

EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND HANDICRAFT ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN KASHMIR VALLEY

Saud Gulzar AHMAD ^{1*}, Mandeep BHARTI ¹, Rohit CHAUHAN ²

¹ Lovely Professional University, School of Hotel Management and Tourism, Phagwara, Punjab, India; saudgulzar786@gmail.com (S.G.A.); mandeepbharti@gmail.com (M.B.)

² Lovely Professional University, Mittal School of Business, Phagwara, Punjab, India; rohitfromhimalaya@outlook.com (R.C.)

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Abstract: The Kashmiri crafts are famous for their unique appeal and richness, which have been a significant contributor to the economy of the region through handicrafts and tourism. This paper examines the relationship between tourism development (TD) and handicraft entrepreneurship (HE), with a special focus on the role of government interventions (GI) as a mediator in the Kashmir Valley. The study used a self-administered questionnaire among tourism stakeholders and handicraft business owners to understand the ground realities. The data obtained was analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to ensure that the results are accurate and reliable. The results show that tourism development does not directly contribute to the growth of handicraft entrepreneurship. Rather, government interventions have been identified as a critical factor in strengthening entrepreneurial performance. GI not only improves the performance of handicraft businesses but also helps to bridge the gap between tourism development and entrepreneurial development. Financial assistance, skill development, market development, and infrastructure development policies of the government have been found to play a decisive role in this regard. The study highlights that unless there is proper government intervention, artisans will continue to be marginalised despite the rising number of tourists. The study, therefore, emphasises the need for continuous government support in terms of financing, marketing, and training.

Keywords: tourism development, handicraft entrepreneurship, government initiatives, Kashmir Valley, tourism activities, local artisans

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INTRODUCTION

Known for its scenic backdrop, the Kashmir Valley is also renowned for its rich tradition of weaving and designing handicrafts. Deeply rooted in local culture, these artisans represent both a livelihood and heritage for many residents. Irrespective of having economic growth potential with both handicrafts and tourism, Kashmir is still underexplored in empirical domains, especially when it is susceptible to cross-border conflicts.

Kashmir Valley is not just famous for the spectacular scenery created by nature itself. It is also famous for unique and authentic handicrafts, which are world-famous, attracting a massive footfall of tourists from India and across the world. Kashmiri handicrafts are well-regarded for their raw beauty and richness. They are known for their art, quality, and design. Irrespective of the rising impact of mechanisation and modernity, Kashmiri artisans still get global acclaim for their handmade artefacts and artistry. Kashmir is rich in natural beauty, diverse traditions, colours, festivals, religions, languages, and fragrances. Traditional Kashmiri crafts are renowned for their dignity, form, beauty, and style (Manhas et al., 2021).

The handicrafts of Kashmir stand out with their beauty and richness. Carpets, wooden carvings, paper-machine items, and shawls have sustained their old-world charm over the past centuries. Kashmiri crafts are deeply ingrained in the socio-economic character of the locals. The rich culture and crafts are deeply rooted in the soul of Jammu and Kashmir.

These crafts reflect their landscape, history, and way of life in equal measure. The remoteness of the Ladakh region, the ethereal and rawness of the Kashmir Valley, and the rich culture of Jammu make a lovely blend of diversity in the state (Manhas et al., 2021). Tourism has been well-regarded as an element for significant economic growth. It has been a growth engine for many states in India (Zhuang et al., 2019; Pavlić et al., 2020).

Tourism has witnessed expansion driven by economic growth, with great potential and reduced localised disparities (Alrwajfah et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016). There are adverse effects of tourism, such as a rise in drug use and crime rate, damage to nature, and a rise in traffic jams in some areas (Giannoni, 2009; Látková & Vogt, 2012). There are diverse effects of the development of tourism on local communities to attract tourists (Sharpley, 2014).

