

Can Social Media be Used as a Tool to Increase the Income of Artisans - A Study with Specific Reference to Marble Artisans of Makrana, Rajasthan¹

Aahana Jain

Student of Class 11

Oberoi International School, Goregaon, Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

The wave of social media has stormed all parts of the world, including India, with several platforms being used as marketplaces to sell traditional Indian handicrafts. Marble handicraft, deeply rooted in the historical city of Makrana, Rajasthan, faces a paradox where the artisans, despite their extraordinary craftsmanship, remain ensnared in low-income brackets. This research explores the potential of social media as a tool to increase the income of Makrana's artisans and elevate their work to a national and global platform. It aims to assess the effectiveness of social media in increasing artisans' income.

The study is exploratory and employs a comprehensive research methodology, combining on-site surveys in Makrana, offline questionnaires and literature reviews to gauge artisans' income and social media awareness. The paper also uses the Chi-square test to further support its findings.

The findings of the research suggest that artisans will not be greatly benefited by independently using social media platforms to promote their products. However, if a collaborative approach is undertaken where they work under skilled social media professionals or those well-versed with the medium, social media could serve as a viable tool to generate more sales, ultimately leading to increased income.

Keywords: *Social media marketing (SMM); Artisans; Makrana; Increased income; Collaborative approach*

INTRODUCTION

More than half of the Indian population resides in rural and semi-urban areas. As a result, the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) run by residents of these areas significantly contribute to India's economy. In India, the sector of small and medium enterprises has been contributing towards entrepreneurship development which has further helped in mitigating poverty and unemployment majorly within semi-urban and rural areas (IBEF, 2021). These enterprises are part of the traditional unorganised sector.

With the introduction of Digital India and the wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a shift towards adopting social media marketing (SMM) strategies is evident. In the last 10 years, various social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have become accessible to all. One can leverage these platforms and earn great income by connecting with their audience through marketing strategies like innovative posts and reels. Indian brands like MamaEarth have been using social media platforms as a strategic moat. Through influencer marketing, focusing on digital-first distribution and building brand community and engagement, MamaEarth has increased its brand awareness, consumer loyalty and customer acquisition, promoting organic growth (Patil and Desai). Several other Indian indigenous companies have been harnessing the use of social media to broaden the reach of their brands. In this digital age when

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social media is providing a platform for businesses to grow, it is critical to understand whether workers in SMEs can leverage its use as an additional/ alternative source of income.

A comprehensive study of all secondary sources related to the topic revealed some gaps that are as follows:

1. Limited study on rural artisans.
2. Lack of nuanced understanding of the artisan's psyche.
3. Prevalence of unrealistic assumptions.

Thus, this study aims to bridge the research gaps and hence has the following objectives:

1. Study the current socio-economic situation of the marble artisans of Makrana, Rajasthan.
2. Assess the viability of social media as an effective tool to increase their income.
3. Promote awareness about the fact that artisans can go beyond their daily low-income jobs to live a better life.

Therefore, the central guiding question that this paper will focus on is: **“Can social media be used as a tool to increase the income of artisans - a study with specific reference to marble artisans of Makrana, Rajasthan.”**

METHODOLOGY

As the research question is focused on a particular location (Makrana), primary research was carried out to deeply understand the current situation of artisans which would be difficult to do otherwise through secondary research. The conclusions derived from primary research were evaluated with the help of secondary sources.

To obtain primary data, an interactive survey was conducted with 50 artisans in Makrana and a few thekedars (contractors) (Appendix A). Questions were asked to become cognizant of their system of earning, system of work, standard of living, working conditions, employment rate, etc. The living conditions of the artisans were also understood. Thus, the survey provided an initial answer as to whether the use of social media is feasible. This in turn became the grounds for further research.

However, there was no way to check the reliability of the data collected, as it was self-reported. The artisans may have provided answers that they perceived to be more socially acceptable. Hence, different types of secondary data, like research papers, articles, and blogs, were studied that helped validate the results drawn from the primary data. The hypothesis reached from secondary and primary research was tested using the Chi-squared test for independence. Data for the chi-squared test was derived from another experiment done for a cohort of 20 artisans for 3 months (Appendix B). The test helped establish a relationship between the increase in income and the use of social media by artisans through professional help. Furthermore, an experiment was conducted to gauge how much artisans can expect to earn additionally using social media.

