended questions with multiple options and five open-ended questions requiring the student respondents to type their answers. Feedback was sought on the efficiency of remote research on *Kantha* quilts of West Bengal through personal online interviews conducted through various platforms. Key findings are discussed briefly. To ascertain the outcomes of this pedagogy from the perspective of practitioners, 10 *Kantha* artisans from the Nanoor cluster involved in the field study were interviewed on the phone to gain insight in to their experiences.

Hybrid Model of Craft Research

While mandated safety protocols restrained the students' travel to the identified craft clusters for CRD, the interaction between them and the artisan practitioners was essential. Field studies were facilitated by a faculty mentor-supervisor who travelled to the pre-identified cluster in Nanoor, a village in the Bolpur sub division of Birbhum district in West Bengal. Purposively moving within the cluster, the mentor's phone focusing on the artisan women engaged in *Kantha* embroidery became the eyes on the ground for the students who were located in the safety of their homes across the country. The mentor's observations were heard and viewed by the students. Internet availability in rural Bengal was a critical factor of this activity. The faculty mentor interviewed artisans in the master artisan's home. At the same time, the other *Kantha* makers gathered in pre-identified areas according to the given schedule to maintain social distancing. NIFT distributed masks and hand sanitizers for their safety during such gatherings. The faculty mentor was an intermediary who solved the language barrier by asking questions in Bengali—the artisans' mother tongue and translating their answers to English—the medium of instruction in NIFT, and to Hindi—India's national language, for multi-lingual documentation of essential terms. Additional questions by the students in English and Hindi were translated to Bengali by the faculty mentor. These interviews were transmitted through video calls on Zoom or Google Meet. In addition, the role of the mentor as facilitator extended to carrying digital tools that facilitated the collection and dissemination of data. Problems of technical glitches and low resolution of photography and videography were also addressed by the mentor, especially if the person had expertise in photography and video documentation.

The artisans also faced constraints, mostly stemming from technical issues. While seventeen-year-old Raisha Rahman could actively facilitate connections between fellow artisans and students through video calls on her smartphone, sixty-six-year-old Majera Begum shied away from technology. She was agreeable to a personal interview with the faculty mentor. Problems with the networks in a rural environment and technical

glitches added to the dilemma. Master artisan Tajkira Bibi who was the nodal facilitator faced difficulties in connecting the artisans with students on phone at the scheduled time slots.

At the end of each day, students discussed their observations and learning experiences. Student feedback on the (dis)advantages of conducting research on craft studies through online observation and interviews gave valuable insight into the hybrid model of field studies. Some students found that telephonic conversations with the artisans were moderately effective; others opined that language barriers hampered online communication with the artisans as the artisans could express their thoughts only in Bengali, and some essence was lost in translation. A student felt that witnessing the craft process was necessary and that just listening to it was not enough as it lacked emotional connection and experience. Another student expressed concern that the constraints of not being able to observe the artisans in their natural spaces of practice reduced its impact. The discussion further enfolded concerns of obtaining high-definition photographs of the environment, product development process, and products, as most artisans had basic phones with low-resolution cameras. One student expressed that “When researching a topic, one needs to connect with the specific person(s) and the product, which means one needs to get as close as possible... this was missing from the remote study”. Though the students appreciated the effort made by NIFT and the faculty mentor in CRD, they felt that the hybrid model had shortcomings. For example, the photographs taken by the faculty mentors reflected their enriching experience and understanding of the cluster and product based on the field visit. However, as a student explained, it was “a way to view *Kantha* making through the eyes of an expert, but took away valuable field experience. It alienated us from the knowledge of learning, how to document a craft environment, its people and products”.

Archived Data in Online Museums

Students were asked to identify the gaps in existing secondary data and brainstorm alternate sources of information on *Kantha*. These gaps led the students to digital resources for secondary research. Situational constraints were discussed and students’ concerns about secondary and primary research methods were addressed. Apart from reading books and documented studies by NIFT, they were advised to refer to the virtual galleries of online museums on crafts and textiles. The mandated learning outcomes of CRD depended on research to be undertaken from remote locations where the students were situated. Herein lay the difficulty of craft research without physically visiting the

locale of the craftspeople, experiencing their lifestyle, or imbibing the visual-tactile qualities of the materials and processes of production. With increasing emphasis on multicultural education and adaptive pedagogies, educators encouraged the students to undertake secondary research on the craft sector by supplementing reliable textual sources with community resources in the form of cultural artefacts exhibited in virtual museum collections of Indian handicrafts and textiles, and authentic craft blogs for higher comprehension and appreciation of craft practices.

