

A Comprehensive Analysis of Value Chain Integration in the Varanasi Handloom Cluster (Silk Sarees), Uttar Pradesh

Lipi Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Fashion Management Studies, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Raebareli, India

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the value chain of the Varanasi silk saree industry, one of India's most celebrated handloom clusters, and identify the major gaps that affect its overall efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability. The research adopts a value-chain-based analytical approach to trace the journey of the product from raw silk procurement to dyeing, weaving, finishing, and final market distribution. Within this process, the study evaluates recurring challenges such as inconsistent raw material availability, heavy dependence on intermediaries, limited transparency at multiple stages, and inadequate adoption of modern technologies. It also reviews support-related issues, including restricted access to finance, limited exposure to modern equipment, weak logistics systems, and insufficient direct market linkages, all of which significantly reduce operational efficiency and limit the bargaining power of weavers. The findings indicate that the value chain suffers from fragmentation, low levels of digital integration, and weak coordination among stakeholders, resulting in reduced productivity and constrained growth opportunities. These inefficiencies collectively contribute to declining competitiveness in both domestic and global markets. The study concludes that strengthening the Varanasi handloom value chain requires a combination of digital adoption, improved coordination mechanisms, targeted policy support, and skill-building initiatives aimed at enhancing both productivity and transparency. Implementing these interventions can not only improve the value chain's performance but also uplift the socio-economic conditions of artisans and ensure the continued cultural and economic significance of the Varanasi silk saree sector.

Keywords: Varanasi silk sarees; Handloom value chain; Value chain challenges; Weaver livelihood; Value chain efficiency

INTRODUCTION

India has a strong cultural and craft heritage and is one of the world's major producers of handloom goods. Small-scale and craft-based industries remain globally significant, with **90–95%** of manufacturing units employing fewer than **100 workers**; in Japan, **84%** fall under the SME category. The Indian handloom sector is the **second-largest employment provider** after agriculture, engaging over **6 million (60 lakh)** artisans. Each region has a distinct identity—Varanasi for Banarasi silk, Bihar for Bhagalpur silk, and Telangana for Pochampally Ikat. Despite its importance, the handloom sector faces serious **value chain** constraints. Raw materials like silk and zari often come from distant markets, causing **20–30%** price fluctuations and delays. The value chain is long and fragmented, involving **4–6 intermediaries**, which reduces transparency and leaves weavers with only **30–40%** of the final product's value. Limited credit access prevents **70–80%** of weavers from upgrading technology, and outdated looms reduce productivity by **25–35%**. Weak logistics further add to **5–10%** losses during transit. Competition from power looms and counterfeit products diminishes market credibility and restricts value capture by genuine artisans.

Fig. 1 Handloom Weaving



About Varanasi Silk Sarees:

A Banarasi saree is a traditional silk saree produced in Varanasi—also known as Benaras or Kashi. The craft gained prominence during the Mughal period in the 14th century, when Banaras artisans became known for weaving intricate silk brocades with gold and silver zari. By the 18th and 19th centuries, Banarasi weaving had further evolved in skill and popularity. Renowned for their rich silk, fine hand weaving, and luxurious gold and silver brocade, Banarasi sarees are considered among India’s finest textiles. They feature densely woven silk adorned with elaborate patterns, contributing to their enduring demand. Typical design elements include interwoven floral and foliate motifs, kalga and bel patterns, and the signature jhallar—a row of upright leaves along the border. Other distinctive features include gold work, compact weaving, intricate figurative detailing, metallic sheen, pallu designs, jal (net-like patterns), and meena work.

Varanasi Brocade

Varanasi brocade derives its name from the Latin word **brochus**, meaning “to transfix.” The fabric is created by weaving fine silk yarns as warp and weft, enriched with gold and silver threads (zari). The weft passes over and under selected warp threads according to the design, producing raised, ornate patterns. Varanasi brocades are known for their lavish motifs, use of premium materials, and labor-intensive production. The zari used in these brocades is a traditional variety crafted in Varanasi for centuries.

