AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS INFLUENCING THE SELECTION OF DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS AMONG THE WEAVERS IN THE HANDLOOM SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The study examines socio-economic factors influencing the choice of Distribution Channels among the handloom weavers in Golaghat District, Assam. Drawing on data from 296 weavers selected through Disproportionate Stratified Random Sampling, the research adopts a Quantitative approach using the Chi-square test of independence. Findings reveal that age, marital status, education, income from handloom activities, and years of experience significantly shape the choice of distribution decisions. In contrast, Gender shows no notable impact. Younger, educated, and higher-income weavers tend to explore modern channels, while older and experienced weavers prefer traditional methods. These insights suggest that distribution choices are closely linked to personal and economic realities. The study underscores the need for targeted support such as training and improved market access that aligns with the diverse profiles of weavers, enabling more inclusive growth within the handloom sector.

Keywords: ***Distribution Channel, Weavers, Socio-economic, marketing, handloom sector***

INTRODUCTION

The handloom textile sector is a significant contributor to cultural heritage and rural employment, especially in developing economies like India. After the agriculture sector, the handloom sector employs the highest number of workers (Arunarjun, 2024). However, challenges such as operational inefficiencies, low level of income and limited market accessibility remains a major issue. Lack of control over the channel of distribution affects profitability and sustainability of the weavers (Khanduri and Datta, 2021). Socio-economic factors influence the range of options available to weavers when selecting distribution strategies. Understanding these factors influences distribution channel selection is essential for crafting inclusive development policies and marketing interventions in the handloom sector (Bhowmik, 2021).

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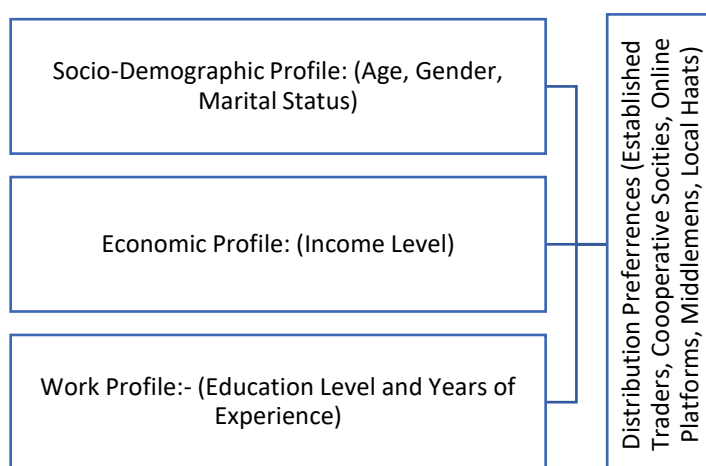[2] Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, USTM, Meghalaya

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The handloom textile sector, regarded as a cornerstone of livelihoods and cultural identity, continues to grapple with significant systemic issues (Debbarma and Murugesan, 2022). Established cooperative organizations can help by pooling resources, offering bargaining power, and connecting weavers. Weavers undermine the importance of connecting with social groups that are genuinely participatory and sensitive to imbalances (Bhowmik, 2021). The rise of digital technology has added a new dimension to the distribution landscape. Digital platforms and e-commerce sites provide opportunities for weavers to reach consumers directly, often without the need for intermediaries. Sharma et al. (2021) report that younger, weavers are increasingly using the online platforms to enhance their visibility and earnings. The digital engagement shifts the balance of power, giving weaves more control over pricing. However, Suryanarayanan and Ramswamy (2022) warn that access to these opportunities is not universal. Many weavers, particularly those who are older in age and less educated lack the digital knowledge to participate and compete in the digital world. Education, in particular, plays a pivotal role in shaping how weavers approach distribution strategies. Venugopal et al. (2023) found that weavers with proper education background are more inclined to tap into the diverse marketing digital marketplaces such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. These weavers are often better equipped to evaluate the risks and benefits, aligning with the decision-making framework proposed by Rational Choice Theory. In contrast, weavers without formal education tend to be restricted to conventional channels, often relying on Middlemen who offer convenience at the cost of very low and unsustainable Pricing.

Income is another defining factor that influences how distribution choices are selected. Weavers with financial stability are able to invest in value-adding initiatives such as branding and digital outreach that enable them to connect with a wider area of buyers. Yadav et al. (2024) found that with increase in the income weavers ability to have a diverse choice increases significantly and the decision-making ability becomes strategic rather than reactive and survival-oriented. Basu (2024) highlights patriarchal norms tend to sideline women from marketing and financial decisions, pushing them toward traditional sources where opportunities are limited. These restrictions are not merely limiting mobility; reduce control over resources and management (Sharma et al., 2021; Venugopal et al., 2023).

