

Innovative Marketing Means: Inclusion of Artisan Cooperatives in State Policies

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ABSTRACT

Artisan cooperatives are ideal vehicles for rural development. Yet limitations in resources and capabilities constantly force them to look up to state initiatives to achieve excellence in marketing. To marshal the different types of artisan cooperatives under a single development program, multi-layered federations were established at the state and national-levels in India. However, a blanket approach in channelizing government policies through these federations failed to reach the primary cooperatives. With the notion that participatory approach is the only alternative to make 'innovative marketing means' successful, this study carries an audit to ascertain the level of inclusion of artisans in planning and implementation of state policies. Focusing on artisan cooperatives in Kerala, this study comprises of 10 village artisan cooperatives and five apex federations randomly selected from the State. The findings exemplify the level of inclusion of village units in the state programs.

Keywords: Artisan Cooperatives, Marketing Means, State Policies, and Kerala Markets.

INTRODUCTION

Artisan cooperative societies are part of the inherited tradition of rural India. These cooperatives are small voluntary organizations with independent artisans residing in villages. Being the traditional familial occupation that generates supplementary income to the rural people, artisan cooperatives are considered to be the pioneer village industries in the state of Kerala. These cooperatives contribute a considerable share in preserving the culture and heritage of the country.

Past studies recognize that traditional industries like pottery, handicrafts, and hand weaves are the ideal conduit for rural empowerment (Mehta, 1965; Bedi, 1958; Rava, 1965; Rao, 1970; Deshpande, 1984, and Rao, 1986). Acknowledging the need to marshal these artisan units under a single development policy, the move to organize federal apex bodies in all states in India were initiated during the First Five Year Plan (1951). Correspondingly, several layers of supporting organizations were established at district, state, and national levels including the Khadi & Village industries Commission (1956), the All India Board for Cottage industries, District Industrial Centres

(1991), and State Corporations and Export Promotion Councils (1987). Entrusted with various responsibilities these organizations are founded to disseminate central and state government programs.

While the responsibility of the multi-layered federations has been well documented (Mathur, 1985), several studies have pointed out the failure of these federations in executing their missions effectively (Digbey, 1965; Gundiff, 1972; and Manzoor, 1992). Highlighting the functioning of federations, study by Sanjay (1988) and Jena (2008) exposes the vulnerability of these sectors in global markets (Menon, 1999).

Acknowledging that intensive competition exists in Kerala markets, this study examines the level of participation of artisan cooperatives in planning and implementing the state industrial programs. Focusing on four attributes in innovative marketing such as *customer philosophy*, *integrated marketing plan*, *adequate market information*, *strategic orientation and operational efficiency* (Kotler, 1977) this research appraises the extent of involvement of primary cooperatives in planning and implementing the state marketing policies.

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Table 1: Response of Artisans (A) and Functionaries (F) on Inclusion of Units in Customized Market Strategies

Q.1. State federations’ have customized market strategies with village units					
Score	Factor	Responses		Score Value	
		A	F	A	F
0	No specific policies.	45	36	0	0
1	General policies	21	48	21	48
2	Serve markets with artisans involvement	34	16	68	32
	Total of score value	100	100	89	80
	Mean			0.89	0.81
	SD			0.68	0.81
Estimated difference in opinion ranges : 0.98 and 0.71 (27 % gap)					
Q.2. State federation develops tailor-made marketing strategies matching nature of craft & market					
0	No	58	12	0	0
1	Somewhat	22	76	22	76
2	To a good extent	20	12	40	24
	Total of score value	100	100	62	100
	Mean			0.62	1.0
	SD			0.86	0.50
Estimated difference in opinion ranges: 0.71 and 0.91 (20 % gap)					
Q.3. State federations consider marketing systems including suppliers, channels, competitors & customers in planning					
0	No, federations do not invite decisions of stakeholder	47	21	0	0
1	Somewhat, federations take long view of channels	43	54	43	54
2	Yes, Federations consider whole marketing systems recognizing threats and opportunities	10	25	20	50
	Total of score value	100	100	63	104
	Mean			0.63	1.0
	SD			0.73	0.85
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges 0.72 and 0.91 (18% gap)				
	Average of mean of score value Q1+Q2+Q3				71

