

Psychological Appeal of Hand-Printed Textiles of India: An Exploratory Study of Emotional Perception, Authenticity, and Cultural Identity in Consumer Preference

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Abstract: *Indian hand-printed textiles, produced through techniques such as block printing, hand painting, and resist dyeing, represent one of the country's oldest craft traditions, yet the psychological mechanisms underlying their appeal to consumers have received limited empirical attention. Most existing research has approached the subject from historical, anthropological, or economic perspectives, leaving the emotional and identity-related dimensions of consumer engagement largely unexplored. The present study examined the psychological appeal of hand-printed textiles among Indian consumers, with specific attention to perceived authenticity, cultural identity, and emotional connection as predictors of consumer preference and recommendation intention. A mixed-method, correlational-descriptive design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from 120 consumers through a structured online questionnaire measuring purchase behaviour, perceived authenticity, importance of artisan narrative, cultural connectedness, emotional attachment, and willingness to recommend and pay a premium for hand-printed textiles, while open-ended items captured qualitative impressions analysed thematically. Emotional perception, a composite of authenticity, cultural connectedness, and emotional attachment, significantly and positively predicted recommendation intention, explaining approximately 61 percent of the variance, whereas perceived authenticity alone did not significantly predict willingness to pay a premium. Design, colour, and motif emerged as the strongest single influence on purchase decisions, ahead of artisan narrative, and the majority of respondents were willing to pay only a modest premium of up to 10 percent for hand-printed over machine-made textiles. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses highlighted cultural heritage, artisanal effort, and intergenerational memory as the most frequently expressed associations. The findings suggest that the psychological appeal of hand-printed textiles is substantially rooted in perceived authenticity and cultural identity rather than economic reasoning, with implications for artisan-support initiatives, sustainable fashion marketing, and craft-heritage communication strategies.*

Keywords: Hand-Printed Textiles, Cultural Identity, Consumer Preference, Emotional Connection, Perceived Authenticity

1. Introduction

Indian textiles represent one of the oldest and most diverse craft traditions in the world. Hand-printing techniques such as block printing, hand painting, and resist dyeing have been practised for centuries across regions including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. These techniques are not merely methods of textile production; they are embedded within cultural heritage, artisanal identity, and community livelihoods, and the handloom and hand-printing sector remains one of India's largest decentralised economic activities, providing livelihoods to millions of artisans, a large proportion of whom are women and members of rural or tribal communities.

Hand-printed textiles are created through labour-intensive artistic processes in which artisans carve wooden blocks, mix natural dyes, and print or paint motifs onto fabric by hand. Unlike mass-produced textiles, each handcrafted piece carries subtle variations that reflect the artisan's personal touch, skill, and emotional investment. In contemporary consumer markets, there is growing interest in handmade and sustainable fashion, and buyers increasingly associate handcrafted textiles with authenticity, cultural heritage, ethical consumption, and emotional value. At the same time, the handloom and hand-printing sector faces mounting

pressure from cheaper machine-made substitutes and changing consumer habits.

Psychological research on material possessions has long argued that objects are not merely functional, they become extensions of the self and vehicles of meaning, memory, and identity. Clothing and textiles, in particular, function as a language through which individuals express who they are and negotiate their relationship with tradition and modernity. Within this literature, hand-printed textiles occupy a distinctive position, combining aesthetic appeal with narratives of heritage, effort, and authenticity that may evoke stronger emotional responses than machine-made equivalents. Despite this apparent psychological richness, empirical research specifically addressing the emotional and identity-related appeal of Indian hand-printed textiles remains limited. This study was undertaken to address that gap by examining how emotional perception, perceived authenticity, and cultural identity relate to consumer preference for and engagement with Indian hand-printed textiles.

Accordingly, the present study asks: how do Indian consumers psychologically perceive and respond to hand-printed textiles, and what role do authenticity, cultural identity, and emotional connection play in shaping their purchase-related preferences and behaviours? Examining this question is of both theoretical and practical relevance, since the long-term viability of the hand-printing sector depends

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substantially on sustained consumer demand rooted in psychological engagement with the craft.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