Figure 1: Distribution Preference Framework

Source: Compiled by the author

Bhowmik (2021) analysis on Institutional Theory, argue that inequalities systematically reduce women's economic agency, leaving them with limited and less lucrative options. The amount of experience a weaver has in the trade also matters significantly. Memo et al. (2022) observed those who have been in the sector for longer tend to possess a deeper and clear understanding of market dynamics, allowing them to make more strategic choices regarding the selection of the distribution channels. Experienced weavers are often better positioned to negotiate with buyers and establish relationships leading to a greater financial stability.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Most weavers work in fragmented and unorganized markets, often lacking proper access to distribution channels. Without a clear understanding of the socio-economic factors that influence how weavers choose to sell their handloom products, well-intentioned reforms may overlook the needs of the most disadvantaged. The study seeks to bridge that gap by analysing how different aspects of weavers' affects the way they adopt while selecting the channel of distribution of their handloom goods.

Table No 1: Socio-Economic Factors and Distribution Channel Selection

Socio-Economic Factor	Influence	References
Age	Age influences preferences towards traditional and modern strategies	Debbarma and Murugesan (2022); Sharma et al. (2021);
Gender	Gender-based discrimination restrict access to resources	Yadav and Sahoo (2024); Basu (2024); Suryanarayanan and Ramswamy (2022).
Marital Status	Marital responsibilities impact mobility and time, affecting channel preferences.	Devbrath, and Singh (2024);
Education	Higher education enhances understanding of market dynamics and distribution channels	Venugopal et al. (2023); Sharma et al. (2021);
Income Level	Higher income allows access to wider and possibly costlier channels.	Khanduri and Datta (2021)
Experience	Experienced weavers prefer established, trust-based channels	Yadav et al. (2024); Bhowmik (2021)

Source: Compiled by the author

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the key socio-economic characteristics of weavers in the handloom sector;
2. To assess the relationship between socio-economic factor and the choice of distribution channels.

HYPOTHESES:

To empirically assess the relationship, the study puts forth the hypothesis:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between socio-economic factors and the choice of distribution channels by weavers in the handloom textile sector.

To facilitate a more detailed examination, the following sub-hypotheses have been established:

$H_{01}a$: Age of the weaver does not influence the selection of distribution channel.

$H_{01}b$: Gender of the weaver has no significant impact on the choice of distribution channel.

$H_{01}c$: Marital status of the weaver is not related to the choice of distribution channel.

$H_{01}d$: The level of education of the weaver does not have an impact on the distribution channel choice.

$H_{01}e$: Income generated from handloom activities has no association with the selection of distribution channel.

$H_{01}f$: Experience in the handloom industry does not affect the choice of distribution channel.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative and descriptive approach aimed to identifying associations between weavers' socio-economic conditions and their choice of the distribution channels in the handloom sector. The primary data was collected from handloom weavers in Golaghat District of Assam. The sample were collected from 296 handloom weavers having equal numbers of weavers from each 8 development blocks of Golaghat District using a Disproportionate Stratified random sampling method during the period December 2024 to February 2025. A structured interview schedule was administered, covering: Socio-demographic profile (Age, Gender, Marital status); Economic profile (Income from handloom activity); Work characteristics (Education and experience) and Distribution preferences (Established traders, cooperative societies, online platforms, middlemen and Local haats). The secondary data was collected from the published articles, journals, government institutions and websites. The data was analysed using chi-sq. test of independence at 5% level of significance using SPSS *v25*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each sub-hypothesis is tested to determine whether a statistical association exists between weavers' socio-economic factors and the choice of distribution channel.

$H_{01}a$: Age of the weaver does not influence the selection of distribution channel.

Table No 2: Karl Pearson χ^2

χ^2	df	p value

| 45.134 | 16 | 0.000 |

Source: Field Survey (Compiled by the author using SPSS *v25*)

The null hypothesis is rejected as the p-value (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05). It is ascertained that age of the weavers influence the choice of the distribution channel. The result showcase that generational gap exists in the decision for the selection of the channel of distribution.

H_{01}b: Gender of the weaver has no significant impact on the choice of distribution channel.

Table No3: Karl Pearson χ^2

χ^2	df	p value
5.474	4	0.298

Source: Field Survey (Compiled by the author using SPSS *v25*)

Since the p- value (0.298) is more than the level of significance (0.05), the null hypothesis is accepted. It is being determined that there lies no significant impact on the choice of distribution channel and the nature of the gender of the weaver. The result shows that irrespective of the nature of the gender the distribution channel is selected based on other factors.

