



Revisiting Global Market Access and Social Fabric: The Case of Limited International Presence in Sri Lanka's Indigenous Apparel Industry

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ABSTRACT

The Sri Lankan handloom sector, rooted in rich cultural traditions and sustainability values, struggles to access and succeed in international markets despite its uniqueness. The real core of this issue remains underexplored from a management perspective, particularly in assessing the role of institutional authorities, given that the indigenous apparel sector itself has received minimal scholarly attention. A qualitative case study approach, supported by semi-structured interviews, is used in conjunction with a blend of two theoretical lenses. Findings revealed many aspects, including the negative influence of societal and industry attitudes, weaknesses in the education system, institutional inefficiencies, local producers being constrained by cultural norms that limit innovation and global engagement, and the endangerment of indigenous knowledge and values. The study addresses significant gaps while pinpointing various loopholes in the social fabric. Such insights help enhance local entrepreneurship, empower rural communities, and support the sustainable development of the national economy through better policy and institutional support for the handloom industry.

Keywords: Apparel, Global market, Indigenous values, Sri Lanka, Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

As the world is continuously moving toward new lifestyles, consumption patterns, and trends, corporations in the global context are also developing new management concepts, philosophies, strategies, and value systems. Within such a modern management arena, sustainability concerns have become crucial aspects as societal expectations on businesses are changing. In the journey toward sustainability, the modern world shows a tendency to embrace traditional values, cultural ideals, and products and industries empowered by such cultural, traditional, ethical, and indigenous values. In that context, traditional production methods have also gained attraction as there is evidence that there is a solid and intimate relationship between indigenous people, their values and the natural environment (Grenier, 1998; Gratani et al., 2016) so that sustainability can be achieved and preserved.

The relationship between indigenous values and sustainability has been clearly articulated by different scholars. Accordingly, indigenous cultures identify the environment not merely as a resource to exploit but as a vital part of their community and spirituality, understanding the human-environmental relationships, emphasizing respect, reciprocity, and stewardship (Gratani et al., 2016; Magni, 2016). For this reason, the world is ready to include those indigenous values in the business landscape. Proving the factor, Klepp (2015) indicates that blending craft traditions with indigenous knowledge and the value chains of artisanal businesses can open up new market opportunities with added value. Accordingly, the International Labour Organization acknowledges that indigenous people are the custodians of natural resources, linking their enterprises to traditional knowledge and these resources (Dhir, 2016). Further, the United Nations (2017) has developed a specific agenda for 2030 that places significant emphasis on the rights and values of indigenous peoples. As a result, indigenous entrepreneurship and business practices are emerging as critical drivers of sustainability.

Problem Identification

When analysing the relationship between indigenous values and sustainability, one industry in Sri Lanka can be discussed. That is the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector, also known as the 'handloom sector'. In the attempt to evaluate the Sri Lankan apparel sector, the indigenous apparel manufacturing sector often receives little attention. According to Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake, and Downs (2018), empowering traditional craft communities in Sri Lanka's handloom sector and integrating them into mainstream markets is crucial for the country's sustainable development, and there is global demand for such products. Additionally, Dissanayake, Perera, and Wanniarachchi (2017) illustrate how Sri Lanka's indigenous apparel sector can promote sustainability within the fashion industry through its traditional craft practices. Furthermore, Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake, and Downs (2020) note that the Sri Lankan handloom industry is attracting increasing attention. Yet Senanayake and Hettiarachchi (2020) note that age-old crafts passed down through generations are disappearing at an alarming rate.

In that context, it was further noted that there is a lack of up-to-date statistical records for this sector, as it has almost gone unnoticed. Even the main government institutional authority, which guides and monitors the Sri Lankan handloom industry, does not yet have a complete/updated database of the sector and its players.

Accordingly, as per the Export Development Board (EDB), despite the sector's deep roots in tradition and history, there are only 8 exporters in the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector. Among them, only one has obtained an International Fair-trade certification, which is a key to gaining global market access and recognition (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, n.d.a). Moreover, the Export Performance Indicators 2022 report by the EDB states that the apparel sector accounts for 40% of Sri Lanka's export revenue, but woven fabric production contributes only 3% (Export Development Board, 2023). The "Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka 2020" report by the CBSL indicates that export income from the Sri Lankan handloom sector is only US\$ 1.16 million (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020). This limited data availability suggests that the indigenous apparel sector has been largely overlooked for a significant period, with no comprehensive database to track

its performance. According to the Export Development Board (2017), there are about 962 small-scale, cottage-based manufacturers employing around 15,000 people, primarily rural women. Hence, it is clear that even though the industry is rich with indigenous values and sustainability initiatives, despite these sought-after aspects in the current world, the industry has been unable to reach the international market at a satisfactory rate.

