

Digital Storytelling and Phulkari: The Role of Virtual Platforms in Highlighting Artisan Narratives

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Abstract

This research paper explores the role of virtual platforms, particularly Instagram, Facebook and e-commerce websites, in promoting Phulkari artisans cultural narratives. By conducting interviews and distributing questionnaires to a sample of 50 artisans in Patiala, Punjab, the study examines the impact of digital storytelling on consumer engagement and the preservation of traditional Phulkari craftsmanship. The results show that artisans using storytelling on digital platforms experience higher engagement and sales, though challenges like digital literacy persist. The research paper highlights the importance of providing digital training to artisans while promoting their rich cultural heritage through virtual platforms.

1.1. Keywords: *Digital Storytelling, Phulkari Artisans, Virtual Platforms*

I. Introduction

Phulkari, an intricate embroidery craft originating from Punjab, India, has been celebrated for centuries as a symbol of cultural identity, tradition, and artisan craftsmanship. The word "Phulkari" literally translates to "flower work," and the craft is known for its vibrant colors, floral motifs, and elaborate needlework. Traditionally passed down through generations of women, Phulkari embroidery was created for personal use during significant life events, such as weddings, births, and festivals, symbolizing emotions, family heritage, and the socio-cultural fabric of Punjab.

In recent decades, however, Phulkari has moved beyond its traditional confines to become a global phenomenon, drawing attention not just for its aesthetic appeal but also for its cultural significance. The advent of technology and digital platforms has dramatically transformed the handicrafts industry, creating new avenues for artisans to showcase their work, preserve their heritage, and connect with broader audiences. Virtual platforms such as social media, e-commerce websites, and digital storytelling tools offer Phulkari artisans the opportunity to present their art in innovative ways while retaining the cultural narratives that make their work unique.

II. Problem Statement

Despite the increasing global demand for authentic and handmade crafts, many artisans in the traditional sectors face challenges in adapting to digital mediums. This issue is particularly prevalent among Phulkari artisans, many of whom belong to older generations and are unfamiliar with the technologies that dominate modern commerce. As a result, many traditional artisans struggle to harness the full potential of digital platforms, which can be an essential tool for both preserving the craft and enhancing the livelihoods of the artisans.

Moreover, the storytelling aspect behind each Phulkari piece its emotional and cultural backstory often gets lost in the transition to online platforms that prioritize quick sales and visual appeal over deeper engagement. This disconnect raises questions about how artisans can effectively integrate digital storytelling with their craft to maintain its cultural significance while expanding their reach and economic potential.

III. Objectives

This research aims to examine how virtual platforms are being utilized by Phulkari artisans to highlight the cultural narratives behind their work.

- To explore how digital storytelling enhances consumer engagement with Phulkari products.
- To identify the challenges artisans face when adopting digital tools and platforms.
- To analyze the impact of virtual platforms on the visibility and economic empowerment of Phulkari artisans.

IV. Literature Review

a. Phulkari as a Cultural Heritage

- Singh (2018) explores the cultural significance of Phulkari embroidery, emphasizing its historical roots in rural Punjab. The author discusses how Phulkari was traditionally crafted by women for personal use, often during significant life events like weddings. Each piece of Phulkari is not only a decorative item but also a reflection of the artisan's identity, carrying symbolic meanings such as fertility and protection. The study also highlights how the craft has evolved, adapting to modern aesthetics while retaining its cultural essence. This deep-rooted cultural connection makes Phulkari more than just a craft it's a form of cultural storytelling.

b. Craft Preservation and Digital Platforms

- Sharma (2019) examines how digital platforms have become essential tools for preserving traditional crafts like Phulkari. According to the research, platforms such as Instagram and Facebook allow artisans to showcase their work to a broader audience while maintaining the cultural narrative behind the craft. However, Sharma warns against the commercialization that may arise from such exposure, cautioning that excessive commodification could dilute the authenticity of traditional crafts. Despite these concerns, the study concludes that digital storytelling is crucial for the survival of traditional crafts in the modern world.

c. Impact of Social Media on Artisan Narratives

- Mehra (2017) investigates how social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook empower artisans to share their personal stories and the history behind their crafts. The research highlights that consumers are increasingly drawn to narratives that connect them emotionally to products, which enhances both engagement and sales. For Phulkari artisans, visual storytelling through images and captions enables them to communicate the cultural significance of each piece, turning the embroidery into a narrative object. The study finds that posts that combine visual appeal with storytelling outperform those that focus solely on product features.

d. E-commerce and Artisans

- Gupta (2020) discusses the role of e-commerce platforms in providing traditional artisans with direct access to global markets. The study highlights that platforms like Etsy and Amazon have opened up new avenues for artisans to sell their products without relying on intermediaries. While this increases artisans profit margins, Gupta warns that the focus on mass sales could lead to a loss of the personal touch that distinguishes handmade crafts. The research emphasizes the need for artisans to balance commercial success with cultural preservation, suggesting that storytelling plays a key role in maintaining authenticity.