However, there is a significant impact of tourism on the environment, the economy of the local community, and the lifestyle of locals (Pavlić et al., 2020; Kuščer & Mihalić, 2019). Tourism has provided many benefits to the state, like

* Corresponding author

employment generation, reducing poverty, environmental conservation, and the growth of fun and amusement attractions (Alrwajfah et al., 2019). There are also adverse effects of the relationship between the local community and tourism, such as high cost of living, drug use, crime, etc., due to drastic cultural shifts and decline of the local environment (McCool & Martin, 1994D). With the development of tourism, there are both pros and cons for host communities (Sharpley, 2014). Residents are well-regarded as the foundation of strategies for tourism growth (Sharpley, 2014). If the benefits of tourism development overshadow the problems for local communities, they are more likely to support the growth of tourism (Lawson et al., 1998). With these arguments, this study examines the impact of tourism development on handicraft entrepreneurship, while focusing on the mediating role played by government initiatives. With a unique socio-political environment, this study provides nuanced knowledge of local entrepreneurship activity and tourism-based demand.

Theoretical Background

There are two factors adopted in theories to discover people's attitudes for tourism development – "community dependence" (which focuses on the community's role in fun activities) and "community identity" (which means the association of residents with a particular community) (Lee, 2013; Dyer et al., 2007). According to Dyer et al. (2007) and Kyle et al. (2005), community effect and cultural ownership have added elements of community attachment.

It is constantly evaluated as a level of connection between the community and people. Interactions with the community are more than just affected by additional appearance. They are also affected by perceptions, commitment, understanding, and appreciation of a specific community (Wang & Chen, 2015). On the other hand, it is expected that individuals with robust ties to society will exhibit more positive attitudes toward tourism development compared to those with weak social connections (Styliidis, 2018). Residents feel the level of satisfaction towards tourism, and they are more willing to support its growth due to their dedication, connection, and engagement with the community (Patwardhan et al., 2020).

Among residents, the overall concept of engagement with the community was measured with identity, dependency, and emotion of people (Ganji et al., 2021). It has been observed that people's perceptions of the value of tourism can affect the relationship between community image, attachment, and tourism support (Blešić et al., 2022). Adding to the previous studies, Lalicic & Garaus (2022) investigated the attachment to the place as a complex matter with two components – location and dependence on place. Community awareness is a new component, which includes dependence on place and location as its two major elements (Pramanik & Rahman, 2023). According to the findings, each element had a substantial positive impact on people's perception of its benefits, which ultimately had a positive effect on their support for sustainable development. The dedication of the community has a significant and positive effect on sustainable tourism (Orgaz-Agüera et al., 2022).

The sense of place of the person affects the way tourism development is ensured, particularly in terms of its use of natural resources. On the other hand, those who feel more firmly linked with their local community will support the growth of tourism, which boosts the local economy. There is a significant effect of contact between tourists and residents on unique experiences of both groups, either negatively or positively (Kastenholz et al., 2013; Luo et al., 2015). Tourist contact is the concept defined in different ways. Tourist contact refers to the "special interaction between a host and a tourist" (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Tourist destinations usually cover ordinary, brief, fleeting, and uneven contacts among residents and visitors, with implications for both tourists and residents (Kastenholz et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, there are opportunities available for interaction to promote exchange among hosts and visitors (Eusébio & Carneiro, 2012). Proper interaction can reduce ethnic biases, conflict among both parties, stereotypes, and encourage deeper association and knowledge among them (Luo et al., 2015). Fan et al. (2023) used a "mixed-method approach" to investigate the relation between cultural contact, social distance, and travel sentiments. Social contact has had a mediating role in this relation. In addition, it is observed that perceived cultural distance and travel behaviour are interlinked with a "contact elastic" association (Pool & Imankhan, 2017). There exists an inconsistent effect of cultural distance on tourism behaviour.

According to Kim et al. (2023), the perception of residents towards tourists as partners results in higher satisfaction and a greater likelihood of maintaining a long-term relationship. Findings of the study highlighted residents' role in determining their engagement with visitors and how they are inclined to welcome more tourists in future. Different external situations affect the growth of tourism, which have an indirect or direct relation with residents' attitudes (Sharpley, 2014).