Gap in Existing Knowledge

It was clearly noted that there are very few explicit studies done on the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector (handloom industry). Even the studies that have already been conducted have paid attention to areas such as sustainability concerns in the production process and business practices (Dissanayake, Perera, & Wanniarachchi, 2017), increasing the efficiency by eliminating waste (Senanayeka & Hettiarachchige, 2020), structural barriers of the industry that hinder innovations (Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake, & Downs, 2020), etc. None of those studies discusses the issue of the lack of global market access of the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector.

Apart from these local studies, global studies conducted in the area of sustainability through indigenous values also highlight the importance of maintaining sustainability practices in businesses, embracing and uplifting indigenous traditions and values, and high potential and space available for such sustainable and indigenous businesses in current business context (Moody, 2020; Dhir, 2016; Ayanu & Newman, 2020; Belanger, 2019, Singh, Anand, & Bhasin, 2019). In the existing literature, the importance of sustainability and indigenous values is discussed separately (Moody, 2020; Dissanayake et al., 2017; Wanniarachchi et al., 2020) or together (Dhir, 2016; Singh et al., 2019; Wanniarachchi et al., 2018; Senanayake & Hettiarachchi, 2020). And also, how they pave the way for international access of business organizations is discussed separately (Ayanu & Newman, 2020; Belanger, 2019). Yet, there is a vacuum to be filled by integrating all these aspects. Moreover, studies examining the role of respective authoritative institutions in enhancing the global market presence of indigenous sectors like handloom are scarce in the extant literature. On the other hand, as existing local studies (Dissanayake et al., 2017; Wanniarachchi et al., 2020; Wanniarachchi et al., 2018; Senanayake & Hettiarachchi, 2020) emphasize, there is a significant gap in the prevalent literature in relation to the Sri Lankan handloom

industry. Thus, how this study addresses this specific gap prevailing in knowledge, literature and empirics is shown in the summary diagram below (Figure 1).

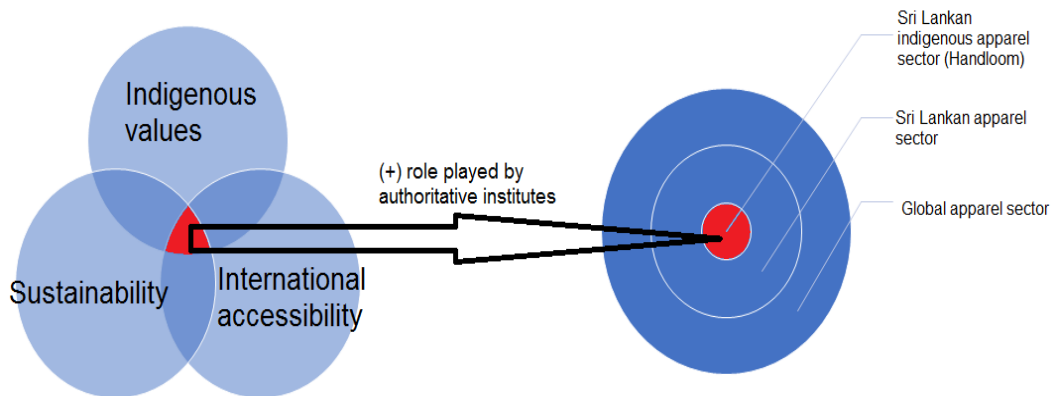


Figure 1: Gap of the study

Source: Author developed

Accordingly, being inspired by all those gaps and background of this sector mentioned above, the research problem investigated under this study is, “Why has the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector (handloom industry) not gained a significant level of global access despite its adoption of indigenous values and business practices aligned with sustainability?”

Based on the background and the performance gap of the sector, and the knowledge gap pertaining to the intended area of study, two research questions have been articulated to explore the aforementioned research problem as follows:

- Why have not a majority of Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector players reached global access?
- How does the support and guidance extended by respective authoritative institutions of the industry and the network among industry players and authoritative institutions of the industry enhance opportunities for the global access of the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector?

