

Geographical Indication Tag and Brand Development: A Case Study of Handloom Sarees in Kerala

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Abstract

Geographic indication of products designates a product's location and ensures protection under Intellectual Property Rights. These products can be categorized using a variety of classifications, including agricultural, natural commodities, manufactured goods, food items, textiles, and handicrafts. The saree is one of the country's more well-known and expensive handcrafted items. The current study looks into the Geographical Indication tag-based brand-building technique of the Indian handloom saree industry. The comparative analysis shows that all Saree producers use GI as a marketing technique to establish their brand identity. Moreover, the GI tag helped expand the market and popularise the Saree products' brand image.

Keywords: Brand Building Strategy, Handloom Products, GI, Saree Industry.

INTRODUCTION

One of India's largest unorganised economic sectors, the handloom industry, employs 3,522,512 people nationally (Handloom Census, 2019-20). This company has a long history of producing exquisitely made goods that respect and uphold the lively Indian culture. The handloom industry delivers sarees, kurtas, shawls, ghagra cholis, lungies, bedspreads, and other traditional textile clothing. Additionally, the sector produces modern goods such as bed linens, curtains, kitchenware, accent furniture, rug durries, and western attire. Expanding the Indian handloom industry requires an environmentally mindful production method that is power-efficient, adaptable, and less capital-intensive.

The geographic indicator is the most significant way to show how a product's quality and country of origin are related (GI). It aimed to solve the problem of knowledge asymmetry throughout the entire market. As a result, GI provides

believable knowledge regarding the value and quality of the products. The seller or producer, however, is well aware of the product's quality and longevity in comparison to other products of a similar nature now available on the market. GI Tag prevents confusion by attesting to the items' advantages and quality. Additionally, the Indian government issues GI tags for many products, including handlooms.

In India, the most popular item of clothing for women is the saree, which dominates the country's clothing and apparel industry. In 2017, it was estimated that the retail value of women's wear in India was INR 122,600 Crore, with sarees accounting for 33% of that figure or INR 38,000 Crore. The demand for sarees is expected to increase with a 6% compound annual growth rate between 2018 and 2023. By Financial Year 25, the Indian saree market is projected to reach 61,700 billion. The saree market in Surat and Rajkot is estimated to be worth 80,000 crores.

In contrast, markets in other cities, such as Kancheepuram, Mysore, Kota, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Kolkata, and Madhya Pradesh, are expected to range from 75,000 to 1,45,000 crores. India is also a significant exporter of handloom goods, such as bed linen, table linen, kitchen linen, bathroom linen, floor coverings, embroidered textile materials, curtains, etc., from cities like Karur, Panipat, Varanasi, and Kannur. From April 2021 to February 2022, Indian handloom exports amounted to Rs. 1,693 crores.

In India, a handwoven saree usually costs 1,475 rupees. Home textiles account for over 60% of India's handloom exports. In 2018, India exported 11,301,330 handwoven sarees worth US\$970,000. Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Canada are the top three importers of Indian handwoven sarees (\$210,000, \$190,000 and \$700,000, respectively). India has about 40 unique handwoven sarees. However, in 2018, India imported US\$12.39 million worth of handwoven sarees, most of which came from Bangladesh (US\$6.48 million) and other countries.

The current article examines how prominent saree producers in Kerala have built their brands utilising GI tags. A comparison of product attributes and marketing tactics was conducted to analyse the GI's brand-building potential. In addition, a thorough analysis of the commercial potential and brand value of GI-tagged handloom sarees has been conducted by contrasting four Keralan examples.

Literature Review

The study aims to investigate the market expansion tactics handloom saree producers use, who have GI tags but vary in

their marketing strategies, market positioning, and weaver attitudes. There is a difference between the saree weavers in northern and southern Indian states, with the former being more independent and employed as a group. Most research on the GI handloom industry focuses on consumer perception and purchasing intentions, but the marketing of handloom textiles, particularly sarees, is centred on business potential (Verma & Mishra, 2018). Although the GI tag provides authenticity, post-GI planning and implementation of marketing and branding is a problem in achieving full commercial potential. It has been argued that the GI tag cannot solve the market's political economy problems. A cost-benefit analysis of GI products shows that while GI provides unique branding, brand building through marketing increases costs (Basole, 2015). However, the popularity of GI-labeled sarees is growing, particularly among international fashion designers, and the handloom weavers receive financial support from the government, allowing them to continue in business (Mishra, 2022; Priyanka & Vimala, 2021).

GI Tag and Brand Creation: Comparison

Handloom loom products are sold in various ways, such as wholesale, online retail, brick-and-mortar retail and export. Weavers sell directly or indirectly to wholesale and retail outlets. Besides, sell directly to the customers when needed. However, this marketing technique is considered conventional and has been very successful. Selling products directly to customers and other merchants gave buyers an advantage as the transaction was usually completed at a lower price. Conversely, wholesale merchants sell their products

through physical stores with margins of 100% or more.