Fig. 2.1a Banarasi Brocade



Varieties of Banarasi Silk

Varanasi has several weaving hubs, with **Alaipura, Madanpura and Bazardiah** being the prominent centers. Madanpura is known for traditional, fine, delicate patterns, while Alaipura weavers often experiment with new techniques and bold designs. Madanpura fabrics are generally lighter and more refined in finish. Other weaving clusters include Pilikothi, Lohta, Lallapura, , Khojwan, and Rewari Talab. **Kalabattu** refers to silk yarn plated with gold or silver. One of the most well-known brocade varieties is **Kinkhab**, where the silk base is almost hidden under heavy gold and silver threads, creating a rich, ornate fabric used mainly for upholstery. Types of kinkhab include Alfi, Tashi, Baftan/Katan, Pot-Than, Himru, and Amru. Other notable Banarasi

weaving styles include **Amru, Jamdani, Tanchoi, Cutwork, Katan, Kora, Mashru, and Rangkat**, each known for distinct patterns and weaving techniques. Most designs draw inspiration from nature—such as **buti, badam, and kairi (paisley)** motifs—reflecting the traditional aesthetic of the region. Banarasi silk designs draw heavily from nature, featuring motifs known as **butis** or **butas**. These single, intricately woven motifs add richness and identity to each saree. Common motifs include **badam buti** (almond), **kairi buti** (paisley), **chaand buti** (moon), **asharfi buti** (coin), **paan buti** (betel leaf), and **pankha** (fan). These motifs, combined with vibrant colours and traditional patterning, contribute to the timeless elegance of Varanasi silk sarees. Banarasi Sarees received their GI tag on **04th Sep, 2009**, under the registered name of "**Banaras Brocades and Sarees**".

Fig. 2.2a An artist weaving the saree



Motifs and Design in Banarasi Weaving

In Banarasi weaving, careful spacing and alignment of motifs is crucial to maintain harmony across the fabric. Geometrical patterns such as **Khanjari (chevron), Ari Doria (diagonal/straight lines), and Charkhana (checks)** are often incorporated to structure the design. The most common motifs are **buti or buta**, which are floral elements woven across the fabric body. These are inspired by flowers and leaves, including **pan (betel leaf), kairi (mango), tara (star), ashrafi (coin-shaped), phul (generic flower), chameli (jasmine), champa, genda (marigold), guldaudi (chrysanthemum), and gulab (rose)**. Butis are further classified by the **number of petals**, such as **Satpatia (seven petals), Tinpattia (three petals), and Panchpatiya (five petals)**. In addition to flowers, **creepers (bel)** are often woven to enhance the overall motif composition.

Porter's Value Chain Model :

Value Chain has been interpreted in multiple ways by different scholars; however, the definition adopted for this study is that of Michael Porter (1985), who conceptualized the Value Chain as a system of interdependent and interconnected activities that collectively create value. Value Chain Analysis, therefore, involves a systematic examination of an organization's activities and competencies to understand how they contribute to competitive advantage. According to Porter, an organization's competitive strength lies in its ability to deliver superior value to customers, which he explained through a framework comprising five primary activities—inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, and service—and four support activities, namely firm infrastructure, human resource management, technology development, and procurement. In the context of Varanasi Silk Sarees and Brocade, the production value chain encompasses multiple intricate stages. Production typically takes place either on a work-order basis, driven by specific client requirements, or based on anticipated market demand.

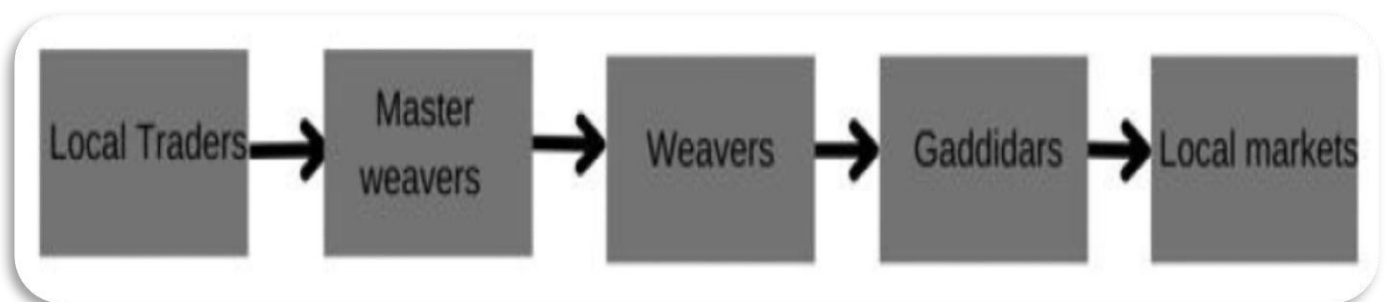
Fig. 3a Porter's Value Chain Model



Inbound Logistics:

Inbound logistics refers to the processes through which materials and goods are ordered, received, stored, transported, and managed within an organization. It encompasses a series of activities, including sourcing and procurement, purchasing, transportation, receiving, material handling, warehousing, inventory management, expediting, distribution, tracking, and reverse logistics. In the context of the Varanasi silk weaving cluster, inbound logistics operates through a distinctive system shaped by local market structures. The procurement of raw materials - primarily silk yarn - is regulated by shopkeepers, gaddidars, business houses, NGOs, middlemen, and, most significantly, master weavers. Local traders typically assess the type and quantity of silk yarn required and facilitates its purchase. Master weavers, who play a central coordinating role, obtain work orders from gaddidars and business houses, based on which they procure yarn from the local market. Depending on the arrangement, they may receive both the raw material and the design specifications along with the work order, or they may independently determine the design and procure the necessary inputs. Once the raw materials are secured, master weavers distribute work to weavers on a piece-rate or daily-wage basis. The wages and estimated time required to complete a particular design are predetermined before the weaving process begins. After the saree or textile piece is woven, the finished product is collected by the master weaver and delivered back to the gaddidars or the commissioning party. Thus, inbound logistics in the Varanasi silk cluster is characterized by decentralized procurement practices, strong intermediary roles, and an informal yet highly coordinated flow of materials from traders to weavers.

Fig. 3.1a Inbound Logistics



Outbound Logistics:

Outbound logistics refers to the processes involved in the movement of finished goods from producers to end users, encompassing activities such as packaging, distribution, transportation, order fulfilment, and delivery. In the Varanasi silk weaving cluster, outbound logistics functions through a decentralized and informal system, as most production takes place within household-based units rather than formal enterprises. Master weavers and artisans store finished sarees in their homes due to the absence of dedicated warehouses. Typically, each master weaver keeps 25 - 30 sarees and distributes additional stock across the homes of other artisans, effectively functioning as small-scale distributors within the cluster.

Master weavers supply these finished products primarily to gaddidars, who operate as local wholesalers and act as intermediaries between weavers, middlemen, and larger buyers such as retail stores, showrooms, and handloom houses. This intermediary-driven structure results in a high degree of fragmentation and dependency, leaving artisans vulnerable to pricing pressures. Gaddidars usually provide partial payment upon receiving the stock and settle the full amount only after selling the sarees to retailers or traders. Master weavers typically price their products about 20% above the production cost when selling to wholesalers and offer approximately a 5% discount to direct customers. Orders placed well in advance, especially those requiring 4 - 6 months of lead time, are priced around 30% higher to account for holding periods. Although some artisans sell through online platforms, the volume remains minimal due to concerns about design duplication.

Packaging is minimal, generally involving a plastic cover and a hard paper box to protect the saree. Transportation is managed directly by the artisans, who use personal vehicles such as bicycles and motorcycles or rely on public transport, thereby incurring only fuel or fare-related expenses. Delivery times correspond to the travel duration from the artisan's home to the buyer's location. If finished products are not sold on time, they become dead stock; these items are often over-dyed into darker shades to match market demand or repurposed for personal use, such as making salwar suits or curtains. This adaptive approach to managing unsold inventory highlights the cluster's reliance on informal logistical arrangements and flexible utilization of resources.

