



African Journal of Biological Sciences



HANDICRAFTS OF ASSAM: PROMOTIONAL TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MARKETING BELL AND BRASS METAL PRODUCTS OF ASSAM

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Abstract: The craftsmanship of Bell and Brass metal products holds significant cultural value in Assamese households. However, this traditional industry is facing challenges in maintaining its popularity. Data was collected through snowball and purposive sampling to understand the promotional strategies used by these artisans. The study reveals that most artisans rely on direct marketing and personal selling for promotion, while only a few use advertising. This indicates the need for more marketing and promotion efforts to sustain and revive this traditional industry.

**Key words: Personal Selling, Advertising , Handicrafts,
Utilitarian Products**

Article History

Volume 6, Issue 13, 2024

Received: 18June 2024

Accepted: 02July 2024

doi:10.48047/AFJBS.6.14.2024. 307-320

1.1 Introduction

The Bell and Brass metal industry of Assam holds immense promise for economic development, particularly within rural communities where it serves as a vital source of employment. Unlike medium and large industries, this sector relies heavily on labor, generating a higher number of direct jobs per unit of investment. Situated predominantly in rural areas, it plays a pivotal role in mitigating seasonal unemployment that often plagues

agricultural sectors, thereby optimizing labor resources that might otherwise remain underutilized.

This industry is characterized by its ability to yield rapid results with a relatively short gestation period, making it particularly advantageous for economies experiencing high inflation. Furthermore, it is noteworthy for its minimal environmental impact, although local production units may contribute to localized noise pollution. Beyond its economic contributions, the Bell and Brass metal industry serves as a crucial deterrent to rural-to-urban migration, helping to sustain communities by providing viable livelihoods within their geographic and cultural context.

Bell and brass metal products are cherished for their utilitarian and decorative purposes, deeply ingrained in Assamese religious and cultural ceremonies. Items such as cymbals, bells, and Tal hold significant value in Assamese Namghars (prayer halls), symbolizing both spiritual devotion and cultural pride within Assamese households.(Kalita, 2009)

Sarthebari, a town in the Barpeta district, stands as a hub for the Bell metal industry, representing the second largest handicraft sector in Assam after bamboo craft. Similarly, Hajo in the Kamrup district leads in Brass Metal production within the state of Assam, India, underscoring the regional significance and economic potential of these artisanal traditions.Despite its cultural and economic importance, the Bell and Brass metal industry faces significant challenges in reaching its full potential, largely due to the absence of an effective promotional structure. This gap inhibits these cottage industries from effectively reaching their target customers, limiting their capacity to flourish in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Effective promotion, therefore, plays a critical role in unlocking the industry's growth and development potential. By effectively communicating information about the industry, its products, activities, pricing, and policies to diverse societal groups, promotion aims to enhance the industry's image and market presence. In doing so, it addresses key elements of the marketing mix—product features that satisfy consumer needs, product availability (place), and competitive pricing—that are essential for sustainable growth in any industry, including traditional cottage industries like those found in Assam. In this context, this paper explores the significance of promotional strategies in supporting the sustainable growth and market expansion of the Bell and Brass metal industry in Assam. It examines current

promotional challenges, identifies opportunities for improvement, and proposes strategies to strengthen promotional efforts, thereby fostering economic resilience and preserving cultural heritage within the region

