

Determinants of Intermediary Choice among Handloom Weavers: A Comparative Study of Agents and Society in Madurai – A Way Forward

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Abstract

A handloom weaver is someone who builds and maintains a business centred around the traditional art of handloom weaving. A handloom weaver usually gets rupees 500 to 800 for weaving a saree which takes 5 to 10 days and ultimately leads to transfer of profession. thehindubusinessline.com April 15,2023 reported that "The handloom sector in Tamil Nadu is facing a challenge with the educated next generation not willing to join the family profession passed on for generations; Production of limited varieties and low value products and resistance to change among existing weavers to adopt novelties in textile and fashion trends are hurting the sector". Handloom weavers form a vibrant community in Tamil Nadu that significantly contributes to the state's rich textile heritage. Despite competing with challenges posed by modernization and technological advancements, the resilience of the weaving community in Tamil Nadu is evident. A study was conducted among the handloom weavers located in Sourashtrapuram, Madurai with the aim of understanding the productivity among Sourashtrian handloom weavers associated with agents and societies in Madurai. This study follows descriptive research design in which survey method was adopted to collect the data from respondents.

Keywords: Handloom weavers, Agents and Societies

Introduction

The handloom industry is the second largest sector in India after agriculture and is widely diffused throughout the country. These activities involve transferring of skills from one

generation to the next. The handloom weavers are vastly spread around different areas in Madurai, Sourashtrapuram is one of the areas where people are associated with two different intermediaries.

Weavers associated with intermediaries

The common characteristics of both the weaver's segment is that the raw material is supplied by the intermediaries, Orders are provided by the them and the finished products are delivered to these intermediaries.

1. **Weavers associated with Societies:** People who are part of handloom weavers societies and engage in weaving are commonly known as society weavers. There are various handloom weavers societies in Madurai. Our study focused on Sudharsanam society and Meenakshi Nagar society in Sourashtrapuram. The total number of weavers associated with society in Madurai are from 1000 to 1200 approximately (According to Assistant Director of Handloom Office, Madurai).
2. **Weavers associated with Agents:** Individuals engaged in weaving under the guidance of agents are termed as agent weavers. The weavers are engaged with multiple agents, due to unidentified number of agents, the population size is unknown.

Factors influencing productivity:

Productivity is a measurement or the efficiency with which input can be converted into output over some given period of time. Some of the factors that influence productivity are

- **Training:** Proper training in weaving techniques and equipment operation can improve the speed and accuracy of weaving, which leads to higher productivity.
- **Quality checking:** Quality checking during the weaving process ensures that the finished products meet quality standards, which enhance productivity.
- **Family members:** Family members working together in weaving process creates supportive environment and commitment which boosts productivity.
- **Pehchan card:** Pehchan card is an identity equivalent to licensing for weavers. It enables weavers to access various benefits and facilitate loan transactions. This enables them to invest in better equipment or technology, which can improve productivity.

Review of Literature

- Sandhya Rani Das (May 2015) conducted a study on the topic “Socio-Economic Profile of the Handloom Weaving Community” with a focus on the Bargarh district. This study found out the overall problem faced by the handloom weavers are due to the technological constraint and traditional method causes low productivity at various stages of weaving as its time consuming.
- Mrs. Gowreeswari. D (2019) conducted a study on the topic “Problems Faced by Rural Handloom Weavers” The purpose of this study is conducted on the various challenges faced by rural handloom weavers. The findings of this study shows that majority of the employees are of opinion that they choose this field due to heredity. One of the most significant challenges identified in this study was the high cost of production. The study suggests that support is needed for the handloom weavers, who are preserving a traditional craft while facing modern economic challenges.
- Pratheshta.B.A. (August 2019) conducted a study on “A Study of the Present Situation of the Saurashtrian Weavers – A Minority Group in India”. The study aims to analyse the causes and reasons behind the decline of the handloom weavers in India. The study found out that weaving is the traditional occupation of Saurashtrians, and people are suspending themselves from weaving because of their lesser wage and development of power-loom.
- Shruti Sudha Mishra and Prof. Dr. A.K. Das Mohapatra (September 2019) conducted a study on the topic "The present condition of the weavers of handloom industry". This study focuses on the problems and the challenges that weavers are facing in continuing the tradition. And the study also focused on emerging issues of handloom weavers such as lack of technological development. The weavers are following traditional methods of production and design due to lack of exposure, awareness and knowledge over changing technological methods. Thus a study was conducted to understand the factors influencing productivity and basis of weavers choosing their intermediaries

