



Assessing the information needs of weavers of Banaras: A conceptual analysis

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Abstract

Information plays an important role in the development of society. The purpose of this paper is to examine the information needs of weavers. The present research revealed that information needs of weavers are diversified. They are not aware about available information sources for them. Illiteracy plays an important barrier in obtaining required information. The present study is very useful for the policy makers to identify the information needs of weavers. The findings of the study may also be useful to develop an information system for the weaver community. The findings emphasize the importance of individual differences in information use and information awareness among them.

Keywords: Information needs, Information sources, Weavers, Banarasi Sarees.

Introduction

The present era is called as “Information era” and information plays as key role in the development of society. To thrive in this modern era, one needs a variety of information, no matter how well versed one is in a field or profession. Every person needs information to work properly in his field. Many people do not aware about their information need and do not try to fulfill it^{1,2}.

Varanasi or Banaras is one of the oldest living cities in the world and the ultimate pilgrimage for Hindus. The Hindu community believe that to die in the city, is to attain instant salvation. Varanasi is situated on the bank of Ganga and lying between the rivers Varuna and Assi. Which are flows into the Ganga. Another name of Varanasi is Kashi. It is called as the city of light because one of the twelve "Jyotirlinga" is installed here. Varanasi is famous as a city of traditional classical culture, glorified by myth and legend and sanctified by religion. It has always attracted a large number of pilgrims and worshippers from around the world. Varanasi is also renowned for its rich tapestry of music, arts, crafts and education from ancient time.

Location and Geographical Area: The city of Varanasi is located in the middle Ganges valley of North India. It is situated in the Eastern part of the Uttar Pradesh, along the left crescent-shaped bank of the River Ganges (Latitude 25° 18' N and Longitude 83° 01' E). The Varanasi district is bordering the districts of Jaunpur in the North, Ghazipur in the North East, Chandauli in the east, Mirzapur in the South and Sant Ravidasnagar (Bhadohi) in the West. The total area of the Varanasi district is 1535 square kilometer. It has a mix population of 3,676,841 out of them 2,079,790 lives in rural and 1,597,051 in urban areas.

Banarasi Sarees: Banarasi sarees are historically considered as the finest sarees in India and are known for their gold and silver brocade or zari, fine silk and opulent embroidery. These sarees are made of finely woven silk and are decorated with intricate design, and because of these engravings, these sarees are relatively heavy. Their special characteristics are *Mughal* pattern designs, heavy work of gold made thread, compact weaving, Micro designed figures, metallic visual effects, pallus, jaal, and mina work. a Saree can take five days to a one month and sometimes up to six months to complete, depending upon the intricacy of designs and patterns^{3,4}.

The weavers of Banaras: The impact of Mughal art and culture reflect on these sarees and the profession is predominantly occupied by the Muslims. This is an old traditional occupation and the profession passed from one generation to another and thus became community dominant. The weaving community was called as 'Julaha' in ancient time. In fact, Julaha refers to weavers, and it was the common name until nineteenth century, after that Muslims insisted that they should be called as *Ansaris* (an Arabian community which was skilled in the art of weaving). Now days the situation has changed and they called themselves *Bunkar* (Weaver) instead of *Julaha*. Though there are no written evidences to prove the place of origin of these bunkars but on the basis of weaving pattern and designs, the weavers claim that they are migrated from Arab⁵.

Objectives of the study

The objective of the study includes the following points: i. Identify information need of weavers. ii. Assess the barriers of acquiring required information. iii. Make some recommendation to fulfill their information needs.

Methodology

The study is based on interview conducted with some selected people. However, Personal observations were given importance in the study. Some people are educated who did not find any difficulty to answer the questions. A lot of explanations had to be made and the questions were interpreted to the illiterate people. After making a long discussion, the information needs of weavers are identified.

Information need of weavers: The weavers of Banaras use traditional techniques, material and designs for making their fabrics. Due to lack of information, they are not able to compete at international market. Their demand is decreasing day by day and they are exploited by mediators⁶. There are different kinds of information required by weavers which can categorize under following broader categories.

Raw material related information needs

Information about raw material Market: They don't know about raw material market and purchase raw material from local market. They are exploited by local raw material suppliers by high rate.

