

Integrating Traditional Handloom Practices with Tourism Development: A Case Study of Weaver's Community Perception

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Received: November 2025 | Accepted: February 2026

DOI: 10.5937/turizam30-62854

Abstract

In Meghalaya, 80% of the population lives in rural areas, and many residents are involved in various economic activities essential to improving their quality of life. Apart from agricultural activities, the handloom sector is considered important by many rural communities. The purpose of the study is to assess the current scenario of traditional handloom practices and to examine the perception of weavers' communities of Umnden-Diwon Village, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, India, on integrating traditional handloom practices as a tourism development tool. The study adopted a mixed-method approach, using a structured questionnaire (n=130) and semi-structured interviews (n=91). The concept of the study draws upon the context of the theoretical framework based on empowerment theory and stakeholder theory. Major key findings reveal that most of the weavers' communities perceive tourism as a development tool, with high mean scores for community participation in tourism planning (M=4.88), support for traditional practices as cultural attractions (M=4.83), and belief in tourism's role in economic growth (M=4.78). The 9-item perception scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha=0.928$). However, significant challenges persist, including limited awareness among the weavers' community and tourists (86.15%), inadequate marketing strategies (74.62%), and a deficit in infrastructure development (58.46%). Despite earning below Rs. 10,000 monthly from traditional handloom practices (57.69%), weavers demonstrate a positive optimism to participate in tourism initiatives. The study also proposes recommendations like infrastructure enhancement, strengthened marketing strategies, capacity-building programmes, and policy frameworks that support integration of traditional handloom practices into a sustainable community-based tourism resource, which fosters cultural preservation and weavers' community empowerment.

Keywords: Traditional weaving, Handloom Practices, Tourism Development, Community Empowerment, Community-based tourism, cultural heritage tourism, Handicraft Tourism

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Introduction

Tourism has played a big role in uplifting societies in urban and rural areas. As a service sector, tourism acts as one of the important sources of income growth, livelihood activities and lifestyle of the communities at large brought about by its development (Chi et al, 2017). The socio-cultural and economic influences of tourism initiatives are discussed normally in rural areas, particularly in the presence of ethnic minority groups (Deery et al, 2012; Sangchumnon and Kozak, 2018; Faulkenberry et al, 2000). Tourism expansion can bring about the integration and strengthening of the cultural identity, living standards, and changing economic environment. Many communities accepted innovative resource management models because of the perceived social and economic aids of tourism development (Mbaiwa, 2011; Abrahams, 2015). The growth of touristic activities and handloom practices combine to offer great potential for community empowerment, especially in areas where traditional crafts are an essential part of cultural heritage (Cohen, 2001; Richards, 2005). At the same time, tourism has become a potent instrument for economic growth, opening doors for regional businesses and producing employment opportunities. (Rout *et al*, 2017; Alcalá-Ordóñez et al, 2023; Shukla and Shamu-railatpam, 2024).

Handloom weaving is one of the important sectors in the state of Meghalaya, most of the weavers are women folks who practice these traditional practices of weaving (Mishra et al, 2021). There are varieties of handloom products woven by various communities, such as *Dukmanda* (Garo Lungi), *Pathin* (Hajong Lungi), *Jainsem and Dhara* (Khasi women dress), *Lushai loom* cloth and other items like *Bedsheets, Towels, Debra, Bedcovers, Mosquitos Nets, Shirting, Shawls, Bags, Daksari, Thoh Saru* (Jaintia women dress), *Gumcha* etc (Diengdoh, 2017). According to the Textiles Department (2024), the handloom and sericulture sectors are the two most significant cottage-based, eco-friendly sectors in rural areas of Meghalaya. Both these sectors signify the cultural identity and rich heritage of the rural communities. Where the nonappearance of the textiles industry, sericulture and the handloom sector is believed to play an important part in the production of silk fabrics and hand-woven fabrics of traditional designs. There are 15,900 families engaged in the handloom sector and 16,000 families in sericulture farming.

The rural communities in Ri Bhoi have embraced these traditional practices as an essential part of their culture and standard of living (Bareh, 1991; Meynell, 2021; Baruah, 2016). Handloom weaving differs from industrial production as it is highly time-consuming and requires competent human resources. For this reason, the handmade quality is considered of high value (Soundarapandian, 2002). The small production scale has limited access to bigger markets and competition from cheaper machine-made textiles. The demand for traditional handloom goods is declining and are more drawn to contemporary factory-made clothing and many weavers in Ri Bhoi are finding it difficult to make a living (Meynell, 2022).

Tourism can support the conservation of traditional handloom practices by bringing a wide range of audiences (Hani and Barua, 2015). Incorporating tourism with handloom practices can ultimately bring several benefits to the communities especially the younger generation of the society (Parida and Tada, 2018). Tourism-derived exposure can contribute towards the sustainability of handloom practices by establishing their economic significance and cultural identities of the communities (Pradhan and Khandual, 2020).

The proposed study tries to fill the research gaps by discussing the weavers' community perception of combining either the traditional handloom practices and tourism as a development tool. Engaging in an in-depth study of the community perceptions, the research provides a

subtle insight into the traditional weaving and handloom practices with regard to tourism integration as a tool for development.

The study was being conducted with the following objectives: -

1. To assess the current scenario of the traditional handloom practices of the study area.
2. To study the local communities' perception of integrating traditional handloom practices as a tourism development tool.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a community-based tourism development model, giving importance to the weavers' community ownership. The framework is based on two major approaches, i.e., empowerment theory and stakeholder theory.

A) Community Empowerment through Tourism Development

Empowerment theory was first proposed by Julian Rappaport, an American psychologist in 1981. Where he defines "Empowerment as a construct that links individual strength and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviour to social policy and social change" (Craig and Mayo, 1995). According to David Werner (1988), "Community empowerment is a process by which disadvantaged people work together to increase control over events that influence their lives". Empowering communities is to develop an atmosphere, conditions or climate that allows them to be actively involved and part of tourism development (Adebayo and Butcher, 2022). The development of tourism initiatives in rural communities depends on the goodwill and cooperation by them. Joo et al. (2019) tested the theory of empowerment in the tourism context, on residents' pervaded knowledge, psychological perception, social, political and economic empowerment through tourism development by using Rocha's (1997) theory of empowerment. Thus, motivating communities to take part in touristic activities and management can ultimately enhance the sustainability of rural economic growth and cultural sustainability (Esichaikul and Chansawang, 2022).

The conceptual framework for this study can be derived by using the empowerment level of analysis as proposed by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) as follows:

Table I: Empowerment Level of Analysis

Level of analysis	Process (Empowering)	Outcome (Empowered)
Individual	Learning decision-making skills Managing resources Working with others	Sense of control Critical awareness Participatory behaviour
Organisational	Opportunities to participate in decision-making Shared responsibility Shared leadership	Effectively compete for resources Networking with another organisation Policy influence
Communities	Access to resources Open government structure Tolerance for diversity	Organisational coalition Pluralistic leadership Resident participatory

Source: Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995

B) Stakeholder Theories for Empowering Communities with Tourism

R. Edward Freeman proposed the stakeholder theory in his award-winning book “Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach” in 1984. Since then, the stakeholder approach has been used in different fields of study, such as management, social science, and humanities. Khazaei et al. (2015) attempted to advance tourism development by empowering local communities by drawing on progressive approaches to stakeholder theories in management and exploring the dynamic future of empowering local communities with tourism development, which involved stakeholders and representatives towards tourism planning and approaches. Rachmawati and Fountain, (2020) explored the role of external stakeholders in empowering local communities where tourism was developed, with a good start for community empowerment. Shafieisabet and Haratifard (2020) presented a study to measure the involvement of tourism stakeholders in communities’ empowerment through tourism development by using indicators such as economic, social-environmental impact and perceived in terms of rural destinations in Iran. In the field of the tourism sector, the study concerning instrumental stakeholder theory has been used by many researchers and is capable and likely to provide a competitive range of advantages for empowering communities through integrated tourism development (Mondoñedo, 2021; Pribadi and Nastiti, 2023; Eki et al., 2024).