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the reasons for choosing the weaving profession.
2. To know the reasons for choosing intermediaries.
3. To identify the key benefits that weavers enjoy by being associated with both agents and society.
4. To determine the primary challenges faced by weavers associated with both agents and society.

Research Methodology

The study follows a descriptive research design with no control over variables. A convenient sampling technique was adopted to identify 30 sourastrian handloom weavers, as the size of population is unknown. The population for study is known.

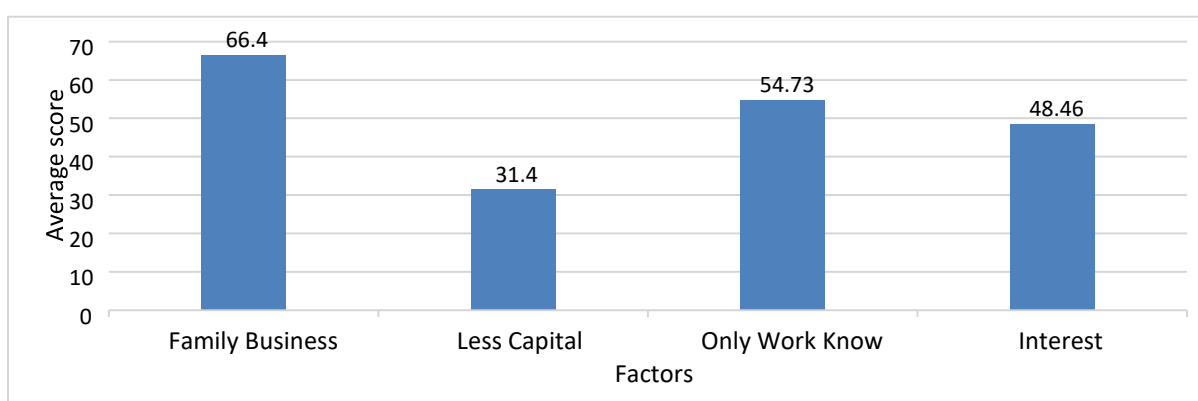
Table No.: 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Particulars		
N	30	
Weavers associated with Agents: Weavers associated with Societies	15:15	
Weavers associated with Agents	Male	3
	Female	12
Weavers associated with Societies	Male	5
	Female	10

The questionnaire was framed incorporating the factors that contribute to productivity among weavers and the selection of intermediary. The interview schedule method was adopted to collect data. This study ensured that participants involved in data collection was with their willingness and they were allowed to withdraw at will without any obligation. Descriptive statistics like the percentage method and Garrett ranking were used to analyse data. Bar diagrams are used to present the findings.

Results and Discussion

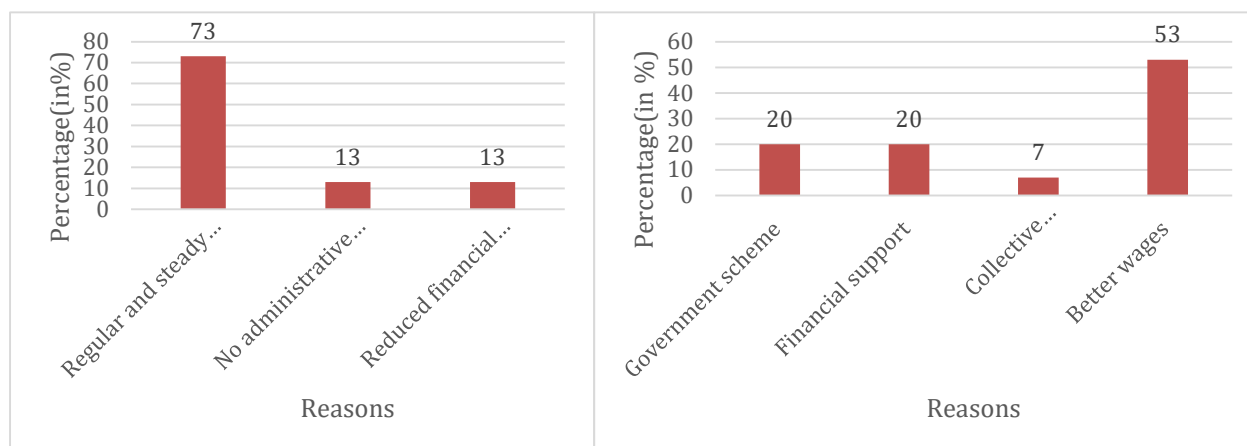
Diagram 1: GARRETT RANKING SHOWING THE REASONS TO BECOME A WEAVER