e. Consumer Behavior in Craft Purchases

- Jindal (2021) explores how modern consumers perceive handmade crafts like Phulkari and the role of digital storytelling in influencing purchasing decisions. The study finds that consumers are more likely to buy products that come with an engaging story, particularly when the narrative emphasizes the cultural or emotional significance of the craft. According to Jindal, this emotional connection can significantly increase both consumer loyalty and the perceived value of the product. The research underscores the importance of storytelling in differentiating traditional crafts from mass-produced items, making them more appealing to conscious consumers.

f. Challenges of Digital Literacy

- Bansal (2019) addresses the digital literacy gap that many artisans face, particularly older generations who struggle to adopt new technologies. The research highlights that while younger artisans are quick to adapt to digital platforms, older artisans often find it challenging to use social media and e-

commerce tools effectively. This digital divide limits their ability to benefit from the opportunities offered by virtual platforms, such as increased visibility and direct consumer engagement. Bansal argues for the implementation of targeted digital literacy programs to ensure that all artisans can leverage these platforms for storytelling and sales.

g. Economic Empowerment Through Virtual Platforms

- Aggarwal (2020) examines the economic impact of digital platforms on traditional artisans, focusing on how virtual spaces offer new opportunities for revenue generation. The study reveals that artisans using digital platforms have experienced a significant increase in both visibility and sales, particularly those who incorporate storytelling into their marketing strategies. Aggarwal highlights that digital storytelling adds a layer of emotional value to products, which can justify higher pricing and attract more discerning customers. The research concludes that virtual platforms can serve as powerful tools for economic empowerment, especially for women artisans.

h. Gender and Digital Craft Narratives

- Kaur (2021) focuses on the role of women in traditional crafts like Phulkari and how digital platforms have provided them with a voice to share their stories. The study finds that many women artisans use digital storytelling not only to preserve their craft but also to assert their economic and social independence. By sharing personal narratives and the cultural significance of their work, these women are able to engage with consumers on a deeper level, turning Phulkari into a symbol of empowerment. Kaur emphasizes the importance of digital platforms in promoting gender equality within the artisan community.

V. Research Methodology

a. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, with a case study approach focusing on Phulkari artisans in Patiala, Punjab. The aim was to explore how virtual platforms enable artisans to share their cultural narratives, engage with consumers and preserve traditional Phulkari practices. Both primary and secondary data were employed for an in-depth understanding.

b. Sample Selection

A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select participants. A total of 50 Phulkari artisans from Patiala were chosen, including both seasoned artisans and new entrants into the digital marketplace. This diversity allowed the study to capture a wide range of perspectives on the role of digital platforms.

Table 1: Sample Composition

Category	Number of Participants	Criteria
Traditional Artisans	25	10+ years of Phulkari experience
Emerging Artisans	25	1-5 years of Phulkari experience
Total	50	

c. Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and surveys.

- **Interviews:** 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative insights into how artisans use digital platforms to share cultural narratives and preserve Phulkari traditions.
- **Survey:** A structured questionnaire was distributed to 30 artisans to collect quantitative data on the impact of digital platforms on consumer engagement and sales.

Table 2: Data Collection Methods

Method	Number of Participants	Focus
Interviews	20	Experiences with digital platforms
Survey	30	Impact on sales, consumer engagement
Total	50	

d. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a combination of thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data.

- **Thematic Analysis:** Interview transcripts were analyzed for recurring themes such as storytelling, consumer engagement and tradition preservation.
- **Descriptive Statistics:** The survey data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics like frequency distributions and percentages to understand the artisans use of virtual platforms.

Table 3: Data Analysis Methods

Method	Analysis Technique	Outcome Focus
Thematic Analysis	Coding of interview data	Identified key themes in digital storytelling
Descriptive Statistics	Frequency, percentages	Patterns in sales and consumer behavior

e. Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed. All participants provided informed consent and their data was anonymized. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

VI. Results

The findings from the interviews and survey are presented below, organized into three main categories: the role of virtual platforms in enabling cultural storytelling, their impact on consumer engagement and sales and their effectiveness in preserving Phulkari traditions.

a. *Role of Virtual Platforms in Enabling Cultural Storytelling*

Interviews with artisans revealed that virtual platforms such as social media, e-commerce websites and YouTube have become crucial tools for sharing the cultural significance of Phulkari. Artisans reported that these platforms allow them to tell the stories behind their work, connect with customers on a personal level and maintain the rich heritage of the craft.

Table 1: Usage of Virtual Platforms for Storytelling

Platform	Number of Artisans Using (%)	Primary Purpose
Social Media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook)	60%	Sharing Phulkari stories through visuals and captions
E-commerce Websites (e.g., Etsy, Amazon)	50%	Selling products with a focus on cultural background
YouTube	20%	Demonstrating Phulkari techniques through videos
Blogs/Personal Websites	10%	Writing detailed stories about the history of Phulkari
Total	100%	

b. Impact on Consumer Engagement and Sales

Survey results showed that the use of virtual platforms had a significant impact on consumer engagement and sales. Artisans noted that consumers are more likely to buy Phulkari products when they understand the cultural narrative behind the craft. Additionally, artisans who actively shared stories and background information saw increased customer loyalty and higher sales.