Theoretical Lenses Used

While many sustainability theories have been used in quantitative studies, this study uses a blend of Institutional Theory (IT) and Systems Thinking (ST) as its theoretical lens to support the discussion and shape the study's structure and boundaries.

When IT is considered, a number of studies have used this theory from a qualitative perspective and in the sustainability arena. Accordingly, Scott (2013, p.56) defines the concept of institutions using three pillars of new institutionalism concept such as (1) regulative pillar as rules, regulations, legal sanctions and so on, (2) normative pillar as norms and values in the social life, and (3) cultural cognitive pillar as taken for granted assumptions and shared conceptions regarding nature of social reality through which meaning making is happened in the society. Further, Powell and Bromley (2015) identify the applicability of the New Institutionalism theory in the analysis of complex contemporary organizations. Hence, we can understand how institutional elements within a country or cultural context influence the business practices of a particular industry; therefore, this theory will be appropriate for a deep evaluation of the complex business context of such an industry, which is heavily influenced by the country's indigenous values and cultural boundaries.

Giving birth to the term Systems Thinking, Richmond (1994, p.139) defines ST as “the art and science of making reliable inferences about behaviour by developing an increasingly deep understanding of underlying structure”. Accordingly, what he emphasized is that ST refers to an overall way of seeing things with the purpose of improving the way the entire system works rather than considering individual parts. Arnold and Wade (2015, 2017) state that systems thinking enables one to understand the deep roots of complex behaviours to better predict them and adjust their outcomes. Hence, this theory provides a better foundation for this study, as it enables us to see the industry as a whole, the interconnectedness among the respective parties, and loopholes in the system.

Apart from the applicability of IT and ST in this kind of study, studies in which both theories have been combined to gain broader and deeper insight are rare. Therefore, this study, where both IT and ST are blended, will

address that gap as well. Accordingly, the two theories are utilized to address the research questions separately. Hence, the IT is used as the theoretical lens behind the first research question. And ST is utilized in answering the second research question. Hence, it provides more valuable, deeper insights that help fill the prevailing theoretical and empirical gaps as well.

METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted using a qualitative approach and a case study strategy, as it explores real-world contemporary scenarios in a natural environment. In this study, interviews were employed as the data collection method, and data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique.

Participants of the Study

With regard to the first research question, 04 owners of the non-exporting handloom organizations were selected as depicted in Table 1 below.

With regard to the second research question, 03 representatives from the Export Development Board (EDB), the Department of Textile Industry (DTI), and the Southern Provincial Council (SPC) were interviewed. Their details are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 01: Details of Interview Participants from Handloom Companies

	Name of the company (pseudonym)	Name of the owner (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Educational qualifications	Race and religion	Reception of ownership	No. of years in business
Local manufacturers	DD Handloom	Nirasha	Female	45-55	A former school teacher, specialized degree in Japanese	Sinhala Buddhist	Self started	Around 10 years
	Sunray Handloom	Sithara	Male	35-45	An MBA holder	Sinhala Buddhist	Generationaly (from parents)	Around 20 years
	GH Handloom	Zaheena	Female	45-55	A/L in commerce stream	Muslim Islamic	From father	Around 25 years
	PSP Handloom	Channa	Male	45-55	A/L in Arts stream	Sinhala Buddhist	Generationaly (from parents)	Around 20 years

Source: Author compiled

Table 02: Details of Interview Participants from Authoritative Organizations

Organisation	Name of the official (pseudonym)	Position	Gender	Work role
Export Development Board (EDB)	Hiroshi	Export Promotion Officer	Female	Developing programmes to promote Sri Lankan handloom, developing and monitoring training programmes, assist in developing strategic plans
Department of Textile Industry (DTI)	Manage	Senior Textile Technologist	Male	Developing training programmes, developing strategic plans, heading research and development
Southern Provincial Council (SPC)	Nirosha	Administrative Officer	Female	Coordinating training center activities, managing employees at weaving centers

Source: Author compiled

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Development

Table 03 presents a summary of the main themes and codes developed during the analysis. It will provide an understanding of how the data were analysed using themes and supported by the selected theoretical framework.

