E-commerce and the Indian Textile - Modernity and Tradition in a Changing World

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Major Research Paper

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Introduction

For the past one thousand years, Indian artisans and traders have been producing Indian textiles and exporting them to the far corners of the globe (Guy, 1998, pp. 19-37). Indian schooners have plied the waters from the Mediterranean to the South China Sea, bearing colourful bolts of cotton, muslin, linen and silk, to discerning customers. The vibrant, colourfast nature of Indian dyes, as well as the dazzling array of patterns that were produced, made Indian textiles a highly coveted trade good from Europe to the Middle East, and Thailand to Indonesia. Indian textiles were also valued in Japan, not solely as textiles to wear, but to satisfy "a love for the exotic" (Guy, 1998, p. 159). In addition to the technology required to produce fabrics, other kinds of knowledge contributed to the distribution of Indian textiles – ships and navigational techniques to carry them around the globe, and knowledge of market demands (Guy, 1998, p. 67).

Today, despite rapid transformations in Indian society, and the availability of a vast array of domestic and imported clothes, there still exists a thriving handmade Indian textile industry. But there have been major shifts to this industry; while still crafted using traditional techniques, today, modern forms of technology, like trucks, planes, computers and the internet, are used to market, sell and transport Indian textiles around the world. Online commerce is on the rise in India and abroad – more and more people are shopping on their phones and computers for new clothes – and many of them are made of handmade Indian fabric. This raises several questions: what leads people to continue to desire Indian textiles? What do these textiles mean in a modern context? What are the socio-technological conditions that lead people to seek them out online?

And, lastly, does the production and selling of Indian textiles online replicate or disrupt class stratification in India?

This Major Research Paper (MRP) will be an exploratory analysis of the topics raised by these questions. Specifically, I will look at the way that handmade Indian textiles, purchased on online websites (electronic, or e-commerce for short), are an example of intracultural transnational consumption. I use this term to refer to the consumption practices of members of a diaspora (transnational temporary or permanent migrants) when they purchase products from "back home". These consumption practices, I contend, are facilitated by the rapid rise of the internet and smart phones, which enable diaspora members to quickly and easily locate and purchase goods from their country of origin. The use of this mediating technology alters the act of consumption from that carried out in a bricks-and-mortar store. But how is it altered, and how can examining online commerce help us understand more about consumption?

While there is a considerable body of research on cross-cultural consumption, which can be defined as consumption of commodities across borders, used by a different ethnic group than that of the producer, there is a puzzling lack of research on intracultural consumption that crosses borders. In an era of globalization, migrant hypermobility, and rapid internet penetration, these consumption practices merit greater examination and theorizing.

While the limited scope of an MRP does not permit me to test this theory of intracultural transnational consumption, I believe it does provide an opportunity for me to propose an understanding of online commerce, and what it means for a domestic and transnational class of

Indian consumers. Accordingly, in this paper I will present sociological theories of consumption, to better understand this form of online commerce. Specifically, I will draw upon Appadurai's notion of "regimes of value" to understand why handmade Indian textiles are still valued today - in India, and by members of the Indian diaspora around the world.

If this paper were dealing solely with the topic of handmade Indian textiles sold in bricks-and-mortar shops, I would confine myself to sociological theories of consumption. However, since I am interested in examining the sale of Indian textiles *online*, I will require an additional set of analytical tools, specifically those from the discipline of Science and Technology Studies (STS). According to Bijker et al, even in 2012, conventional sociology demonstrated "a failure to deal with technology and materiality" (Bijker et al, 2012, p. xx); and this, a full 25 years after the publication of the influential work *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (originally published in 1987). Indeed, in my research I was unable to find a well-developed sociological treatment of online commerce. This paper seeks to address that lacuna, by bringing a socio-technological perspective to the study of online shopping for handmade Indian textiles.

To this end, I contend that, co-constructed with the regime of value for Indian textiles, there is a "regime of technological meaning" that builds up awareness of the internet and information technology, and leads to e-commerce becoming the method used to satisfy desire for this specific commodity. In addition to building awareness, the regime of technological meaning also includes the physical infrastructure that supports the internet and online commerce, the knowledge industry infrastructure of colleges, universities, and the Information Technology (IT) knowledge workers who build these shopping websites. By including all these diverse elements in this

concept of the "regime of technological meaning," I am modelling my ideas upon the work of Hecht, who wrote an influential STS study of the technopolitical regime of nuclear reactors in France in the 1960s (Hecht 2001).

Looking solely at the social or the technological aspects of online commerce will only give a narrow view of this emerging phenomenon; without understanding the social element we cannot properly understand the technology of the internet. Similarly, without understanding the technological infrastructure and the human resources that build the internet, and the hardware used to access it, we cannot fully understand its impact upon society. Examining how the social and the technological interact and are co-constructed in online activity represents a new nuance for sociological studies of consumption, and is particularly pertinent in a time when ever greater aspects of our lives are moving online.

Why study Indian textiles?

A growing field for Indian entrepreneurs, online commerce of Indian textiles is an interesting example of consumer activity. Over the last five years, there has been an expansion of websites selling handmade Indian clothing and handicrafts. This has been portrayed as a positive development for Indian artisans and craftspeople, who can sell their wares to a wider market using a global online platform (Pani 2018). Many of the companies selling these products also highlight the ways in which they are providing jobs, training and upskilling to lower skilled individuals (e.g., http://www.anitadongrefoundation.org/). However, while the production and marketing of handmade Indian textiles can represent opportunities for marginalized groups in

India, the Information Technology (IT) industry, and the education and social characteristics of the privileged workers within it, represents a replication of existing class and status hierarchies in India. How this happens, and how these two are woven together, is also the subject of this research paper.

The following sections will provide a definition of key concepts that will be used in the paper, and an overview of the sociological literature on consumption. This body of literature will be divided into two main categories: theorists who critique the excesses of consumption, and those who examine the symbolic aspects of consumption. Following a critique of this body of literature, I will discuss analyses of consumption in India. The theoretical framework will present Appadurai's concept of regimes of values, and then describe the ways that regimes of value are co-constructed with regimes of technological meaning. As noted above, regimes of technological meaning is a concept adapted from Science and Technology Studies (STS), which examines the interplay of the social and the technological. A key preoccupation in STS is to peer into the "black box of technology" and to show the ways in which technology is socially constructed, and not merely the "natural" and linear result of scientific discovery (Pinch and Bijker, 2012, pp. 15-16). The theoretical framework will also include the work of Bourdieu on consumption, education, and bundles of capital, Bijker's theories on the social, political, and technological, and Wajcman's work on how science and technology studies can be used to reveal social inequality.

Following this, the case study on Indian textile e-commerce websites will be presented. As part of this case study, I will look at the history of textiles in India, the role of textiles in development

efforts post-Independence, and modern social enterprises that promote artisanal textiles for livelihoods. I will also consider the role of Indian IT workers in building the websites that are used to sell Indian textiles in a modern context. The paper will then present an analysis of the case study, and how the consumption of Indian textiles via e-commerce can be understood as an example of the co-construction of regimes of value and regimes of technological meaning. Drawing upon the theories of Bourdieu and Wajcman, the paper will then conclude with an examination of the ways that the Indian IT industry perpetuates caste and class privilege in India, by considering the "background" of those who occupy this class of elite knowledge workers.

Key concepts

Consumption

Evans notes that most works on consumption do not provide a definition of the term (Graeber, 2011, as cited in Evans, 2019, p. 499). I found this to be the case for most of the literature I reviewed (e.g. Rey and Ritzer 2012, Ritzer 2001, Aldridge 2003, Dittmar 2008). Rather than defining consumption, authors described the contours, the ideological position, the critiques, and the theories behind the aspects of consumption they were discussing. Evans does offer up a definition, based on the work of Warde; this takes a "kitchen sink" approach, by combining every possible permutation and combination of theories of consumption:

> I understand consumption as a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes,

> of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion. (Warde, 2005, as cited in Evans, 2019, p. 506)

Evans draws out three elements from this – acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation – to develop his own definition of consumption. For him, consumption therefore defines activities that cover the entire lifespan of consumption, from acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation to devaluation, divestment and disposal (Evans, 2019, pp. 506-507). While this comprehensive approach has its uses, I found that Storey provided a more useful definition:

> Consumption is often thought of in two quite separate ways: as an economic activity and as a cultural practice. If we think of consumption as a purely economic activity, it ends with the moment of purchase. But once we have bought something, we do not stop consuming it. When you buy a CD, you may listen to it hundreds of times; each of these times is a moment of consumption not captured by thinking of it in purely economic terms. In other words, the moment of purchase is just the beginning of consumption. All these moments beyond purchase are moments when consumption becomes cultural as it becomes entangled in social use and the making of meaning (Storey, 2017, pp. xi-xii).

Therefore, rather than offering a single definition of consumption, Storey's text on theories of consumption offers a "critical map of the discourses of consumption, and in so doing, it also argues for a particular way to read these discourses" (Storey, 2017, p. xii).

For the purposes of this paper, I will consider the economic and cultural aspects of consumption. As will be discussed in the literature review, however, this work falls more into the "cultural" aspect of theories around consumption, as it looks at the "making of meaning" around the online purchase of Indian handmade textiles (Storey, 2017, p. xii).

Transnationalism

From the 1960s until the 1990s, immigration from India to the West (primarily England, Canada and the United States) consisted of permanent migration, with occasional trips back to India (Sarmistha, 2019, p. 6). With the growth of the global Information Technology (IT) industry and the outsourcing of IT work to Indian knowledge workers, there has developed a class of "transnational" knowledge workers who are employed in well-paying jobs as computer programmers, engineers, project managers, and technical writers (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 8). Based in India, they live abroad for stints, or travel frequently to client's sites. These can range from Australia, Europe, North America, or to other parts of Asia. As Sarmistha notes, according to this model, "firms send their workers in an on-site project to the United State (*sic*) on temporary work visa and on completion of that visa they are supposed to return back to India" (Sarmistha, 2019, p. 7).

In her work on transnational Indian IT professionals, Radhakrishnan describes this class of migrants as "transnational" because they move between two or more distinct nations. The term also indicates her analytical method, "that examines the connections and relationships between different places" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, pp. 17). In this conception, a transnational method

denotes an understanding that "the bounded nation-state may not be the most appropriate scale for examining social phenomena, and that many such phenomena may be constituted through interactions between multiple locales" (Levitt and Khagram 2008; Mitchell 2002; Yeoh, Willis, and Fakhri 2003, as cited in Radhakrishnan, 2011, pp. 18).

For my purposes, I define "transnationalism" as describing a highly mobile social class in the sense that Radhakrishnan puts forth, and also as a way to describe the movement of commodities and cultural practices across borders. While permanent migrants (immigrants and second-generation members of the diaspora) may not be highly mobile, their consumption and cultural practices, which see them engaging in "travel to India…consumption of Indian cultural products, and religious practice" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 19) provides a lively engagement with India, and a way to "negotiate their locally specific conditions and identity work" with their Indian heritage (Yoon, 2019, p. 3).