Museums hold a special place in the culture of a society operating as educational institutions—archiving, displaying, explaining and sometimes teaching visitors the facts and histories surrounding certain artefacts and concepts (Ismaeel and Al-Abdullatif, 2016). With the confinement of people during the pandemic, there has been an expansion in the role of museums. Museum collections of real objects need to be presented both on their premises and online, especially as digital and social media becomes more influential in people’s everyday lives (Giannini & Bowen, 2022). Technological intervention has enabled museums to open their doors to people circumscribed in their homes (Art World, n.d.). Virtual museums and cultural platforms, therefore, become ubiquitous for “making knowledge accessible for free-choice learning, when and where the audiences might choose” (RICHS Think Paper 06, 2016, p.3). As cultural repositories, several museums and private collections in India and abroad housing clothing and textiles of Indian origin facilitated digital access to researchers, students and the general audience. The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, has initiated virtual tours of seventeen museums across the country. Even though interactive virtual galleries and online archives for craft research are at a relatively nascent stage in India, they offer a potential route to facilitate research on indigenous practices of handcrafted textiles and other products. Some of the most searched museums with archived digital collections of Indian textiles and blog posts on their websites were considered valuable points of reference by the students for CRD.

- Google Arts and Culture: This is an online platform comprising of high-definition photography and video content of artworks and cultural artefacts collected from the partnered global organizations. It also archives a digital gallery of handicrafts and textiles of India under the theme ‘Crafted in India’ that includes the crafting processes, raw materials, tools, and makers. Google has collaborated with Incredible India and Dastkari Haat Samiti in archiving more than two hundred visual stories. Its interactive features facilitate learning through features like Virtual Gallery Tour, Artwork View, Create an Artwork Collection, Explore and Discover, Education and Art Selfie.

- Museum of Material Memory: Co-founded in 2017 by Aanchal and Navdha Malhotra, this digital repository of material culture traces the family history and social ethnography through heirlooms, collectables and objects of antiquity. Each post articulates the material memory embedded in personal collectables. In this way, it builds on generational narratives to advance the knowledge of India's cultural traditions, customs, language, society, geography and history.
- India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF): Established by the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, it is a knowledge-sharing platform for global investors, international policy-makers and media, comprising authentic and updated information on the Indian economy, states and sectors, including and crafts and location of various craft clusters.
- Archives of DC (Handicrafts): This is a government website for accessing data related to artisans, self-help groups, cluster details, and various statistics related to handicrafts and handlooms. It elaborates on the vision and mission of various government schemes to help develop this sector. It has the calendar of events, artisan database, list of awardees, details on various crafts of India and e-newsletters for disseminating information collected by the government.
- The Heritage Lab: This digital media platform connects viewers to cultural heritage through stories, public engagement programs, campaigns, and free-access content. For more accessibility, inclusivity and entertainment, graphic representations particularly focus on engaging the young audiences through participative activities such as creating art memes or even submitting a story. Varied sections titled Museums, Stories, Culture, Modern Art, Campaigns and Events make it easy for the users to navigate and find specific information related to craft research.
- The Textile Atlas: This is an open-access platform for advanced information on traditional handcrafted processes and artefacts through local and global perspectives initiated by Sharon Tsang-de Lyster of 'Narrative Made' in 2017. It also features voices of craftspeople that stimulate imaginative associations inside the field of interest. It adopts a comprehensive strategy by combining field insights in private and public areas, overcoming barriers among local craftspeople, scholarly communities, and commercial organizations.

In addition, the websites of some international museums have digital archives and Blogs that provide a wide range of information, including an exclusive section on Indian

textiles and crafts. The Victoria and Albert Museum website has several well-researched blogs on textiles in its collections. In 2015, 62 articles were posted on The Fabric of India—a ‘major exhibition to explore the rich and fascinating world of handmade textiles from India’ and exemplify ‘the processes, history, and politics associated with these incredible objects’ (V&A blog). Archived visuals supported by textual information on Indian textiles and crafts available in British Museum and Philadelphia Museum of Art have also been secondary research sources for the students.

***Nakshi Kantha* Exhibits in Museums**

A virtual tour of *Nakshi Kantha* exhibits at Philadelphia Museum of Art, and British Museum was undertaken. The Philadelphia Museum of Art hosts two collections of the *Nakshi Kantha*, traditional hand-embroidered quilts of Bengal exported by the East India Company c.1926. These quilted and embroidered quilts are visual documentaries that embody the socio-cultural chronicles of the women who embroidered them for domestic use, as a blessing for newborns or gifted as dowry during weddings. Primarily collected during the years between 1922 and 1950 from Calcutta, this collection of quilts titled ‘Threads of Cotton, Threads of Brass: Arts of Eastern India and Bangladesh from the Kramrisch Collection-July 7, 1998 - 13 June 1999’ are from the collection of the eminent scholar and former Philadelphia Museum of Art curator Stella Kramrisch (1896–1993) many as her bequest to the museum. Another collection comprises forty-three *Nakshi Kantha* quilts made during the 19th till mid- 20th century from the ‘*Kantha*: The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz and the Stella Kramrisch Collections-December 12, 2009 - 25 July 2010’.