The GI label guarantees the quality and uniqueness of the goods and attracts more buyers. It also strengthened manufacturers' bargaining power and ability to assert product authenticity. Regarding post-GI product registration, the Indian government has mainly focused on pre-GI awareness initiatives but has not made significant efforts in areas such as advertising, distribution channels, branding and exports. Studies show that most products achieve premium prices by leveraging regional or geographic connotations, successfully creating distinctive brands in the global market. Out of 40 Indian handwoven sarees, four popular brands from Kerala with GI tags were selected and examined their brand image based on product quality, pricing and marketing strategies.

Chendamangalam Sarees: Kerala Kasavu Sarees are often referred to as sari (gold thread). Traditional handloom sarees known as Chendamangalam Sarees come from the village of Chendamangalam in Kerala, India. These sarees are renowned for their exquisite patterns, eye-catching hues, and premium fabric. They represent the area's rich cultural legacy and are manufactured using traditional handloom techniques handed down through the years. Spinning the yarn on a spinning wheel is the first step in creating a Chendamangalam saree. To give the yarn its unique colour and design, natural dyes like indigo and madder are used to dye it. After the dyeing procedure is finished, the yarn is weaved into a saree on a handloom employing a challenging weaving method that calls for patience and talent. High-quality cotton

used to create Chendamangalam sarees is breathable and cosy to wear. Nature and the local traditional arts are the sources of inspiration for the motifs and patterns on Chendamangalam sarees. The most widely used patterns, woven into the cloth using various colours to produce a lovely and distinctive saree, include paisley, floral, and geometric patterns.

Balaramapuram Sarees: This famous saree is produced in Balaramapuram, a district of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Balarama Varma, the former king of Travancore, encouraged Balarampur's weaving industry. The finest kasavu fabric is produced by the weavers of Balaramapuram. The weavers roll each yarn by hand to intertwine it with the weft that is wound in small pirns. Additional weft designs are woven in easy-to-wash vegetable colours. Rib weave is used for the zari at the flat hem of the fabric, which is done using additional pedals and strings. The flat hem of the product has a series of horizontal veins thanks to this weave. Moreover, the thread density of the Saree is higher than that of other similar saree.

This fabric is the first handwoven item in Kerala that came under GI protection. Balarama Puram Sarees' new marketing strategy includes turning weaving villages into their sales hubs. Unlike in previous years, weavers are keen to work with designers. The weavers of Balaramapuram Sarees are skilled enough to adapt to new designs without changing looms. In addition, they also produce on demand for weddings and festivals.

Kuthampully Sarees: The distance between the village of Kuthampully and the town of Thrissur is only about 50 km. Between the years 1200 and 1700 AD,

Tamil Nadu weavers migrated to the region and started producing these sarees. Jacquard used to weave Saree's pallu and weft. "Street sizing" technology wraps the yarn around evenly, giving the saree a very light surface and no protrusions. Plus, it retains a less starchy finish for a softer feel. Sarees by designer Kuthampully are known for their peacock, flower, Lord Krishna and kathakali designs. The warp and weft of kasavu came from Selma and Tamil Nadu, while the kasavu was brought from Surat in Gujarat.

Kasaragod Sarees: The traditional handloom sarees come from Kasaragod, a town in Kerala, an Indian state. These sarees are renowned for their exquisite patterns, eye-catching hues, and premium fabric. In order to create a Kasaragod saree, the yarn must first be spun on a spinning wheel and then dyed using natural colours. On a handloom, the yarn is knitted into a saree employing an intricate weaving process that calls for talent and perseverance. The popular motifs on Kasaragod sarees include paisley, floral, and geometric patterns woven into the cloth using various colours. The designs and patterns on Kasaragod sarees are influenced by nature and traditional art forms. High-quality cotton used to create Kasaragod sarees makes them breathable, comfortable to wear, and perfect for both everyday wear and special occasions.

Discussion

The GI tags support the producers' efforts to focus on and increase customer-centric product trust. However, the Saree producer uses word-of-mouth marketing through social media, flexibility to respond to changing fashion demand, and product quality maintenance to increase sales. Apart

from the futuristic side of the GI-tagged Sarees, the absence of uniform prices is one of the problems faced by the manufacturers and buyers. The product comparison reveals that prices for a single brand vary significantly among various weavers. It is evident from the comparison that the GI status provides recognition and credibility to the brand and helps to increase brand awareness among customers. This is one reason for higher product demand and greater market visibility. Moreover, the GI status provides a competitive advantage in the market.

Conclusion

Sari is the most popular dress for women in the country. Rural areas are the biggest market of Sarees with about 60% of saree consumption; however, it is assumed that the high-cost designer sarees will not be sold as they are sold in urban areas. The demand for silk and designer saree is increasing significantly as women in urban areas spend more money on this type of saree. The GI tag bridges the information gap between manufacturers and customers. Therefore, consumers purchase a product with brand value and product non-duplicability that can be connected to its place of origin. The manufacturer can offer an actual consumer the best price for his goods. Obtaining GI status proved a valuable tool for building a brand and protecting the authenticity and uniqueness of Saree Products in Kerala.

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