H_{01}c: Marital status of the weaver is not related to the choice of distribution channel.

Table No 4: Karl Pearson χ^2

χ^2	df	p value
38.905	4	0.000

Source: Field Survey (Compiled by the author using SPSS *v25*)

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05) the null hypothesis is rejected. Marital status has a significant association with the choice of the distribution channel. The family obligation tends to influence the determinants of the choice regarding the channel of distribution for the handloom products.

H_{01}d: The level of education of the weaver does not have an impact on the distribution channel choice.

Table No5: Karl Pearson χ^2

χ^2	df	p value

44.438	16	0.000

Source: Field Survey (Compiled by the author using SPSS *v25*)

The null hypothesis is rejected as p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05). The education qualification and level have an impact in the choice of the channel of distribution. This implies with higher educational knowledge and qualification weavers tend to explore the various alternatives.

$H_{01}e$: Income generated from handloom activities has no association with the selection of distribution channel.

Table No 6: Karl Pearson χ^2

χ^2	df	p value
56.418	12	0.000

Source: Field Survey (Compiled by the author using SPSS *v25*)

The null hypothesis is rejected as the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05). It implies that the income generated from the handloom activities have a positive association towards

the selection of the distribution channel. With Financial stability the weavers develop an eager to explore the alternative means to increase the profitability and growth.

$H_{01}f$: Experience in the handloom industry does not affect the choice of distribution channel.

Table No 7: Karl Pearson χ^2

χ^2	df	p value
43.534	10	0.007

Source: Field Survey (Compiled by the author using SPSS *v25*)

Since the p value (0.007) is less than the significance level (0.05) the null hypothesis is rejected. There lies a relationship between the years of experience of the handloom weavers and the selection of the distribution channel. Newly joined weavers have unique openness flexibility regarding the

choice of distribution as compared to Experienced Seasoned weaver as due to limited exposure in the handloom textile sector.

Table No 8: Summary of Hypothesis Test

Socio-economic Factor	Hypothesis	Results
Age	$H_{01}a$: Age of the weaver does not influence the selection of distribution channel.	Reject
Gender	$H_{01}b$: Gender of the weaver has no significant impact on the choice of distribution channel.	Accept
Marital Status	$H_{01}c$: Marital status of the weaver is not related to the choice of distribution channel.	Reject
Education Level	$H_{01}d$: The level of education of the weaver does not have an impact on the distribution channel choice.	Reject
Income	$H_{01}e$: Income generated from handloom activities has no association with the selection of distribution channel.	Reject
Experience	$H_{01}f$: Experience in the handloom industry does not affect the choice of distribution channel.	Reject

Source: Compiled by the author

FINDINGS

The study highlights the weaver's personal and economic conditions influences their decision-making abilities. Age was found to be a significant factor, with younger weavers often leaning toward newer and more modern platforms, while older weavers preferred traditional, well-established networks. This highlights a generational shift and divides in how opportunities in the market are perceived and approached. Marital status also showed a strong linkage towards distribution choices, suggesting that family responsibilities may influence the type of channels weavers consider reliable or convenient. Weavers with higher levels of education qualification appeared more open to exploring different distribution options, likely due to greater awareness and confidence in navigating market alternatives.

Weavers who earned more were better positioned to experiment with diverse channels in pursuit of higher profitability and business growth. Similarly, years of experience in the sector influenced distribution preferences. Experienced weavers, having establishes connections and tends to rely on familiar channels, while newer entrants seemed more open to trying different routes. Gender did not have a significant influence on distribution choices. This suggests that both male and female weavers make similar decisions when it comes to choice for the channel of distribution, once other socio-economic factors are taken into account. The study showcases that decisions around distribution are not made in isolation but ponder various socio-economic variables.

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic factors influencing weavers in the selection of distribution channels are complex and multifaceted. There is a significant relationship between socio-economic factors and the selection of distribution channels. Socio-economic factors influence the availability and understanding of different marketing channel choices. Rational Choice Theory asserts that individuals make decisions based on a logical evaluation of benefits, and constraints stands positively. Weavers choose distribution channels that maximize their profitability and minimize risks. Local norms and rules including power asymmetries, often shaped by demographic characteristics constrain weavers' choices regardless of their rationality. Socio-economic factors are crucial in understanding the decision-making process. The factors such as education, income level, nature of gender, age, marital status, experience serve as a determinant that influences the weaver's choice. These factors play a crucial role in shaping the decisions, particularly in the choice of channel selection.

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CITE THE ARTICLE

Todi, A., & Deb, M. (2025). An analysis of socio-economic determinants influencing the selection of distribution channels among weavers in the handloom sector. *Don Bosco International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(1)*