

Crafting Narratives: Co-producing Content for Social Storytelling of Indian, Craft-based Brands

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Abstract

Indian crafts have, in the recent past, seen somewhat of a revival with many young brands leveraging the techniques, value chains and processes inherent to them. These new age brands predominantly work on a lean production model with low stocks, production on demand and smaller teams (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). They do however, know how to leverage image making and storytelling to draw the consumer into the brand's eco system, be it through compelling visual narratives or content focusing on process, people and raw material, all leveraging the power of social media, technology and unique customer engagement techniques (B.Amritha & Suresh, 2020). The same, however, cannot be said about independent craft producers and artisans, who, up until the COVID 19 pandemic hit, relied almost solely on selling to retailers and through physical exhibitions.

This paper documents a collaborative, co-production project that was run in May 2021, between students of Pearl Academy, India and Manchester Fashion Institute(MFI), MMU, Manchester, UK. The project entitled, The Craftisan Project, aimed at co-producing visual content, still and moving image along with a social media posting plan and in some cases brand names and logos for each of 5 artisans from Bhuj in Gujarat India. The project was run online using multiple web conferencing and knowledge sharing collaboration platforms. A combined group of 20 students from the Fashion Styling & Image Design course at Pearl Academy and the Fashion Promotion course at MFI, were divided into 5 groups and assigned one artisan each.

The paper reports on the project in terms of the initial planning, soliciting student participation through statements of intent and why, the execution, the outcomes and reflections from all the participants. Feedback from the artisans on efficacy of the films and plans pitched, was also sought and is reported.

There is no denying the importance of providing independent makers with the skills and knowledge that will condition a mindset, confident enough to explore social media tools in conjunction with appropriate

narratives. To this end, the intention with the development of this project was to create a community of practice through praxis, visual expression via storytelling and capturing meaning through the moving image (Barrett and Bolt 2007,2013; Bignell, 2002; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Wenger, 1998;). The students, with the help of the artisans, defined the target audience, the aspirations of the producers themselves and how they may resonate with the group of people being communicated to.

The paper also reports on the mixed pedagogical approach followed for the project, combining theoretical information transfer through structured masterclasses (Integrative) followed by group tasks, pitch presentations (Collaborative), discussions (Constructivist), individual and group studio practice (Inquiry Based Learning) and group tutorials (Reflective).

Keywords: craft narratives; India crafts; storytelling; digital narratives; co-production; social storytelling

ISBN: 978-989-54263-2-4