Note: Average mean slab: 0-0.5 poor; 0.51-1.0 average; 1.01-1.50 good; and 1.51- 2.00-very good.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rural artisans excelled in production with the artistic skill they received from their ancestors who once were living as communities named after their skill and trade, such as potters, weavers etc. Past literature reveals strong relationship between artisan industry and rural employment (Gandhi, 1934 Aruna, 1969; Khosla, 1959; Gunnar, 1968, and Jayaprakash, 1989). It has been argued that although these cooperatives were recognised as small industries (Hayashi, 1955; Mehta, 1965; and Mathur, 1985), the craftsmanship and aesthetic beauty of products differentiated each one of these units from others (Kale 1963).

In addition, the dependence of artisans on nature in search of raw materials compelled them to retain their production units in villages. Apparently, constant association of these cooperatives with villagers not only encouraged rural employment but also generated income to them. Therefore, many think-tanks regarded these units as the engines for rural development (Gunnar, 1968; Reston, 1969 and Rao, 1970). Significantly, admitting the importance of village industries in rural development, Gandhi (1934) recommended for the inclusion of artisan industries in the national development programs. Later on, by allocating a separate budget for cooperatives, measures were initiated to bring this sector under cooperative line (Second Five Year Plan, 1957). The need to introduce cooperative system at village levels has been stressed in

many literatures during that period (Arthur, 1965; Mehta, 1965; Mathur, 1965 and Rava, 1965).

However, even after the passage of half a century, the artisan cooperatives products have never shown any significant progress in market. For instance, despite the reputation for Indian handicrafts in global markets, Kerala artisan cooperatives have not achieved the expected share in export when they compete with private and government artisan units. These cooperatives managed to survive with a bare minimum of less than one percent share of handicraft export from Kerala (Menon, 2010). In contrast to the above scenario, globalization and apparent liberalization encouraged import of machine-made crafts to Indian markets, evidently intensifying local market competition.

Nevertheless, even after the passage of years, compared to other types of small industries, artisan cooperatives have not undergone any radical changes (Sanjay, 1988; Manzoor, 1992). With high concentration in production of repeated designs (Menon, 2010 and Gupta, 2012), few studies criticized them for lacking professionalism in production and marketing (Digbey, 1965 and Gundiff, 1972). Perhaps, absence of state support or lack of coordination between several levels of apex organizations could be one main reason for these drawbacks (George, 2009). Conceptualizing the aforementioned facts, the author believes that wider range of alternative measures are needed for artisan cooperatives to upgrade production and expand markets for their products.

It is obvious from the aforementioned reviews that the art of marketing still remains complex to artisan cooperatives. To compete with contemporary global marketers, village crafts need tailor-made market strategies. In an attempt to build their own destination brand—“*Gods Own Country*”, symbolizing the tradition of Kerala—the current small industrial policies and procedures designed to promote indigenous sectors in the state call for considerable modulations. This signifies the scope of this study.

Recent studies on artisan industries also analyzed the problems of these units in general (Ananthu, 2002; Ajay, 2005; Frost & Sullivan, 2005; Santhanam, 2006; and Pradeep, 2010). But these studies have not captured the absolute involvement of them in state marketing policies in designing innovative marketing means. As noted earlier, artisan cooperatives in Kerala could not survive without the state patronage (Khosla, 1959 and

Murray, 2008). In this context, this paper argues that the “state innovative marketing means” could present effective results only if there is a participatory approach in designing and implementing them. However, research that has attempted to explore the level of involvement of primary artisan units in state programs is limited.

In this context, this paper examines the effectiveness of the marketing means adopted to promote rural artisan products by assessing the five attributes discussed above. Based on the discussion, the effectiveness of innovative marketing means to promote artisan cooperatives was appraised by assessing the degree of contribution by the primary units in state policies.