Another interesting aspect of the research on transnationalism are the descriptions of specific moments that occur when the local meets the transnational; Radhakrishnan refers to "interactions between multiple locales" (Radhakrishnan, 2012, p. 18), while Yoon mentions "globalizing and localizing forces…articulated with each other" (Yoon, 2019, p. 5). In this research paper, I will highlight specific moments, or interactions, when culture and technology intersect in a "socio-technological moment." This will draw attention to the ways that new forms of information technology are shaping consumer behaviour and other aspects of people's daily lives.

Technology

While most of us can readily identify physical examples of technology (computers, motor engines), Bijker identifies three different layers of meaning in the word "technology" (Bijker, 2006, p. 682). This includes the afore-mentioned physical objects such as computers, cell phone, and nuclear reactors. However, for Bijker, technology also "includes human *activities*…where it also refers to the designing, making and handling of such machines. Finally… "technology" refers to *knowledge*; it is about what people know as well as about what they do with machines and related production processes" (Bijker, 2006, p. 682).

By defining technology in these three ways, we can be "more specific than when employing "technology" as a container concept at a macro level" (Bijker, 2006, p. 682). I agree with this approach, and will take a similarly broad look at the technology that co-creates social attitudes towards online commerce of Indian textiles.

Literature Review

Theories of consumption falls into two main camps: a moralizing approach that denotes consumption as symptomatic of a "culture of excess…overproduction, saturation, transgression and waste" (Evans 2019, p. 514) and theories of consumption that see it as part of a broader set of symbolic practices associated with communication, establishing identity and maintaining social relations (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, pp. 40–42). In this section, the differences between this "moralizing" approach and this "cultural" approach to consumption will be discussed, with a critique of both of these approaches and how they neglect the experiences of

marginalized groups in society. Since this paper deals with the topic of Indian textiles and changes in Indian society, this section will also look at the perspective of Indian sociologists and social commentators, as well as Western scholars who have examined consumption in an Indian context.

Critiques of consumption

Looming large within the sociological study of consumption is the work of Marx, Veblen, and the Frankfurt School, in particular of Adorno and Marcuse. Marx's focus on production, the exploitation of workers, and their alienation from the products of their labour has led to a "productivist bias" that neglects consumption and is said to dominate sociology to the present day (Rey and Ritzer 2012, Storey 2017, Haynes 2010). The next major theorist of consumption was Thorstein Veblen, whose book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) is considered to be the first major theoretical work in this area. Although most of his work actually focused on production, industry and business, Veblen is best known for his influential concept of "conspicuous consumption," which describes consumer activity that is undertaken to convey an elevated social rank (Rey and Ritzer, 2012, p. 451).

In this vein, the Frankfurt School, which included the theorists Adorno and Marcuse, took an approach to consumption that was "overwhelmingly critical and tended only to address consumption in the context of a wider intellectual schema" (Evans 2019, pp. 503-504). Focusing primarily on a critique of the cultural industries (popular music, magazines, films, etc.) they saw popular culture as a capitalist tool to distract the working class from their oppression, and mourned the "end of the moment when the working class could realize that the capitalist system

had little to offer them and could overthrow it in favor of a system with a more equitable distribution of resources" (Rey and Ritzer, 2012, p. 453). As can be seen, the critiques of Adorno and Marcuse were informed by what they saw as the hyperconsumption of American consumers following the economic post-war boom.

Symbolic views of consumption

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for his part, focused his critique on social class struggle, "as produced, maintained and reproduced" through consumer practices and preferences (Storey, 2017, p. 40). Writing in the 1970s and 1980s, he addressed the symbolic meaning of consumer activity. Key to this was the notion that "consumption does not reflect the social order, it helps legitimize it" (Storey, 2017, p. 40). Although he looked at the realm of "high culture", as Adorno and Marcuse did, he concluded that the problem was not that workers were distracted by the many attractions of mass culture and cheap consumer goods, but that the greater prize of social mobility and prosperity were denied to the working classes through consumption practices that indicate "social distinction" through the "making, marking and maintaining of social difference" (Storey, 2017, p. 40).

As Storey notes, "Bourdieu's work on consumption is underpinned by his view of education. Rather than being a means to lessen inequality, it functions to legitimate it. He argues that the education system fulfils a quite specific social and political function: that is, to legitimate social inequalities which exist prior to its operations" (Storey, 2017, p. 43). By drawing attention to the social construction of dominant/minority cultures, and interrogating their "naturalness," he

challenged class domination and cultural practices that had previously not been considered political.

Another key concept of Bourdieu's is his manner of distinguishing between three types of capital – economic, social and cultural. According to Storey:

> In capitalist societies, economic capital in the form of money, property, etc. is able to buy access to cultural and social capital. Hierarchies openly based on the accumulation of economic capital are vulnerable to challenge. Cultural and social capital is able to conceal and legitimate economic domination by reproducing it in the form of cultural and social hierarchies (Storey, 2017, p. 43.).

The idea of different kinds of capital is part of Bourdieu's critique of class struggle. He saw social class as being "produced, maintained and reproduced" through consumer practices and preferences (Storey, 2017, p. 40). Writing in the 1970s and 1980s, he addressed the symbolic meaning of consumer activity. Key to this was the notion that "consumption does not reflect the social order, it helps legitimize it" (Storey, 2017, p. 40). Although he looked at the realm of "high culture," as Adorno and Marcuse did, he concluded that the problem was not that workers were distracted by the many attractions of mass culture and cheap consumer goods, but that the greater prize of social mobility and prosperity were denied to the working classes through consumption practices that indicate "social distinction" through the "making, marking and maintaining of social difference" (Storey, 2017, p. 40).

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Turning to contemporary sociologists, Ritzer, working in the 2000s, has focused on a number of key concepts in sociology, chief among them “immaterial consumption sites” like the internet, the Mcdonaldization of society, and the notion of “cathedrals of consumption.” Immaterial consumption deals with online commerce, which tempts us to overconsume, and leads to a new relationship between consumer and the site of commerce. As he notes, “the consumer can no longer locate the site of consumption in physical space…where they are, where the “mall” is where the goods are kept – none of this matters any longer. We would be hard pressed to say exactly where the transaction takes place” (Ritzer, 2001, p. 14). Written just at the beginning of the internet revolution, his theorizing of online commerce does not go very far, but does address the beginnings of this new mode of consumption.

A better developed theory of Ritzer's is that of "McDonaldization." This he describes as the spread of McDonald's-like elements (efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control) and the ways that they characterize modern consumer culture. However, he also notes that the "rationalization of consumption can be counterproductive for capitalism because too much of it causes consumers to become disenchanted" (Rey and Ritzer, 2012, p. 458). To remedy this, he states that producers, marketers and commercial sites create ever greater spectacles, to lure in shoppers.

Aldridge, for his part, describes consumption in the West as having certain contours and characteristics. Drawing upon Bauman, he describes the "consumer attitude" with its five elements: 1) consumers perceive life as a series of problems, which can be specified and dealt with, 2) believing that dealing with such problems, solving them, is one's duty, 3) believing that, for every problem, there is a solution and one's task is to find it, 4) assuming that such objects or recipes are essentially available and can be obtained in exchange for money and by shopping, 5) the art of living is learning how to acquire the skill of finding such objects and recipes, and gaining the power to possess them once found (Bauman, 1990, as cited in Aldridge, 2003, pp. 3-4). Shopping is work, and various resources assist us in carrying out this work.

Aldridge notes that this tension between consumption being "work" and "pleasure," is a key contradiction. Citing Edwards, he observes that "consumers enjoy power but are also constrained; consumption is enjoyable and frustrating; people are embraced by the world of

consumption and excluded from its consumption is essential to free market capitalism but also corrosive of it" (Edwards, 2000, as cited in Aldridge, 2003, p. 5).

Aldridge also states that debates about consumption and consumerism, "frequently revolve around stereotypes of the consumer. Consumers are treated as though they fitted neatly into one and only one stereotype" (Aldridge, 2002, p. 10). He summarizes a list of these stereotypes, developed by Gabriel and Lang. These are the consumer: as chooser, communicator, explorer, identity-seeker, hedonist/artist victim, rebel, activist or citizen (Gabriel and Lang, 1995, as cited by Aldridge, 2003, p. 10). However, Aldridge considers these stereotypes to be of limited use. Instead, he constructs a four-cornered schema that lays out the following components: the rational actor, the communicator, the victim, and the dupe. Depending on the issue, the consumer can be found more in one quadrant than the other. He notes, moreover, that typologies of the consumer often position females as "victims and dupes."

Identity and Ethical Consumption

In contrast to the views covered above, some sociological research, particularly contemporary work, does present the positive aspects of consumption. Rey and Ritzer, in their chapter on the sociology of consumption, describe how consumption shapes identity. They state that:

> The enveloping theoretical assumption of this work on identity is that who you are cannot (fully) be separated from what you consume, particularly in contemporary consumer culture. Moreover, identity theorists tend to assume that

> modern individuals are liberated from the constraints of consuming for "instrumental" (i.e., life-sustaining) purposes and can use consumption for other purposes such as identity work (Bauman 2001, as cited in Rey and Ritzer, 2012, p. 445).

Rey and Ritzer also note the role of consumption in establishing collective and group identities. These usually focus on societal sub-groups such as youth, ethnic minorities, or families (Rey and Ritzer, 2012, pp. 445-446).

Other researchers have considered positive aspects of consumption: Castello and Mihelj examined "consumer nationalism" a process by which members of a nation focus their consumption on domestic production *or* boycott products from another nation. This mode of consumption reflects the political, social and cultural preoccupations that can be linked to consumer motivation (Castello and Mihelg 2018). Zimmerman, in writing of a TV show on sweatshop labour, describes the ways that consumers try to engage in "ethical consumption" and "pro-social goals," by buying "fair trade goods" (Zimmerman 2020).

Anthropological views of consumption

Some of the most nuanced studies of consumption come from the field of anthropology. Among these is the work of Douglas and Isherwood, whose 1979 book *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption,* has been influential in the contemporary literature on consumption. In this work, a collaboration between an anthropologist (Douglas) and an economist (Isherwood), consumption is characterized as a form of expression focused on "making visible and stable the categories of culture" (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, p. 38).

They note that "it is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators" (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, p. 38). That is to say, it is not solely the acquisition of goods (i.e., the act of purchasing) that is significant; what is meaningful about consumption is how goods are *used.* In this approach they square their theoretical perspective firmly against critics of consumption, to focus instead on the symbolism and meaning behind it.

The goal of their project is clear from the outset. In the introduction they note the "growing swell of protest against the consumer society (that) sets the background to this book. Consumerism is castigated as greed, stupidity, and insensitivity to want…We would like to know how they live, the style and life of these moralists. Perhaps they give their royalties to the poor..." (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, p. i). It is clear that their analysis will not give in to the temptation to condemn consumption practices but, rather, seeks to understand them.

