

Investigating the Design Process of Traditional Costume Penetrating a Niche Market

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Keywords – Design Process, Traditional costume, Niche market, Consumers, culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The design process defines each market segment in the apparel sector. Traditional costumes of Sri Lanka gained a long historical and cultural demand among Sri Lankan consumers. The most demanding costumes are "Nilame" costumes (male costume) and "Oloriya" (female costume). This research identifies that traditional costume has become an emerging and demanding market segment today. The market segment is evident in Sri Lanka's suburbs in Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Rathnapura, and Kurunegala. The researcher predicts that the market meets niche market parameters.

A. Significance of the study

Inadvertent scholarship in the research of the design process of traditional costumes in the niche market has created a vacuum in the academia of costume studies. The new scholarship of this study will advance systematic research in traditional costume studies. Further, the absence of a systematic design process in the traditional costume may lead to inefficient procedures, increased costs, prolonged completion times, and an inability to reach the intended market effectively. The traditional costume industry in Sri Lanka currently experiences a deficit of high-end traditional costume artisans specializing in exclusive couture.

Traditional costume design represents the cultural wisdom of the past [1]. It's a cultural treasure, but its preservation is at risk as young talent leaves the industry due to low profits and wages. This study's outcomes eradicate and bring new hope to the young generation who lack enthusiasm and are disappointed to work in this sector due to prolonged poor profits and low labor rates in the traditional costume design industry. This study benefitted for stakeholders of artisans, academics, fashion designers, and policymakers.

B. Aim of the study

This study seeks to develop a conceptual framework that comprehensively outlines the features of the traditional costume design process, aiming to cater to the preferences and needs of modern-day consumers in terms of both functionality and aesthetics.

C. Objectives of the study

1. To identify characteristics of the traditional costumes within the local niche market.
2. To formulate a conceptual framework outlining the key aspects of the traditional costumes.
3. To validate the conceptual framework by finding the impact of key aspects of the design process of traditional costumes concerning modern-day consumer purchasing decisions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Munasinghe [2] suggests that researching diverse market levels and design methods can reveal valuable insights for the fashion supply chain, benefiting stakeholders and enhancing the industry's financial health and sustainability.

The traditional costume market experiences complex and dynamic demand [3]. Purchases are often linked to special events like festivals and weddings, driven primarily by social circles [4]. Sociocultural, religious, political, and economic factors significantly shape traditional costume choices [5]. Modern consumer needs have also transformed the purpose of traditional costumes [6]. A significant gap exists between traditional costume design and theoretical research [7]. Traditional costumes have evolved recently, offering improved quality and diverse designs, including nontraditional options [4]. These costumes hold a strong connection to past generations and serve sociocultural needs.

A. Niche market strategy

Niche marketing targets a specific, well-defined market segment with unique needs, often preferred by small firms. Benefits include increased profits, diverse consumer behaviors, and adaptability. Key factors for success are understanding customers, matching market needs, effective communication, fit, style, market size, brand image, and reasonable pricing [8], [9]. Textile and apparel firms often use pull marketing to differentiate in niche markets [10].

B. Sri Lankan Traditional costume

The Kandyan costume's historical elements are visually well-documented. It originated during the Kandyan era, the last

kingdom of Sri Lanka rule from 1469 to 1815. This period witnessed rapid influences from South Indian, Western (Portuguese, Dutch, British), and Siamese cultures, impacting costume pieces, designs, accessories, and more [11].

C. Nilame costume and Ohoriya

During the English era, high-ranking officials like *Adikar and Disawe* wore *nilame* costume during the Kandyan Kingdom, later known as *Mul anduma*. This costume included long pants, a *tuppotti*¹ with a belt, a *mante*², gem-studded gold rings, carved ornaments, bangles, gold necklaces, and a flower-tree-decorated cap. The value of their clothing was associated with the quality of raw materials used [12]. *Mul Anduma* symbolizes national identity and pride. Its extravagant design, characterized by knotted and pleated layers, signifies power, wealth, and high social standing, particularly at the abdomen, where knots are called '*mohotti geta*' [13]. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy [14] asserts that *ohoriya* has Tamil origin. The national costume for Sinhalese women in the Kandyan region is *ohoriya*. It features a ruffled waistband and a loose, flat piece draped over the shoulders. Modern Ceylon brides often blend Eastern and Western styles in their costumes, incorporating shiny pearls, sequins, and tulle fabric into Kandyan sarees. The "fall" is a distinct part of the saree that hangs over the upper body and back shoulder, made from a different fabric than the main saree. This is often referred to as a "made-up" *ohoriya*, preserving the traditional *ohoriya* designs with various fabrics.[15]

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In pursuit of an overarching research objective, this study has delineated three specific research objectives to guide investigative endeavors. Data collection will adhere to the sequential mixed-method methodology to ensure a comprehensive and robust approach [16]. This research will be executed in two phases.

A. Phase one: study one

Phase one involves qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with traditional costume artisans, industry experts, weavers, and costume tailors. This aims to delve into the traditional costume characteristics and the design process. Objectives one and two will be achieved within this phase. This qualitative exploration will serve as the foundation for constructing a conceptual framework that underscores the pivotal aspects of the traditional costume design process. The collected qualitative data will be subjected to an inductive analysis using thematic analysis. Defining and enhancing key aspects and themes will contribute to establishing a theoretical framework for the traditional costume designing process within the niche market.

B. Phase two: study two

The subsequent phase will employ a quantitative methodology by consumer survey with a multiple-choice questionnaire to rigorously assess the validity of the conceptual framework established in the first phase [17]. Objective three will be achieved within this phase. The framework will be segmented into measurable constructs through operationalization. Subsequently, pre-validated scales will evaluate the constructs' relevance and applicability to modern-day consumer purchasing decisions by consumer

survey. The validated framework will be disseminated to artisans through a designated social media (Facebook/Instagram) page and group for usability assessment.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research addresses the disparity in focus between global and Sri Lankan traditional costume niche markets. It introduces an innovative approach to understanding and improving the traditional costume design process within Sri Lanka's niche market. Developing a conceptual framework will offer theoretical insights and recommendations, enabling artisans to address design process challenges and leverage opportunities in contemporary consumer behavior.

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¹ "tuppotti" A cloth of some fifteen or twenty cubits in length, folded round the waist and legs [18]

² "mante" (tippet) is a collar part which fastened to the shirt [18]