CUSTOMER PHILOSOPHY

The study on Indian handicrafts by Papola and Mishra (1980) argues that to penetrate global markets, artisan products should be qualified with distinctive designs to compete with urban crafts. Obviously, the first step to meet this requirement should be an in-depth product modification and design diversification that would be appropriate to match global customers’ expectations (Menon, 1999). A firm’s failure to meet customers’ diversified demands results in its inability to gain market reputation (Jobber, 2007 and Kotler et al., 2009). But, study on product concentration analysis by Menon (2010) criticises artisan cooperatives for their concentration on single designs. Obviously, the outdated design strategy weakens the competency of artisan products in global markets. Keeping in mind the importance of customization of product, the study proposes hypothesis H1:

H1: The joint effort by the state federations and primary cooperatives to design customized product strategies promises customer satisfaction.

INTEGRATED ORGANIZATION:

Efficacy of market policies depends on the integration of planning at all levels in an organization. Indeed, marketing policies for development of cooperative sector are well designed at the national level in India. However, to implement it, coordination of participants at each level in the structure of cooperatives is essential. Often the geographical location of primary artisan cooperatives is found to be a disadvantage for them to actively contribute in the aforementioned planning process. However, with

Table 2: Responses of the Artisans (A) and Office Bearers (F) on Integrated Organizational Policies of State Policies

Q.4. Integration and control between federations and village units					
Score	Factors	Responses (F)		Score Value (F)	
0	No integration	68	32	0	0
1	Formal integration. Lacks coordination	17	52	17	52
2	Effectively integrated.	15	16	30	32
	Total of score value	100	100	47	84
	Mean			0.47	0.84
	SD			0.77	0.79
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges:			0.56 and 0.75 (19%)	
Q.5. Federations’ policies are integrated with village units					
0	No involvement of primary units; artisans themselves meet responsibility	18	15	0	0
2	Somewhat. Relations are amicable	70	73	70	73
3	Federation cooperate effectively	12	12	24	24
	Total of Score value	100	100	94	97
	Mean			0.94	0.97
	SD			0.73	0.74
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges			1.06 and .86 (20 % gap)	
Q.6. Well-organized product development strategy exists					
0	Ill-defined system; poorly handled	45	12	0	0
1	System exists but lacks application	32	65	32	65
2	Well-structured and professional	23	23	46	46
	Total of score value	100	100	78	111
	Mean			0.78	1.11
	SD			0.88	0.89
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges:			0.91 and 0.97 (6 % gap)	
	Average Mean of total Scores for Q4+Q5+Q6			72	99

Note: Average mean slab: 0-0.5 poor; 0.51-1.0 average; 1.01-1.50 good; and 1.51- 2.00-very good.

a conviction that coordinated effort from top to bottom level is essential to plan effective marketing means, the hypothesis H2 is developed:

H2: The integrated organizational system between the federations and primary cooperatives facilitates smooth flow of tailor-made market policies.

ADEQUATE MARKET INFORMATION

When intensified competition urged rural enterprises to look for plausible solutions to reach global markets, studies by Prajapati (1986) and Laylia (1994) on "diversity marketing" recommends regular market survey to design workable solutions. Even if the aforementioned reviews suggest strategic measures, unavailability of

systematic market data often causes delay in planning innovative strategies. Therefore, to disseminate timely market tactics, federations are expected to work in close association with primary cooperatives, encouraging mutual communication. This signifies hypothesis H3:

H3: Joint effort by federations and primary cooperatives facilitates collection and dissemination of data needed to design innovative marketing strategies.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION

The interest of the consumers is of paramount concern for business enterprise. But, with limited holding on one side and increased production cost on the other, the village cooperatives in Kerala fail to meet consumers'

expectations. High operational cost discourages artisans to test marketing packages offered by consultants. Significance of village industries in micro and macro economy (Uma, 1965 and Keplan, 1977) necessitates the need to incorporate them in state policies. This would reduce the wide disparities in the performance of urban and rural units. This is the reason for hypothesis H4:

H4: The innovative strategies of the federations are adaptable for long-term growth and profitability of primary cooperatives functioning at the village level.