There is a vast complexity of factors affecting the views of residents towards tourism growth. For instance, many tourism scholars have focused on economic reliance on tourism development and the effects of the industry. The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the sense of place, community attachment, and entrepreneurial environment. Prior studies suggest that dependence influence and community identity have an impact on attitudes toward tourism (Kim et al., 2023). Governance and effectiveness of state government are major contributors to these factors. Hence, this study is based on government initiatives as a mediator to promote entrepreneurial engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship between tourism development and handicrafts entrepreneurship

There is a robust, symbiotic relation between handicrafts entrepreneurship and tourism development, as observed in previous studies (Pool & Imankhan, 2017; Kim et al., 2023). Each sector plays a vital role in supporting the other. Tourism creates a significant market for increasing demand for handicrafts by providing a platform to showcase the works of artisans and enhancing their income. Handicrafts play a vital role in tourism by providing souvenirs, adding cultural value, and attracting more tourists who explore artistry and local traditions. This relationship is mutually beneficial to preserve culture, economic growth, and community development. In any tourist destination, handicraft entrepreneurship plays the most important part in enhancing the overall experience of tourists. Handicrafts are appealing to tourists as they love to

invest in crafts that have symbolic meaning as souvenirs. Handicrafts are something tourists take to their homeland as a memory of the places they explored. Handicraft manufacturing can also create jobs for local artisans as their source of income. They also increase earnings with foreign exchange when foreign tourists buy them (Nzei, 2024).

Tourism has been well-regarded as a source for conservation of culture and local economic growth (Zhuang et al., 2019). As concrete cultural expressions, handicrafts have the plus point of tourist demand with global exposure and higher sales (Kim et al., 2023). However, the relationship between economic growth and tourism development in Kashmir is not straightforward. Artisans find it hard to grow with the rise of tourism without policy support and infrastructure in other destinations like Bali and Rajasthan. In Morocco, handicrafts play a vital role in the tourism economy under "Handicraft Vision 2025". In Marrakech and Fez, government-sponsored projects have promoted market access for artisans through online promotion and branding, resulting in a 25% increase in sales to foreign tourists (Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts, and Social and Solidarity Economy; Morocco, 2023). In Nepal, traditional pottery and woodcarving have been promoted by the "Tourism for Rural Livelihoods Programme (TRLP)" by enhancing access to eco-tourism circuits for artisans. This program has improved cultural experiences for tourists and income for artisans (Baniya & Thapa, 2022).

In Thailand, handicrafts play a vital role in the tourism economy, supported by digital marketing, skill training, and government-operated exhibitions under the "One Tambon, One Project (OTOP)" program. Regions where cultural tourism is well promoted, such as Chiang Mai, experienced a 40% rise in revenue from crafts (Suntikul & Pratt, 2021). The Cusco region in Peru is the prime example of holistic growth of heritage tourism and handicrafts. Through partnerships between the government and UNESCO, local artisans are seeking training in product design to meet the demands of foreign tourists while preserving their local culture. It has drastically improved both the lives of artisans and tourism (Igreja et al., 2025).

Relationship between handicrafts entrepreneurship and government initiatives

The handicraft sector can produce many entrepreneurs with its potential in this age of globalisation. The handicraft industry generates numerous jobs but also faces numerous challenges, including government priorities, production, sourcing of raw materials, and income stability. Due to these issues, the rural workforce may migrate to urban environments, and local industries may decline. There is a mismatch between the recipients and the programs available, despite the existing government initiatives. In the bibliometric mapping of the knowledge base, Trip et al. (2021) highlight that sustainable entrepreneurship in the tourism sector is largely influenced by institutional and policy frameworks, which are imperative for creating enabling conditions to facilitate innovative and responsible entrepreneurial practices. The study reveals that there are clusters where policy-related issues are considered pivotal drivers, thereby confirming that appropriate governmental and policy interventions are imperative for creating a favourable environment to facilitate the long-term entrepreneurial viability of the tourism sector and other related sectors (such as cultural/heritage-based sectors). Additionally, the study has outlined the research gaps in the application of policy mechanisms and implementation, thereby implying the need for better coordination among policymakers, institutions, and stakeholders to eliminate inconsistencies and further strengthen the systemic support for sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes (Trip et al., 2021). Policies promoting training, financial support, and marketing platforms to promote the sustainability of the business and control market failures (Chatterjee & Das, 2016).

Relationship between government initiatives and tourism development

The Government of India has taken various measures for tourism development. There has been a rise in foot traffic among tourists, but the country's share of global tourism remains low. The World Economic Forum has provided in-depth insights into the factors for improving India and areas that require attention, according to the "Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index Report". Government agencies have claimed that India has been a global destination for tourism.