Garrett ranking technique was adopted to understand why the weavers chose this profession. The results reveal that family business had the strongest influence among the four factors with an average score of 66.4 securing the top rank among sourashtrian weavers. Following behind, only work known secures the second rank with an average score of 55.73. The interest of

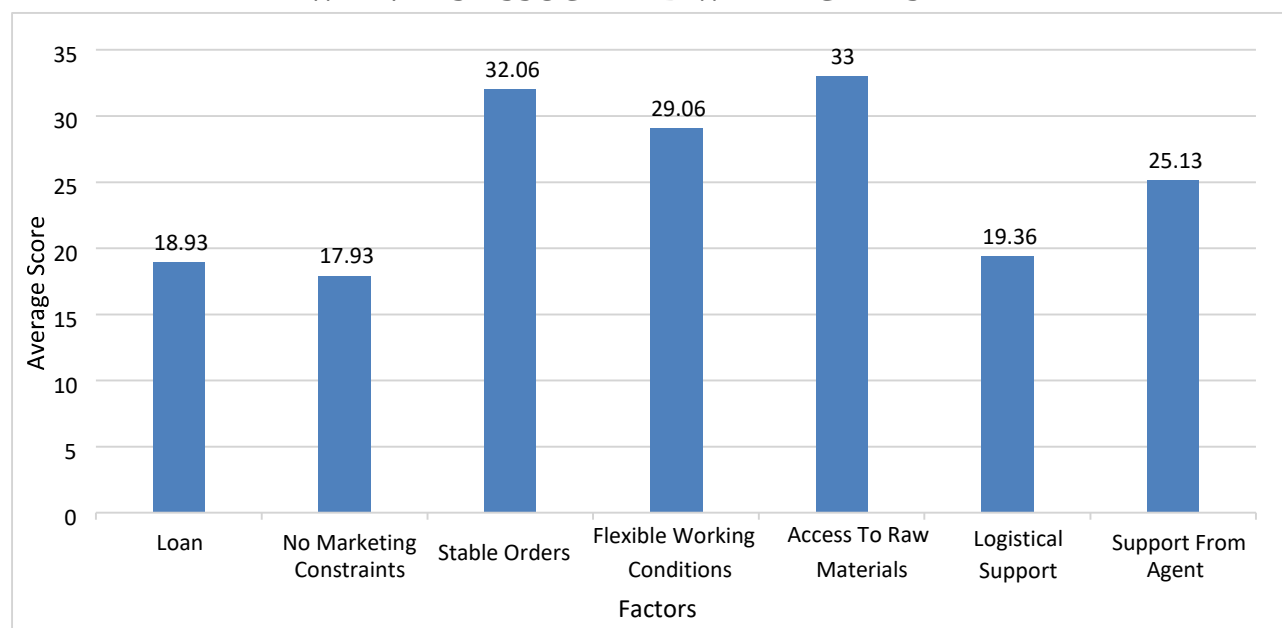
weavers has secured third rank with an average score of 48.46. Finally, less investment required to start the profession of weaving has secured the fourth rank with an average score of 31.4.