Thus, quantitative experiments helped justify the hypothesis made through qualitative analysis. This helped to reach a sound conclusion.

ABOUT MAKRANA

Makrana is a tehsil in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan. More than 136 villages are under this tehsil, making it one of the biggest tehsil in the district. Chawandiya (4 KM), Jakhli (7 KM), Bidiyad (7 KM), Jusariya (8 KM), and Gangwa (9 KM) are the nearby villages. It is surrounded by Parbatsar and Kishangarh towards the South, Kuchaman towards the East and Didwana towards the North.

Makrana is famous for the marble and marble stones from its mines. It is popularly known as "Sangmarmar City" (translates to marble city). Makrana marble is exported overseas mainly to the Persian Gulf countries, the European Union, Southeast Asia, Canada, Pakistan and Russia. In India, it is mainly used for handicraft and sculpture work. This marble was given the geographical indication (GI) status in 2015 by the Geographical Indication Registry, Chennai. A geographical indication (GI) is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. It is one of only two calcitic marble varieties found in India, while all others are dolomitic.

Makrana artisans are highly skilled in their craft. All handicrafts are man-made and intricately carved. Common items include sculptures, statues, vases, cutlery, boxes and many more. However, these artisans are underpaid relative to

their hard work. Thus, this paper explores the viability of an alternative/ additional source of income through using social media as a marketplace.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Insights

According to data released by Govt. of India for Census 2011, Makrana has a literacy rate of 64.03%, less than the national urban average of 85%. The 2011 census revealed that about 25.27% of the population is Muslim and 59.5% of the entire population resides in the rural areas of Makrana. These demographics attest to why artistry is one of the most popular occupations in Makrana. The census also showed that 74.9% of workers describe their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 25.1% are involved in Marginal activity providing a livelihood for less than 6 months. This means that most of the population is permanently employed. They thus have a steady income. Of 122,992 workers engaged in Main Work, 31,480 are cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 5,872 are Agricultural labourers - thus remaining (about 70%) are artisans (85640). Artisans hence make up the largest proportion of the population.

Ownership and access to Smartphones

Out of the 50 artisans surveyed, 47 said they own mobile phones (94%). However, only 30 out of them owned smartphones (63.8%). Even those who owned smartphones reported that they used them for calls, SMS, making videos, clicking photographs or watching videos. Very few of them knew its economic and commercial usage in promoting their goods and services.

Connectivity challenges and internet accessibility

31 of 50 respondents (62%) had access to a stable source of electricity connection while 39 (78%) of the sample had satisfactory phone network and internet connectivity through personal data packs.

Banking ecosystem

27 artisans (54%) reported having a bank account. However, only 11 out of the 27 (40.7%) used digital payment systems like UPI wallets such as Paytm PhonePe and GPay, internet banking services, debit/credit cards, and AEPS. UPI was the most common digital mode of transactions among all.

Smartphone application knowledge

Out of the 30 artisans who own a smartphone, most of them had adequate knowledge about platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube. However, except for artisans under the age of 25, no one knew how to use Instagram. Even those under 25 years of age used Instagram for entertainment and were unaware of the financial benefit they could gain from properly using the application.

Ability and desire to onboard an online marketplace

The study results noted that 100% of the artisans had never made a sale online (digital platforms, e-commerce websites, and Facebook or WhatsApp groups). When asked whether they would be interested in doing so, the artisans were very hesitant to the idea.

Ability to learn and navigate different digital platforms

The survey results captured a very critical operational hurdle faced by the artisan community. 20% of the respondents stated that they need to be taught how to click and upload photos and 80% stated that they needed help navigating through the various features of the platform.