Tourism has grown significantly in India over the years, and it remains to be seen whether it can compete with leading performers, among other factors (Mishra et al., 2021). Effective governance is crucial for transforming the potential of tourism into regional growth. India has a significant scope for improving institutional and infrastructural coordination (Mishra et al., 2021). Hence, policymaking should be inclusive, adaptive and grounded.

Research Gap

Kashmir has considerable potential, with its ever-growing tourism and handicraft industries. A significant research gap remains, as many studies have focused on handicraft manufacturing and tourism growth. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence in the context of the Kashmir Valley. Many studies either focus on entrepreneurship or handicrafts or neglect the importance of government initiatives to fill those gaps. Hence, it is imperative to know the role of tourism in handicraft entrepreneurial activities and how supportive government policies can enhance this relationship.

Objectives of the study

- To determine the impact of "tourism development on handicraft entrepreneurship" in the Kashmir Valley
- To find out how government initiatives mediate the relationship between "tourism development and handicraft entrepreneurship"
- To determine the impact of "government initiatives on handicraft entrepreneurship"

Research Framework

Figure 1 illustrates a research framework that defines a hypothetical relation between handicraft entrepreneurship (dependent variable), tourism development (independent variable), and government initiatives (mediator variable).

It is grounded on the belief that there is a rise in opportunities generated by tourism for local artisans.

However, this impact is drastically affected by the efficiency and availability of government initiatives. Government initiatives act as a mediator, like training, subsidies, and market promotion.

These catalysts boost the relationship between entrepreneurial growth and tourism. The empirical relation between both indirect and direct effects provides in-depth insights into the phenomenon.

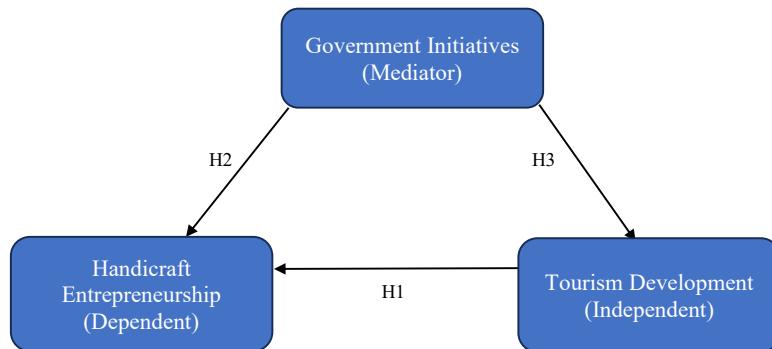


Figure 1. Research Framework for the study

Hypotheses

H1 – There is a significant and positive impact of tourism development on handicraft entrepreneurship

H01 – There is no impact of tourism development on handicraft entrepreneurship

H2 – There is a significant and positive impact of government initiatives on handicraft entrepreneurship

H02 – There is no impact of government initiatives on handicraft entrepreneurship

H3 – Government initiatives mediate the relationship between tourism development and handicraft entrepreneurship

H03 – There is no mediation impact of government initiatives on the relationship between tourism development and handicraft entrepreneurship

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of this study is an essential component as it offers an in-depth roadmap for data collection, research approach, and hypothesis development. In this study, we have adopted a quantitative approach to determine the complex relation between "tourism development and handicraft entrepreneurship" and the mediating role played by government initiatives in the Kashmir Valley. This study employs a causal and exploratory research design to examine the current state of handicraft entrepreneurship and tourism development. A causal design enables the testing of both indirect and direct relationships among the independent and dependent variables. We have conducted a cross-sectional survey to collect primary data. The research design is adopted to test various hypotheses to identify associations among variables. Research Approach To fulfil the objectives of this study, a deductive approach has been adopted, which formulates a theoretical framework and hypotheses, followed by an empirical survey and analysis with collected data. This study ensures consistency in responses for data analysis with the use of a structured questionnaire.

In this study, the target population consists of Handicraft manufacturers – These people include woodcarvers, weavers, and artisans, tour operators – this group includes hoteliers, travel agents, and tour guides, Government officials engaged in craft or tourism and Locals who are directly involved in tourism and handicraft businesses.