They direct particular criticism towards Thorstein Veblen who, they state, "has much to answer for when we consider how widely his analysis of the leisure class is received and how influential has been his unqualified scorn of conspicuous consumption. To turn the discussion into more realistic channels, several changes need to be made" (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, p. i). These changes consist of viewing consumption, not as the rampant acquisition of goods, but as a language for communication:

> Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty." This perspective then "sets the individual squarely in a social context, treating knowledge as a joint constructive enterprise. Knowledge is never a matter of the lone individual learning about an external reality. Individuals interacting together impose their constructions upon reality: the world is socially constructed (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, pp. 40–42).

The ideas of Douglas and Isherwood have been influential in stimulating research that examines how symbolism and meaning are co-constructed within societies. This analytical tool can then be used to examine commodities and consumption in a range of settings, as well as cross culturally. In this vein, and inspired by Douglas and Isherwood as well as the anthropologist Appadurai (to be discussed later), a number of contemporary anthropologists have examined consumption in cross-cultural and domestic settings. This includes a study of Western commodities in Melanesia (Philibert and Jourdan, 1996), Guatemalan textiles in the U.S. (Hendrickson, 1996), Coca Cola in Argentina (Classen, 1996), soap, and embroidered shawls in India (Kaur, 2010, Maskielle, 2010). In each of these studies, the researchers draw careful attention to the ways in which commodities are placed within specific local schema of understanding. Sometimes, this happens in ways that alter the meaning of the commodity from that intended by the original producer (Howes, 1996, p. 4).

Pessimistic views on consumption

As can be seen in the summary above, there is a body of sociological literature on consumption that takes a primarily pessimistic stance. Academic theorizing in this area is often marked by the heavy mantle of disapproval: the act of consumption is seen as materialistic, pathological, manipulative, excessive, or environmentally destructive. Moreover, consumers are seen as passive or as dupes who are being manipulated by capitalist forces (Schor, 2007, p. 26).

This moralizing approach to consumption can also be seen in the work of contemporary academics such as Dittmar, who examines the ways that idealized images of the perfect body, expensive consumer goods, and affluent lifestyles lead to unrealistic beauty ideals, body dissatisfaction, and compulsive buying (Dittmar 2008). Van Wessel, writing about consumption among the middle class in India, highlights the unsustainable environmental impact of their increasing consumption (Van Wessell 2019).

For his part, Aldridge states that:

> Although consumption is widely acknowledged to be a key concept, many sociologists are uneasy at the seeming frivolity of some of the literature. Sport, television, fashion, fandom, shopping, clubbing: these activities may be fun, but are they not trivial distractions from the serious things in life – work, politics, and maybe religion? (Aldridge, 2003, p. 23)

Yet, far from being frivolous, as Aldridge states when speaking of definitions of consumption and consumerism, “Whatever definitions are adopted important issues are at stake. The literature on consumption is a battlefield for competing visions of the good life” (Aldridge, 2003, p. 6).

Rey and Ritzer also acknowledge this concern about frivolity. In writing a “consumption-oriented perspective to the development and continuation of the “Great Recession” of 2007-2012, they state that:

> The motivation behind this last section is to dispel the view that the sociology of consumption deals, in the main, with trivial issues. The fact that it can be related in such a meaningful way to such a monumentally important issue as the recession demonstrates, we think, the power of this often underestimated and underutilized type of sociology. (Rey and Ritzer, 2012, p. 465.)

Part of the reason for sociology’s negative perception of consumption may also be due to the discipline’s uneasiness at being associated with commercial activity. This is because the broader academic literature on consumption falls into two main areas: the domain of business, marketing, and commerce, which seeks to convince consumers to buy more, and sociology, with its ambivalent view, which seeks to dissuade overconsumption.

Indeed, constant moralizing about consumption may be due to concerns of sociologists that academic studies of consumption will be co-opted by market researchers to get people to buy

more *stuff.* For example, when I told people my ideas for this research paper, I was encouraged to publish my work in a marketing journal, to help people understand how to better market Indian textiles. I had to make it clear that my interest was in the technological and social conditions in which Indian textiles were produced and consumed, and not in ways to persuade people to buy more of them.

Consumption among marginalized groups

While my review of the sociological literature on consumption was by no means comprehensive, it was broad, and I did uncover a number of sources that provided summaries of literature on consumption. As well, I examined the last five years of articles published in the American *Journal of Consumer Culture* (which includes non-sociological articles). While covering a broad range of topics, I did find some notable gaps.

To begin with, a noteworthy aspect of this body of research is the determined focus on affluent urban middle-class consumers (e.g., Dittmar 2008, Schor 2007, Rey and Ritzer 2012, Ritzer 2001); consumption among poor, rural, Indigenous, immigrant or racialized communities is conspicuously absent. This is particularly pronounced in studies of consumption in India, where most research focuses exclusively on the emerging middle class (Van Wessell 2019)

But how do the poor – in the West as well as in developing countries - or those with access to limited consumer goods, spend their money? How do they acquire the things they need to

survive and have a measure of comfort in their lives? What ingenuity and tactics do they use – barter, swap, borrowing, sharing, credit, payday loans, partial payments just one step ahead of having their utilities cut off – to get by? These remain understudied in the sociological literature on consumption.

Aldridge provides one of the rare insights into poverty and consumption. He describes the stereotypical view that "the poor are regularly accused of behaving irrationally. They waste their money on pointless and even harmful pursuits: alcohol, tobacco and gambling. They are not capable of deferring gratification, so if they have a windfall gain they immediately spend it in a self-indulgent binge" (Aldridge, 2003, pp. 103-104). But on the contrary, he states:

> Research on the coping strategies of the poor…has demonstrated that, contrary to the stereotype of feckless improvidence, they employ a high level of personal, economic and social skills to cope with the constraints of poverty. It is, typically, women's work. They plan budgets meticulously to the last penny. They set aside money for later, sometimes hiding it from other family members. They make shopping lists and stick to them (Walker and Collins, as cited in Aldridge, 2003, p. 104).

Gender and consumption

Another dimension – that of gender - is occasionally drawn out in the literature on consumption, mainly in ways that deconstruct the stereotype of the manipulated female hyperconsumer

(Aldridge, 2003, pp. 16-17, Dittmar, 2008, pp. 105-114). In his classification of images of the consumer, Aldridge notes the ways that Western discourse around consumption constructs "women (as) dupes while men are rational actors" (Aldridge, 2003, p. 17). Dittmar, in a survey of research on compulsive buying, found that women are more likely to be affected by this disorder. However, she states that there are reasons to be cautious about these findings, as "many studies have sampled people in such a way that women are more likely to participate…and the focus has been predominantly on high-street shopping, rather than on buying goods at auctions, or collecting goods, which are activities in which men engage more prominently than women" (Dittmar, 2008, p. 105).

Immigrant / Transnational Consumption

While I did find a body of research on aspects of immigrant consumption, this focused on immigrant consumption of media (New Canadian Media 2020, Christiansen, 2004), and consumption of food and commodities produced within the new country of residence (Eg. Cheyroux 2018, Cleveland et al. 2009). Very little research exists on objects consumed by immigrants that were shipped from their country of origin. One exception is a study of transnational consumption of Korean media (music, video games, social media and social network sites) by Korean youth (Yoon 2020). An ethnographic study, it primarily drew upon theories from cultural and youth studies.

Indian sociology

Indian sociology, as to be expected, has also dealt with the issue of consumption in India. This has included work by Indian theorists, and also Western scholars doing research in India. However, as above, most theorizing has been about the middle class and their changing consumption patterns.

Wilhite, writing of consumption in South India, describes the way new consumer goods are transforming everyday life. In particular, he describes a shift from thrift and saving to spending, especially on consumer white goods such as mixers, grinders, refrigerators and microwaves (Wilhite 2008). Srinivas, in his book *The Indian Consumer,* describes the excitement around the growing middle class in India and the ways in which Western companies have sought to profit from their new-found wealth. To the surprise of many, however, Indian consumers, particularly older ones, have been resistant to spending freely on consumer goods, preferring to save for the traditional goals of children's education and weddings (Srinivas 2008). An exception, as Wilhite notes, is spending on household conveniences and automobiles (Wilhite 2008), and increased spending by the younger generation, who have benefitted from high salaries in the Indian IT sector (Srinivas, 2008, p. 2). These findings indicate a generational divide in regard to attitudes towards spending on non-essential goods.

Pandey, for her part, describes the spending of a group of young urban women in India. These women, part of a generation of young people with access to high-paying jobs in the transnational

Information Technology sector, are earning more than their fathers. While they were spending a significant part of these earnings on clothes and expensive accessories, they were also saving for their weddings and purchasing household consumer goods. Interestingly, these goods are labour-saving devices that are used to replace the young women's labour in the home (Pandey, 2014, pp. 6-7). It will be interesting to see the ways in which this newfound economic power disrupts patriarchy and social stratification in India.

Problem statement

As can be seen in the above literature, consumer behaviour is well studied. Of the various theoretical approaches, anthropology provides the most nuanced approach to how social practices and values shape consumption. However, as noted in the introduction, while anthropology has given much attention to "cross-cultural consumption, or what happens to commodities when they cross-cultural borders" (Howes, 1996, p. 2), less attention has been given to what happens when commodities cross borders, but are used by the same cultural group.

In the era of globalization and increased migrant mobility, there is certainly a rise in this form of consumer activity, particularly due to the ease of selling products online. Migrants, eager for a taste of home, or specific commodities like clothes or religious goods, use the internet to satisfy these desires and needs. This phenomenon, which I have called "intracultural transnational consumption" (ITC), is the focus of this research paper. Examples of this might include music, clothes, carpets, decorative cultural artifacts, food, and religious objects.

Research Question

How can we understand intracultural transnational consumption? What leads people to desire handmade textiles, and what are the socio-technological conditions that lead people to purchase Indian textiles online? As noted in the introduction, while a Major Research Paper cannot test theories of consumption, this paper will propose a possible understanding of intracultural transnational consumption, by exploring e-commerce websites and relevant literature in this area. With this, I am interested not just in *what* is being sold (Indian textiles) but also *how* they are being sold (online, on e-commerce websites). While studying a commodity can reveal a great deal about social contexts and social meaning, examining the technology that enables this consumption is also important, as commodities cannot be separated from the social and technical assemblages through which they are produced, circulated and consumed.

Theoretical framework

Regimes of value

To understand the place of Indian textiles within transnational practices of consumption, I will draw upon the work of Appadurai, whose theory of "regimes of value" helps us to understand these phenomena, and to place them within a social and global context.

In the introduction to his 1986 book *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Appadurai states that "economic objects circulate in different regimes of value in space and time" (Appadurai 1986, p. 4). Furthermore, he agrees with Kopytoff (whose essay is in

the same volume) that "commodities…can usefully be regarded as having life histories" (Kopytoff, as cited in Appadurai, 1986, p. 17).

To understand consumption practices and the commodities that they consume, Appadurai states, it is necessary to "follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things" (Appadurai, 1986, p. 5). The idea of commodities having "life histories" is enticing, and blurs the line between human and non-human actors. Furthermore, the notion of a "trajectory" for commodities is significant, as most goods that we consume, even the most mundane, are produced and move across borders in a complex path that involves numerous social actors.