This research draws upon four psychological and cultural frameworks. Consumer identity theory holds that individuals use consumption choices, including clothing and textiles, as tools for expressing and communicating identity. Owning or wearing a traditional Indian craft textile may allow a consumer to signal cultural affiliation, aesthetic values, or ethical commitments. Norman's emotional design theory distinguishes visceral, behavioural, and reflective levels of emotional response to design. Hand-printed textiles arguably operate strongly at the reflective level, since much of their value is carried by the narrative of who made them, how, and why. Authenticity and craft theory treats authenticity as a socially constructed but psychologically powerful source that consumers attribute to products associated with tradition, heritage, and non-industrial production. This complements this with the well-documented "handmade effect," where consumers rate handmade products as more attractive than otherwise identical machine-made products. This rating is driven substantially by the perception that handmade objects symbolically "contain love." Finally, cultural identity theory, closely related to social identity theory, holds that traditional crafts serve as markers of cultural belonging and heritage preservation, with motifs, techniques, and colour palettes specific to particular communities and regions embedded into textiles.

Empirical Review

A substantial body of consumer psychology research has examined handmade products, authenticity, and craft consumption in general commercial contexts. Experimental work has demonstrated a consistent handmade effect in which handmade items are judged more attractive than machine-made equivalents due to perceived effort, quality, and uniqueness. Interview-based research on luxury goods has shown that producers construct authenticity through a sincere narrative emphasising historical roots, place, and commitment to craft rather than industrial efficiency, and multi-item scales. This has developed to measure consumer-based brand authenticity more precisely. Foundational consumer-research literature has also proposed that possessions, including clothing with strong personal or symbolic meaning, become part of an individual's identity. Within the Indian context, historical and material-culture studies have documented the regional diversity of Indian textile traditions, including ikat, resist-dyeing, and block-printing techniques, situating hand-printed and hand-woven textiles within a broader lineage of craftsmanship. Correlational research among handloom weaving communities has found a significant positive relationship between weavers' income satisfaction and the importance they place on preserving cultural heritage. This suggests that economic security and cultural meaning are intertwined for artisans. Case studies of specific regional handloom traditions have similarly identified economic, social, and psychological threats to craft continuity, underscoring the psychological as well as economic importance of preserving craft heritage.

Research Gap

Existing studies primarily examine Indian textiles from historical, anthropological, or economic perspectives, or examine handloom weaver livelihoods from the artisan's side. General consumer psychology has separately documented a robust handmade effect and authenticity effect in Western or cross-national commercial contexts, but this literature has rarely been applied specifically to Indian hand-printed textiles as a category, nor tested with reference to India-specific cultural identity motives. There is, in particular, limited research examining the emotional connection Indian consumers report toward hand-printed textiles, the psychological motivations that most strongly predict willingness to recommend or pay a premium for such textiles, and the role of identity expression and cultural symbolism relative to purely economic or fashion-trend considerations. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on the consumer side of the artisan-consumer exchange.

3. Problem Definition, Objectives, and Hypotheses

While handcrafted textiles are increasingly appreciated in modern fashion markets, there is limited psychological research exploring how emotional value, cultural identity, and perceptions of authenticity influence consumer engagement with Indian hand-printed textiles specifically, as distinct from the broader handloom sector or Western handmade-product contexts. This gap motivates the following objectives:

- 1) To explore the psychological appeal of Indian hand-printed textiles among consumers
- 2) To examine how emotional perception, comprising perceived authenticity, cultural connectedness, and emotional attachment, relates to consumer preference and recommendation intention
- 3) To understand the role of identity expression, cultural symbolism, and artisan narrative in consumer decisions to purchase or wear hand-printed textiles.
- 4) To identify, through thematic analysis of open-ended responses, the dominant psychological associations that consumers attach to hand-printed textiles.

The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: emotional perception (authenticity, cultural connectedness, and emotional attachment) significantly and positively predicts consumer recommendation intention for hand-printed textiles

H2 : perceived authenticity significantly predicts willingness to pay a premium for hand-printed textiles.

4. Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-method, cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational design was adopted. The quantitative component used a structured online questionnaire to measure consumer perceptions, preferences, and behavioural intentions, while open-ended questionnaire items captured spontaneous thoughts and personal meanings analysed thematically. This design allows for a triangulated understanding of both the measurable strength of association between psychological variables and the qualitative texture of consumer experience.

Participants

The target population consisted of consumers who purchase, or are potential purchasers of, handcrafted and hand-printed textile products. Convenience sampling was used, with respondents recruited through online channels and personal and professional networks. Responses were obtained from 120 consumers. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be adults (18 years or above) who purchase textile products and are able to complete an English-language questionnaire. Individuals directly employed in textile manufacturing or retail were excluded to minimise professional bias.