When it comes to the sample area, data was collected from various tourist destinations and artisan hotspots like Baramulla, Srinagar, and Anantnag. When it comes to sampling technique, this study employs purposive sampling, as it aims to gather data from individuals engaged in the handicraft or tourism sectors. Participants should have at least one year of experience in their field for the validity and reliability of responses. This survey has a targeted sample size of up to 300 participants, which is sufficient for inferential analysis like mediation. We have collected a total of 300 responses from three prime tourist destinations in Kashmir: Baramulla (100 responses), Srinagar (100 responses), and Anantnag (100 responses). A self-structured questionnaire is used to collect primary data. It is split into the following sections containing **Demographics** – This section is used to collect background information like gender, age, education, experience, occupation, etc., **Tourism development** – This variable will measure participants' perceptions related to the impact of tourism and growth in the region, **Government initiatives** – It determines the reach of government support and policies, effectiveness, and visibility, **Handicraft entrepreneurship** – It focuses on business growth, market access, and the behaviours of entrepreneurs. Variables such as tourism development, government initiatives, and handicraft entrepreneurship are measured using a Likert scale to determine the level of participants' perceptions.

Items and Construct

Table 1 presents the items of variables tourism development, government initiatives, and handicraft entrepreneurship, along with their references. To ensure the validity of responses, we have designed a single questionnaire based on a literature review related to entrepreneurship and tourism growth. For reliability, we have tested the questionnaire items using Cronbach's Alpha test in PLS SEM software. For each variable (Government Initiatives, Tourism Development, and Handicraft Entrepreneurship), a threshold value of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable to ensure consistency of responses.

Table 1. Questionnaire Items and References

Tourism Development (Independent variable)	Reference
Economic growth	
Tourism has led to the rise of job opportunities for residents	Lone & Ravi (2023)
Tourism development has improved financial incentives for local artisans	Manhas et al. (2022)
Tourism plays a vital role in improving my annual income	Mitchell & Ashley (2010)
Quality of Life	
The income and living standards of artisans have been improved	Gulzar et al. (2019)
Handicrafts are in high demand by tourists.	
Quality of life has been improved.	
Market Access	
Demand for local handicrafts has increased.	Hall & Mitchell (2005); UNWTO (2015)
The tourism industry promotes traditional crafts among foreign and Indian tourists.	
Artisans can promote handicrafts to other regions due to infrastructure development.	
Tourism-based events	
Local fairs and festivals are helpful for artisans and tourists	Getz (2008)
The income source has increased from selling handicrafts to tourists.	
Local events revived the business of local artisans.	
Business Opportunities	
Tour operators promote handicrafts through their packages	Thomas et al. (2011); Hjalager (2010)
Tour agencies have indirectly increased sales by promoting local crafts.	
Artisans are making more profits by making and selling handicrafts.	
Handicraft Entrepreneurship (Dependent variable)	
Innovation	
I have added innovative designs to my crafts	Zahra & Wright (2011)
Kashmiri handicrafts blend modernity and traditional designs.	
Artisans have adopted innovative practices like collaborating with digital platforms to increase sales.	
Business growth	
I have expanded my business over the past few years	Rogerson (2004); Shane (2003)
I feel confident about growing and sustaining my business.	
I am working with other artisans to expand my business.	
Increase in sales	
I could increase sales through both online and offline modes	Nambisan (2017)
I promote products through digital platforms or social media.	Tiago & Veríssimo (2014)
I engage in craft fairs and local exhibitions regularly	Richards (2007)
Government Initiatives (Mediator variable)	
Financial Support	
Artisans get financial support or subsidies from the state government	Sharma (2021)
I get timely updates about funding options and new finance schemes	Majeed et al. (2023)
Government training programs have been beneficial to me	Majeed et al. (2023)
Awareness and Inclusion	
The government has also introduced awareness programs about their schemes.	Hajam et al. (2024); Najar et al. (2020)
The government never make policy changes or decisions without consulting artisans.	
The J&K administration has been successful in supporting local artisans with skill development.	
Ease of Doing Business	
Registration has been easier and more convenient for artisan benefits	Majeed et al. (2023)
It has been easier to monitor and evaluate government schemes	Hajam et al. (2024)
I have expanded my business due to government initiatives	Chatterjee & Das (2016)