METHODOLOGY

The genesis of this research can be traced back to the author's visit to village artisan cooperatives in Kerala in 2011. It was noticed that in the zeal to earn money at low cost, artisans employ outdated strategies susceptible to global markets. In this context, focusing on three districts of Kerala, namely Palakkad, Thrissur, and Ernakulam, the study explores the level of inclusion of primary artisan cooperatives in designing and implementing development policies.

Table 3: Responses of the Artisans (A) and Office Bearers (F) on Involvement of Village Units in Market Research

Q.7. Latest marketing research by federation was					
Score	Factors	Responses (A) (F)		Score Value (A) (F)	
0	Several years ago	82	79	0	0
1	Few years ago.	16	20	16	20
2	Recently	2	1	4	2
	Total score	100	100	20	22
	Mean			0.20	0.22
	SD			0.38	0.45
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges			0.30 and 0.10 (20% gap)	
Q.8. Federations define market segments for village units?					
0	Not at all	12	8	0	0
2	Somewhat	74	68	74	68
3	Very well	14	24	28	48
	Total Score	100	100	102	116
	Mean			1.02	1.16
	SD			0.69	0.79
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges			1.15 and 1.03 (12% gap)	
Q.9. Federations bring in cost-effectiveness research methods as a policy?					
0	Little or no effort	88	73	0	0
1	Some effort	11	17	11	17
2	Substantial effort	1	10	2	20
	Total score	100	100	13	37
	Mean (SD)			0.13	0.37
	SD			0.37	0.68
	Estimated difference in opinion ranges:			0.26 and 0.23 (3 % gap)	
	Mean of total Scores for Q7+Q8+Q9			45	58

Note: Average mean slab; 0-0.5 poor; 0.51-1.0 average; 1.01-1.50 good; and 1.51- 2.00-very good.

Table 4: Responses of artisans (A) and office bearers (F) on customer focused strategic orientation policy

Q.10. Formal marketing planning exists in handicraft industry?					
Score	Factors	Responses (A) (F)	Score Value (A) (F)		
0	No formal planning exists	93	88	0	0
1	Federations disseminate state poli- cies	4	22	4	22
2	Units participate in planning	3	0	6	0
	Total of score value	100	100	10	22
	Mean			0.1	0.22
	SD			0.55	0.52
	Estimated difference ranges:			0.23 and 0.08	(15%)
Q11. Quality of marketing strategy of state federations?					
0	Current strategy not clear	32	28	0	0
2	Current strategy is a continuation of old one	64	60	64	60
3	Current strategy is clear, participative , data-based	4	12	8	24
	Total of Score value	100	100	72	84
	Mean			0.72	0.84
	SD			0.64	0.74
	Estimated difference in opinion			0.84 and 0.71 (13 % gap)	
Q.12. Contingency thinking and planning by federations?					
0	No contingency plans	64	46	0	0
1	Little contingency planning.	22	47	22	47
2	Village units involve in contingency planning	14	7	28	14
	Total of score value	100	100	50	61
	Mean			0.50	0.60
	SD			0.77	0.68
	Estimated difference in opinion			0.62 and 0.47(15% gap)	
	Mean of total Scores for Q10+Q11+Q12			44	56

Note: Average mean slab; 0-0.5 poor; 0.51-1.0 average; 1.01-1.50 good; and 1.51- 2.00-very good.

Market audit is a method used to rate effectiveness of the four major attributes discussed above. Survey was administered by a questionnaire designed with 15 questions. The respondents were asked to register their opinion on a three points Likert scale ranging from '0' to '2' with the mean of total questions for each factor ranging between 0 to 200. To measure the degree of inclusiveness of each sample unit, the mean of score obtained was grouped into four categories such as: 0-0.5 poor; 0.5-1.0 average; 1.01-1.5 good; and 1.51- 2.0-very good, with score value ≥ 1.0 (50 per cent) as benchmark for accepting the hypotheses. Difference in the opinions of two sets of sample was estimated with equation (1). If the estimated

gap in opinion between two samples exceeds 0.33, the acceptance of the hypothesis would be treated separately.

$$S = \sqrt{\frac{S_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{S_2^2}{n_2}} \quad (1)$$

(S_1 is the standard deviation of sample 1, S_2 is the standard deviation of sample 2, n_1 is the size of sample 1, and n_2 is the size of sample 2)

The questionnaire was administered in three districts of Kerala. With a purposive sampling, the study selected 100 artisans from 10 village craft units and 100 office bearers from five state level handicraft organizations. The

survey was conducted in 2011 during the period of July and August.