Measures

Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire, "Consumer Survey: Preferences of Hand-Printed Textiles," comprising socio-demographic and purchase-behaviour items. A five-point Likert-type attitude items measured perceived authenticity, importance of artisan story, cultural connectedness, emotional attachment, and recommendation intention. A willingness-to-pay item with four ordered categories was included. Categorical items on motif preference and purchase motivation and two open-ended items inviting free-text responses on the thoughts, emotions, and perceived value associated with hand-printed textiles were also added. Because the achieved sample size was modest, Likert items were treated as single-item indicators rather than validated multi-item subscales.

5. Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was distributed online during July 2026. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and voluntary nature and provided informed consent before participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout; identifying information collected for form validation was removed prior to analysis. Data were exported, cleaned, and analysed using Python (pandas, SciPy, and statsmodels).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarised purchase-behaviour categories and the central tendency and spread of Likert-scale variables. Pearson product-moment correlation examined the strength and direction of association among the continuous and ordinal variables. Simple linear regression tested whether the composite emotional perception score predicted recommendation intention, and whether perceived authenticity alone predicted willingness to pay a premium. Thematic analysis, using an inductive, keyword-guided coding approach, was applied to the two open-ended items. A conventional significance threshold of $p < .05$ (two-tailed) was used throughout.

6. Results and Discussion

This section presents the descriptive, correlational, regression, and thematic findings from the 120 consumer respondents.

Table 1: Descriptive Profile of Purchase Behaviour (N = 120)

Variable	Category	%
Frequency of purchase	Occasionally (a few times a year)	63.3
	Rarely (once a year or less)	20.0
	Frequently (monthly or more)	16.7
Preference (hand-printed vs. machine-made)	No particular preference	43.3
	Depends on occasion	26.7
	Hand-printed / handcrafted	23.3
	Machine-printed / mass-produced	6.7
Willingness to pay extra	Up to 10% more	53.3
	10–25% more	30.0
	Not willing to pay extra	13.3
	More than 25% more	3.3
Primary purchase factor	Design, colour, or motifs	63.3
	Story or history behind the craft	30.0

As Table 1 shows, most respondents purchase textiles only occasionally, and preference for hand-printed over machine-made textiles is largely context-dependent rather than a fixed disposition. Just over half of respondents were willing to pay only a modest premium of up to 10 percent for a hand-printed textile, and design, colour, and motif emerged as the single most influential purchase factor, well ahead of the narrative or history behind the craft.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Likert-Scale Variables (N = 120)

Variable	Scale range	Mean	SD
Perceived authenticity	1–5	2.50	1.14
Importance of artisan story	1–4	2.67	0.92
Cultural connectedness	1–5	2.17	1.12
Emotional attachment	1–5	2.57	1.28
Recommendation intention	1–5	2.27	1.14
Emotional perception (composite)	1–5	2.41	0.98

Mean scores across all Likert variables clustered in the lower-to-middle portion of their respective scales, indicating moderate rather than strong agreement with statements regarding authenticity, cultural connectedness, and emotional attachment. This tempers any interpretation of hand-printed textiles as evoking uniformly intense emotional responses across the general consumer population. The emotional appeal appears concentrated among a subset of more strongly engaged respondents.

Table 3: Selected Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 120)

Variable pair	r
Authenticity – Recommendation intention	.56**
Cultural connectedness – Recommendation intention	.64**
Emotional attachment – Recommendation intention	.74**
Authenticity – Willingness to pay	.06 (n.s.)
Emotional attachment – Willingness to pay	-.18*
Recommendation intention – Willingness to pay	-.33**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

All four emotional and authenticity-related variables were significantly and positively intercorrelated, supporting the assumption that they form a coherent underlying dimension of emotional perception, and each was significantly positively correlated with recommendation intention, with emotional attachment showing the strongest association. The pattern for willingness to pay a premium was more mixed: perceived authenticity and artisan-story importance showed small, non-

significant associations, whereas cultural connectedness, emotional attachment, and recommendation intention were negatively and significantly correlated with willingness to pay. This counterintuitive pattern suggests that more emotionally engaged consumers do not necessarily expect, or feel able, to pay proportionally more, and may warrant further investigation into perceived pricing fairness among highly engaged customers.