Current system of earning

Currently, the artisans follow a thekedar (contractor) system. Each contractor has a set number of artisans working under him. He acts as a middleman and thus recruits these artisans for larger businesses. Artisans in fact prefer this system of earning as it provides them with a steady income. They make around ₹8000 - ₹12000 monthly. Artisans

struggle to work independently because of a lack of business acumen required in terms of customer relationship management, branding, marketing, handling logistics, accounting, etc. Their satisfaction and comfort with the current “thekedari” system ruled out the option of social media being used as an alternative to the current system. Thus, we need to explore whether it can be used additionally.

How did they get into marble crafting

The skill of marble craftsmanship in Makrana is deeply ingrained and passed down through generations. Artisans bring their children to work, where they learn the craft firsthand, as there is no formal education provided for this purpose. Growing up immersed in this environment, children absorb the skills naturally and continue the family tradition. Artisans typically begin working at a very young age as they accompany their fathers to their warehouse and learn the ropes.

The Global Statistics said that the number of social media users in India in 2024 has grown to 692 million, which is about 48.7% of its total population. Furthermore, the average daily time spent on social media is 2 hours 50 mins. As discussed earlier, not only large corporations but also small businesses have been using social media to promote their business because of steady traffic on these platforms. Social media allows for a medium to build organic relationships with consumers, develop customer loyalty and foster a sense of community through engaging posts and stories. For a small business like selling marble handicrafts, social media is especially pivotal as it will allow artisans to tell their stories. This will raise awareness about the brand and widen the customer base because of the number of users on social media. Most importantly, social media platforms are free of cost and hence provide a very high return on investment.

However, the survey revealed that the artisans were neither educated about social media nor about digital payment systems. The younger generation of artisans, who use social media for entertainment purposes were aware of how it can be used for economic gains however important factors like the poor quality of pictures they clicked and their inability to interact with customers in English would hinder their success as no customer would be attracted to visit their social media account anyway.

Thus, the paper hypothesized that artisans lack the skills to handle social media platforms. They would have to be trained to use social media first however training would not guarantee that they would be able to truly use social media for their benefit because there is a high likelihood that the brand image that they would be able to create would not match the likings of most customers hence artisans by themselves would not be able to generate a lot of sales. The investment of time and effort to learn how to use social media, click pictures to post, engaging with audiences through pools and reels would be too high and the return on investment in comparison has a high probability of being low. **Thus, it was concluded that artisans shouldn't use social media as a marketplace by themselves. However, if artisans work under an educated professional who understands social media marketing, they would greatly benefit.** The paper recommended that artisans be paid a fixed percentage of each sale. Under this system, social media can be a source of additional income for artisans.

To test the hypothesis, a chi square test of independence was conducted based on an experiment conducted for a period of 3 months. Artisans handled their social media accounts independently or with professional support and it was measured whether their income rose significantly or not (more than 10% of the monthly income they generate under thekedari system). The sample size was 20 artisans; 10 had access to professional support whereas 10 did not.

χ^2 test for independence

Null hypothesis (H_0) - There is no relationship between access to professional support in social media marketing and an increase in income for artisans.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1) - There is a relationship between access to professional support in social media marketing and an increase in income for artisans.

Observed frequency table:

	Increase in income	No increase in income	Column Total
Professional support	7	2	9
No professional support	3	9	12
Row Total	10	11	21

(This is a 2 × 2 contingency table)

$$\text{Expected Frequency} = \frac{\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

Therefore, expected frequency table:

	Increase in income	No increase in income	Column Total
Professional support	4.29	4.71	10
No professional support	5.71	6.29	10
Row Total	9	11	20

$$\chi^2_{calc} = \frac{\text{sum of } (f_{observed} - f_{expected})^2}{f_{expected}}$$

Degrees of freedom (df)	Significance level α		
	10%	5%	1%
1	2.71	3.84	6.63
2	4.61	5.99	9.21
3	6.25	7.81	11.34
4	7.78	9.49	13.28

Source: Haase Mathematics Analysis and Interpretations 2

The above figure shows the critical value given the significance level and degrees of freedom. χ^2 table:

	Increase in income	No increase in income	Column Total
Professional support	$\frac{(7 - 4.29)^2}{4.29} = 1.71$	$\frac{(2 - 4.71)^2}{4.71} = 1.56$	10
No professional support	$\frac{(3 - 5.71)^2}{5.71} = 1.29$	$\frac{(9 - 6.29)^2}{6.29} = 1.17$	10
Row Total	9	11	20

$$\chi^2 = 1.71 + 1.56 + 1.29 + 1.17 = 5.73$$

Degrees of freedom (df) is the number of values that are free to vary

$$Df = (\text{number of rows} - 1) \times (\text{number of columns} - 1) = 1 \times 1 = 1$$

The chosen significance level is 1%. Therefore, according to the previously enclosed figure, the critical value is 6.63.

Since $\chi^2_{critical\ value} > \chi^2$ we accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

Thus, there is a relationship between access to professional support in social media marketing and an increase in income for artisans. Artisans have a much higher likelihood of earning significant additional income through social media marketing using professional support than by using social media themselves.

Once it was statistically established that artisans are more likely to earn higher income through social media working under media professionals than independently, the paper also checked whether artisans would earn additional income by collaborating with those well-versed in social media in a real-life scenario.

Thus, artisans were made to work under 'Erasmic Marbles', a company based in Makrana that deals in marble products. Extensive discussions with the social media team at Erasmic Marbles which undertakes organic marketing in the form of reels and posts revealed that each post/ reel on Instagram had on average 1000 views. The social media team tried to portray the story behind each piece of handicraft, ranging from trays to trinkets by showing the artisans who were the hands behind the final product. This helped build a brand image. Through engaging stories, they built a strong connection with the audience and gained around 25 customers from each post thus arriving at a conversion rate of 2.5%. This conversion rate was also attested by Driftlead. Over 6 months, Erasmic Marbles made 178 posts which helped them to acquire 4450 customers ($25 \times 178 = 4450$). The average order value was ₹250 and the profit margin was around 15%. As an incentive to the artisans, 5% of the profits of Rs 37.50 per order thus Rs 1.88 was shared with them. This approach not only offered the artisans a share in the profits but also led to an increase in their monthly income. Hence, as against only earning ₹8,000 - ₹10,000 monthly, the artisans earned Rs 1395 additionally per month ($\text{Rs } 1.88 \times 742 \text{ monthly orders}$). Offering them the opportunity to earn 14% - 18% additionally would help increase their standard of living and keep them motivated without the need to work overtime. So, with no additional effort, they earned an additional amount of Rs 1395 per month, thus proving that under the right circumstances, social media is a very effective tool for artisans to increase their income.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the potential of social media to increase the income of marble artisans in Makrana, Rajasthan. The research reveals that while artisans will not significantly benefit from adopting social media independently, collaborating with individuals who have expertise in social media marketing can greatly boost their income.

Backed by both qualitative and quantitative data, including a Chi-square test for independence, the findings of the paper suggest that artisans are more likely to see a significant increase in their earnings with professional support. The case study with Erasmic Marbles suggests that a professional approach to social media marketing can increase artisans' income by around 14% to 18% without any extra effort.

In conclusion, while independent use of social media may not be feasible, a collaborative approach with media professionals is a viable solution. This paper underscores the importance of professional collaboration to empower traditional artisans in today's digital age.

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Appendix A - Questions asked to the artisans (translated to English, asked in Hindi)

Sr. no	Question
1.	What is your name?
2.	What is your age?
3.	Since how long have you been residing in Makrana?
4.	Since how long have you been working as a “karegar”?
5.	Do you own a mobile phone? If yes then is it a smartphone?
6.	What do you use your phone for?
7.	Do you have a bank account? If yes, do you have a UPI ID?
8.	Do you use social media? If yes, then what for?
9.	Which form of social media do you use? Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or anything else?
10.	Do you know that you can use social media to sell your marble products?
11.	Are you open to the idea?
12.	What is the current system of earning
13.	How much do you earn? An approximate range?
14.	Are you open to an additional/ alternative source of income?

Appendix B - Pictures of my visit to makrana and my interaction with artisans



Appendix C - Pictures of Erasmic Marble's Instagram Account