Figure 1: *Kantha* from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz and the Stella Kramrisch Collections, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Source: Screenshot from <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/88596>

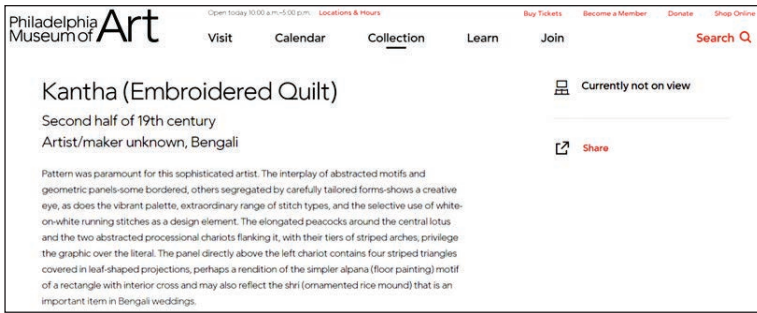


Figure 2: Description of the *Kantha* shown in Figure 1

Source: Screenshot taken from <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/88596>

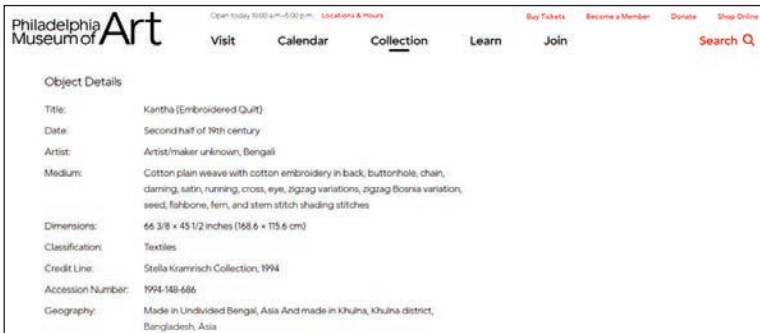


Figure 3: Object details of the *Kantha* shown in Figure 1

Source: Screenshot taken from <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/88596>

Archival information on each quilt is available online (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). The description includes a brief description but no information about the process. The semiotics of the motifs are unclear as there is no information about the artisan or the purpose of making the *Kantha*. Mention of the embroidery technique for making the quilt (Figure 3) would pose a challenge in identification by a novice.

The digital repository of the British Museum includes several *Kantha* items sourced from Bengal accessible through its website. The description explains semiotics and technical details of the curated object. The virtual model allows visitors to zoom into sections of the quilt. The curator's comments nudge the viewers towards further probing the information sources. The examples of *Kantha* in online museums point to the importance of curatorial data about the artefact as it engenders a holistic understanding of the hand crafted textile and its maker community.

Student Feedback on Virtual Galleries of Digital Museums

Feedback of the students regarding the effectiveness of virtual museums was collected via an online questionnaire. While close-ended questions helped to generate quantitative data, the open-ended questions contributed to the qualitative data.

Wider accessibility

There was consensus among the students that online museums are the best source for collecting secondary data on craft cultures in a visual mode. Developing awareness about Indian handicrafts is necessary for design education. This sector is the second-highest sector to employ craftspeople in an organized business, and students are the future entrepreneurs. Each craft being geography-specific, is not easily accessible to those located in distant places. Internet offers the only avenue to global accessibility during the pandemic.

Gap between virtual museums and experiential learning

While 66 percent of students felt that the effectiveness of virtual exhibits in online museums is less than physically visiting museums as visual tactility is missing, 52 percent claimed that virtual museum exhibits do not facilitate comprehension of the actual socio-cultural environment in which the craft activities take place. About 46 percent felt that virtual galleries do not provide adequate descriptions of the materials and techniques of a handmade artefact, and 38 percent were unable to understand the motif ideation process.

Lack of human narrative

Around 74 percent found a lack of emotions and the human story in the digital archives. As oral traditions of cultures demonstrate, audiences understand and process information more effectively when it is supported by a clear narrative. The students suggested that the display of artefacts be supplemented by the addition of artisan stories that would shed light on the socio-cultural narratives of the predominantly female *Kantha* embroiderers.

Lack of explanatory details

There was consensus among the students that the available online data on *Kantha* exhibited in the craft archives of several Indian museums was not as detailed as in global museums. Artefacts and pictorial representations of visuals of *Kantha* need to

be supplemented with precise and adequate text, failing which it creates a lacuna in terms of discretionary interpretation by the viewer.