Table 2: Consumer Engagement and Sales Impact

Impact Category	Percentage of Artisans Reporting Increase (%)
Consumer Engagement	75%
Sales Volume	65%
Repeat Customers	60%
Social Media Interactions (likes, comments)	80%

c. Preservation of Phulkari Traditions

Artisans expressed that virtual platforms not only helped them reach a global audience but also played a key role in preserving Phulkari traditions. Many artisans felt that digital storytelling allowed them to document and pass down techniques and stories that might otherwise be lost. This was particularly important for younger generations, who could learn Phulkari through online tutorials and social media content.

Table 3: Role of Virtual Platforms in Tradition Preservation

Aspect of Tradition Preservation	Percentage of Artisans Agreeing (%)
Documentation of Phulkari Techniques	70%
Transferring Knowledge to Younger Generations	65%
Increased Visibility of Traditional Designs	55%
Preserving the Cultural Stories Behind Phulkari	60%

d. Challenges in Adopting Virtual Platforms

While most artisans appreciated the benefits of using virtual platforms, many also encountered challenges. The most common difficulties were related to digital literacy and the costs associated with maintaining an online presence. Older artisans, in particular, struggled with the technical aspects of digital marketing and storytelling.

Table 4: Challenges in Using Virtual Platforms

Challenge	Percentage of Artisans Facing Issue (%)
Lack of Digital Skills	50%
High Cost of Platform Maintenance (e.g., website hosting)	40%
Difficulty in Reaching a Global Audience	35%
Language Barriers in Online Communication	30%

VII. Summary of Key Findings

- Virtual platforms, especially social media and e-commerce websites, play a significant role in enabling Phulkari artisans to share their cultural narratives.
- Artisans who actively engage in digital storytelling experience higher consumer engagement, loyalty and sales.
- Virtual platforms help preserve Phulkari traditions by documenting techniques and stories, especially for younger generations.
- Digital literacy remains a key challenge, particularly for older artisans who may struggle to adapt to modern technology.

VIII. Discussion

The results of this study highlight the transformative role of virtual platforms in shaping the future of Phulkari artisans in Patiala. Virtual platforms have emerged as powerful tools for not only enhancing the visibility of Phulkari but also for enabling artisans to share the rich cultural stories behind their work. Social media and e-commerce websites allow artisans to connect directly with consumers, creating a unique narrative-driven shopping experience. By showcasing the historical and cultural significance of Phulkari, artisans have successfully deepened consumer engagement and fostered loyalty, resulting in increased sales and repeat customers.

Moreover, the ability of these platforms to preserve Phulkari traditions cannot be understated. Artisans are using digital storytelling to document their techniques, ensuring that the craft’s heritage is passed down to future generations. Virtual platforms have enabled artisans to reach younger audiences who are interested in learning about Phulkari through digital content, such as YouTube tutorials or Instagram stories. This not only keeps the tradition alive but also broadens its appeal to a global audience.

However, the adoption of digital platforms comes with its own set of challenges. The lack of digital literacy among older artisans and the financial burden of maintaining an online presence are significant barriers. Many artisans, particularly those with limited access to technology or unfamiliar with digital marketing, struggle to fully leverage the potential of these platforms. This presents a gap that needs to be addressed through targeted

support, such as training programs in digital skills and affordable solutions for artisans to establish their online presence.

IX. Suggestions

To support Phulkari artisans in overcoming the challenges posed by the digital shift, several strategies can be implemented. First, there is a need for digital literacy programs specifically tailored to the needs of traditional artisans. These programs could focus on teaching artisans the basics of using social media, managing e-commerce platforms and engaging with global audiences. Government agencies or non-profit organizations could collaborate with local craft associations to provide these training sessions at minimal or no cost.

Second, a collective platform or digital marketplace exclusively for Phulkari artisans could be developed. This would allow artisans to pool resources, share the costs of maintaining an online presence and present their products under a unified brand. Such a platform could offer built-in tools for storytelling, enabling artisans to highlight the cultural significance of their products without having to individually manage complex digital platforms.

Finally, language and communication barriers must be addressed to help artisans better connect with international customers. Simple translation tools or multilingual support could be provided on e-commerce platforms to facilitate smoother communication between artisans and buyers. Additionally, mentorship programs pairing younger, tech-savvy artisans with older artisans could bridge the digital divide, fostering collaboration and mutual growth within the community.

These suggestions aim to create a supportive ecosystem for Phulkari artisans, ensuring that they can continue to thrive in the digital era while preserving their cultural heritage.

X. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role that virtual platforms play in transforming the Phulkari craft and its artisans in Patiala. Through the use of social media, e-commerce websites and other digital tools, artisans have been able to share their cultural stories, engage with consumers and preserve Phulkari traditions for future generations. The increased visibility and consumer engagement brought by digital storytelling have positively impacted sales, but challenges such as digital literacy and platform costs remain obstacles for many artisans.

By addressing these challenges through targeted training, collective digital platforms, and language support, Phulkari artisans can further harness the potential of virtual platforms. This will not only enhance their economic prospects but also ensure that the rich heritage of Phulkari continues to thrive in the modern digital landscape.

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