Examining the limitations of cooperatives in bringing themselves into the mainstream of state programs, this study leaves space for further research to ascertain the causes and reasons that hinder the growth of rural artisan cooperatives in Kerala.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result demonstrated adequate support to the observation of the researcher. The emerging customized marketers across the world call for constant review of the effectiveness of market orientation programs. Kerala village industries are not an exception.

Inclusion of artisan cooperatives in designing customer oriented strategies is the responsibility and obligation of the apex federations employed at the state and district levels. Average of the mean of total score values indicated average level of participation by the village units in the state policies, even though the federations claim it fair. No profound variations were found in the estimated difference of means of two groups. Low mean proposes the study to reject hypothesis H1 (Table 1).

Table 2 reveals that the artisan cooperatives were dissatisfied with the prevailing integrated organizational system. Majority of the artisans opined that there were no integration between primary cooperatives and the federations. Whilst the gap in the opinion between the two groups of respondents was high, both primary cooperatives and federation admitted that they were working independently (Table 2). Therefore, hypothesis H2 is rejected.

The traditionally skilled artisans engaged in rural crafts warned of slow death of some of the ethnic, village-based heritage crafts. They vowed that they would never encourage their children to take up this unduly neglected trade. According to them, lack of funds is hardly an issue but absence of appropriate market information was the problem. Interviews with functionaries revealed that so far no managerial or market analysis training has been organized to learn the strengths or weaknesses of their business policies. Moreover, dutiful apex federations located in urban centres hardly furnish any market data needed by the artisans. The mean of score value (Table 3) failed to support hypothesis H3.

Majority of the artisans opined that till date they survived with a product and sales-driven concept rather than a market-driven concept. Ignorance of innovative marketing means hold back artisans' products from global markets. Hence, in midst of highly competitive market, it is not easy to learn the challenges and opportunities that impact their businesses. The situation calls for the attention of state organizations into the customer driven concepts. A qualitative marketing plan is essential at village-unit levels to challenge imported goods with diversified designs. Low score reveals lack of timely, apposite market planning (Table 4). In addition, the marketing plans do not fruition effectively unless they are resourcefully carried out. Artisanal units should have right amount of resources to implement market strategies in a cost-effective manner. There should be proper linkage between federations and these village units to support the latter during the time of contingencies. With a gap of less than 15 percent between the opinions of two groups of the respondents hypothesis H4 is rejected.

In short, the study ascertains that the role of village industries in state programs in designing innovative marketing means was not satisfactory. Their participation lay below the level of expectations of the researchers referred in the review.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Past research has focused on examining the quality of marketing strategies adopted to promote artisan products. Inclusion of primary artisan cooperatives in designing innovative marketing means by the government of Kerala has not been examined in previous researches. In contrast, current study evidently reveals that one of the reasons for the absence of innovative marketing means to promote Kerala artisans cooperatives was the lack of attention to them by the state government while designing policies. The data in general reveals the weakness of state federations in involving village artisan cooperatives in designing their agenda for innovative marketing means.

CONCLUSION

No doubt, the village handicraft units in Kerala have justifications for their incapability to offer competitive products to the markets. Management of village industries is a state subject in India. Therefore, the state

authorized apex federations have the responsibility in the development of these sectors. Notably, Kerala government policy compels village units to register with the District Industrial Centers to coordinate internal and external marketing functions. Still, there exists low-level of participation by village units in state programs and the study reveals their complaints to be genuine. Indeed, the state federations have to traverse a long way in order to fulfil their mission of building Kerala's own indigenous brand focusing on culture, tradition, and village products.

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