Table 03: Thematic Development

Themes	Codes
1) Unique identity and sustainability through cultural underpinnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National culture • Indigenous knowledge
2) Willingness to embrace change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing change and technology • Preparedness to change and self-reliance with educational level
3) Institutional structure of the industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulative set-up • Social normative and cultural cognitive pillar • Reshaping institutional pillars and maintaining ethicality
4) Operational barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to material • Labour shortage • Time challenge • Quality vs. price
5) Systemic nature of the industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnectedness between authoritative organizations and industry players • Integration among authoritative organizations • Poor connectivity among manufacturers • Loopholes in the entire industry system • Gaps in the national system

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Unique Identity and Sustainability through Cultural Underpinnings

When the insights and ideas shared by the interview participants are concerned, it is clear that the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector has well embraced the Sri Lankan cultural values within its processes and practices. It ranges in different aspects such as environmental concern, ethical relationships between people, especially how employees are treated,

traditional designs, leadership qualities and so on. What they have understood is that those cultural values are integral to the business, since they are in the DNA of local people, and hence are well reflected in both their actions and the products they make. Accordingly, Sri Lankan culture, which is inspired by Buddhism, has shaped the business activities, production processes, final products, and the stories behind the final outcomes in this sector. Not only environmental concerns, but also people orientation, is a highly embraced value in the industry. Industry players also credited their cultural background for that value system. These elements align with the social normative and cultural cognitive pillars of the Institutional Theory, since culturally embedded sustainable and ethical practices that prevail in the industry are inherently inspired by those social norms and the cultural consciousness of local people.

When exploring the cultural foundation of the industry, indigenous knowledge cannot be overlooked, as it is at the core of the industry and gives it its uniqueness among other industries and the handloom products of other countries. Yet it should be utilized in innovative ways with upgraded technology and methods in order to compete in the modern market while preserving the cultural heritage. Despite its unique value, the future survival of the indigenous knowledge of the Sri Lankan handloom industry is at risk due to the facts such as the tacit nature of the knowledge repository, the reluctance of generational people to share knowledge, no new generation to pass on and carry out it on, and the absence of a national mechanism to preserve such indigenous knowledge. Accordingly, it was found that the regulatory pillar (mechanism) in Institutional Theory is not strong enough to preserve this unique knowledge for the future.

Proving the findings, literature also mentions that the influence of the national culture and the unique indigenous knowledge pertaining to the industry uplift its sustainable practices and unique identity while enhancing the potential to gain international accessibility. (Loker, 2010; Gardetti & Muthu, 2015; Klepp, 2015; Singh, Anand & Bhasin, 2019; Perry, 2012). Further, numerous scholars have pointed out that indigenous knowledge specific to this industry creates unmatched value while supporting sustainability (Grenier, 1998; Singh, Anand, & Bhasin, 2019; United Nations, n.d.a). Yet, it is evident that preserving and passing on such unique knowledge has become a challenge (Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake and Downs, 2018; Singh, Anand, & Bhasin, 2019; Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake, & Downs, 2020). Furthermore, it is essential to integrate indigenous knowledge into

innovative systems so that it can be aligned with current consumption patterns and corporate trends (Megan, 2006; Padmasiri, 2018). Yet, local manufacturers have not seen all these aspects with an out of the box mindset, and hence, it closes the doors for them in the international market.

Willingness to Embrace Change

It is evident that the new technology and innovations are a must to uplift this industry to the international level. It is obvious that indigenous knowledge, traditions, and practices have great value because they are unique and authentic. Yet, with the development of technology, living standards, lifestyles and the competitive environment of the business world, it is not possible to apply traditional indigenous methods, designs, techniques, and knowledge as they are. In that circumstance, it was apparent that the educational background of the owner of such indigenous industries plays a leading role, as they are willing to embrace change, innovation, and new technology. They have openness to change, willingness and capacity to face challenges, and out-of-the-box thinking compared to traditional manufacturers. Also, it was clear that comparatively less-educated traditional weavers are reluctant to change due to factors such as sticking to traditional designs and techniques, fear of embracing technology and innovation, trying to stay in their comfort zone, and a dependent mentality and a backward attitude.