The incorporation of empowerment theory and stakeholder theory in the study provides a robust analytical lens for examining how traditional handloom practices can be leveraged as a tourism development tool. At the individual level, weavers’ decision-making skills and resource management capabilities are essential for participating in tourism activities. At the organisational level, collective structures such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperative societies facilitate shared responsibility and networking opportunities. At the community level, access to resources and participatory governance structures determine the extent to which tourism benefits are equitably distributed among the community members. Stakeholder theory complements this framework by emphasising the importance of engaging multiple actors, including government, related tourism agencies, private enterprises, and non-governmental organisations, in tourism planning processes. This study applies these theoretical constructs to analyse weavers’ perceptions, examining how empowerment processes at various levels influence their attitudes toward tourism integration and identifying the stakeholder dynamics that shape community-based tourism development in the study area.

Literature Review

Economic Sustainability of Tourism and Handloom

Noonan and Rizzo (2017) examine the financial effects of cultural tourism. The study draws attention to the difficulties in identifying and quantifying the benefits of cultural tourism is constantly changing. They call on cultural economists to concentrate on this field of study, emphasising the need for more investigation to fully grasp the economic complications and developing trends for cultural tourism. Zadel and Bogdan (2013) concentrated on the financial implications of cultural tourism in Croatia, pointing out that insufficient statistical systems make it difficult to evaluate the impact of this industry. They stress the significance of turning cultural assets into tourism offerings to optimise positive effects and minimise negative ones. Johnson (2010) highlights the contributions of social economy enterprises to the role of community-based tourism (CBT) development in rural areas. These locally owned businesses con-

tributed to community-based tourism (CBT) by offering distinctive tourism experiences and necessary infrastructure, which boosts the social, economic and cultural advantages of rural communities.

Roy (2021) discussed that the tourism and handloom sector in India is one of the major contributors to the economic significance of various regions in the country, and these industries can enhance the livelihood of the local communities and living cultural heritages. The study also discussed the importance of the handloom sectors, which can generate employment opportunities for weavers and associated workers that play an exceptional role in the Indian economy. According to the Textiles Department (2024), the handloom sectors in Meghalaya constitute one of the major exciting aspects of the cultural heritage of the state, which constitutes an integral part of the rural and semi-rural setting livelihood for economic activities. As per the Fourth All India Handloom Census (2019-2020), there is an increased number of weavers in the state, i.e., 42,000 marked the total number of weavers, and the number of active looms as per the record were 43,220 numbers. This shows that many weavers in the state depend merely on the handloom sector to sustain their livelihood.

Tourism Development and Community Empowerment

Tourism is gradually seen as a development tool by many countries, in the context of income generation, employment opportunities, economic diversification, empowering communities and cultural preservation (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Saad (2021) investigated the relationship between the growth of the handloom industry and domestic tourism in India by evaluating the government's effort and support for handloom weavers. In his study, he found that tourism can significantly support local handloom industries. The study also recommended that local initiatives for the sustainable growth of the handloom sector are important, and to strengthen the foundations of tourism initiatives at the ground level.

Ara et al. (2022) examine how handicrafts fit into ethnic tourism. The findings of the study show that handicrafts can influence interactions and foster collaboration between tourists and host communities within their networks. But the study also points out problems that could risk the sustainability of tourism centred around handicrafts, like a conflict of interests and viewpoints between the tourist and host communities. Ahmed et al. (2021) investigated the Manipuri handloom sector in Bangladesh, paying particular attention to its difficulties and opportunities for societal advancement. The study revealed that low-profit margins, competition and a lack of capital are the main problems faced by the sector. Despite these obstacles, the Manipuri handloom sector is vital to the community's development for social capital building and empowerment of women entrepreneurs

Challenges Between Handloom and Tourism

According to Ray (2014), tourism in Kamarpukur, West Bengal has improved in terms of basic amenities such as transportation, communication and sanitary conditions. He also emphasises how crucial it is to examine visitors' requirements and communities' viewpoints on the levels of satisfaction to optimise tourism's potential in rural areas. Choudhury et al. (2018) examine how rural tourism contributes to sustainable livelihoods in Northeastern India, emphasising both the social and economic advantages. And suggested that by promoting social interactions and economic development between visitors and locals, rural tourism—which includes ideas like homestays— can directly benefit local communities.

Devi (2014) stated that, since cloth mills and a large number of power looms are not available within the Northeast region, weavers put their effort into working manually in the process to sustain their livelihood. The contribution of income from handlooms is very low compared with other Indian states. The conditions of the handloom sector encounter various challenges, such as skills, technology and the main market structure. Sharma et al. (2021) found that imported silk is less expensive and poses a threat to Sualkuchi, Assam, a city known for its golden Muga silk. The authors contended that promoting travel can aid in educating tourists about the complex and time-consuming nature of handloom weaving, thus expanding the market for genuine silk goods. Stakeholder opinions on this strategy are presented along with the Assam government's support for rural tourism development.

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey methods with qualitative interview techniques to provide comprehensive insights into the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

Study Area

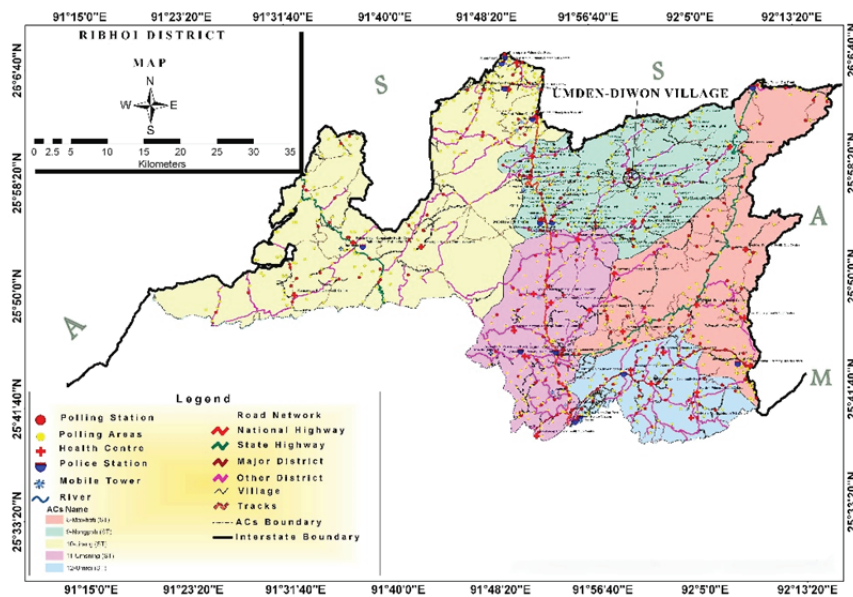


Figure 1: Map of study area, Ri Bhoi District
Sources: The Official Web Portal, Government of Meghalaya

Umden-Diwon village, located in Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, was purposively selected for this study based on several criteria: (a) the presence of an active weaving population engaged in traditional Eri silk production, (b) the village's designation as the first Eri Silk village of Meghalaya, (c) recent recognition through the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for its traditional handloom Eri-Silk products (registered on 7th April 2025), and (d) the potential for developing

the area as a cultural tourism destination. The village is situated approximately 28 km from the district headquarters, Nongpoh, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, India.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The target samples comprised the weavers' community that is engaged in traditional handloom practices of Umden-Diwon village. A census-based sampling approach was employed, attempting to include the active weavers' community of the village. The final sample consisted of 130 respondents, representing women weavers of the village. Since the majority of the weaving and handloom practices in the village are being performed by women only. This sample size certifies statistical adequacy for the descriptive analyses conducted (Cochran, 1977) and provides sufficient representation of the weavers' community's perspectives.