Overall, the concept of "regimes of value" is helpful to understand not just the movement of exotic objects like oriental carpets or expensive paintings, but also that of many everyday objects we consume. For example, tomatoes (produced in the U.S. using migrant labour, then exported to Canada), and electronics (designed in the West, produced in Asian factories, shipped and consumed in the West, then shipped back to Asia to be disassembled); all have complex life histories that belie their prosaic uses.

In line with the work of Appadurai, I consider "regimes of value" to be the social, historical, and economic conditions within which objects circulate in space and time. In discussing the work of Appadurai, Haynes notes that "things have no intrinsic meaning of their own but acquire their significance in specific social contexts often shaped by political contestation…and these

meanings may be subject to significant change." (Appadurai, as cited in Haynes, 2010, pp. 13-14). Therefore, "constructing "social lives" of "things-in-motion" will draw out the ways that people give meaning to objects in social contexts" (Appadurai, as cited in Haynes, 2010, p. 14). Accordingly, in this paper I will explore the ways that "regimes of value" are created for Indian textiles as they are produced and travel the world.

Regimes of technological meaning

Regimes of value, I contend further, are co-constructed with what I will call "regimes of technological meaning" that build up awareness and familiarity with the technology required to function in a given society. Latour, one of the founders of Science and technology Studies, refers to this as "pre-inscription" - "all the work that has to be done upstream of the scene and all the things assimilated by an actor (human or nonhuman) before coming to the scene as a user or as an author" (Latour 1992, p. 257).

Science and Technology Studies

Delving into regimes of technological meaning draws attention to the social factors and technological conditions which transmit social values in an internet setting. This aligns with the goal of Science and Technology Studies, which seeks to highlight how the social interacts with the technological to shape technology, and which then, in an iterative process, shapes society.

This view of technology is at odds with the "standard view" of technology and scientific knowledge – that these are neutral forces – "objective, value free, and discovered by specialists" (Bijker, 2006, p. 683). As Bijker notes, "the standard image of science and technology was the dominant view of technology among students of technology and society until the 1980s, and is still widely held by citizens, politicians, and practitioners" (Bijker, 2006, p. 683). In this view, society and technology develop separately from each other, humming along.

Another aspect of this standard view of technology is that of "technological determinism". Bijker identifies two elements to this: "1) that technology develops autonomously, following an internal logic which is independent of external influences; and that 2) technology shapes society by having economic and social impacts" (Bijker, 2006, p. 683). While it is readily acknowledged that technology shapes society, generally absent from this view is the idea that society, in turn, also shapes technology.

In the 1970s and 1980s, two theories arose that challenged this standard view: the social construction of technology (SCOT) and the social shaping of knowledge (SSK). These theories arose from the work of sociologists, historians, and philosophers. Through detailed analysis (eg. Latour and Woolgar's research on scientists and engineers, 1986) they drew attention to the ways in which technology, and technological research, are shaped by social, political, and economic factors (Bijker, 2006, p. 684). This came to be known as the "constructivist conception of technology" (Bijker, 2006, p. 685). SSK and SCOT theories, as well as others like actor network theory (ANT), are part of the larger category of Science and Technology Studies.

In recent years, the strictly constructionist approach has evolved and, building on the work of Jasanoff, "co-evolution" and "co-production" have come to typify the current approach to technology studies (Jasanoff 2004, as cited by Bijker, 2006, p. 695). However, as Bijker points out in his work on technology and politics, regardless of the topic, to have a thorough understanding of any social and technological study, one needs to get specific (Bijker, 2006, page 695).

The specific example that he cites to explain the "co-production" approach to technology and politics is that of Hecht's work on nuclear reactors and their political use in France in the 1960s. For this study, Hecht developed the concept of the "technopolitical regime", which refers to "linked sets of individuals, engineering and institutional practices, technological artifacts, political programs, and institutional ideologies acting together to govern technological development and pursue technopolitics" (Hecht 2001, as cited in Bijker, 2006, p. 695-696). For this, Hecht was influenced by the work of Thomas Hughes on "technological system and technological style" (Hughes, 1983, as cited by Hecht, 2001, p. 257). In her essay on nuclear reactors, Hecht defines technopolitics as "a term that describes the strategic practice of designing or using technology to constitute, embody, or enact political goals" (Hecht 2001, 56-7, as cited in Bijker, 2006, p. 695-969). As Bijker notes, "this concept allows us to describe the interaction between politics and technology in a quite specific way" (Bijker, 2006, p. 696).

Technology and consumption

Building on this analytical approach, we can readily transfer Bijker's 2006 examination of "technology and politics" to a study of "technology and consumption". Taking some of Bijker's

sentences and substituting the word “consumption” for “politics” gives us the following statements. For example:

1. “The first reason to pay attention to technology in political studies is that such a focus on the technological in society will reveal aspects of politics that remain unnoticed otherwise.” (Bijker, 2006, p. 701) becomes *“The first reason to pay attention to technology in consumption studies is that such a focus on the technological in society will reveal aspects of consumption that remain unnoticed otherwise.”*

2. And: “Another way in which technology matters to politics and shapes politics is by setting the conditions for political discussion and development” (Bijker, 2006, p. 694) becomes *“Another way in which technology matters to consumption and shapes consumption is by setting the conditions for consumption practices and the means to fulfil them”.*

To follow Bijker’s advice, we must then come up with a specific example to illustrate how this interaction between technology and consumption manifests itself. Therefore, let us consider that technology matters to consumption because it:

- helps to shape the desires of consumers (eg. advertising, social media, tv),
- creates the products to consume (artisanal or mass production of cheap, costly, or innovative goods),
- develops the means to purchase the products (eg. credit card, PayPal),
- creates the means to transport goods (roads, planes, ships, trucks),

- facilitates access to goods (e-commerce websites, stores, paper catalogues),
- and the means to dispose of them (recycling, waste disposal).

To understand any act of consumption, then, we need to understand the technology that interacts with the relevant step of the consumption cycle. This links technology to the consumption lifespan approach of Evans, noted above, which considers the stages of consumption to be: acquisition, appropriation, appreciation, devaluation, divestment, and disposal (Evans, 2019, pp. 506-507).

Through this analytical lens we can also better understand the "co-evolution" / "co-production" aspect of technology and consumption. An example is the way in which some products are being modified in response to pressure from consumers and environmentalists. The jugs of some brands of laundry detergent are now made of molded pulp, or contain a certain percentage of recycled plastic (Mohan 2011). The technology to do this, however, is complicated; the jugs need a certain amount of strength and rigidity so they can remain upright and not collapse when they are stacked atop each other. As well, too much recycled plastic content turns the material grey, which is unappealing to consumers (Niven-Phillips 2019). The cost of the final product is also a factor. The company that has the technological ability to fulfil all these varying parameters will capture the dollars of the conscientious consumer.

This is an example of an act of consumption that highlights 1) the desires of consumers, and 2) the production and disposal aspects of consumption. A SCOT examination of environmental

products would, therefore, take into account the relevant social actors, and the relevant stages of the technology and consumption cycle.

Returning to the subject of Indian handmade textiles that are sold over the internet, I contend that awareness and appreciation of these commodities is woven together to create a regime of social and political value that makes them desirable in India and abroad. Regimes of technological meaning are then responsible for the various forms of technology that are necessary to create and access e-commerce websites via the internet. In line with the work of Hecht (2001) and Hughes (1983), I identify these in the broadest possible terms: in this case, the technology involves the physical infrastructure of internet towers, electrical cables and computer servers, as well as virtual technology like the internet, credit cards, databases, and supply chain management techniques. The technology also involves the knowledge industry infrastructure, such as colleges, universities, and the Information Technology (IT) knowledge workers who are building these electronic websites and communication platforms.

Regimes of value merge with regimes of technological meaning when a member of the Indian diaspora searches for handmade Indian clothes online. The mode of exchange – online in an ephemeral "dematerialized" site seemingly devoid of human contact, versus in a physical brick-and-mortar store - has a meaning beyond a shallow materialistic act (Ritzer, 2001, p. 14). I contend that, by using these two concepts, we can better understand that socio-technological moment when, fingers hovering over the keyboard, a person decides to tap out a few keywords, scans an e-commerce website, and pulls out their credit card to make a purchase.

Social inequality – Capital and technofeminism

I also put forth a third argument, that those who purchase Indian textiles online belong to a privileged class of subjects of consumers who are motivated to participate in the regime of value and the regime of technological meaning. This is because they possess the cultural capital (Indian values and culture) and the economic capital (newly acquired wealth due to employment in the Indian IT industry and related sectors) to purchase the electronic equipment and internet connection necessary to access online commerce websites. As noted above, the concepts of economic and cultural capital emanate from the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who used the term to illustrate how class privilege is "produced, maintained and reproduced through consumer practices and the education system" (Storey, 2017, p. 40).

Like Bourdieu, Wajcman, a sociologist working in the realm of science and technology studies, also draws attention to the ways in which social inequality is perpetuated via the educational system. This analysis can be used to help understand the enduring effects of the Indian caste system, and the socially constructed boundary between the two main streams of work in the Indian IT sector (symbolic analytic and Business Process outsourcing). Wajcman refers to her approach as "technofeminism." Writing about this, she states that:

> …feminist writing within science and technology studies, technofeminism, eschews both the lingering tendency to view technology as necessarily patriarchal and the temptation to essentialize gender. Moreover, it points to the connections between gender inequality *and other forms of inequality*, that come into view if we examine

> the broader political and economic basis of the networks that shape and deploy technical systems. In particular, this means tying together the material realities of a technology's production and use (Wajcman, 2006, p. 717, italics mine).

While this paper will not provide a feminist analysis of the IT industry (tempting though that is), it will look at the "material realities of a technology's production and use" (Wajcman, 2006, p. 717) by examining the economic and social context of the Indian IT workers who are building e-commerce websites, and who are also among the class of consumers using them. Through this, we will see the way that "technologies embody and advance political interests and agendas and they are the product of social structure, culture, values, and politics as much as the result of objective scientific discovery" (Wajcman, 2006, p. 718). This demonstrates that, while e-commerce and innovative technology do promise new liberties in some ways, in other ways their production and consumption can reproduce entrenched systems of social inequality.

To summarize, in the case of Indian clothes purchased over the internet, having the desire to purchase Indian clothes, using the appropriate keywords to find the desired articles, and possessing the internet, electronic device, and credit card required to complete the purchase, are all examples of cultural and economic capital. Furthermore, examining the technology used to access e-commerce websites draws attention to the privileged position of the Indian IT knowledge worker, and the ways in which caste and class privilege are perpetuated in India. These ideas will be explored in the coming sections.

Case Study – E-commerce and the Indian textile

Indian textiles are not just colourful and beautiful, they also represent the history of India, with its complicated multiethnic and colonial past. Tracing the "life history" of these beautiful "things in motion" (Appadurai, as cited in Haynes, 2010, p. 14). will demonstrate the way in which the theory of regimes of value can be applied to a commodity to better understand how social values around consumption are created and transmitted across borders, both temporal and physical.