Need for interactive virtual tours

Responses of 82 percent of students indicated their felt need for virtual tours of the archives with 3D and a 360-degree view of the exhibits. 62 percent favored interactive libraries to increase viewer interest and facilitate research.

Need for videos to supplement static visuals

It was observed that 78 percent of students felt that adding a video on the authentic processes of *Kantha* would supplement their knowledge with virtual learning of the skill-based processes of embroidery.

Ease of access and future use

It was found that 20 percent of respondents felt that accessing data from virtual museums was easy, another 20 percent found this process inconvenient. In comparison, 60 percent opined that they would continue to leverage the advantages of digital archives for research. Therefore, it was concluded that digital museums must present curated collections in a more systematic and informative manner to strengthen remote research.

In summation, craft archives in digital museums exposed the students to both national and global perspectives of *Kantha*, including the historical context to contemporary significance. The hybrid model is an alternative for students who cannot travel to the craft clusters and may have derived secondary data only from textual sources. The human factor of craft studies in its natural environment would have remained unseen. The combination of secondary research through digital museums and primary research in hybrid mode offers a more comprehensive research method but one that may require improvisation for future implementation in case of a renewed strain of the pandemic.

Conclusion

This study has discussed how design institutes endeavor to achieve the course objectives of CRD by collating and documenting data collected from online sources, which predominantly included digital museums, as well as in-person interactions with the artisans under the supervision of faculty mentors. Educators are rethinking the

fundamental purpose of education and pedagogic models that are more suited to the ever-present possibilities of insecurity, risk and relentless change (Peters, et al., 2020).

The world wide web has been a redeemer; nevertheless, its limitations surface when users depend on online sources primarily for craft studies. Mixed responses to the hybrid model of CRD stemmed from student awareness of the situational constraints caused by COVID-19, the main disadvantage being that documenting craft processes and products were not conducive to being carried out from remote places.

Learning processes through online platforms can be strengthened by greater inclusivity, thriving on the triple-axis of participation, interaction and access. Pandemic constraints have led to a shift in the transformative role of museums away from static displays to virtual and interactive modes that enable the viewing of archived collections in digital museums irrespective of the viewer's location. Indian museums need to reimagine their roles in engaging scholars, just as the need for a renewed vision of education needs to leverage the features of digital museums. As contrasted with digital and virtual museums in developed countries, most Indian museums are yet to develop digital archives. They have not adopted the technological advances in AR-VR to enable remote access to their galleries resulting in low viewership. Incorporating the need for facilitating multiple perspectives that can develop from the virtual viewing of archived collections, museum websites may consider 360-degree virtual tours with participatory activities like virtual craft workshops and webinars. To maximize the advantages of virtual museums, institutes may need to review their research pedagogies. Cloud technologies and data visualization methods for uploading collection scan override the scarcity of space that prohibits physical display. Collaborative associations between the government and academia can enable the digitization of traditional crafts and textiles, enabling online researchers. However, it is essential to state that while the physical experience of viewing an artefact in a museum or an exhibition cannot be replicated by virtual viewing, it does provide an alternative experience during the constraints of the pandemic as digital museums gain relevance.

As learning processes and available resources vary from one academic environment to another, a generalized pedagogy to tide over such disruptions may not be the answer. To find customized solutions, design institutions need to incorporate their hybrid models with focused deliverables involving digital research and online interactions in the syllabus of craft studies to stimulate learners. Students need encouragement to make the most of accessible digital platforms. Decoding online information and

presenting the findings in an organized manner may be included in subjects like design research. A significant learning outcome was that digital resources for craft research could support but not substitute field study experiences. Adoption of hybrid models, immersed in purpose and meaning can deliver enhanced involvement in participatory research.

Note

1. Website of Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. *Virtual Museums*, <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/virtual-museums>

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About the author

Sreenanda Palit completed her B.Des in Fashion Design from NIFT. She has a PG Certificate in Fashion & Lifestyle Journalism from the London College of Fashion and a Masters in Journalism and Mass Communication. Dr. Palit has been trained in Fashion Styling at the Domus Academy in Milan. She completed her doctoral degree from the Folklore Department of Kalyani University in the area of sustainable crafts, emphasizing *Kantha*. Preceding NIFT, she freelanced as a fashion stylist, illustrator, designer, and graphic artist. Passion for academics and craft made her join her alma mater in 2003. She has been serving as an academician since then and headed several departments. Dr. Palit undertook several notable projects with over 15 years of experience in the craft sector. She has published several papers and presented her research in fashion and craft on national and international platforms, including at two IFFTI conferences.

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