Silk Procurement and Pre-Processing in the Banarasi Handloom Value Chain (Operations):

Silk procurement and pre-processing form the foundational stage of the Banarasi handloom value chain. High-quality mulberry silk yarns, primarily sourced from Bangalore in grey form, are selected in varying deniers depending on the desired fabric structure, motif complexity, and zari integration. Upon arrival in Banaras, the yarns undergo degumming, where sericin and surface impurities are removed through controlled boiling with soap and alkali, resulting in enhanced luster, softness, and dye receptivity. The cleaned yarns are then dyed using acid, reactive, or metal-complex dyes, with dyers ensuring shade uniformity through continuous manual rotation and subsequent air-drying. After dyeing, the yarns move to winding and warping units, where they are converted from hank to cone form, arranged systematically on warping frames, and transferred onto beams with lease rods inserted to maintain thread order. Parallely, weft yarns—including silk and zari—are prepared through bobbin and pirn winding. The design process involves creating motif graphs (naksha) on graph paper, which are translated into Jacquard punch cards for loom programming. Finally, the processed warp is mounted on traditional pit looms, passed through healds and reeds, and tied to the front rod to initiate weaving. This integrated pre-processing workflow ensures that the yarn attains the structural and aesthetic readiness required for the intricate brocade weaving characteristic of Banarasi sarees.

Fig. 3.3a Degumming of Silk Hank



Fig. 3.3b Drying of Silk Hanks after Degumming



Fig. 3.3c Dyed Silk Hanks



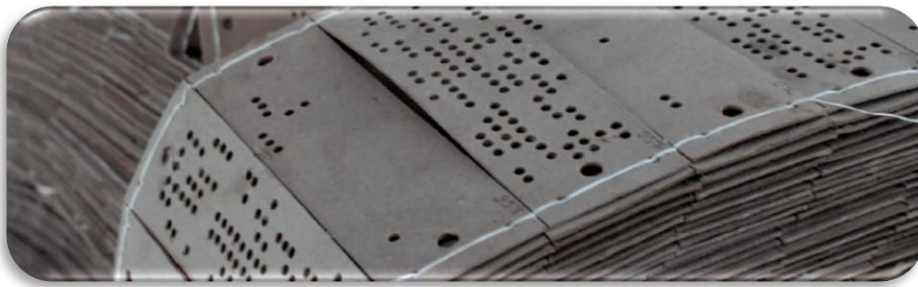
Fig. 3.3d Warping & Beaming



Fig. 3.3e Bobbin Winding & Pirn Winding



Fig. 3.3f Punch Card



Marketing & Sales:

The key clients of the silk weaving clusters at Varanasi are traders, retail store owners, and wholesalers. Individual customers purchase products either directly from artisans or through local retail shops and wholesalers. Gaddidars act as intermediaries, sourcing finished products from master weavers and supplying them to retailers and wholesalers. They typically add a 20% profit margin, while retailers add around 15%, resulting in market prices being approximately 25% higher than the original value. Master weavers regularly follow up with gaddidars for payments. While payments are smoother during festive seasons, they often get delayed during market downturns. In such periods, social capital becomes essential, enabling master weavers to access raw materials and maintain cash flow through their networks. Payment delays occur because gaddidars release payments only after their purchased stock is sold. Master weavers are central to the cluster because they help maintain low transaction costs and rely heavily on social network - an important factor in this labor-intensive sector. Although they control the production process, they have limited influence over the marketing and promotion of finished goods due to the credit-based structure of the cluster. During market collapses, payment recovery becomes especially difficult, and master weavers must wait for market conditions to improve before receiving their dues. Their limited awareness of digital tools and online selling platforms further restricts their ability to reach buyers directly. This gap, rooted in the low literacy rates within the weaving community, contributes to prolonged payment cycles and reduced earning potential.

Services:

Customers can choose from a wide range of silk sarees, and a significant portion of the products is exported to international markets. Although Varanasi sarees do not carry an official hallmark, authenticity is commonly verified through a burn test, in which genuine silk emits the smell of burnt hair and leaves a fine ash residue. Despite handloom products being exempt from GST, retailers generally do not offer discounts, regardless of whether purchases are made in single pieces or in bulk. Post-purchase feedback is limited; South Indian customers rarely provide feedback, while many domestic customers rely on long-standing relationships with traditional shops. In case of product-related issues, sarees are replaced, though repairs are usually not required for silk sarees. Retailers also offer additional services such as fall polishing, home delivery, complimentary gifts on purchase, and multiple transportation options, including air, rail, and platforms like IndiaMART.