Diagram 2: WEAVERS REASONS FOR OPTING TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH AGENT AND SOCIETY



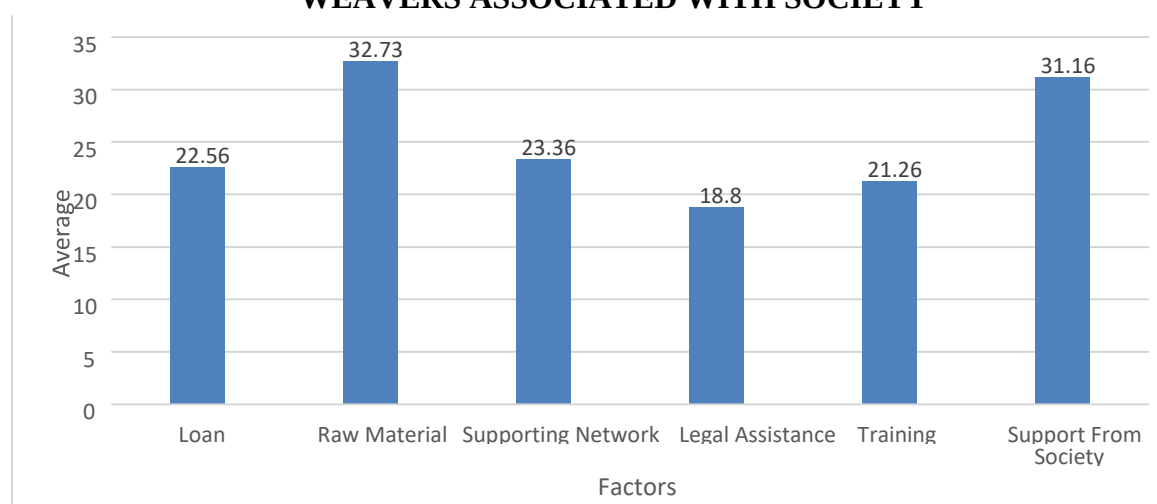
Percentage analysis was conducted to understand the reasons of weavers opting for choosing their intermediaries. The results reveal that 73% of respondents are associated with the agent for regular and steady work and 53% of the respondents have chosen to be associated with the society for better wages.

Diagram 3: GARRETT RANKING SHOWING BENEFITS RECEIVED BY WEAVERS ASSOCIATED WITH AGENTS



Garrett ranking technique was adopted to understand the benefits received by weavers associated with the agent. The results reveal that the weavers get easier access to raw materials and it holds the first rank with the average score of 33. Following closely, obtaining stable orders from the agents has secured second rank with an average score of 32.06. The data reveals that flexible working conditions secures third rank with an average score of 29.06 which allows them to manage their work and personal life. Support from agents placed a fourth rank with an average score of 25.14. Following behind, agent, logistical support from the agents secures fifth rank with an average score of 19.36. Obtaining loan through agent enables weavers to stabilize their financial position which secures sixth rank with an average score of 18.93. Finally, weavers who are associated with the agent had no marketing constraints which allows weavers to focus only on production which secures the last rank with an average score of 17.93.

Diagram 4: GARRETT RANKING SHOWING BENEFITS RECEIVED BY WEAVERS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIETY



Garrett ranking technique was adopted to understand the benefits received by weavers associated with society. The results reveal that Raw materials provision from the society holds the highest rank with an average score of 32.73. Following closely, support from the society secures the second rank with an average score of 32.16. The presence of a supportive network within the society provides a positive environment which holds the third rank with an average score of 23.36. Easier access to loans from the society protect the weavers from any financial risk which secures fourth rank with an average score of 22.60. Training opportunities holds the fifth rank with an average score of 21.26. Legal assistance has secured the last rank with an average score of 18.86.

Table 2: FAMILY MEMBERS INVOLVED IN WEAVING

Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Yes	11	73	13	87
No	4	27	2	13
Total	15	100	15	100

Percentage analysis was conducted to identify the involvement of family members in weaving. The results reveal that 73% of respondents who are associated with agents have their family members involved in the weaving process, 27% have responded that their family members are not involved in the weaving process. 87% of respondents who are associated with society have responded that their family members are involved in the weaving process and 13% have responded that their family members are not involved in the weaving process. The above table shows that majority of the weavers family are involved in the weaving process.