A structured questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical framework of empowerment theory (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995) and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), as well as relevant literature on community-based tourism and the handloom and handicraft sectors. The questionnaire comprised three sections:

Section 1: Socio-demographic Profile – Five items capturing age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, and annual income from all sources.

Section 2: Current Scenario of Traditional Handloom Practices – Four items examining years of experience in weaving, type of proprietorship, membership in organisations, and monthly income from handloom practices.

Section 3: Community Perception of Tourism Integration – Ten statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), designed to assess perceptions across three dimensions aligned with empowerment and stakeholder theory:

- Economic empowerment (items on job creation and local economic growth)
- Socio-cultural empowerment (items on cultural preservation, appreciation, and authenticity)
- Participatory empowerment (items on community involvement, willingness to support initiatives)

Furthermore, a dichotomous (Yes/No) questionnaire was added to capture perceived challenges, and open-ended questions were elicited on the perceptions for steps, benefits and suggestions for integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

Instrument Validation and Reliability

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 15 weavers to assess clarity and comprehension, resulting in minor modifications to question wording. Reliability of the perception scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Initial analysis of all 10 items yielded $\alpha = 0.774$. However, one item ("Integrating traditional weaving and handloom practices with tourism is very challenging") demonstrated a negative item-rest correlation ($r = -0.266$), indicating that this item measured a distinct construct, perceived challenges, rather than positive perceptions toward tourism integration. This item was therefore analysed separately as a challenge indicator rather than as part of the perception scale.

The refined 9-item perception scale (excluding the challenge item) demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.928$), substantially exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Item-rest correlations for the 9-item scale ranged from 0.615 to 0.908, indicating that all items contributed strongly to the construct.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews during February-March 2025. Interviews were conducted in the native Khasi language to ensure accurate comprehension and responses. Each interview lasted approximately 20-35 minutes. Out of 130 respondents who completed the structured questionnaire survey, 91 (70%) respondents provided detailed responses to the open-ended questions, which formed the basis for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed for all variables. For the Likert-scale items, except for the first statement of the Community Perception of Tourism Integration, were analysed separately due to a negative item-rest correlation ($r = -0.266$), the other 9 items of the statement, the weighted average of the mean score for the 9 statements was interpreted as follows: Weighted average (9-item scale) = $42.24/9 = 4.69$. (i.e., ≥ 4.69 =High Perception, 4.17-4.68= Moderate Perception, and 3.65-4.67=Low Perception). The same analysis applied to a dichotomous (Yes/No) questionnaire on challenges perception as, Weighted average= $7.9/5=1.58$, (i.e., ≥ 1.58 =High Perception, 1.21-1.57=Moderate Perception, 0.90-1.20= Low Perception) (Wilcox, 2003).

Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Themes were identified inductively from the data and subsequently mapped to the theoretical framework according to the respondents' observations.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time was clearly communicated.

Result and Analysis

This section of the study represents the findings of the collected data and is analysed into seven sub-sections. The analysis begins with the socio-economic profile of respondents, followed by an examination of the current scenario of traditional handloom practices. Subsequent sections present community perceptions regarding tourism integration, perceived challenges, suggested steps for integration, expected benefits, and additional comments and suggestions from the weavers' community. The results of the analysis are constructed in the context of empowerment and stakeholder theory to provide a theoretical understanding of the empirical observations.

Socio-economic Profile of the Respondent

Understanding the socio-economic characteristics of the weavers' community is essential for contextualising their perceptions and identifying factors that may influence tourism integration outcomes. The demographic profile of the 130 respondents is presented in Table II below.

Table II. Socio-economic profile of the respondents (n=130)

Category	Sub-Category	f	%	Mean
Age	18 to 25	34	26.15%	2.68
	26 to 35	28	21.54%	
	36 to 45	29	22.31%	
	46 to 55	24	18.46%	
	56 and above	15	11.54%	
Marital status	Married	44	33.85%	1.66
	Unmarried	86	66.15%	
	Illiterate	21	16.15%	
Qualification	Primary level	38	29.23%	2.98
	Secondary level	24	18.46%	
	Higher secondary level	24	18.46%	
	Graduate	15	11.54%	
	Postgraduate and above	8	6.15%	
Occupation	Farmer	44	33.85%	2.31
	Labourer	38	29.23%	
	Self employed	28	21.54%	
	Government employee	6	4.62%	
	Business	12	9.23%	
	Others	2	1.54%	
Annual income	Less than 100000	94	72.31%	1.32
	100001-200000	30	23.08%	
	200001-300000	6	4.62%	
	Above 300001	0	0.00%	

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The demographic analysis reveals the important aspects that have implications for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development initiatives. The age distribution indicates that the weavers' community are relatively very young, with 47.69% of the women weavers' community aged 35 years or below ($M=2.68$). This indicates the potential engagement with tourism initiatives and digital marketing platforms for the long term. The highest number of unmarried women weavers (66.15%) suggests that many weavers have flexible time allocation. This could facilitate the weavers' community participation in tourism development initiatives and ventures.

The educational profile of the weavers' community indicates a concerning pattern, with 45.38% of the weavers having only primary-level education or below. According to empowerment theory, building individual competencies through education and training is fundamental to achieving empowerment outcomes (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

Occupational analysis indicates that traditional handloom practice is not the primary livelihood for most weavers, but largely depends on farming (33.85%) and labour-based (29.23%) livelihoods. This diversified livelihood strategy reflects the economic vulnerability of the traditional handloom practices, while also indicating opportunities for integrated tourism models that combine weaving with agricultural experiences. The annual income distribution analysis, such as 72.31% earning below Rs. 100,000 annually from all sources, emphasises the marginalised economic status of the weaver's community and indicates the potential transformative implications that successful tourism integration could achieve.

Current Scenario of the Traditional Handloom Practices of the Area

This section of analysis examines the current state of traditional handloom practices of the study area, focusing on experience levels, business structures, organisational affiliations, and income generation. These aspects provide insight into the sector's dimensions for tourism integration. As presented in Table III.