Indian Textiles

As part of the post-Independence economic efforts, reviving the Indian textile industry, in the 1950s and right up to the present date, have been a priority for the government of India. In addition to contributing to the Indian economy, the handicraft or "cottage industry" sector has been seen as a means of poverty alleviation (Government of India, no date, p. 201). The federal government established the All India Handicrafts Board in 1952, and currently has a Ministry of Textiles to support handloom and handicraft production[1]. Several states also established handicraft departments and cottage industry emporiums to sell products. These organizations provided funds for training, promotion, and crafts fairs to bring consumers and sellers together. They also sought to educate consumers about the unique regional crafts of India. Today, it also provides funds for entrepreneurs to develop products, and access domestic and international markets. Of course, befitting a country with a robust IT industry, information on all these programs is available on their user-friendly and well-designed website (http://handlooms.nic.in/).

[1] Regrettably, on August 6, 2020, the Government of India abolished the All-India Handicrafts Board, citing the desire for "minimum government and maximum governance". This move worries NGO and handicrafts proponents, particularly due to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the handicrafts sector (Nath, 2020).

The private sector has also played an important role - one of the best known such companies is Fabindia, a clothing and home goods store founded by American John Bissell. It opened its first retail store in 1976, in New Delhi, India. In addition to home goods, it sold hand block and handwoven clothes, including *khadi* tunics, for the Indian market. In India in the 1980s, the "Fabindia Look," consisting of a handwoven kurta tunic, blue jeans, sandals and a cloth sling bag slung over the shoulders, was the unofficial uniform of New Delhi college girls and boys alike (Singh, 2012, p. 100).

Today, Fabindia has 250 stores across India, as well as a website that ships across the world. According to its website:

> Fabindia is India's largest private platform for products that are made from traditional techniques, skills and hand-based processes. Fabindia links over 55,000 craft based rural producers to modern urban markets, thereby creating a base for skilled, sustainable rural employment, and preserving India's traditional handicrafts in the process. Fabindia's products are natural, craft-based, contemporary, and affordable (Fabindia, 2020).

The keywords used in this text (traditional / skilled / hand-based / craft-based / rural / employment) echo the concerns of Nehru and Gandhi, which I describe below, and demonstrate the continued interest in using handmade textiles to promote social values and economic development in India. They also demonstrate the interrelationship between regimes of value,

which lead people to desire handmade Indian textiles, and regimes of technological meaning, which bring them to the computer to search for them.

E-commerce and Indian textiles

While there are many Indian clothing websites that sell everything from Western designer sportswear to elaborate sequined ethnic Indian party wear, for this research paper I chose to focus on websites that sell handcrafted Indian clothes. I found these by using Google Search and searching under the names of specific clothing and craft styles. These included "indigo kurta," "kalamkari," "silk sari," and "phulkari," among others. I started visiting these websites for personal consumption, captivated by the idea of buying Indian clothes without the trouble of shopping in India. As I visited various websites, I saw common themes and a common way that the website presented the products. This piqued my interest and led to the inspiration for this research paper.

The websites that I analyzed for the purposes of this research paper (see *Annex B* for the full listing) highlight the "handcrafted" aspect of their products and draw attention to the "social enterprise" aspect of their work. In this, I saw a link between consumption of these products and the Gandhian ideals of Indian independence, poverty alleviation, and social justice. To note, while the websites promoted livelihoods for artisans, they did not mention if the artisans were paid a fair wage for their work. While some Western business, like Ten Thousand Villages, do assure consumers that artisans are paid "a fair, stable income" (and, indeed, carry certified Fair Trade products) (Ten Thousand Villages, 2020), none of the Indian websites made this claim.

While it is interesting to speculate on this point, determining fair wages for artisans was, unfortunately, outside the scope of this paper.

Returning to the textiles, the term “handcrafted” is, of course, open to much interpretation; does it refer solely to clothes that are made from hand-spun thread, handwoven, handstitched *and* hand embroidered? Or could the term include clothes that are made from machine-woven fabric, stitched with a sewing machine and hand embroidered? Where does the artisan come into play? Is there a combination of machine made and handwork that can still claim the label “handmade?” The Indian clothing store Fabindia grappled with precisely this question; as the business evolved and grew, they had to modify their goal of carrying only handwoven fabrics. In some cases, they purchased “power-loom fabric,” but had artisans hand embroider or block print the pattern onto it. In this way, the idea of “handcrafted” was still maintained, but they were able to satisfy customer demand (Singh, 2012, p. 261).

While Fabindia is the best established such retailer, there are many other entrepreneurs that promote social enterprise ideals for their handmade Indian clothes and home goods (e.g., Pure Ghee, Jaypore, Tjori, iTokri, Anita Dongre). For example, Okhai.org prominently features “Tales of Empowerment” on its main page, which highlight specific employees and how their lives have improved through employment in the textile industry (Okhai.org, 2020).

While some of these companies operate e-commerce and "bricks and mortar" businesses in India, others are solely on-line (e.g. Pure Ghee, Okhai, Tjori, iTokri). These websites provide a cyber platform for Indian handicrafts, and bring these age-old techniques into a new millennium.

According to Puneet Chawla, co-founder of the online store Jaypore.com:

> Jaypore was started six years ago and it was conceived as a platform with a mission to bring the world closer together and connect global audiences to India's most beautiful artisanal products. Very soon we realized that there was actually a lot of demand of artisanal products here in India too. After six months of starting, we opened to India and the rest of the world and today 70 percent of our business comes from India (Indiaretailing.com, 2018).

The products offered on Jaypore.com and other websites are primarily handmade clothing and accessories: Indian kurta tunics and salwar pants in a wide array of cuts, fabrics and styles; saris and blouses; dresses, both Western and Indian style, shawls, shoes, purses, bags, jewelry and hair ornaments. Some of them also sell home goods such as hand block print cotton tablecloths, baskets, placemats, artwork, small decorative objects, soaps and toiletries. The majority of clothing items are for women, with small selections for children and men.

Building on this case study, I contend that the history of textiles in India, along with the social and economic context in which they are produced and consumed today, can be considered a "regime of value" – a framework of knowledge, meaning and symbolism that informs how Indian textiles are viewed by consumers. Concretely, the regime of value is created in several ways, via various social institutions in India. First, there is the importance of the textile industry in the context of colonialism.

Colonialism

As colonialism spread during the 1600s and 1700s, demand for Indian textiles led European powers to consider ways they could monopolize and, later, control trade in Indian textiles, spices, and other products. Why should European silver and gold flow to India, when colonial domination could ensure a ready supply of these goods, as well as profits for Europeans? (Reddy, 2011, p. B231). Accordingly, the East India Company, incorporated in 1600, was formed for the exploitation of trade with East and Southeast Asia and India. Although it was originally a "monopolistic trading body," the company became involved in politics and evolved into an agent of British imperialism in India from the early 18th century to the mid-19th century (Reddy, 2011, p. B227). This paved the way for British colonial domination of the Indian subcontinent, and the subsequent disruption of the local and national Indian textile industries.

According to Jawarhlal Nehru, one of the fathers of the Indian independence movement, Britain was directly responsible for "the destruction of India's industry and the decay of her agriculture" (Nehru, 1960, p. 210). In his book *Discovery of India*, written in 1944 while he was imprisoned for anti-British agitation, he describes the ways in which Britain decimated the Indian textile industry and deliberately underdeveloped the Indian economy:

> To begin with, Indian goods were excluded from Britain by legislation, and as the company held a monopoly in the Indian export business, this exclusion influenced other foreign markets also. This was followed by vigorous attempts to restrict and crush Indian manufactures by various

> measures and internal duties which prevented the flow of Indian goods within the country itself. British goods, meanwhile, had free entry. The Indian textile industry collapsed, affecting vast numbers of weavers and artisans (Nehru, 1960, p. 210).

Accordingly, the Indian independence movement placed Indian textiles at the heart of the struggle for *swaraj*, or home rule. Mahatma Gandhi, the "father of Modern India" spent an hour each day spinning. As Wilkinson notes, "this might seem a strange activity for a man who devoted his life to campaigning for the future of his country. But for Gandhi, spinning was one of the most important things he could do. He wanted to show Indians how they could take control of an industry" (Wilkinson, p. 40, 2005). As noted above by Nehru, raw Indian cotton was sent to England to be spun and woven. The finished fabric was then sold back to Indians - at exorbitant prices. While this enriched the British government and the mill owners of Manchester, the high cost of British woven fabric was difficult for the Indian population to afford. It also meant that the profits from weaving went into the coffers of the British. This made the textile industry an attractive target for Gandhi's *satyagraha* or nonviolent resistance campaigns for Indian independence; while not everyone could take part in a *satyagraha* march or attend a rally, purchasing a simple spinning wheel was an act of everyday resistance available to all.

Wilkinson states that "once the cotton was spun into thread, it was woven on a handloom to make *khadi*, or plain cloth. In the 1920s, encouraged by Gandhi, people all over India learned to spin and weave. *Khadi* was coarse and undyed, but Gandhi encouraged everyone to buy it to

support the weavers. By doing so, people could show that they supported Indian independence" (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 41).

To further the message, independence fighters lit bonfires and threw British-made textiles upon them. In my own family, there is an account of one such bonfire: my Indian grandfather - a police chief whose duty was to uphold the British colonial order - was called upon to throw some British-made cloth upon a bonfire he was passing by one day. He hesitated - he had a family to provide for - but then he threw his handkerchief upon the fire. The gesture was noted, and his career suffered as a result.

Wearing *khadi* was also a mark of those fighting for Indian independence: once the Independence movement gained momentum, Nehru notes that "it was difficult to distinguish between members of the legislators and the peasants and townsmen who came in such large numbers. They were often dressed more or less alike, mostly in hand spun cloth with the well-known Gandhi cap on their heads" (Nehru, 1960, pp. 289-290). Indian fabric, particularly handwoven cloth, had become symbolic.

Another dimension of the regime of value is connected with the identity of the consumer and the social space of consumption.

Consumption in India

Consumption patterns in India have been directly shaped by the federal government's economic and development policies. Starting immediately after Indian independence in 1947, Nehru, as

India's first prime minister, pursued a policy of "industrial development and top down national economic planning, in contrast to Gandhi's vision of an agrarian society in which development would happen from the bottom up" (Wilhite, 2008, p. 128). This involved a state-driven, planned economy, with strict government controls on exports, imports, and foreign investment (Changhoke, 2005, as cited in Wilhite, 2008, p. 128).

Gandhian philosophies, however, were still influential. For example, to the greatest extent possible, domestic Indian industry was supported, as per Gandhi's philosophy of *swadeshi*, which emphasizes "local development, local knowledge and frugality" (Narayan 1968, as cited in Wilhite, 2008, p. 128). As Wilhite notes, "implicit to *swadeshi* was the proposition that India would only truly develop, both spiritually and materially if the Western development paradigm and its agents were held at bay. India should determine its own future, drawing on its rich religious and agricultural heritage" (Narayan 1968, as cited in Wilhite, 2008, p. 128).

India, during this period, did accept, "considerable amounts of development assistance from the United States, European countries and the Soviet Union… Nonetheless, India was to be in control of its own fate, expressed in the concept of "self-reliance" (*swaraj*)" (Wilhite, 2008, p. 129). From chocolate (Amul instead of Cadbury's) to fizzy soda (Campa Cola instead of Coca Cola), India developed domestic substitutes for foreign products.