Table 3: TRAINING PROVIDED BY INTERMEDIATORIES IN WEAVING PROCESS

Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Spinning	8	31	11	31
Weaving	15	58	15	43
Packing	3	11	9	26
Total	26	100	35	100

Percentage analysis was conducted in which a multiple-choice question was implemented to identify the training undertaken by weavers in each of the weaving processes. The results revealed that 31% of weavers associated with agents have undergone training in spinning, 58% in Weaving and 11% in Packing. While 31% of weavers associated with societies have undergone training in spinning, 43 % in Weaving and 26% in packing. 31% of weavers associated with societies have undergone training in spinning, 43% in weaving and 26% in packing.

Table 4: TRAINING PERIOD FOR WEAVING PROCESSES BY INTERMEDIATORIES

SPINNING				
Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Days	5	62	4	36
Months	2	25	6	54
Years	1	12	1	9
Total	8	100	11	100
WEAVING				
Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Days	2	13	1	7
Months	7	47	8	53
Years	6	40	6	40
Total	15	100	15	100
PACKING				
Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Days	3	100	5	55
Months	0	0	3	33
Years	0	0	1	11
Total	3	100	9	100

Percentage analysis was conducted to identify the training period of weavers associated with both agents and societies in spinning, weaving and packing. The results reveal that weavers have undergone training to gain expertise in the weaving process.

Table 5: PEHCHAN CARD FOR WEAVING BUSINESS

Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Yes	6	40	10	67
No	9	60	5	33
Total	15	100	15	100

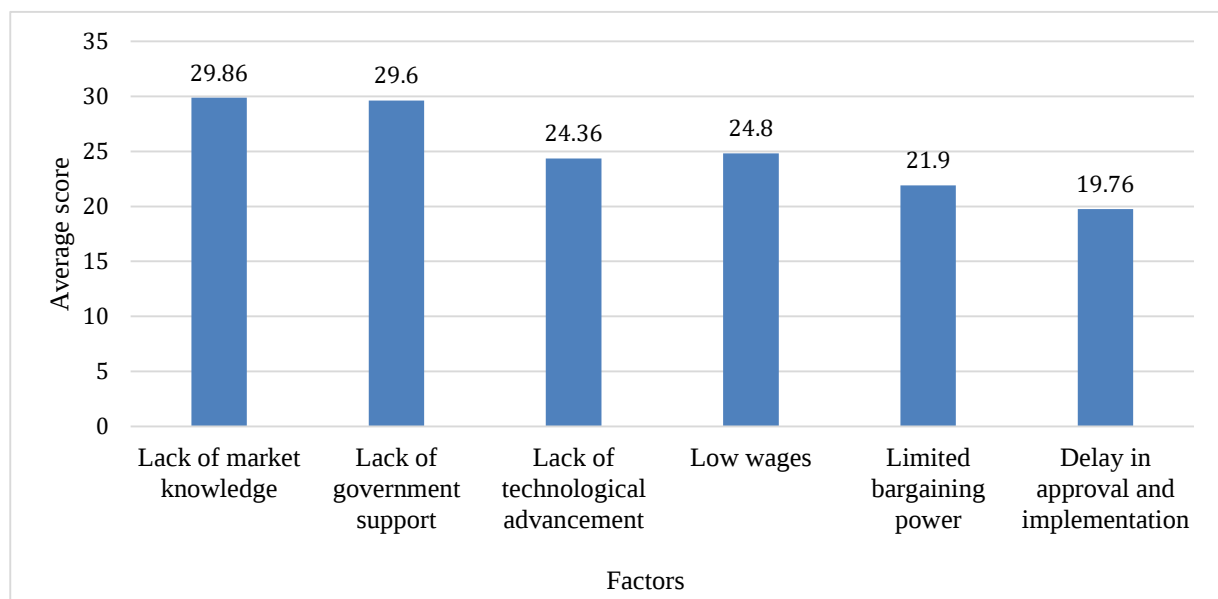
Percentage analysis was conducted to identify whether the weavers procure pehchan card. The results reveal that 40% of respondents who are associated with agent has Pehchan card, 60% of respondents doesn't have the card. 67% of respondents who are associated with society has Pehchan, 33% of respondents doesn't have the card. Weavers associated with agents and society do not have Pehchan due to lack of awareness about the schemes and benefits associated with the license.