1.2 Review of Literature:

The literature review highlights several important aspects related to handicraft marketing strategies, emphasizing their significance and the challenges artisans face in accessing markets effectively. Keshari (2020) examined marketing strategies among SMEs in western Madhya Pradesh, revealing a reliance on traditional practices and suggesting innovative approaches for improvement. Mashingaidze et al. (2021) explored marketing practices in Zimbabwe's manufacturing sector, finding a basic understanding of essential marketing concepts among SMEs. Adam and Alarifi (2021) studied innovation practices during COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the critical role of external support in enhancing SME performance and survival. Dwivedi et al. (2021) compiled expert insights on digital and social media marketing, emphasizing the importance of technology and ethical considerations. Dalal et al. (2023) identified key obstacles faced by artisan entrepreneurs in emerging economies, suggesting strategies to support artisanal businesses. Banerjee et al. (2022) proposed a framework for designing innovative craft enterprises in India, focusing on empowering artisans and their communities. Ahmad and Saber (2015) investigated marketing strategies in UAE's small and medium-sized hotels, while Sahay (2015) analyzed issues in Assam's brass and bell metal industry, recommending modernization and diversification. Simpson and Padmore (2015) tested a marketing model for SMEs, finding a positive correlation between marketing approaches and financial performance. Lastly, Akilandeewari (2016) studied pottery artisans in Tamil Nadu, highlighting their willingness to adopt new technology and marketing strategies despite facing financial and marketing challenges. Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of innovative marketing practices, external support, technological adoption, and community empowerment in enhancing the market access and success of SMEs and artisans

1.3 Materials and Methods:

The study is empirical and descriptive in nature and mainly focuses on bell and brass metal production in Sarthebari and Hajo, which have the highest number of bell and brass metal units, respectively. This study is empirical and descriptive. Data was collected using snowball sampling, purposive sampling, and multistage sampling techniques. 332

sample data were collected, 200 of which were Bell Metal Artisans and 132 of which were Brass Metal Artisans. Personal interviews, schedules, and observations were used to collect the desired responses. The data was analyzed using the Chi-square test, mean, and frequencies.

1.4 Objective:

The present study mainly focuses on promotional strategies for better marketing Bell and Brass Metal products.

1.5 Results and Discussion:

Promotional strategies are primarily absent in traditional handicraft businesses, whereas product promotion is very important for a business to flourish. Focusing on promoting their unique qualities and connecting with the right audience through effective promotional strategies, traditional handicraft businesses can enhance their visibility and competitiveness in the market. This segment of study consists of communication mix, promotional tools, willingness to spent on promotional activities etc for the following study.

Communication Mix:

- **Advertising:** Consider how traditional handicraft businesses can utilize advertising channels such as print media, online ads, and niche publications to reach their target audience.
- **Public Relations:** Explore how PR strategies like press releases, media features, and partnerships with influencers or cultural organizations can help build credibility and visibility.
- **Personal Selling:** Discuss the role of personal selling in traditional handicraft businesses, such as selling directly at craft fairs, markets, or through personal interactions with customers.
- **Direct Marketing:** Analyze how direct marketing techniques like email newsletters, catalogs, and personalized offers can be effective for reaching and engaging customers.

2. Promotional Tools:

- **Social Media Marketing:** Evaluate the potential of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest for showcasing handmade products, telling stories about artisans, and engaging with a global audience.

- **Influencer Collaborations:** Consider partnerships with influencers who align with the brand's values and can reach a broader audience interested in handmade goods.
 - **Craft Fairs and Exhibitions:** Discuss the benefits of participating in local or international craft fairs and exhibitions to showcase products directly to potential customers and buyers.
 - **Online Presence:** Highlight the importance of having a well-designed website or online store where customers can learn about the products, place orders, and engage with the brand.
3. **Willingness to Spend on Promotional Activities:**
- Investigate the current attitudes and practices of traditional handicraft businesses towards investing in promotional activities.
 - Discuss how allocating resources towards effective promotion can lead to increased sales, brand recognition, and sustainability.
 - Consider case studies or examples where traditional handicraft businesses have successfully implemented promotional strategies despite resource constraints.
4. **Enhancing Visibility and Competitiveness:**
- Analyze how effective promotional strategies can help traditional handicraft businesses differentiate themselves in a competitive market.
 - Emphasize the importance of highlighting unique qualities such as craftsmanship, cultural heritage, sustainability, and artisan stories in promotional efforts.
 - Discuss the potential challenges and opportunities traditional handicraft businesses face in adopting modern promotional techniques while preserving authenticity.

By studying these aspects—communication mix, promotional tools, willingness to invest in promotions—researchers can gain insights into how traditional handicraft businesses can effectively promote their products, enhance visibility, and compete in today's marketplace. This study would contribute to understanding the dynamics of marketing in the context of cultural heritage and artisanal craftsmanship.