Table III. Current Scenario of the traditional handloom practices (n=130)

Category	Sub-category	f	%	Mean
Years of Experience	No experiences	0	0.00%	2.25
	1 to 5 years	36	27.69%	
	6 to 10 years	48	36.92%	
	11 to 20 years	27	20.77%	
	21 to 30 years	15	11.54%	
	40 Years and Above	4	3.08%	
Type of Proprietorship	Other	4	3.08%	1.32
	Sole proprietor	80	61.54%	
	Partnership	46	35.38%	
Member of Organisation	Not a member of any	8	6.15%	2.88
	SHGs	69	53.08%	
	NGOs	10	7.69%	
	Society	16	12.31%	
	Co-Operative Society	27	20.77%	
Monthly Income from Traditional Weaving and Handloom Practices	No Income	0	0.00%	1.56
	Below 10000	75	57.69%	
	10001 to 20000	42	32.31%	
	20001 to 30000	8	6.15%	
	30000 and above	5	3.85%	

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The experience distribution analysis indicates that the weaver's community encounter a transitional change in the traditional handloom practices. The highest number of weavers in the 6-10 years of experiences (36.92%) signify moderate expertise, while the lowest number of veteran weavers with 40+ years of experience (3.08%) shows a significant loss of deep-rooted traditional weaving knowledge. Particularly, the lack of complete beginners' weavers (0%) indicates that new entrants to the practices are not being concerned, which might be alarming about the intergenerational knowledge transfer from the older generation to the younger generations. A key component of cultural preservation which could be addressed by the prospec-

tives of tourism development. The highest number of sole proprietorship individuals (61.54%) indicates that the nature of traditional handloom practices offers weavers autonomy, but restricted collective bargaining power and the reach to potential market. From a stakeholder theory perspective, this concern and may creates challenges for coordinated tourism development, but also opportunities for building a collaborative network.

Organisational affiliation patterns are encouraging from the perspective of an empowerment viewpoint. The majority of the weavers' community are in membership with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) (53.08%), and cooperative societies (20.77%). This implies that collective institutional frameworks exist and could serve as platforms for tourism initiatives. These institutional organisations can ease the collective decision-making, shared responsibility, and access to resources, which are in line with the key component of organisational empowerment (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). The analysis of monthly income from the traditional handloom practices shows a precarious economic situation, with 57.69% of weavers earning below Rs. 10,000 monthly from weaving and traditional handloom practices. However, the absence of "no-income" responses indicates that these practices provide a supplementary income for all weavers. This paradox of high optimism toward tourism integrations despite low-income earnings can be understood through empowerment theory: the community recognises tourism as a potential tool for enhancing their economic status while maintaining their cultural identity. The low base of income earning also means that even modest improvements by tourism development could yield proportionally significant benefits to the weavers' community at large.

Communities' Perception of Integrating Traditional Handloom Practices as a Tourism Development Tool

Community perceptions regarding tourism integration were assessed through ten statements. Nine statements measured positive perceptions toward tourism integration across economic, socio-cultural, and participatory dimensions, demonstrating excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.928$). The first statement specifically captured perceived challenges in integration and was analysed separately due to its distinct construct nature. Table IV present the distribution of responses and mean scores for all ten statements with regard to the weavers' community perception of tourism integration.

Table IV. Communities' perception of Tourism Integration (n=130)

Criteria		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Remark/Level of Agreement
Integrating traditional weaving and handloom practices with tourism is very challenging	f	24	0	6	72	28	3.62	Community's acknowledgement
	%	18.46	0.00	4.62	55.38	21.54		
Tourism can create job opportunities among the local weavers in the community	f	0	0	0	44	86	4.66	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	33.85	66.15		
Handloom tourism can contribute to the growth of the local economy	f	0	0	0	28	102	4.78	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.54	78.46		
Handloom tourism increases cultural appreciation and visibility to the tourist	f	0	0	16	28	86	4.54	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	12.31	21.54	66.15		
Local community and weavers should actively participate in community-based tourism planning	f	0	0	0	16	114	4.88	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.31	87.69		
Traditional handloom practices should be supported as cultural tourism attractions	f	0	0	0	22	108	4.83	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.92	83.08		

I believe tourism development can support the preservation of the traditional weaving knowledge.	f	0	0	0	32	98	4.75	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	24.62	75.38		
Tourist shows a strong interest in the live weaving demonstration by the weavers of the local community	f	0	16	0	38	76	4.34	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	12.31	0.00	29.23	58.46		
I believed traditional weaving could be integrated into a tourism development tool without compromising the indigenous tradition	f	0	0	16	16	98	4.63	Moderate Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	12.31	12.31	75.38		
I am willing to support any initiatives through tourism that promote and preserve the traditional knowledge of weaving and handloom	f	0	0	0	22	108	4.83	High Perception
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.92	83.08		

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Note: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree. The first item (challenges) was analysed separately; the remaining 9 items demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.928$). Weighted average (9-item scale) = $42.24/9 = 4.69$. (i.e., ≥ 4.69 =High Perception, 4.17-4.68= Moderate perception, 3.65-4.67=Low Perception)

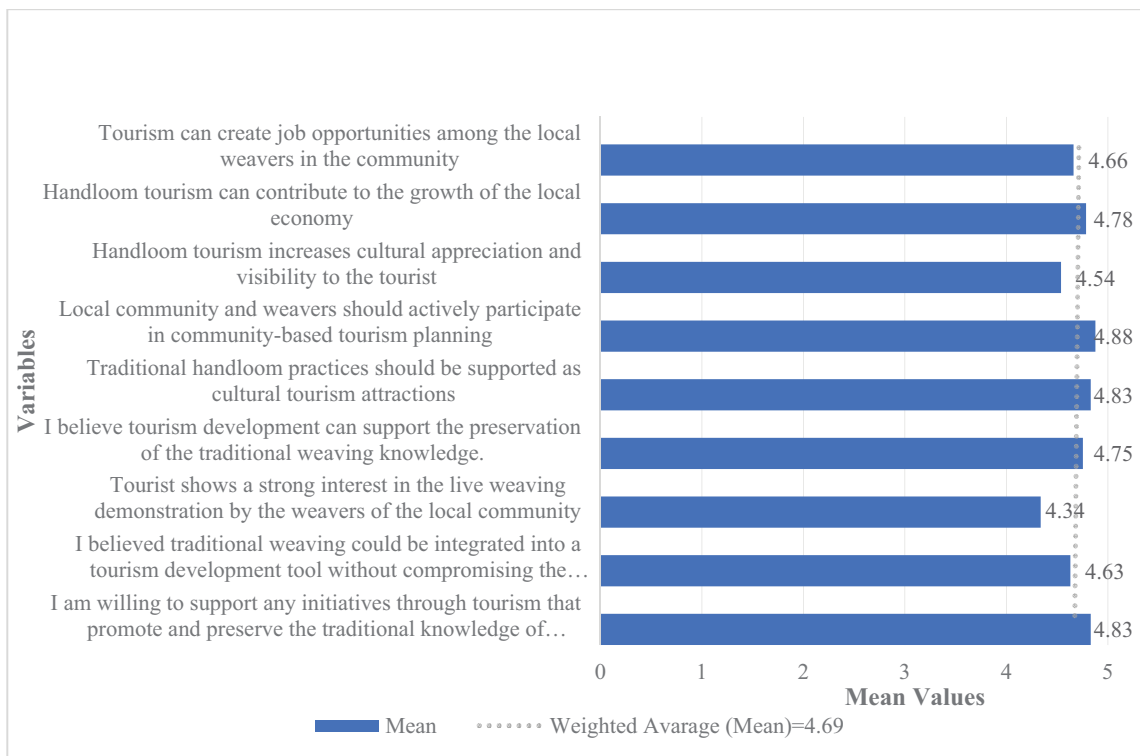


Figure 2: Mean scores of 9-items on Communities' perception of Tourism Integration (n=130)
Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The perception analysis shows the overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward tourism integration, with an overall weighted average mean score of 4.69 for the 9-item perception scale, indicating a positive agreement across all dimensions. The separate analysis of the challenge item (M=3.62) corresponded to the community's acknowledgement of the integration challenges, with the remaining optimism statements regarding the potential of tourism. The finding can

be interpreted in terms of empowerment and stakeholder theory, which reflects that communities will accept development initiatives only when they have opportunities and gain better control over any situation.