Table 6: STAGES OF QUALITY CHECKING IN WEAVING

Particulars	Agent		Society	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (in %)
Raw materials Procurement	2	13	3	20
Spinning	0	0	1	7
Weaving	10	67	8	53
Packing	1	7	0	0
Finished product	2	13	3	20
Total	15	100	15	100

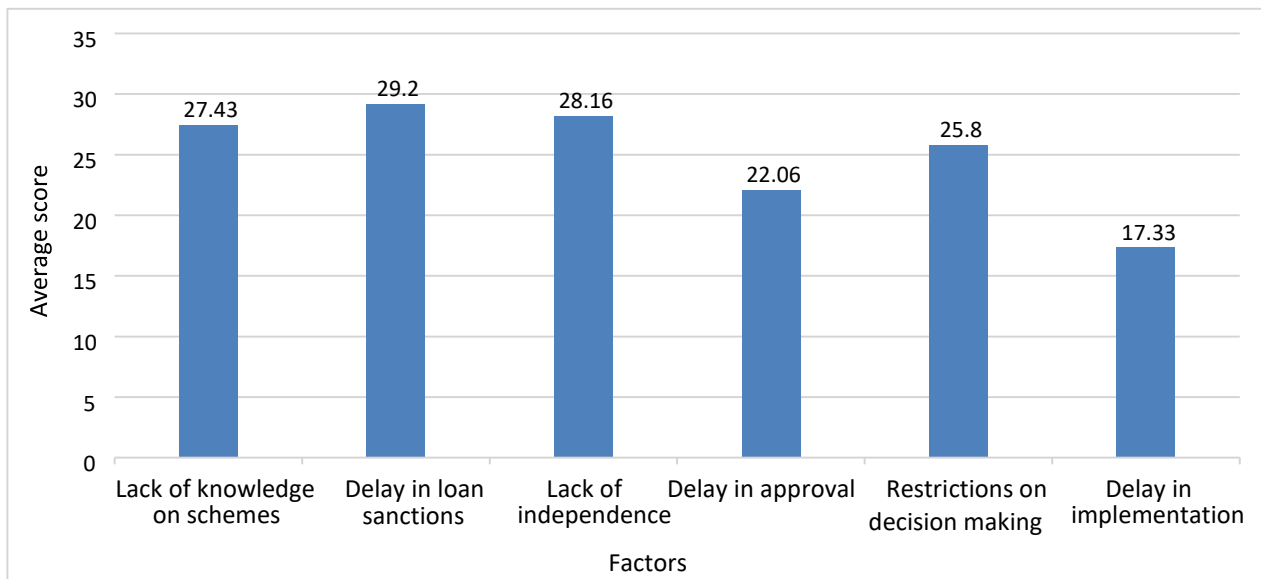
Percentage analysis was conducted to understand the stages of quality checking in weaving. The results reveal that 13% of the respondents weavers associated with agent chose to check quality in raw materials, 67% in weaving, 7% in packing and 13% in finished product, 20% of the weavers associated with society check quality in raw material, 7% in spinning, 53% in weaving and 20% of the respondents check quality in finished product.

Diagram 5: GARRETT RANKING SHOWING CHALLENGES FACED BY WEAVERS ASSOCIATED WITH AGENT



Garrett ranking technique was adopted to understand the challenges faced by weavers associated with agent. The results reveal that most significant challenge is lack of market knowledge which holds the first rank with an average score of 29.86, as weavers are unaware of the market dynamics. Following closely lack of government support holds the second rank with an average score of 29.60. Low wages are a significant concern which has secured third rank with an average score of 24.80. The weavers associated with agent face lack of access to technological advancements which ranks fourth with an average score of 24.36. Limited bargaining power secures fifth rank with an average score of 21.90. Delay in approvals and implementations holds the last rank with an average score of 19.76.