1.5.a SHOWING MARKET COMMUNICATION MIX

MARKET COMMUNICATION MIX	YES		NO	
	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass
DIRECT MARKETING	40 25%	70 63.6%	120 75%	42 38.1%
Total	160	110	160	110
PERSONAL SELLING	140 70%	80 60.6%	80 40%	32 24.2%
Total	200	132	200	132
INTERACTIVE MARKETING	120 75%	82 74.5%	40 25%	30 27.2%
Total	160	110	160	110
SALES PROMOTION	60 37.5%	40 36.3%	100 62.5%	72 65.4%
Total	160	110	160	110
ADVERTISING	10 6.25%	20 18%	155 93.75%	90 81.81%
Total	160	110	160	110
EVENT AND EXPERIENCES	150 75%	40	50 25%	40

Total	200	132	200	132
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Source: field Survey

Paid promotional activities are very rare and negligible among the artisans of Bell metal units. From the above table, it can be observed that out of 200 respondents, only 160 responses could be collected by the author for the above query. 25% of the bell metal artisans and 63.6% of brass metal respondents follow direct marketing. The artisans telemarked only to existing customers. They mainly use this technique when they introduce new motifs or designs or change the shape and size of a particular product. Then, they inform their existing customers through telephonic marketing. Door-to-door and face-to-face selling are common among artisans. Seventy percent of the bell metal respondents and 60 percent of the brass metal respondents have used personal selling as a marketing tool, a pivotal technique for promoting a product. About 75% of the Bell metal artisans and 74.5% of the brass metal artisans use interactive marketing. They mainly use social media marketing, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, to directly or indirectly raise awareness, improve their image, or elicit sales of their products. They do not use paid advertisement. Instead, they post photos or videos of their products by making blogs and posting them on social media. The artisans do not receive paid PR and publicity. Non-paid publicity is achieved due to traditional, heritage, and cultural significance in newspapers, government and non-government seminars, radio, television, and press releases. The government mostly organizes events and experiences in the form of trade fairs and melas. 37.5% of the Bell Metal artisans and 36.3% of the Brass Metal artisans give customers discounts in sales promotion; other sales promotion techniques are not used by the surveyed respondents. Advertising is a vital tool for the promotion mix, but among the respondents, investing in advertisement is negligible.

TABLE 1.5.b SHOWING ARTISANS ATTENDING MELAS/TRADE SHOWS

MELAS/TRADE SHOWS	COUNT		PERCENTAGE	
	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass
YES	150	80	75%	60%
NO	50	52	25%	40%
TOTAL	200	132	100	100

Source : Field Survey

From the above table, it has been found that almost the majority, 75% of the Bell metal respondents and 60% of the brass metal respondents, attend trade fairs and *melas*. But this should also be noted that these *melas* and trade fairs are organized by the government and the different societies and even banks of the town. The artisans represent the state as heritage traditional crafts in the global platforms. In the local fairs also, the products are shown and sold.

TABLE 1.5.c SHOWING SIGNIFICANCE OF PROMOTIONAL TOOLS FOR THE BELL AND BRASS METAL PRODUCTS

SIGNIFICANCE	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass
TO BUILD IMAGE OF THE PRODUCT	170 (85%)	110 83.3%	30 (15%)	22 16.6%	200	132
TO INCREASE SALES	170 (85%)	110 83.3%	30 (15%)	22 16.6%	200	132
TO FACE COMPETITION	120 (60%)	80 60.6%	80 (40%)	52 39.39%	200	132

TO ENHANCE CUSTOMERS SATISFACTION	130 (65%)	90 68.18%	70 (35%)	42 31.81 %	200	132
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Source: Field survey

An attempt has been made to evaluate the responses of the respondents and whether promotional tools will play a significant role in benefiting their unit . It is revealed from the above table that 85% of the Bell metal respondents and 83.3% of the brass metal respondents feel that it will help in building an image of the product and increase their sales. 65% of the bell metal respondents and 68.18% of the brass metal respondents opine that the use of proper promotional techniques will help in enhancing customer satisfaction because through the use of a good technique, they will get to know the customers' demands and preferences. 60% of the respondents reveal that to face competition also use of promotional tools will help.