As local manufacturers with higher education qualifications expressed, being self-reliant, adapting to new technology, using indigenous knowledge in creative and innovative ways, and pursuing language fluency are crucial for expanding their existing local markets to an international level. Yet, less-educated and traditional manufacturers believe that using technology will reduce product quality and indigenous values. Yet, educated local manufacturers and institutional representatives also mentioned that it is possible to protect indigenous traditional values while updating the weaving process with technology. Further, educated industry players want to stand on their own feet rather than depending on government support. Yet, when the ideas of less educated and traditional manufacturers are concerned, they wait for government organizations to provide them with facilities and market opportunities. Another noticeable factor that came to light is that, when

EDB is conducting training sessions and B2B meetings; it sends e-mail invitations directly to registered organizations and publishes notices on the EDB website. However, many traditional and less-educated people do not have email or other social media platforms, and hence the majority are not attending. Apart from the technological aspect, this can be identified as a loophole in the industry's operational system as well, since it creates a detachment between authoritative institutes and local industry players.

When evaluating the literature, scholars also noted that craft producers should introduce new products periodically and continuously improve existing ones (Makhitha, 2016; Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake & Downs, 2020). Further, the level of education and language fluency of industry players are important (Makhitha, 2016). To implement all these changes, attitude issues should be solved, and for that, the whole system should change (Silva, 2019; Senanayake & Hettiarachchige, 2020).

Institutional Structure of the Industry

Further in this study, it was explored how regulative, social normative, and cultural cognitive pillars operate within this industry and how industry players adapt to them. It was also explored whether industry players reshape those three pillars in different situations to align with both social acceptance and international conditions.

First, when the regulative pillar of IT is considered, all interview participants mentioned that there is no specific regulatory framework focusing on the handloom industry. Hence, they do not follow the formal code of rules and regulations within the organization. Even employee management is handled in a highly informal, flexible way through close relationships. Apart from that, when exporting products, manufacturers may have to comply with the standards of the countries and clients involved. Furthermore, despite the current absence of a specific regulatory system, representatives of EDB proposed implementing intellectual property provisions to safeguard the indigenous knowledge unique to the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector.

Subsequently, when the social normative and cultural cognitive pillars are considered, it was evident that, inherently, these indigenous organizations tend to follow the mainstream social order, values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions since they have been adjusted to them for generations and they

are embedded systems of the existing social system. As all the local manufacturers and institutional representatives mentioned normative and cognitive values and beliefs are naturally embedded in this industry through business practices, relationship with employees, treating employees as family members, environmental preservation, etc. Yet, as the findings further revealed, internationally successful Sri Lankan handloom companies have taken a different approach to change some social norms and form new ones that they create as stories and use them in their marketing campaigns.

Further to that, findings revealed criticisms of the business conduct of such successful handloom companies, as they try to create stories on the surface so that outsiders see a nice picture, while inside the business they engage in questionable conduct. There are no aspects in the regulative pillar to address them as well. Thus, it was evident that a proper balance between adhering to the three pillars and reshaping them to meet contemporary requirements is needed to go beyond local frontiers.

According to the literature, Powell and Bromley (2015) highlight that the external environment socially develops organisations, providing them with guidance to formulate their formal structures and policies, and thereby increasing an organization's legitimacy in the wider social world. Raynard, Johnson, and Greenwood (2015) have also confirmed the importance of IT in understanding the role of business organizations within a social web of norms and expectations which restrain the freedom of managers in making their decisions. That is why traditional manufacturers are scared to break boundaries and do something different. Yet, some scholars point out that such institutions are also getting reproduced through everyday practices of individuals and organizational members as a result of their attempts to find solutions for everyday problems (Lang, 2018; Palthe, 2014; Scott, 2013). Furthermore, Raynard, Johnson, and Greenwood (2015) state that the adaptation to institutional pillars can be used by business organizations just to whitewash their malpractices. Hence, a proper balance between both adhering to the three pillars and reshaping them ethically in par with the contemporary requirements is needed.

Operational Barriers

Under this, the ground-level barriers hindering the industry's international access are identified. They are material issues, labour issues, issues in balancing high quality with high price, and time management issues. When evaluating those findings through the study's theoretical lenses, it was found that these issues can be mitigated by implementing an appropriate regulatory framework and a systemic mechanism within the industry. Furthermore, regarding the labour issue, the normative aspect plays a role, as the social identity and social value associated with the weaving career are not satisfactory in the current socio-economic context.