Diagram 6: GARRETT RANKING SHOWING CHALLENGES FACED BY WEAVERS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIETY



Garrett ranking technique was adopted to understand the challenges faced by the weavers associated with society. The results reveal that the most significant challenge appears to be delays in loan sanctions which has secured first rank with an average score of 29.2. Following behind, lack of independence implies that the weavers might have limited freedom in decision-making which has secured second rank with an average score of 28.16. Lack of knowledge about available schemes emerges as the third rank with an average score of 27.43. Restrictions on decision-making rank fourth with an average score of 25.80. Delays in approvals emerge as the fifth most challenge with an average score of 22.06. Delays in implementation is the least prominent challenge among the six factors for weavers associated with society which secures last rank with an average score of 17.33.

Suggestions

1. The findings reveals that 60 % of weavers associated with the agent and 33% of weavers associated with the society do not have license One form of license for weavers is Pehchan card. Thus, it is suggested to obtain Pehchan card to avail the benefits.
2. The findings reveals that 13 % of weavers associated with the agent and 20% of weavers associated with the society do not check quality in raw material procurement. Thus, it is recommended to check quality in each of the weaving process from procurement of raw materials till finished product to avoid excess wastages and thread clippings in the production process.

3. The findings reveals that the challenge faced by weavers associated with agents is the lack of government support with an average score of 29.6. Thus, it is suggested to orient the weavers about the available schemes and also help them in accessing the benefits.
4. The findings reveals that the most significant challenge faced by weavers associated with society is the delay in loan sanctions with an average score of 29.2. This may be due to over dependency on the intermediaries, thus it is recommended to provide practical learning to weavers which enables them to obtain loans on their own.

Outcome of the study

As many weavers were not having Pehchan card and were unaware about its benefits the researchers conducted an awareness session with six weavers and oriented the weavers to apply for the card. One of the weavers was convinced to apply for a pehchan card but couldn't provide due to restrictions. Community certificate, bank passbook, Aadhar card were the list of documents required for applying pehchan card. This card enables weavers to avail the benefits of all handicraft schemes implemented by the Ministry of textiles. Weavers with Pehchan card gets formal recognition as an artisan's associated with the government, they get access to welfare schemes and legal protection.

Conclusion

The research aimed to understand why individuals chose weaving as their profession and reasons behind their association with either an agent or society. Through this understanding the researchers uncovered the benefits and challenges faced by handloom weavers. Additionally, the researchers raised awareness about pehchan card which serves as a license that enables weavers to access various schemes provided by Government. Through this study, the researchers have extended a helping hand to the handloom weaving community by providing solutions and awareness that contributes to improve their livelihoods and overcoming the challenges they face.

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Author Biographies



Aadhisri J is a committed professional working as an Executive Copy Editor at Lumina Datamatics, Madurai, where she applies strong attention to detail and quality-driven editing skills. She has gained valuable industry exposure through internships at Aparajitha Corporate Services Private Limited and Poornatha Partnering Enterprises, which provided her with practical insights into corporate processes, compliance, and organizational development.



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Shifana J is a dedicated MBA fresher specializing in Finance and Marketing, with a strong GPA of 9.2 and proven leadership skills through key roles in academics and events. Through internships at StartupTN Madurai Regional Hub and Trioangle Technologies, she gained hands-on experience in startup ecosystem support, HR operations, recruitment processes, and analytical decision-making.



Kajal J. Mehta is a distinguished Associate Professor with over 21 years of rich teaching experience, complemented by valuable corporate exposure as an HR Executive at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). She is widely recognized for her ability to integrate real-world industry insights into academic practice, creating a dynamic learning environment that bridges theory and application. Her research interests and academic engagements reflect a strong focus on data-driven decision-making. Her unwavering commitment lies in nurturing the next generation of industry leaders through a blend of practical knowledge, research excellence, and digital proficiency.