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Predicting Recommendation Intention (N = 120)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Constant	0.058	0.173	0.335	.738
Emotional perception (composite)	0.916	0.067	13.70	< .001

$R^2 = .614$, Adjusted $R^2 = .611$, $F(1, 118) = 187.7$, $p < .001$.

The regression model was statistically significant and explained approximately 61.4 percent of the variance in recommendation intention. Emotional perception was a strong, positive, and statistically significant predictor of the likelihood that a respondent would recommend hand-printed textiles to others, supporting Hypothesis 1. A parallel regression testing perceived authenticity alone as a predictor of willingness to pay a premium was not statistically significant ($r = .062$, $p = .501$), indicating that perceived authenticity, considered in isolation, does not meaningfully predict willingness to pay more in this sample; Hypothesis 2 was therefore not supported.

7. Thematic Findings

Thematic analysis of the two open-ended items identified cultural heritage and tradition as the most frequently expressed theme, reported by roughly one-third of respondents, followed by craftsmanship and effort, aesthetic appreciation, and emotional warmth and nostalgia, including intergenerational family memory. A smaller proportion of responses referenced authenticity and naturalness explicitly, while a minority expressed no strong association. These themes provide qualitative support for the theoretical frameworks reviewed above: cultural heritage and tradition echo cultural identity theory and the quantitative preference for traditional and cultural motifs, while craftsmanship and effort align closely with the handmade-effect literature, in which perceived effort and symbolically "contained love" drive positive evaluation of handmade goods.

8. Discussion

The pattern of results suggests a layered psychological appeal of hand-printed textiles. At the point of purchase decision-making, aesthetic factors such as design, colour, and motif, dominate the purchase. However, once ownership and use are considered, a deeper layer of emotional perception, comprising perceived authenticity, cultural connectedness, and emotional attachment, becomes a strong basis for recommending the product to others. This is consistent with the reflective level of emotional design and with authenticity and craft theory, which hold that the meaning and story behind an object, rather than surface appearance alone, sustain longer-term attachment and advocacy.

At the same time, the absence of a significant relationship between emotional perception and willingness to pay a premium is a counter-intuitive finding with direct implications for artisan livelihoods, since price premiums are one of the primary mechanisms by which higher labour input can be fairly compensated in the marketplace. The relatively low proportion of respondents purchasing directly from artisans, combined with the popularity of online marketplaces and local markets as purchase channels, further suggests that much of the emotional and cultural meaning-making around hand-printed textiles currently occurs at a psychological distance from direct artisan interaction.

9. Conclusion

Emotional perception, comprising perceived authenticity, cultural connectedness, and emotional attachment, is significantly and strongly associated with consumers' recommendation of hand-printed textiles, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Perceived authenticity alone did not significantly predict willingness to pay a premium, and Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Design, colour, and motif were reported as the single most influential factor in purchase decisions, ahead of artisan story or craft history, indicating that aesthetic appeal remains the primary conscious driver of purchase even though narrative and authenticity appear to matter more for sustained emotional engagement and advocacy. Cultural heritage, craftsmanship and effort, and personal or family memory were the dominant qualitative themes associated with hand-printed textiles, supporting the theoretical role of cultural identity and authenticity in their psychological appeal. Willingness to pay a premium remains modest for the majority of consumers in this sample, suggesting a gap between emotional and cultural valuation and economic behaviour that merits further research and potentially targeted consumer education or marketing intervention. For artisan cooperatives and textile brands, these findings suggest that marketing communication emphasising cultural heritage and artisan story may be particularly effective in building long-term consumer advocacy, even if design and motif remain the primary driver of the initial purchase decision.

10. Future Scope

Future research should aim for a larger, more representative sample, ideally 500 or more respondents, using probability-based or stratified sampling across regions and demographic groups. Multi-item psychometric scales for constructs such as perceived authenticity and cultural connectedness should be developed and validated to enable reliability analysis and more robust measurement. Researchers should consider directly incorporating artisan interviews or surveys, allowing comparison between artisan and consumer psychological experiences of the same craft object. Given the gap identified between emotional perception and willingness to pay, future research could experimentally test specific marketing messages, for example emphasising artisan story versus design, to determine which most effectively increases both

recommendation intention and willingness to pay a premium. Finally, longitudinal or experimental designs would help clarify the causal direction of the relationship between emotional perception and recommendation intention identified in this study, and would help determine whether regional and demographic factors, such as age, income, and diaspora status, moderate the strength of cultural identity effects on consumer preference.

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