Due to the lack of imports during this period, consumer goods were relatively scarce. Government economic policies, combined with enduring Gandhian ideals of frugality, self-reliance and thrift, led to a widespread adoption of these attitudes among all classes of society, as

noted in the literature review on consumption, above. As Wilhite observes "simplicity and moderation were seen as essential to achieving fulfilling lives" (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, as cited in Wilhite, 2008, p. 130). Indian handmade textiles, modestly priced and produced domestically, fit within this regime of moderate consumption.

Protectionist policies were in place until the 1980s, when a financial crisis caused by declining economic growth, growing national debt, and a growing trade deficit, forced the government to rethink its economic and trade policies (Khilnani 1998; Corbridge and Harriss 2000, as cited in Wilhite, 2008, p. 132). Furthermore, "the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s contributed to a decline in foreign trade and removed the only alternative ideological model to the capitalist market" (Khilnani 1998, as cited in Wilhite, 2008, p. 132).

Following the economic liberalization of the 1990s, there was a period of vigorous economic growth. Singh states that "during 1999-2000 and 2004-05, the… government under Atal Behari Vajpayee continued to push economic reforms introduced by Manmohan Singh in the early '90s. The average growth rate stayed well above 7.5 per cent between 2003 and 2005 and…thereafter, averaged an all-time high of 9.2 per cent between 2005-06." (Singh, 2012, p. 257).

Speaking of this economic growth and the resultant rise of sales in Fabindia clothing stores, Singh observes that these measures led to:

> A dramatic increase in the spending power of the urban middle class estimated to be over 150 million people. The National Sample Survey (NSS)

> data showed that for urban India as a whole the purchasing power had expanded four times between the mid-‘80s and today; in Gujarat five times; Chandigarh, four times; Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka over four times; and Kerala almost five times. So it was pretty clear where the new Fabindia shoppers were coming from (Singh, 2012, p. 264).

New wealth led to an increased consumption of Indian textiles, a commodity valued for its beauty, its role in Indian independence, and its ability to provide a livelihood for Indian artisans. This illustrates the way that the regime of value, that had been built up in the minds of Indian consumers during the past few decades, remained constant, even among a younger generation of well off Indians. While this cohort does spend more freely on non-essential goods than their parent’s generation (Srinivas, 2008, p. 2), I contend that the desire to purchase and wear handmade Indian clothes, rather than expensive designer creations, suggests a continuation of support for values of Indian self-reliance and poverty alleviation.

Another outcome of economic liberalization was the establishment of two entirely new industries in the 1990s and 2000s: Information Technology (IT), and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). Multinational corporations in these industries were attracted to India’s well educated, English-speaking knowledge workers. Moreover, while their salaries were lower than that of comparable Western workers, they were high compared to the general Indian population. Srinivas states that, for these workers:

> Their incomes were higher, and most became globetrotters, acquiring the traits

> of typical Western middle-class consumers. Their mindsets changed; they thought and behaved differently; they were no longer part of the traditionally conservative middle class. They became materialistic, flashy, ambitious, confident, and sometimes arrogant. Logically, they became the perfect consumption targets for marketers (Srinivas, 2008, p. 2).

The new wealth created by high-paying jobs in this industry has led to new patterns of consumption, particularly among young people in India (Srinivas 2008, p. 2). While these youths have different consumption patterns from their parents (Wilhite, 2008, p. 129), the growing demand for Indian handmade textiles, as demonstrated by the skyrocketing growth of Fabindia, suggests that they still seek out handmade Indian clothes. Therefore, what is notable is that, not only did young people become the ultimate Indian consumers, they also helped to build the e-commerce platforms and IT industry which would lead Indians to become "globetrotting" consumers. This highlights the interrelationship between regimes of value and regimes of technological meaning.

Who is the consumer?

In examining these e-commerce Indian clothing websites, it is clear that the audience for them is primarily middle- and upper-class Indians living in India, and members of the Indian diaspora. I make this inference because the websites are all in English, the default currency for each of them is in Indian rupees (conversion to other currencies is possible), and items are shipped out of India. As well, although the cost of clothing is reasonable compared to that of Western clothes, for lower income Indians, the price makes them unattainable.

In India the average net national income per capita in 2018 was $1,740 US (World Bank, 2020). In Canada, by comparison it was $37,665 US. For the average Indian to spend $100 US on an Indian kurta, tunic and scarf set (the average price of an outfit on Jaypore.com) would be unrealistic. It would also be unnecessary, as Indian clothes are available at lower cost in regular Indian bricks-and-mortar stores, or by buying fabric and having clothes tailor-made. To return to the e-commerce websites, the language of these websites, alone, makes them relatively inaccessible to lower income Indians; as Radhakrisnan notes, English language proficiency in India remains the domain of the middle and upper classes (Radhakrisnan, 2011, p. 43).

This method of determining the consumer is consistent with that used by Kaur in her study of the indigenization of soap in colonial India. She noted that advertisements for soap were in English, in English newspapers. Thus, this commodity was "targeted only this elite segment of Indian society: they were the only section of Indian society able to read these English newspapers, and also the only section which had the disposable income to buy scented oil at the price of Re 1 a phiala – a huge amount at the time" (Kaur, 2010, p. 260).

While it is possible that non-Indian consumers are purchasing these garments, the likelihood that they would seek to amass a large wardrobe of Indian clothes is unlikely. These garments are relatively expensive, and unless a non-Indian is living in India, they would be unlikely to need a regular supply of Indian clothing. As noted above, the co-founder of Jaypore.com started off with a plan to sell Indian products around the world; however, 6 months later, 70% of their business was in India so they shifted their business model (Indiaretailing.com, 2018). Fabindia,

for their part, had a thriving home goods export business throughout the 1980s and 1990s. When market demand shifted, they refocused on the domestic Indian clothing market, with enormous success (Singh, 2012, p. 264).

Why buy online?

Along these lines, a post by a member of the Facebook group Saree Speak is telling:

> …the pipeline that supplies me the sarees, are my sisters. They both live in the United States. They make hurried, hectic visits to India. During their short visits, they do a lot of reckless shopping. Their judgment is often clouded by jet lag and rupee conversions. They fly back and sometimes realize that the sarees they have picked up are either too simple/gaudy for their social functions or unsuitable for their American weather. When they fly back the next year, they bring suitcases filled with sarees, which they want to get rid of and make space for new sarees (Kaur, 2020).

As Kaur's Facebook post illustrates, shopping in India poses several challenges for visitors: short visits, jet lag, currency conversion, and hurried shopping. Added to this is the need to cram in visits to friends and relatives, chores, and a bit of sightseeing. Indeed, even for Indian residents, getting around in urban India has a number of challenges: traffic jams, heat, pollution, pot holes, crowds, and broken sidewalks make commuting, whether to work or for shopping, a challenge (Anantharaman 2017). Therefore, for Indians and members of the Indian diaspora, clothing e-

commerce sites offer the convenience of shopping without the traffic, jet lag, and pollution, with time to carefully consider purchases and avoid unsuitable impulse purchases.

The growth of e-commerce in India can thus be understood within the context of a challenging travel infrastructure and shopping environment. Why leave the comfort of your home when every need, from movie tickets to clothes, can be fulfilled with the few clicks of a button? Indeed, The Boston Consulting Group found that "e-commerce is on the rise amongst urban internet users in India, with nearly half of them now shopping online" (The Boston Consulting Group, as cited by Pandolph 2018). Urban Indians are increasingly connected to the internet, and marketers and shoppers alike, are finding ways to fulfil consumer needs through online shopping. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these trends are only intensifying (Sheth and Unnikrishnan, 2020).

Indian textiles – Regimes of value

Gathering these ideas together, how is the regime of value for Indian textiles created in the minds of the Indian consumer? Based on the case study, I suggest that the following elements make up the regime of value:

1) The education system in India, which teaches the history and values of the Indian independence movement; these values include those of thrift, self - sufficiency, and the importance of domestic industry. This reflects the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated the importance of spinning and production of handloom fabric, *khadi*, as a way to advance Indian independence and livelihoods for craftspeople (Wilkinson 2005).

2) Family members and friends valuing and wearing specific handmade textiles, including heirloom silks, for festivals and life passages. While some may wear these solely to convey social status, in the case of simpler handmade clothes, others do so because it is trendy, or to show allegiance to social causes and support for craftspeople.

3) The Indian government and various state governments, which provide support to entrepreneurs and craftspeople (training, subsidies for supplies), and opportunities for education and consumption of handicrafts (crafts villages, exhibitions, festivals) (e.g., http://handlooms.nic.in/ and https://cauverycrafts.com/).

4) Crafts associations emphasizing "authentic" vs. "fake" handicrafts (e.g., https://www.kanchipuramhandloomsilks.com)

5) Social media: blogs and travel websites that describe where to buy handicrafts and what to buy in certain areas (e.g., https://travelandleisureindia.in/art-and-craft-villages-india/ and https://www.ixigo.com/arts-and-crafts-village-in-india-lp-1475537)

6) Textile revivalist websites (e.g., https://ProjectLoom.in), funded by a clothing store, and www.Utsavpedia.com, which describes a wide range of Indian clothing styles.

7) Media: films depicting Indian women wearing beautiful and expensive Indian clothes like saris and kurta tunics.

8) Bricks-and-mortar stores such as Fabindia, where clerks provide info on the textile or the tags, or particular textile traditions or techniques are highlighted in in-store displays (https://www.fabindia.com/).

Moreover, many e-commerce sites selling Indian handmade clothes (e.g., Utsavpedia, Pure Ghee, Jaypore) use specific terms to describe the products and to refer to the history of Indian textiles, their handmade nature and the benefit of purchasing one of the products. These include: "exquisite imperfections," "handwoven," "handmade," "one of a kind," "India's heritage," reference to specific festivals (Eid, Holi, Diwali, Christmas), "imperfect," "poverty reduction," livelihood for craftspeople, etc.

I contend that these terms and expressions, on these websites, activate the existing "regime of value," that has been built up in the mind of the consumer through the means described above. But how does the regime of value integrate with the regime of technological meaning?

Indian textiles - The regime of technological meaning

Just as a consumer's understanding of the symbolism of Indian textiles is built up through exposure to various social institutions, so too are regimes of technological meaning built up through these same social institutions.

Regimes of technological meaning are revealed when we consider the characteristics of the e-commerce website; the appearance of the Indian textile websites I reviewed all had a "common look and feel," with a banner across the top with a list of categories, and then drop-down menus

with further categories of available products. There are bars of white space on either side, with small photos of each outfit listed down the main display page. One can click on the item to see the available sizes and more details. Photos of the items are generally against a plain background, with a slim, light-skinned and attractive model in 2-4 poses. See *Annex A* for screenshots of selected websites. A full list of websites consulted is listed in *Annex B.*

Sales are advertised with pop-up banners, enticing the consumer to "buy more, save more!" At the very bottom of the main page, one can access information "About Us," along with details on refunds, shipping, privacy, careers, and how to contact customer service. Sometimes there is a blog which profiles certain artisanal products or social enterprises.