Economic Empowerment Perceptions: The highest mean score for local economic growth (M=4.78) and the moderate mean scores for job creation (M=4.66) reflect the community's recognition of the prospects of tourism in economic growth. Importantly, 100 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, indicating unanimous consensus. This strong economic orientation aligns with stakeholder theory's emphasis on balancing diverse interests, and the community anticipates that tourism can serve their economic needs while also preserving cultural values.

Socio-cultural Empowerment Perceptions: Traditional handloom practices as cultural tourism attractions (M=4.83), preservation of traditional knowledge (M=4.75) received strong endorsement, and moderate responses on cultural appreciation (M=4.54). This reflects the important role that tourism can play in economic development and the conservation of the cultural heritage. Notably, most of the weavers' community's belief that tourism development can occur without compromising indigenous traditions (M=4.63), as it suggests the community has a strong confidence in their ability to control the tourism narrative and maintain cultural authenticity. As a key concern in cultural tourism literature regarding commodification risks (Cohen, 2001).

Participatory Empowerment Perceptions: Weavers' community is willing to participate in tourism planning and support any initiatives through tourism that promote and preserve traditional knowledge, which has the highest mean score (M=4.88, with 87.69% strongly agreeing and M=4.83, with 83.08% strongly agreeing). This finding aligns with empowerment theory's emphasis on the community's participatory behaviour as both a process and outcome of empowerment. The insistence of the weaver's community on active participation indicates the awareness of risks associated with external domination of tourism ventures and embodies the concept of community-based tourism, which stresses on local ownership and control systems.

Challenges and Concerns: The moderate mean of integration is challenging (M=3.62), and needs to be acknowledged. This statements exhibit variation with unanimous positive responses, such that 18.46 per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed. Such a distribution shows that even though the weavers' community is conscious about the challenges, they do not perceive them as unachievable, but instead as an attitude with a promising future for implementation efforts on the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

The reason for the slightly lower score of tourist interest in live demonstrations (M=4.34) and the fact that there are some responses of disagreement (12.31%) could also be related to previous limited exposure to tourism or the logistics of the demonstrations. These facts imply that there is a need for awareness creation of the potential of tourism for the weavers' community and physical infrastructure development to enable tourist interaction within the locality.

Challenges in Integrating Traditional Weaving and Handloom with Tourism

While the community is highly optimistic about the process of tourism integration, it is important to identify the perceived challenges to formulate specific targeted interventions. Table V presents the distribution of responses regarding specific challenges identified in the literature and through preliminary consultations.

Table V. Perceived Challenges in Tourism Integration (n=130)

Criteria	NO		YES		Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of Agreement
	f	%	f	%			
Infrastructure development and raw materials	54	41.54%	76	58.46%	1.58	.49	High Perception
Awareness of tourism and tourists	18	13.85%	112	86.15%	1.86	.35	High Perception
Lack of funding, government financial aid, and support	73	56.15%	57	43.85%	1.44	.49	Moderate Perception
Inadequate Promotion and a lack of marketing for handloom products	33	25.38%	97	74.62%	1.75	.44	High Perception
Lack of community participation in tourism development	95	73.08%	35	26.92%	1.27	.45	Moderate Perception

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Note: Weighted average = $7.9/5 = 1.58$, (i.e., ≥ 1.58 = High Perception, $1.21 - 1.57$ = Moderate Perception, $0.90 - 1.20$ = Low Perception)

The challenge analysis indicates a hierarchy of concerns that should be reflected in priorities of interventions. Awareness of tourism and tourists came out as the most noticeable challenges (86.15%, $M=1.86$), implying that there is a major gap in information between the weaver's community and the prospective of tourist markets. This observation aligns with stakeholder theory, which stresses the importance of communication and interaction among stakeholders and groups in ensuring successful tourism development. Secondly, the Inadequate promotion and lack of marketing for handloom products (74.62%, $M=1.75$) represent the most pressing challenge. This perception, along with the awareness gap, indicates that the weavers' community recognised that their products and practices are not effectively reaching the potential market, as a structural challenge and requires systematic intervention with the help of digital platforms, tourism networks, and promotional campaigns.

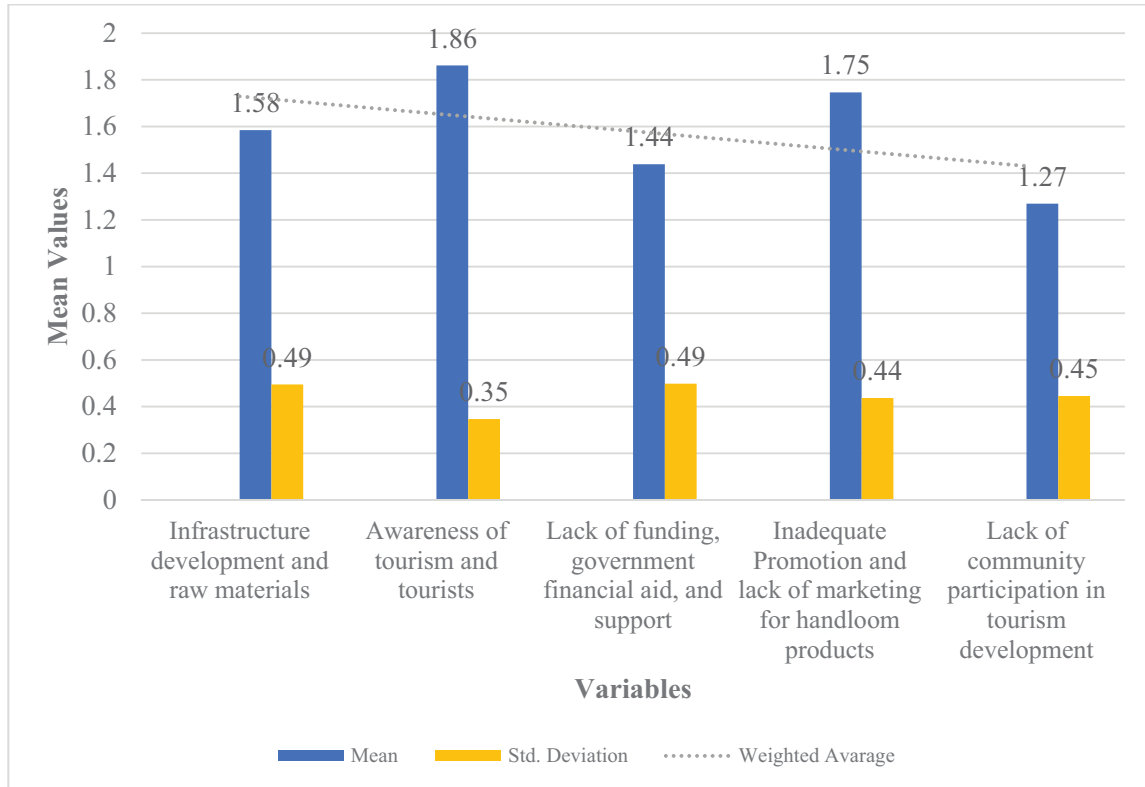


Figure 3: Mean Scores of Perceived Challenges in Tourism Integration (n=130)

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Thirdly, the deficits of Infrastructure development and raw materials (58.46%, $M=1.58$) are moderate and one of the important concerns. The relatively lower agreement than the awareness and the marketing challenges may indicate that a basic infrastructure exists but requires improvements and upgradation through which the tourism development process may occur. This observation is consistent with the formal status of the village's establishment as an Eri silk production centre.