TABLE 1.5.d SHOWING WILLINGNESS TO SPEND ON PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY	COUNT		PERCENTAGE	
	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass
YES	149	61	74.5%	47%
NO	51	70	25.5%	53%
TOTAL	200	132	100%	100%

Source: Field survey

Respondents are not aware of the various promotional tools and models that they can use to meet consumer demand. They are mainly occupied with existing customers and have less scope for standardizing their products. They are involved and target the local market, and thereby, they do not feel the necessity to invest more in promotional activities. 74.5 % of the bell metal respondents and 47% of the brass metal are willing to spend on promotional activities. These respondents are usually the artisans whose income is a bit higher than that of the rest. Lesser income is a noticeable factor due to which they are reluctant to invest in any promotional activities. Lack of proper knowledge and awareness about the various tools and

techniques is also an important factor in their unwillingness to invest, as informed by the respondents.

TABLE 1.5.d SHOWING CROSS TABULATION OF WILLINGNESS TO SPEND ON PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY WITH RESPECT TO INCOME OD THE ARTISANS

Willingness to spend on promotional activity	Upto 3000		3001 to 6000		6001 to 9000		9001 to 12000		12001 To 15000		15001 to 18000		18001 to 21000		Above 1200	
	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass	Bell	Brass
Yes	0	0	0	0	16	0	31	15	19	20	43	14	18	10	2	2
					10.7		20.8	24.6	12.8	32.8	28.9	23	12	16	2	2
					%		%	%	%	%	%	%	.1	.4	1	3.3
													%	%	4.8	%
No	5(9.8%)	2	12	27	34	28	0	13	0		0		0		0	
		2.9	23.5	38.6	66.7	40		18.6								
		%	%	%	%	%		%								

Source: Field Survey

The above table highlights that bell metal artisans from the income group of Rs 6001 to 9000, Rs.9001 to 12000, Rs.12001 to 15000, Rs.15001 to 18000, Rs.18001-21000, and above 21000 consider spending money on promotional activity. In the case of Bell Metal Crafts, the Chi-square test with a p-value of 0.01 and Cramer's V .845 reveals a strong association

between income and willingness to spend on promotional activity. Again, considering brass metal craft, Cramer's V value of .887 shows a strong association between income and willingness to spend on promotional activities. In Both the craft type artisans earning between Rs.3000 to 9000, they are not willing to spend on promotional activity. Hence, this suggests that artisans earning more in the case of both crafts have a willingness to spend on promotional activity.

TABLE 1.5.d.i SHOWING TEST STATISTICS FOR ASSOCIATION BETWEEN WILLINGNESS TO SPEND ON PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY AND INCOME

Test	Value		Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	N of Valid Cramer's V value of 0.646.
Pearson Chi-Square	Brass	103.011 ^a	<.001	132
	Bell	142.729 ^a	<.001	200
Cramer's V	Brass	.887	<.001	132
	Bell	.845	<.001	200

1.6 Conclusion:

Bell and brass metal products in Assam represent more than mere artifacts; they embody deep cultural, traditional, and religious significance among the local populace. Despite their intrinsic value, the marketing of these products by artisans remains limited, relying primarily on goodwill and historical reputation. This approach has contributed to sluggish growth and stagnation within the industry. The study underscores the critical need for adopting proper marketing practices to sustain and commercialize these products effectively. Artisans, often unfamiliar with modern promotional activities, can benefit significantly from targeted marketing strategies aimed at expanding beyond the local niche market. By embracing digital platforms, participating in cultural events, and

enhancing distribution channels, artisans can reach broader audiences both nationally and globally.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity to educate consumers about the craftsmanship and cultural heritage embedded in these products. Initiatives such as workshops, educational partnerships, and certifications can enhance market perception and consumer trust, thereby fostering long-term sustainability for this cherished cottage industry.

In essence, by bridging the gap between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary marketing strategies, Assam's bell and brass metal artisans can secure a brighter future, preserving their cultural legacy while embracing new opportunities in the global marketplace.

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