Support Activities:

- **Human Resource Management:** The cluster primarily relies on family labor, with business owners hiring their family members and close relatives to support production and related activities. Task allocation is centrally managed by master weavers, who oversee work distribution and monitor performance.
- **Procurement:** Raw material sourcing has shifted significantly after the COVID-19 outbreak. Earlier, most inputs were imported from China; currently, master weavers procure raw materials from Bengaluru and local markets to ensure uninterrupted production.

- **Technological Development:** Production continues to depend largely on traditional weaving techniques. Designs are developed through manual exploration and experimentation, with limited adoption of digital or advanced technological tools.
- **Infrastructure:** Overall activities are coordinated and supervised by shopkeepers, gaddidars, and export houses, which control procurement, distribution, and marketing channels. Master weavers maintain direct communication with traders and gaddidars to manage orders and market requirements.
- **Family-Based Work Structure:** The workflow within the cluster is structured around family systems, planned and regulated by senior weavers or master weavers. Quality management is conducted in-house, where both weavers and master weavers inspect finished products before they move into the market.

Silk Mark:

The **Silk Mark** helps consumers identify genuine silk products, addressing the long-standing challenge of distinguishing pure silk from other fibers. Introduced on **17 June 2004**, it is promoted by the **Silk Mark Organization of India (SMOI)**, a registered society under the Karnataka Societies Act, jointly supported by the **Central Silk Board**, the **Ministry of Textiles**, and the Government of India. Silk Mark labels come as **paper hang tags** or **sew-in labels**, applied only to authentic silk by authorized users. Each label carries a **hologram and unique number**, enabling consumers to trace the product to the manufacturer.

Objectives of Silk Mark:

- Protect consumer interests.
- Safeguard authentic silk traders and manufacturers.
- Promote the use of natural silk nationally and globally.

Fig. 4 Silk Mark



Handloom Mark:

The **Handloom Mark**, inaugurated on **28 June 2006** by former Prime Minister **Dr. Manmohan Singh**, promotes India's handloom sector by ensuring product quality and authenticity. Designed by **NID Ahmedabad**, the mark helps distinguish hand-woven textiles from power-loom products, which cannot be verified through conventional testing. The Handloom Mark represents the **heritage and tradition** of Indian handloom textiles and supports the livelihoods of over **6.5 million weavers**. It creates a distinct identity for hand-woven products, enabling them to compete in the market while preserving traditional skills.

Registration Process:

- Applicants must register and declare the number of handlooms and products they produce.
- The product is then verified, and the appropriate label is issued.

Key Features and Benefits:

- Ensures product quality and authenticity.
- Facilitates product testing and ISO certification.
- Promotes social accountability.
- Helps distinguish handloom items from power-loom products.

Fig. 5 Handloom Mark



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Research Objectives:

The objective of this study is to examine and analyze the existing marketing practices of the handloom cluster and to propose strategies that can enhance the market visibility of Banarasi sarees, develop a niche market for these silk products, and recommend effective promotional approaches to strengthen the cluster's connection with consumers and improve the overall economic prospects of its weavers.

Problem Statement:

The Banarasi handloom struggles with limited market visibility and reliance on traditional marketing, restricting direct engagement with consumers and growth opportunities for its weavers. Developing innovative marketing strategies is essential to enhance market presence, promote the craft, and ensure sustainable cluster development.

Research Design:

The study adopts an **exploratory and descriptive research design** to understand the functioning of the Silk weaving craft and analyze the practices, processes, and business systems associated with it. This approach enables a detailed exploration of the craft ecosystem while documenting current conditions and identifying potential areas for improvement.

Research Data:

The study is based on both secondary and primary data. Secondary data were collected from research journals, academic articles, and relevant case studies, along with credible online sources such as ODOP, Utsavpedia, and the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). Primary data were obtained through direct field observations and structured interviews using questionnaires administered to artisans, suppliers, retailers, and customers.

Sample Design:

The sample design included diverse stakeholders from the Silk weaving craft ecosystem. The sample population comprised artisans, suppliers, retailers and small-scale vendors, exporters, banks, and customers. **Cluster sampling** was employed to select artisans within the identified craft clusters, while **Purposive**

sampling was used for retailers, suppliers, exporters, banks, and consumers to ensure the inclusion of knowledgeable respondents. A total of 20 individuals were approached, and all 20 valid responses were successfully collected.