The common look and feel of the global-facing websites bear a strong similarity to Western e-commerce sites (e.g., Amazon.com, TheBay.com. See *Annex A* for screenshots). This speaks to the common business training of the global workforce of IT professionals and web developers who build these websites. Radhakrishnan, in her ethnography of transnational Indian IT workers notes that the Indian IT sector is based on an "offshore" outsourcing model. This occurs when companies located in the West (Canada, the United States, Australia, etc.) "relocate specific projects to a team abroad, which completes the work either on a contract basis, or as a subsidiary, branch, or partner of the client firm" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 35). As Radhakrishnan notes, "this model has allowed Indian IT firms to establish partnerships with leading global multinationals" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 35).

However, the offshore outsourcing model only works when the virtual teams all speak "the same language" and use the same IT programs, databases, and so on. The language is English, of course, but it is also a standardized mode of communication and a way of thinking about the work to ensure that "all professionals are operating with similar standards and understandings of the work to be completed. This enforced standardization contributes significantly to the cultivation of a working environment that feels global" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 70).

Indeed, most firms hire "cross-cultural training firms" to work with both the Indian and Western teams to ensure a common understanding and to avoid cultural misunderstandings (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 71). Other aspects of the workplace also bring about this feeling of "global culture" and standardization: gleaming office buildings, air-conditioned offices with rows of grey cubicles, a lunchroom and kitchen. While on the inside, the office could be in California, USA or Bangalore, India – it hardly matters. Radhakrishnan calls this "a cultivated sense of placelessness and insulation in office interiors" (Radhakrishnan, pp. 54-55). Really, one could be anywhere in the world, doing this work.

What makes this omnipresent placelessness so strange is its juxtaposition with handmade Indian textiles. One the one hand, there exists a highly educated IT knowledge worker in her placeless cubicle, typing out globally standardized web coding to create an internet site for an e-commerce site featuring traditional crafts. On the other hand, these Indian handmade fabrics are so unique, geographically specific, ethnically distinct, and so avowedly "low-tech." These fabrics get sold using standardized techniques to reach consumers, and then are packaged in plastic envelopes and sent hurtling across the globe to reach their intended audience. This represents another

interesting socio-technological moment, akin to that stated above, when I described the consumer searching for a product online.

To summarize, regimes of technological meaning are built up in India in the following way (Radhakrishnan, 2011):

1) Through the education system in India, which has a heavy emphasis on science, mathematics, and other STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

2) Parents, particularly of the growing middle class, encouraging children to study engineering and medicine.

3) The Indian government, which established 23 "Indian Institutes for Technology" (IIT) across the country. This was done by the first prime minister of India, Jawarhlal Nehru, to aid India's efforts at industrialization. In 2019 these top-calibre universities admitted nearly 11,000 aspiring engineers (Bhardwaj, 2020).

4) Private industry in India and abroad, providing stable jobs and good salaries to engineers, IT knowledge workers, and Business Process Outsourcing workers (e.g., call industry). The establishment of the IIT system, combine with the legacy of colonialism, has led to a large English-speaking, highly skilled workforce for the growing global IT knowledge industry.

5) Social peer networks of alumni and friends who encourage and assist with studying, entrance exams, finding jobs, etc.

The regime of value for Indian textiles is thus co-constructed with regimes of technological meaning. In addition to this co-construction, the study of e-commerce and Indian textiles reveals the workings of social, economic and cultural capital, and how these are replicated among India's transnational IT knowledge workers.

Social inequality – Capital and technofeminism

As described above, I believe it is useful to theorize online commerce of Indian clothes as a demonstration of bundles of capital. As Bourdieu noted, social, cultural and economic capital all function as markers of social class and group membership. In her study of transnational Indian immigrants in the United States, Sarmistha highlights the importance that they placed upon language, food, clothing, and other markers of Indianness: "An estimated 57% of them accepted wearing the Western attire every day, whereas only 7% of them wore it at least once in a week. Women responded said they wear Indian kurtis and tops to workplace very often" (Sarmistha, 2019, p. 19).

She describes Western attire as a "transitional practice" for this group of Asian Indian professionals "who are staying in the U.S. on a temporary work visa (H1B or L1)" (Sarmistha, 2019, p. 1). As mentioned above, for transnational immigrants and members of the Indian diaspora, it is hard to fit in much clothes shopping during hectic visits "back home." Yet, as Sarmistha notes, wearing Indian clothes is an important aspect of social capital, particularly for

women who are Indian or of Indian heritage; for this reason, online clothes shopping fulfils an important function in enabling the acquisition of Indian clothes.

Another aspect of Bourdieu's theory that has relevance to e-commerce and the IT industry is the way in which education in India perpetuates inequality. As noted above, Bourdieu argued that the education system functions to "legitimate social inequalities which exist prior to its operations" (Storey, 2017, p. 43). This certainly is true for the Indian context. Radhakrishnan's study of Indian transnational IT workers is insightful in teasing out the way in which it is primarily IT workers of a "certain background" who are seen as being the "right kind" of IT worker.

According to Radhakrishnan "almost all of the IT professionals I interviewed claimed to come from "an ordinary middle-class background," but this claim is necessarily suspect because of all that it conceals" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 8). This is because "studies have shown that IT professionals are overwhelmingly urban and upper caste, mostly from families in which the fathers worked at government jobs" (Krishna and Brihmadesam 2006; Upadhya and Vasavi 2006, as cited in Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 8). She adds that:

> With even the most minimal of contextualization, then, we find that Indian IT professionals do not fit easily into prevailing sociological conceptions of "middle class." Rather, in their position at the frontlines of the global economy, they comprise an elite group that identifies with India's

> middle class while also occupying the economic and symbolic cutting edge of the country. Claims to middle-classness also overlook entrenched caste divisions that have historically segregated India's educational system, as well as public life more generally (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 8).

As a result, "most of those who make up what has been dubbed India's "new" middle class had parents who were a part of the "old" one. New industries brought to India by globalization have brought new wealth but have not fundamentally shaken up India's class structure" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 42).

As noted in the theoretical framework, above, Wajcman examines the ways that technology replicates pre-existing social stratification. She states that "digital technologies, like older technologies are malleable and contain contradictory possibilities, but they also reveal continuities of power and exclusion, albeit in new forms" (Wajcman, 2006, p. 717), an almost mirror image of Radhakrishan's quote. In a similar vein, Bourdieu points out that, "those who are acquiring the skills and professional education to become upwardly mobile already possess a significant amount of economic and symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, as cited in Radhakrishnan, 2011, pp. 42-43).

In the IT workplace, this class segregation plays itself out in a symbolic stratification between two tiers of high-tech workers: "the tier occupied by those in the transnational knowledge economy, which includes engineers, graphic designers, and technical writers, and the tier occupied by those in the business processing outsourcing (BPO) industry, which includes call

center workers, medical transcriptionists, and simple data entry positions" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 8). Those working in the knowledge economy make up a cadre that Reich refers to as "symbolic analysts," who are the "most privileged workers in the global economy" (Reich 1991, as cited in Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 35). Radhadrishnan states that "symbolic analytic work includes "problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic-brokering activities" that must compete in a global market and encompasses work ranging from software engineering to public relations" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 35). Respondents in Radhakrishnan's study contrasted this work with BPO work which, they asserted, involves rote call centre scripts and "routine production jobs that require routine coding and maintenance and that do not call for specialized problem-solving skills" (Khadria 2001; Konana and Balasubramanium 2002, as cited in Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 35). This socially constructed division between symbolic analytic work and BPO work is an example of "boundary making," identified by Bijker as a way that scientists assert their status. As he notes, "bodies of scientific advice maintain their scientific authority by continuous boundary work, and not because of some intrinsic institutional characteristic of their institution or of their position between politics and science/technology" (Hilgartner 2000; Bal, Bijker and Hendriks 2002, as cited in Bijker 2006, p. 691).

Due to this symbolic division in status, the respondents in her study maintained that those working in BPO jobs, did not possess the "right background," a coded way of saying their families did not have the necessary middle class or caste credentials. Radhakrishnan noted that "although (BPO work) requires a proficiency with English that very few youth outside India's dominant middle class possess, most middle-class kids consider BPO jobs to be "beneath" them" (Patel 2008,74–75, as cited in Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 43). She adds that "the ability of IT

professionals to question the backgrounds of call center workers speaks in large part to the symbolic privilege of the ethos of the transnational, and all the special distinctions that come with it" (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 43). As can be seen, in India, class privilege does not refer just to wealth; the upper castes, who have historically occupied an elite place in Indian society as priests and government workers (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 8), have moved into the privileged new space of global IT knowledge workers. Class and caste thus reproduce themselves, even in the brave new world of digital technology and online commerce.

To summarize, Radhakrishnan's careful analysis, in line with the work of Bourdieu and Wajcman, succeeds in drawing attention to the social construction of dominant/minority cultures in India's IT sector. This analysis interrogates the "naturalness," of this social order, even when respondents themselves attest to a "middle class" position that is at odds with their actual elevated position in domestic and global hierarchies.

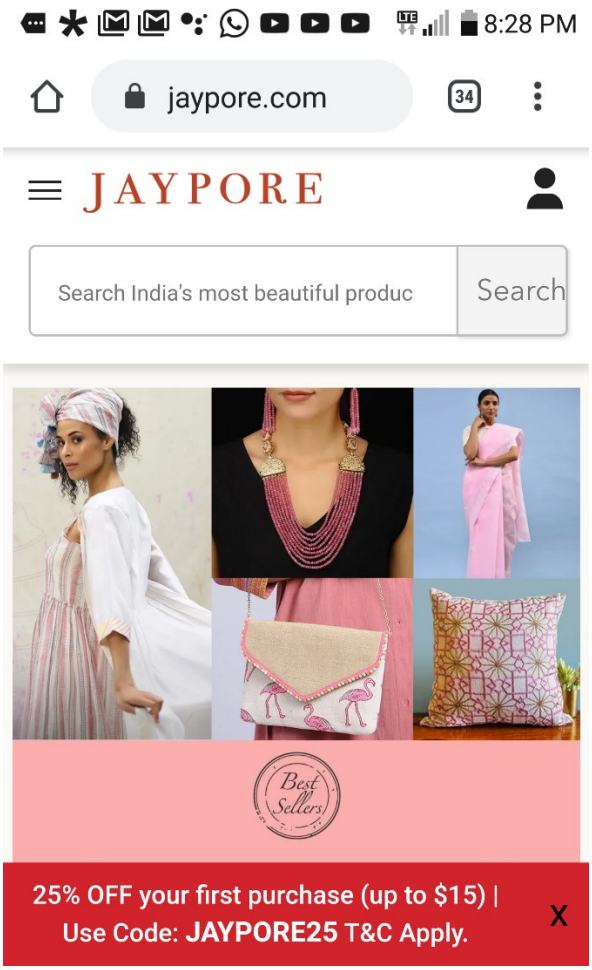
Conclusion

As can be seen from the above text, a commodity as simple as a cotton hand block printed tunic can have a multiplicity of meanings layered upon it. If we add in the mediating influence of new technologies, the meaning pivots and reveals another dimension of society and how it organizes itself. The two parts fit together – lay out the regime of value that gives meaning to the Indian tunic, and then juxtapose it next to the regime of technological meaning that allows the acquisition of this commodity. This method of deconstruction enables a deeper understanding of social relations than just a single treatment of the commodity would have revealed.