Interestingly, funding and government support (43.85%, $M=1.44$) were not seen as more pressing than awareness and marketing barriers. This observation can be interpreted as either adequate current support levels or a pragmatic community-focused perspective that prioritises market value solutions over institutional reliance. From an empowerment perspective, this market access preference over subsidies indicates that the weavers' community is seeking to integrate economic sustainability rather than being welfare dependent. The low perception of community participation, which is a considerable challenge (26.92%, $M=1.27$), is notable and somewhat contradictory given the context of the high importance placed on participatory planning. This implies that weavers feel adequately engaged in community planning processes and want to be actively involved in community-based tourism planning and development. This distinction underscores the importance of creating dedicated participatory mechanisms for tourism development initiatives.

Steps for the Integration of Traditional Handloom Practices with Tourism: Weavers' Community Perspectives

To complement the quantitative findings, respondents are encouraged to provide their observations through the open-ended questionnaire. Out of the 130 participants, 91 (70%) of the participants gave substantive responses, which were thematically analysed and categorised into major key themes as presented in Tables VI, VII, and VIII.

Table VI. Suggested Steps for Tourism Integration (n=91)

What steps should be taken for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development in your locality?				
Criteria	Frequency	Per cent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Infrastructure Development	27	29.7	2.47	1.30
Marketing and Promotion Strategy	24	26.4		
Preservation of Culture and Tradition	18	19.8		
Innovation and training	14	15.4		
Governmental Policy	8	8.8		
Total	91	100.0		

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

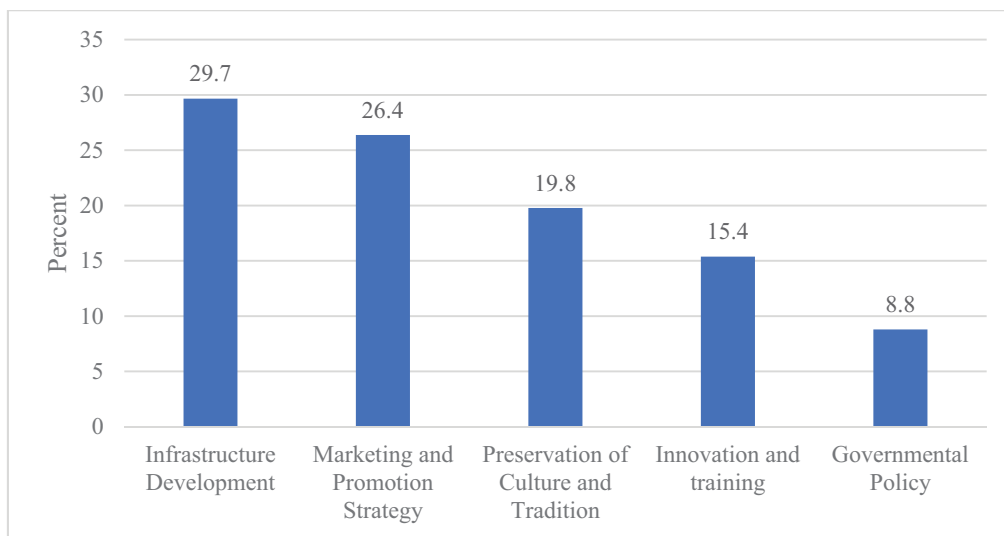


Figure 4: Percentage of respondent's observation on steps for integration traditional handloom practices with tourism.

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

The thematic analysis of community suggestions demonstrates practical and in-depth knowledge of the need for integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. Infrastructure development (29.7%) and marketing/promotion strategies (26.4%) together account for over half of the responses, which support the quantitative findings on the key barriers. The infrastructure recommendation had certain components, such as proper road acces-

sibility, dedicated handloom products display centres, exhibition centres, and handicraft museums at the community level. These suggestions demonstrate that the weavers' community see the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development requires physical facilities. This can showcase their crafts and accommodate tourists, not merely the sale of their products, but also toward experiential tourism.

The Marketing and promotion responses emphasised the need for digital platforms, storytelling approaches, and partner-oriented events, including craft fairs and handloom festivals. The fact that the weavers' community has become aware of the importance of digital marketing is noteworthy. The relatively low educational levels identified earlier suggested that either exposure to successful examples of other locations digitally or aspirational thinking about market growth. Cultural preservation (19.8%) appeared as a diverse priority, distinct from but harmonising with economic concerns. Respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining authenticity while adapting to market trends, reflecting the tension between commodification and cultural integrity that is inherent in cultural tourism globally.

The need for contemporary design adaptations, the development of business skills, and sustainability practices were addressed in terms of innovation and training (15.4%). In the empowerment theory framework, these recommendations reflect individual-level empowerment processes, including learning new skills and managing resources effectively. The relatively lowest suggestion on governmental policies (8.8%) is consistent with the challenge perceptions. Perhaps because of less trust in the effectiveness of policies, or a community is more inclined toward self-reliance and market-based solutions. This indicates implications for intervention design, suggesting that community-driven approaches may be more effective compared to top-down policy implementation.

Weavers' Community Views on Support and Benefits from Tourism Development

The analysis of expected benefits, as shown in Table VIII, indicates a balanced perspective among the weaver's community, with relatively even distribution across three support dimensions. Market access (36.3%) received the highest endorsement, reflecting the community's primary concern with reaching customers for their products. This economic orientation aligns with the empowerment theory's importance, where access to resources is considered a foundation for community empowerment. Increased tourist footfalls (33.0%) is a somewhat different advantage, indicating that direct visitor engagement can create opportunities beyond simple product sales, such as live demonstrations, experiential workshops, and cultural interaction. The experiential dimension of tourism can increase both economic returns and cultural appreciation.