Analysis

Marketing Mix Analysis:

- **Product:** The weaving cluster's product mix is predominantly silk-based, with sarees as its core offering. Other product lines include fabrics, shawls, dupattas, stoles, kidswear, dress materials, and curtains. While the clusters at Varanasi are traditionally known for silk sarees, it has gradually diversified into broader apparel and upholstery categories, strengthening its presence within the Varanasi handloom market.
- **Place:** Product distribution is concentrated in local markets; supported by direct selling from the clusters, retailers, wholesalers, exhibitions, trade fairs, and limited sales through WhatsApp. Despite these channels, the cluster's market reach remains largely local, with minimal penetration into wider regional or digital markets.
- **Price:** Pricing is primarily cost-based, offering very low margins to weavers. Limited production volumes elevate operating costs, resulting in higher final prices. The cluster currently follows no structured pricing strategy, leading to inconsistency and weak competitiveness.
- **Promotion:** The clusters lack a formal promotional framework and do not engage in advertising across offline or online platforms. Visibility relies mainly on organic demand and occasional seasonal or festive designs, reflecting a significant gap in strategic promotion.

Porter's Value Chain Analysis:

The key activities in Porter's (1985) framework include inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing & sales, and service. In the handloom craft sector, inbound logistics, operations, and outbound logistics form the core production functions, which are carried out either on a work-order basis or based on anticipated market demand. The mode of production directly shapes marketing strategies. In work-order-based production, wholesale customers, export houses, business houses, and designers place orders through shopkeepers or gaddidars. In market-anticipation production, artisans create products according to seasonal trends and trader demand, selling finished goods through retail shops, exhibitions, trade fairs, or occasionally to gaddidars. Marketing and sales are primarily managed by gaddidars, shopkeepers, and retailers, who distribute products through physical outlets, exhibitions, and digital platforms such as WhatsApp.

Regardless of the model, weavers - the creators of these handloom products - receive the lowest wages on a daily basis, while profit margins increase for actors higher up the chain, reaching a maximum for those selling directly to consumers. Weavers are often reluctant to work with unfamiliar buyers due to previous issues with payments. Implementing an end-to-end value chain could significantly enhance their earnings and ensure the sustainability of both the craft and the artisan community. Contemporary models, which involve shorter value chains, already show higher earnings for weavers compared to traditional models. However, few organizations are willing to engage directly with weavers and manage timely delivery of quality products. One potential solution is to identify progressive weavers and provide them with support and resources to showcase and sell their work directly. Modifying the value chain in this way can improve weavers' livelihoods, strengthen craft sustainability, and enhance competitive advantage through better design, execution, and marketing of the products.

GAPS: Marketing Strategies of the Cluster

The cultural and traditional value of Banarasi silk sarees has been successfully preserved through generations, and customers recognize the importance of acquiring these products from authentic sources. This presents a significant opportunity for handloom weavers in Banaras to directly engage with consumers and enhance the craft's reach. To capitalize on this potential, the cluster must increase market visibility and adopt dynamic

marketing strategies. Effective marketing interventions can support the growth of weavers and artisans while fostering a direct connection between the craft and its customers, ensuring both economic sustainability and the preservation of traditional expertise.

Solution

To address the gaps identified in the value chain of Banarasi silk sarees and ensure the sector's long-term sustainability, a revised marketing mix is proposed. The recommendations aim to preserve traditional craftsmanship, enhance market access and strengthen the economic and social support systems for artisans. The suggested marketing mix is outlined below:

- **Product:** The cluster's offerings remain largely traditional, limiting engagement with new customer segments. Strategic **product diversification** into lifestyle and décor items—such as table mats, runners, coasters, cushion covers, and wall hangings—can broaden market appeal and enhance visibility. Strengthening the presentation and branding of existing sarees will further elevate their market position.
- **Place:** Market reach is currently confined to local traders and nearby markets. Expanding distribution through **multi-seller e-commerce platforms** (e.g., Craftsvilla, Etsy) and strengthening sales via **social media and WhatsApp commerce** will enable access to wider national and international audiences.
- **Price:** Positioning the products within a **premium pricing segment** is feasible due to their craftsmanship and cultural value. Implementing structured pricing strategies based on product category, exclusivity, and workmanship will support better revenue realization.
- **Promotion:** A coordinated mix of **digital and offline promotion and training to use the same** is essential. Online marketing through social media campaigns, targeted advertisements, and visual storytelling, combined with offline initiatives such as craft fairs and exhibitions, will enhance visibility, stimulate demand, and support product range expansion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the long-term sustainability and growth of Banarasi Silk Sarees, several strategic recommendations can be implemented. These strategies aim to enhance market presence, support artisans, preserve traditional skills and raise consumer awareness. Here are the key recommendations:

Strengthening Marketing and Branding:

- **Brand Identity Development:** Establish a unified and distinctive brand identity for Banarasi silk sarees that highlights their cultural legacy, craftsmanship and exclusivity. Ensuring consistent application across packaging, communication materials and digital platforms to enhance visibility and consumer recall.
- **Narrative-Driven Promotion:** Integrating storytelling into marketing efforts to communicate the heritage, artistry and cultural relevance of Banarasi weaving. Authentic narratives can deepen consumer engagement and elevate perceived value.
- **Niche Market Positioning:** Strategically target consumer groups that appreciate handcrafted and heritage products - such as luxury buyers, sustainable fashion advocates and cultural connoisseurs - through tailored marketing initiatives.

Expanding Market Access:

- **Digital Presence Enhancement:** Supporting artisans in building robust online portfolios and utilizing E-commerce platforms effectively. Training in digital marketing, visual presentation and content creation can strengthen their reach and sales potential.
- **Participation in Global Exhibitions:** Facilitating regular participation in international craft fairs and trade shows to connect artisans with global buyers, expand market opportunities and enhance brand exposure.
- **Collaborations with Designers and Influencers:** Fostering partnerships with fashion designers, brands and influencers to amplify visibility and promote Banarasi products to newer, diverse consumer segments.

Supporting Artisan Development:

- **Skill Transmission Programs:** Introducing structured apprenticeship and mentorship initiatives to ensure the transfer of traditional weaving skills to younger generations while preserving authentic techniques.
- **Financial and Business Training:** Providing artisans with training in financial literacy, costing, business planning and market understanding to strengthen economic stability and promote sustainable livelihoods.
- **Cooperative Strengthening:** Encouraging the formation and growth of artisan cooperatives to enable collective resource sharing, improved market access and stronger negotiation power.

Fostering Cultural Awareness:

- **Educational Outreach:** Implementing educational initiatives and interactive workshops in schools and communities to raise awareness of Banarasi weaving traditions and cultivate appreciation among the youths.
- **Craft Document and Archiving:** Developing a comprehensive digital and physical archive of weaving techniques, historical context, and artisan narratives to support preservations and future research.

Building Supportive Infrastructure:

- **Policy Advocacy:** Promoting policy measures that provide long-term support to the handloom sector, including financial incentives, targeted subsidies and prioritization of handmade products in institutional procurement.
- **Establishment of Craft Hubs:** Creating dedicated craft centers in Varanasi offering workspace, training facilities, design support and retail opportunities to empower artisans.
- **Research & Innovation Support:** Encouraging R&D initiatives exploring new materials, contemporary design interventions and improved techniques to broaden product lines while retaining traditional authenticity.

CONCLUSION

A detailed analysis of Porter's value chain for the Varanasi handloom cluster provided a clear understanding of its existing processes and highlighted key gaps across both primary and support activities. By comparing traditional and contemporary value chain models, actionable solutions were identified to strengthen operational efficiency and enhance market linkages. These proposed interventions, when implemented over time, can improve coordination across the clusters, foster stronger connections between weavers and customers and support the long-term sustainability of the craft. Although the cluster remains largely unorganized and additional gaps persist, a structured adoption of the recommended improvements can help the cluster build competitive advantage and uplift its overall performance.

Ethical Approval:

This study followed standard ethical guidelines, and informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the interviews.

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