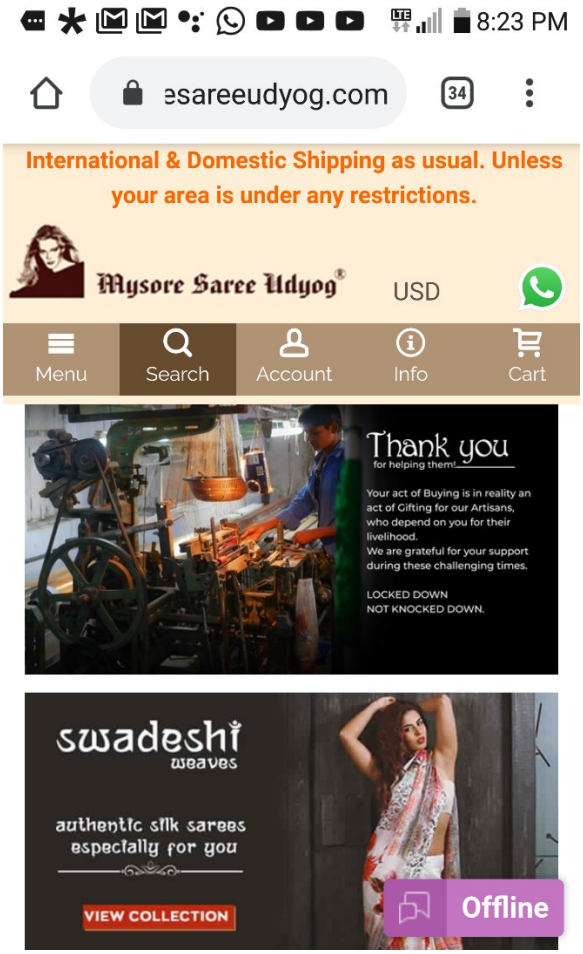
This case study and analysis demonstrates the way that cultural artifacts evolve constantly due to social change, the availability of new forms of technology, and the movement of peoples. By examining the consumption of Indian textiles, we can see the ways in which Indian society itself has changed, with some aspects remaining constant, and others tilting rapidly in time with technological and social changes around the world.

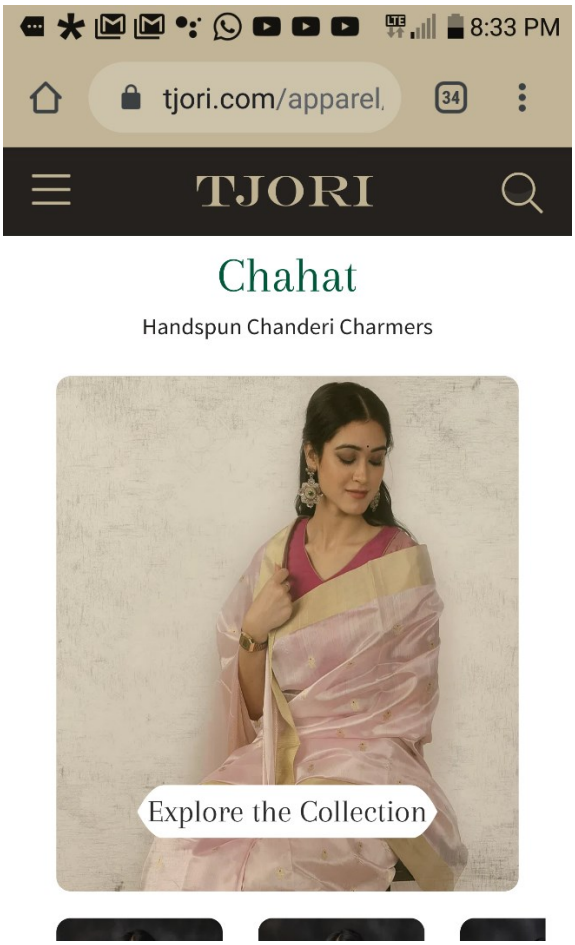
Annex A – Screen shots of selected e-commerce websites

Indian e-commerce websites

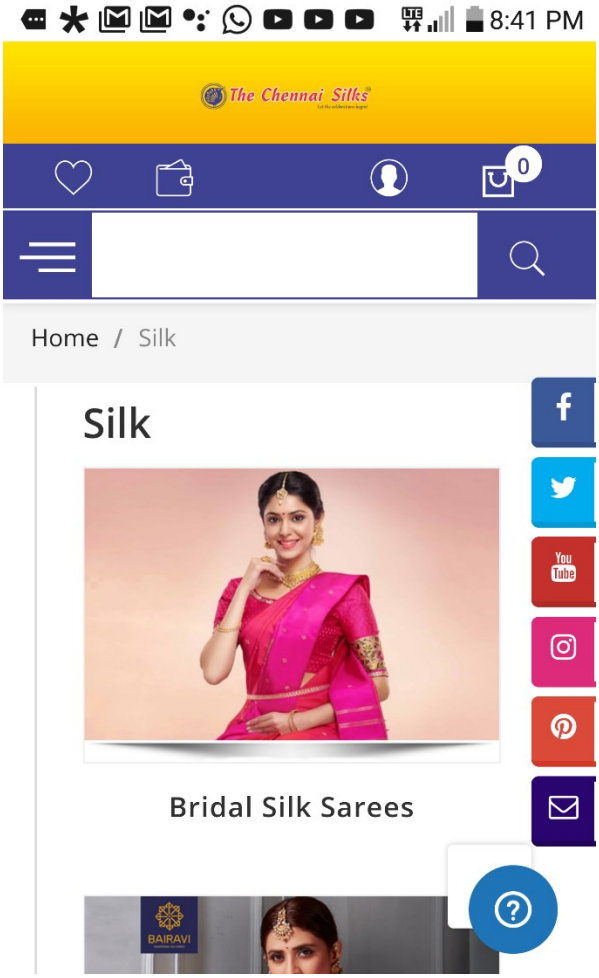


Sources: www.Fabindia.com, www.Jaypore.com. Accessed July 19, 2020



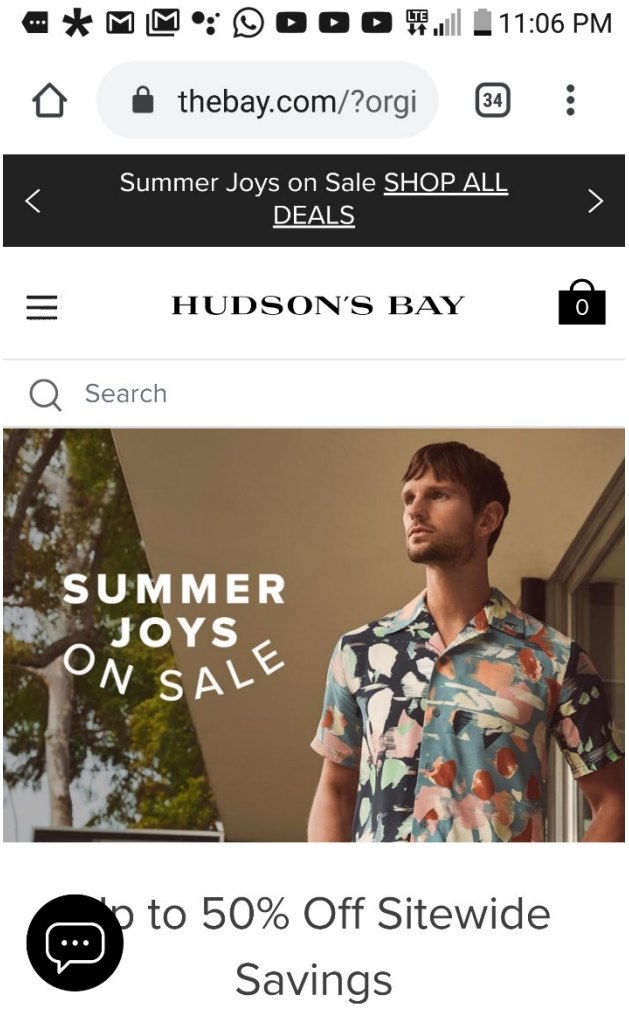


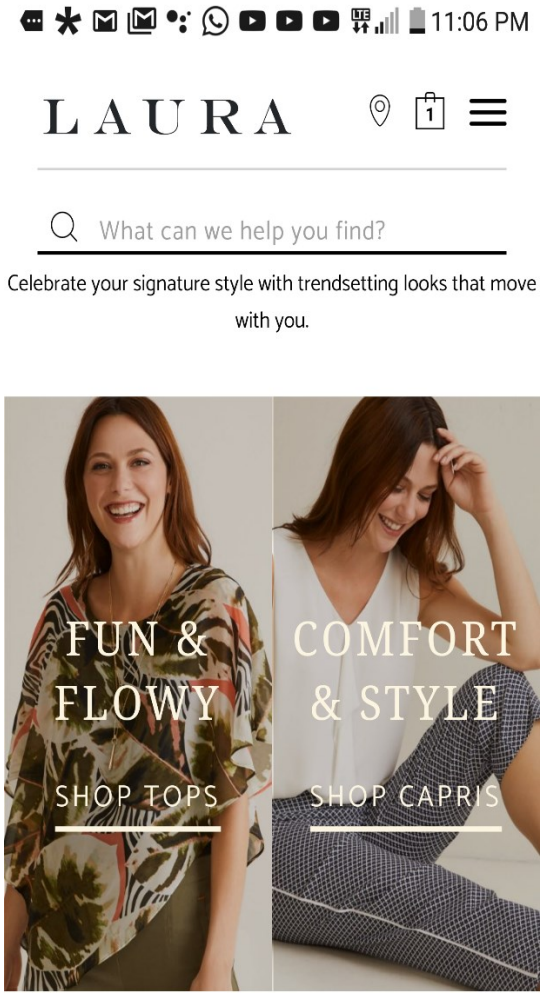
Sources: www.MysoreSareeUdyog.com, www.Tjori.com. Accessed July 19, 2020



Sources: www.iTokri.com, www.theChennaisilks.com Accessed July 19, 2020

Western e-commerce websites





Sources: www.TheBay.com, www.Laura.ca Accessed July 19, 2020

Annex B – Indian textile industry websites consulted

Indian government:

http://handlooms.nic.in

https://cauverycrafts.com

Indian textile:

hwww.anitadongrefoundation.org/

www.Fabindia.com

www.faridagupta.com/

www.iTokri.com

www.Jaypore.com

www.mysoresareeudyog.com/

www.Nalli.com

www.Okhai.org

www.PureGhee.com

www.TheChennaiSilks.com

www.theweddingbrigade.com

www.Tjori.com

Craft industry:

https://www.kanchipuramhandloomsilks.com

https://ProjectLoom.in

www.Utsavpedia.com

Travel and leisure:

https://travelandleisureindia.in/art-and-craft-villages-india

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