Table VII. Expected Benefits from Tourism Support (n=91)

If you are a weaver, what type of support will you benefit more from tourism?				
Criteria	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Market Access	33	36.3	1.95	.82
Increase Tourist Footfalls	30	33.0		
Government and Institutional Support	28	30.8		
Total	91	100.0		

Source: *Primary Survey, 2025*

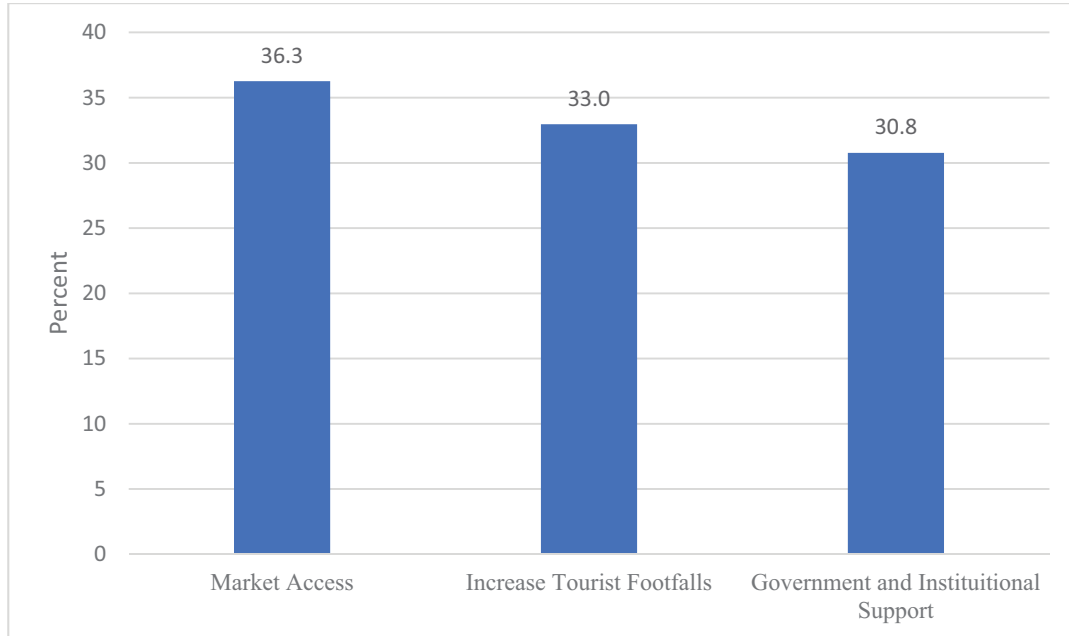


Figure 5: Respondent observation on the type of support and benefit from tourism.

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Government and institutional support (30.8%) remain important to almost one-third of respondents. This includes support such as subsidies, training programmes, exhibition opportunities, and infrastructure investment. The balanced response distribution ($M=1.95$, $SD=0.82$) indicates that the weavers' community perceived these three dimensions as complementary benefits rather than opposing or competing priorities. From a stakeholder theory perspective, achieving these benefits requires coordinated action among multiple stakeholders: market access depends on private sector engagement (tour operators, retailers, e-commerce platforms), increasing tourist footfalls requires destination marketing by tourism stakeholders, government agencies and support from institutions or NGOs. The community is also prepared to engage in multiple stakeholders' partnerships while balancing their expectations for the integration.

Comments and Suggestions from Weavers' Community

The final thematic analysis in Table VIII captures the weaver's community's broader vision for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. Collaborative effort (40.7%) appeared as the dominant theme, indicating that successful tourism development requires partnerships among various stakeholders, including cooperatives, tourism departments, local government, private enterprises (tour operators, fashion houses, retailers), and NGOs. This resonates well with stakeholder theory and denotes a sophisticated understanding of tourism as a multi-actor system. Collaborative effort recommendations, such as joint marketing initiatives, public-private partnerships for infrastructure development, and networking with urban fashion markets. The ideas on collaboration also reflect organisational-level em-

powerment processes, where shared responsibility and inter-organisational networking contribute to enhanced empowerment outcomes.

Table VIII. Additional Comments and Suggestions (n=91)

Any other comments and suggestions on integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism as a development tool.				
Criteria	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaboration Effort	37	40.7	1.87	.81
Increase Tourist Activities	29	31.9		
Youth Participation	25	27.5		
Total	91	100.0		

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

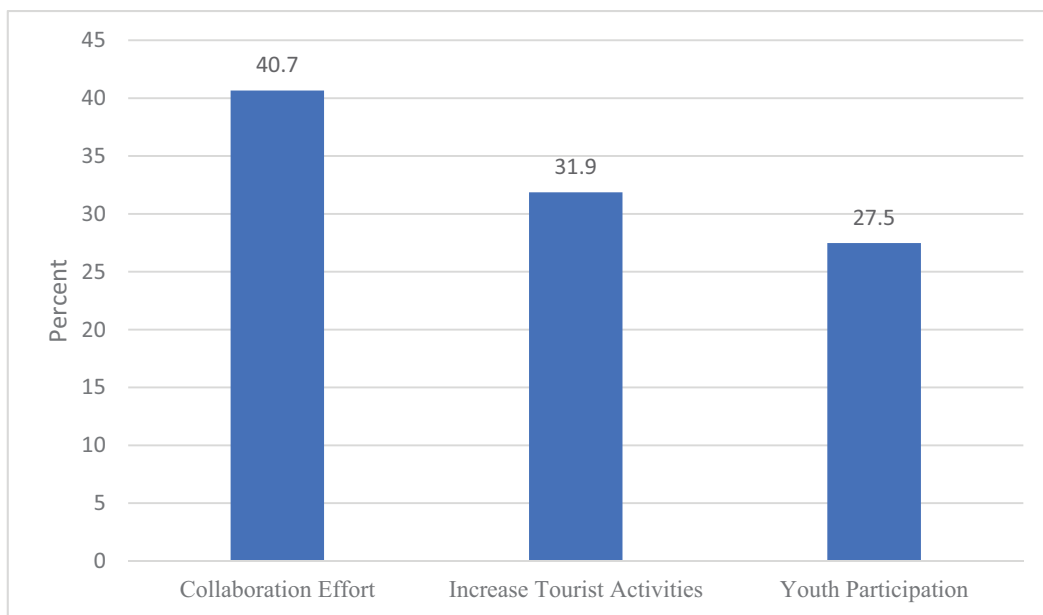


Figure 6: Respondent's comments and suggestions on integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development.

Source: Primary Survey, 2025

Increased tourist activities (31.9%) signify a demand for various tourism products beyond passive sales of handicraft products. This suggested to include tourism activities such as craft festivals, live weaving demonstrations, cultural immersion tours, handloom village trails, and hands-on workshops where tourists can learn and observe basic weaving techniques. These suggestions indicate the community's vision for experiential and participatory tourism that creates deeper engagement with visitors.

Youth participation (27.5%) arose as a major concern about intergenerational continuity and innovation. Communities expressed concern about falling interest among younger generations and the underutilisation of modern design approaches and digital platforms. Engaging youth is

essential for both cultural continuity and for bringing new perspectives on marketing, design innovation, and technology adoption. These suggestions are relatively homogeneous ($SD=0.81$), which indicates general agreement within the community regarding priorities, providing a solid basis for coordinated action.

Discussion and recommendation

The findings of this study provide empirical support for integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development in Umden-Diwon village while also emphasising the critical challenges that must be addressed for successful integration. This section discusses the findings in the context of the theoretical framework and presents literature, followed by evidence-based recommendations.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of the study strongly support the application of empowerment theory to the integration of traditional handloom practices with community-based tourism development initiatives. At the individual level, weavers are very conscious of their skills and express their willingness to learn and to participate in tourism initiatives. These are in line with the learning decision-making skills process and participatory behaviour outcomes identified by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995). However, the poor educational level and lack of marketing knowledge indicate that individual-level empowerment processes need to be reinforced by means of targeted training and capacity-building programmes, especially for the resource management process. At the organisational level, the domination of SHG and cooperative membership (73.85% combined) indicates that there are institutional frameworks which can further support the integration of traditional handloom with tourism development. These forms of collective structures that bring into line with organisational empowerment outcomes, such as networking, shared leadership, and outcomes of resource competition. The challenge lies in leveraging these present structures precisely for tourism development purposes.