When considering the raw material issue, the inability to grow yarn, the lack of attempts to seek alternative raw material sources, high tax rates, and a monopoly in yarn imports were the underlying concerns. It was evident that due to the high tax on importing yarn, local manufacturers cannot afford it, and if they are going to export their products, the cost of the production is high, and they cannot earn a satisfactory level of profits. Further, it is revealed that buying materials at the local market is difficult for local manufacturers due to their high prices, which are controlled by a few organisations that import yarn. Thus, there is a monopoly in the yarn import, which hinders local manufacturers' ability to buy yarn at a concessionary or reasonable price. Moreover, local manufacturers stressed the importance of growing yarn domestically and finding alternative material sources.

The next most highlighted concern in the industry is the labour issue. All interview participants elaborated that there is a significant issue in engaging the new generation in the industry due to factors such as the new generation's reluctance to join, parents' reluctance to direct children toward these traditional industries, and external societal influences that discourage engagement with these industries. As they mentioned, low comfort in the industry, lack of social identity, lack of financial gains, and people's attitudes are major causes of this issue. Changing the attitude of people to avoid underestimation of the industry, creating a high social identity for this sector and its members, refining the education system of the country, incorporating more technology in the industry, and developing a diverse range of job opportunities in handloom companies were some suggestions to overcome this issue.

In addition to these two major issues, there is another concern in the industry regarding time management, as production is highly labour-intensive and time-consuming. The practical solution proposed for this issue was to talk with the buyer, explain the nature of the product and the production process, request the required time, and agree on a possible order delivery date. Then, the next time, buyers place the order well in advance. Another possible solution is to mechanize the process by doing a part by hand and doing the other part using machines. Then the entire burden of a product does not fall on one weaver, and hence the production process can be sped up, allowing effective time management and meeting demand.

Another problem caused by the current competitive environment is balancing the quality and price of handloom products. As the findings reveal, some local manufacturers try to reduce product quality to sell at lower prices in order to attract more customers and compete with imported low-quality textile products. The absence of a proper regulatory and monitoring mechanism for product quality standards in this industry can be identified as a major reason for that. This has become another barrier preventing local manufacturers from reaching international markets, since the global market and international customers highly value quality. During this study, it was evident that manufacturers with higher educational backgrounds tend to maintain product quality, whereas those with relatively lower educational qualifications tend to change product quality based on various factors.

According to the literature, as identified by Wanniarachchi, Dissanayake, and Downs (2018), a lack of entrepreneurial skills, networking and communication skills, infrastructure facilities, and capital, the absence of direct market access, extended lead times, and relatively low production volumes are key barriers to the industry. Dissanayake, Perera, and Wanniarachchi (2017) also reveal that there is no willingness or inclination among the new generation to enter the industry. As Yeh and Lin (2011) mentioned, even though we are moving to a new aesthetic economy, traditional craft is lost when trying to reduce cost because culturally endorsed high-quality products are at a high price. Bouziane and Hassan (2016) also emphasized that it is important to motivate traditional craft industries to improve competitiveness in terms of quality, cost and prices. In that milieu, proper strategic planning and support of the authoritative institutions is also pivotal to smooth these operational issues.

Systemic Nature of the Industry

Using the second theoretical lens employed in the study, this theme elaborates on the industry's interconnected nature. Taking the handloom industry as a system, this paper explores whether manufacturers and relevant authorities can work together to help the industry flourish towards international access. Finally, taking the national system as the big system and the handloom industry as a sub-system, whether significant attention is given to the industry despite its unique values is explored.

Through the findings, it was evident that there is no healthy relationship between authoritative organizations and manufacturers. Further, it was evident during the data collection that there is no updated database of local manufacturers with both DTI and EDB, which shows the poor relationship between authoritative organizations and manufacturers, as well as unorganized systemic nature of the industry. Therefore, it is natural that traditional and rural manufacturers fail to establish connections with these organisations, and hence their awareness levels are poor. When the interconnectedness of authoritative organizations responsible for the Sri Lankan handloom sector is considered, it was also evident that the interconnection is at almost zero level. Accordingly, it is apparent that members of one organization do not know what happens in the other organisation or its aims, objectives, policies, and projects. Thus, if someone wants to get an integrated knowledge on both local and international mechanisms of the industry, it cannot be achieved through a single system.