Information about different threads: They use traditional threads to make fabrics. They are not fully aware about different type of threads used to make different fabrics.

Information about color-making and combinations: Color making and combination of color to be used, is very challenging work. They use traditional color combination to make their Sarees. They are unaware about different colors used at international level.

Information about change in price of raw materials: This is the main issue related to the raw material. The price of silk depends upon international market and it fluctuates day by day. When price increase, the local supplier immediately increase the price of silk but when price decrease at international level, the local supplier supply silk at previously high rate.

Information needs about Market

Information about new market: The weavers makes traditional fabrics and supplies their products to few countries. They are unaware about different emerging markets.

Information about price fixing: The price of products is fixed by Middlemen brokers (Gaddidars). They bought the products from the weavers at very nominal prices and sold the same to buyers at extremely high prices. The weavers require information about rate at international level to fix price of their products accordingly.

Information about requirement of consumers: The weavers

make their products and sell them to their buyers. If product becomes successful they earn profit otherwise they get loss. They need information about their potential consumers to avoid losses.

Information needs about Technology

Information about new emerging technologies: The weavers used traditional technologies for weaving. It is high time consuming and has not perfect finishing. They require information about emerging technologies to increase production as well as finishing of fabrics⁷.

Information about new machinery: They are unaware about machinery market and depend upon local suppliers. The local supplier supply machinery at high rate and it takes too much time to supply them.

Information about handling of new Technology: They require information about handling of new machinery after purchasing it. They depend on supplier to provide training about machinery and supplier demands high charge to provide them assistance.

Information needs about Capital

Information about Banking finance system: Most of the weavers have not their bank account. They are not aware about loaning system of banks. They require information about banking finance schemes.

Information about Government finance Schemes: Government make finance schemes for poor but they are unaware about those schemes. Most of them didn't find any financial support from government due to lack of information.

Information of various funding agencies: There are many other funding agencies that provide small credits. The weavers require information about such funding agencies to get loan from them.

Trends related information needs

Information about new Fashion: The weaver used traditional design and trends for their fabrics. They require information about new trends and fashion to make their product accordingly.

Updation of new designs: The fashion and trend become old very frequently. They require information about changing fashions to change their designs accordingly.

Information needs about IPR

Information about Patent, Copyright etc.: This is very complex problem facing by weavers. They are not aware about Patent, Copyright of their products. They are facing challenge from Chinese fabrics which are sold with Banarasi tag.

Information need about GI tag: Banarasi sarees are granted as a geographical indication tag for its product. The sarees, which are made in Banaras, can only sell under the name of 'Banarasi Sarees'

Other Information needs: Their other information needs are about health, political, economy, education and community development.

Barriers to fulfill their information needs

Illiteracy: The high rate of illiteracy plays first major barrier to acquire required information among weavers community. Most of them do not understand English. They therefore cannot use the information available in the English language.

Language: Language is another barrier. Their primary language is Bhojpuri or Banarasi Khadi (a dialect of Hindi). Hindi is secondary language for most of them that's why they feel difficulty in understanding Hindi technical words.

Lack of Information Sources: The third major barrier is lack of related literature in their mother tongue or secondary language. There is no quality literature available in their language and its play an important role in their information access behavior.

Lack of Technical Skill: Another major barrier is lack of technical skill. Most of them are not know about use of information communication devices. Most of them are using mobiles bur they are not fully aware about its functions. They just use them for conversation like landline phones.

Conclusion

Banarasi sarees are world famous for its magnificent look and known for their gold and silver brocade work. The condition of Saree weavers has deteriorated in the recent years and the identity of Saree weaving industry of Varanasi is being threatened. The weavers of Banaras are not much aware about their information needs. They are still using traditional medium to getting information. In this ICT era, they are still depending on traditional sources of information⁸. The illiteracy is the main cause of their barrier to information. Most of them are not literate and it plays an important role as a barrier to information⁹.

Recommendations: Government should make a policy to improve their literacy rate. Some programs can also initiate to make them aware, some training programs and workshop can also organize to make them aware about new information technologies. Government can also develop an information system especially for weavers¹¹. The information system will provide them their required information. Some training programs can also initiate to train them for using said information system. Government can also run community

information centers where weavers can fulfill their information needs.

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