At the community level, the highest responses of participatory planning ($M=4.88$) is an indicator of the need to have inclusive governance structures that would ensure equitable benefit distribution among the weavers' community. This finding echoes with community empowerment outcomes, such as pluralistic leadership and resident participation. The community's awareness of risks related to external dominance of tourism ventures means that critical consciousness is a key element of being empowered.

Stakeholder theory provides complementary information on the collaborative requirements for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. The recognition of the weaver's community on the role of multiple stakeholder collaboration, such as government agencies, private enterprises, cooperatives and NGOs, indicates their willingness to participate and engage in multi-stakeholder partnership. The emphasis on collaborative effort (40.7% of suggestions) indicates an understanding that tourism development initiatives require coordinated action across various actors with different resources, capabilities, and interests.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings are consistent with previous studies of cultural tourism and the development of the handloom sector. The weavers' community optimism regarding the potential of tourism

and economic growth can be seen in the case of Roy's (2021) on the role of the Indian handloom sector's contribution to regional economies. The acknowledgement of tourism as a preservation method and process justifies Pradhan and Khandual's (2020) claim that tourism-derived exposure can contribute to traditional handloom practices and sustainability. The findings also indicate challenges consistent with Devi's (2014) verdicts regarding structural barriers in Northeast India's handloom sector, including inadequate market access and technology gaps.

The awareness and marketing challenges of the findings were recognised (86.15% and 74.62%, respectively), similar to Ahmed et al.'s (2021) conclusions about Manipuri handloom industries' struggles with visibility and market accessibility. The recommendations on community participation reflect Adebayo and Butcher's (2022) findings from Nigeria regarding stakeholder demand for inclusive tourism planning. The apprehension about cultural legitimacy while embracing commercialisation resonates with Ara et al.'s (2022) explanations about tensions between tourist expectations and host community values in ethnic tourism contexts.

Recommendations

From the empirical findings and theoretical analysis of the study. The following are some of the recommendations for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism as a development tool for the study area:

Enhancement of infrastructure development: Given the importance of weavers' community prioritisation on infrastructure development (29.7% of suggestions) and the high perceptions of challenges about infrastructure development and materials (58.46%), dedicated investment is required for the development of weaving demonstration centres in the area, which may also include basic physical facilities and amenities for tourists and visitors. Investment in the development of a community-based handicraft museum, improvement of road connectivity and setting up displays and exhibition centres or spaces with integrated facilities own controlled by the weaver's community can also enhance the implementation of the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development in the area.

Strengthening marketing and promotional strategy: Addressing the pressing gap identified in awareness of tourism and tourists (86.15%), and inadequate promotion and lack of marketing (74.62%), it is important to develop a digital marketing platform that suits the weavers' community's perception and tourists. Provided with training and capacity building programmes on social media marketing and product photography, among the weaver's community of the area. Also, encouraging the local communities with storytelling approaches, partnering with other stakeholders, and participating in regional, national and international craft fairs and exhibitions can also enhance the visibility of the traditional handloom products of the area, which may in turn attract tourists visiting the village area.

Capacity building and innovation: Responding to educational constraints and the need for innovation and training (15.4 %), the effort should also involve organising regular workshops on contemporary design and trends while maintaining and preserving the traditional method of production techniques. Basic business skill training is also required for the weavers' community that covers pricing, inventory and customer relationship management. This could enhance the productivity and management of the local resources available for the traditional handloom sustainability. And also, procurement of the mentorship programme with incentives for the younger practitioners is very much needed in order to preserve the traditional knowledge of the practices.

Policy and institutional support: While most of the weavers' community responses advocate a market-based solution (36.3%), the government and institutional support (30.8%) remain essential. This can be achieved by simplifying the access to existing government schemes for the weavers' community, subsidised financing on infrastructure, plant and materials through which the community are encouraged to sustain the traditional handloom practices. Importantly, the implementation of intellectual property law and fair-trading regulations, and a coordination mechanism among government departments (tourism, textiles and rural development) can enhance and protect the interests of the weaver's community of the area.

Integrated livelihood approaches: Since most of the weavers' community relies on multiple occupations (farming 33.85% and labour 29.23%), interventions should also cover an integrated tourism package by combining weaving demonstration with agricultural experiences to create unique tourism experiences for visitors. Eri silk production with a sericulture farm visit can also be linked to create village tour itineraries. This could position the village as a living heritage destination offering a holistic cultural immersion and experiential tours. And to deal with the issues of integrational continuity and young generation engagement in the practices of traditional knowledge, documentations, designing a competition, and entrepreneurial programmes can enhance the purpose of preserving traditional knowledge and practices.

Conclusion

This paper examined the possibilities for integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development in Umden-Diwon village, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya, India, with the help of empowerment theory and stakeholder theory. The result shows that the weavers' community that possesses the traditional knowledge of handloom practices shows positive responses for the integration of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. This is being demonstrated by unanimously positive perceptions regarding the potential of tourism in economic growth, benefit of cultural preservation, and community empowerment outcomes. The weaver's community shows strong positive responses on participatory planning ($M=4.88$) and willingness to support tourism initiatives ($M=4.83$), which indicates a strong foundation for cultural tourism and community-based development initiatives.

However, the result also reveals various challenges, such as limited awareness among weavers and potential tourists (86.15%), inadequate marketing and promotional strategy (74.62%), and lack of infrastructure development (58.46%), that must be addressed by means of coordination and multi-stakeholder interventions. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of the study demonstrate the applicability of empowerment theory in understanding the community's perceptions of integrating traditional handloom practices with tourism development initiatives. The responses of the weavers' community reflect the awareness at individual, organisational, and community levels of the empowerment process and outcomes. The study mainly focused on the participatory behaviour and collective benefit-sharing of the process and outcomes of empowerment theory among the weavers' community. Stakeholder theory offers complementary understandings, with the community recognising the necessity of collaboration among government agencies, private enterprises, NGOs, and support from institutional organisations.

The result of the study also carries practical implications for policy formulation and project implementation for the integration process of traditional handloom practices with tourism development. Key barriers such as infrastructure development, marketing strategies, capacity building, and institutional support indicate a roadmap towards the interventions. The weaver's

community's preference for market-based solutions over welfare dependency also indicates that sustainable models need to place a special emphasis on economic growth possibilities and market integration rather than subsidy-driven approaches. Moreover, traditional handloom practices of Umden-Diwon village signify a valuable cultural heritage with substantial potential for tourism development. The strong optimism of community willingness, combined with the recent Geographical Indication recognition, creates a favourable environment for developing the village as a cultural and heritage tourism destination.

Limitations of the study

This study has a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was obtained from only one village of Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya, which limits the generalisability of the other weaver's community of Ri Bhoi district, or the states of North East India. Future research should look into multiple communities to identify the specific context and generalisable factors. Second, the study primarily relies on the women weavers' community perceptions; future research should include perceptions of other stakeholders, including village residents, tourists, tourism stakeholders, government officials, and potential market partners. Third, the cross-sectional study design provides a snapshot of current perceptions only; longitudinal studies would enable tracking of attitudes during the progress of tourism development. Fourth, although the mixed-method approach provided complementary information, a more in-depth qualitative investigation, with focus group discussions and participant observation, may provide a deeper understanding of community perceptions and dynamics.

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