Furthermore, it was evident that connectivity among manufacturers is also very poor. When further exploring the systemic nature of the industry, a few criticisms of the prevailing systemic approach, such as the absence of a proper vision, favoring selected handloom companies based on power and politics, and holding responsible positions of authoritative organizations by unsuitable, unqualified people, were unveiled. When one explores why the true understanding of the industry is lacking, it raises questions about the suitability of officials appointed to uplift the industry, as they are just government officers who are rotated periodically among various government departments and institutes.

Furthermore, the attention given to the industry within the national system was explored. Consequently, it was evident that responsible authoritative organizations have not paid much attention to the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector in order to uplift its international accessibility. Moreover, findings stressed the requirement to refine the national system, including vision of the country, political and economic structure, and socio-cultural background, including education and attitude, etc., if it is required to obtain real benefits of these indigenous industries while opening them for the world.

Accordingly, when a proper ST is implemented, the industry and its related facets, the behavior of industry players, requirements of the global market, etc., can be properly understood to treat these issues (Richmond, 1994). As Sweeney and Sterman (2000) emphasized, rather than complex phenomena being broken down into parts, it synthesizes the things upward to understand a particular scenario as a part of the larger system. This perspective is essential to understanding how the indigenous apparel sector operates within the country's national socio-economic and political systems. Thus, to capture the true essence of this unique industry, which integrates sustainability practices, it is crucial to close all these loopholes in the systems and sub-systems related to the industry and the national system.

CONCLUSION

When the first research question inquires into why the majority of Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector players have not achieved global access, one of the salient reasons identified was the attitudes of industry players and society at large. Accordingly, the majority of the industry players, who are comparatively less educated, are not willing to embrace change, remodel their traditional practices and indigenous knowledge, improve language fluency and other personal, technical and conceptual abilities, adapt to new technology, and even to go forward and search for the opportunities available, identify and capitalize their potential, stepping out from their comfort zone. They try to protect existing traditional practices and align with conventional normative, cognitive values and beliefs. Further, they are not willing to share their unique indigenous knowledge pertaining to the industry, and hence, it leads to the loss of such precious knowledge.

The attitudes of the responsible authorities and the general society are also not conducive to achieving global access for this industry, since some authorities do not see this industry as a promising sector, whereas others lack the necessary knowledge, capability, and background. On one hand, local manufacturers do not try to develop their own path and expect to depend on government organizations, whereas on the other hand, such a national system does not pay significant attention to them. Considering all these issues, it was identified that attention should be paid to a wide range of improvements, including attitudes, educational levels, technical skills, and soft skills such as language and technology, among local manufacturers at the national level.

Taking a holistic perspective, the next research question explores how support and guidance provided by the industry's respective authoritative institutions enhance the global accessibility of the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector. Encapsulating all the findings, it can be stated that the industry's systemic functionality and attentive strategic vision are at a poor level, and hence the support and guidance extended by regulatory bodies are not satisfactory to propel the industry to the international level. To solve these grave issues, first, there should be a national vision and strategy, including a long-term action plan to orient these indigenous sectors. While developing manufacturers to international standards, it is vital to raise societal attention to these indigenous industries.

Implications and Future Research

This study makes significant contributions in theory, empirically, in managerial implications, and in economic and societal terms through its findings. The main theoretical contribution of this study is the use of a blend of institutional theory and systems thinking, which has not been explicitly employed before. The addition done to the theory through this study is that, when business organizations reshape normative and cultural cognitive values in society through their practices upwardly, the regulative pillar should stand on top to maintain ethical conduct in the industry without allowing powerful organizations to dominate the competition and engage in malpractices. Further, all these aspects needed to be properly monitored through a properly integrated industry system. This study makes a significant contribution to the empirical literature, as there is an inadequate number of studies on the Sri Lankan indigenous apparel sector, especially those covering management perspectives, international accessibility, and the role of authoritative institutes.

Further, this study assists policymakers in this sector in making better decisions for the industry's improvement while enhancing its global accessibility. It can be noted that this study has both organizational and societal implications contributing to the well-being of this valuable industry and its players.

Due to the insufficiency of studies done focusing on this sector, there are a lot of avenues to conduct future research focusing on areas such as the knowledge management process of the industry, involvement of the young generation in these indigenous industries, especially as a solution to the unemployment issue, uncovering how different managerial functions take place in the industry etc. contributing to uplift the existing knowledge and industry status.

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