Due to the accessibility of participants, data were collected through an online mode. A Google Form has been shared for smartphone and other digital device users and urban clusters. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before data collection, ensuring that their responses remained anonymous and confidential. PLS SEM tool will be used for data collection for performing the following statistical tests – For descriptive statistics, demographic data will be analysed along with scale-based items, Cronbach's Alpha test would be conducted to test the internal consistency of responses, Linear Regression Analysis would be conducted to test the impact of tourism development on government initiatives and handicraft entrepreneurship (H1 and H2) and Mediation analysis would be conducted to find the mediation effect of government initiatives on the relationship between handicraft entrepreneurship and tourism development

Ethical Considerations

In this study, participants have been informed about the purpose of this research, their freedom to participate, and their choice to withdraw at any point in time. They will be assured that their data will be used entirely for research purposes and their confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

There are 93 (31%) participants who are 25 to 34 years old, 79 (26%) participants are 35 to 44 years old, 34 (11%) participants are 45 to 54 years old, 77 (26%) participants are below 25 years old, and 17 (6%) participants are above 55 years old (Figure 2). The

majority of participants in this study are male. There are 216 (72%) participants who are male, and 84 (28%) participants are female in this study (Figure 3). When it comes to academic qualification, 142 (47%) participants are graduates, 85 (28%) participants are post-graduates, 37 (12%) participants have completed 10th to 12th class education, and 19 (6%) participants are doctorates. Only 17 (6%) participants have not completed their high school education (Figure 4). When it comes to occupation of participants, 59 (20%) participants are artisans, 35 (12%) participants are government officers, 51 (17%) participants are hotel/resort staff, 70 (23%) participants are self-employed, 24 (8%) participants are tour operators, and 61 (20%) participants are employed in other professions (Figure 5). When it comes to experience of participants, 60 (20%) participants have 1 to 3 years of work experience, 70 (23%) participants have 4 to 6 years of work experience, 72 (24%) participants have been working for 7 to 10 years, 67 (22%) participants have less than 1 year of experience, and 31 (10%) participants have more than 10 years of experience. (Figure 6).

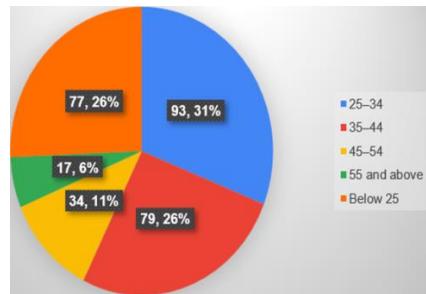


Figure 2. Age Group of Respondents

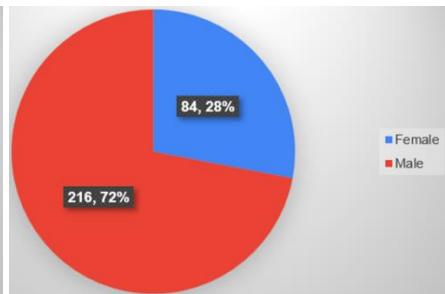


Figure 3. Gender of Participant

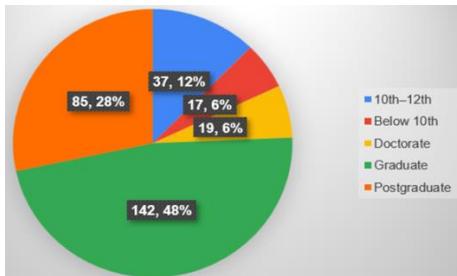


Figure 4. Academic Qualification

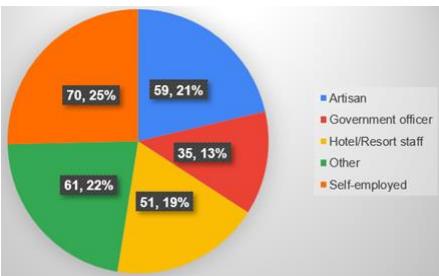


Figure 5. Occupation of participants

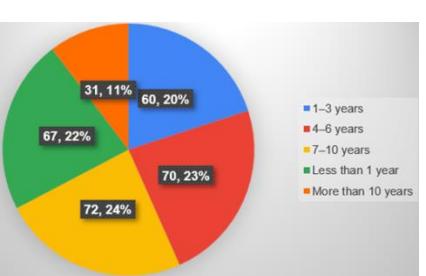


Figure 6. Work experience of participants

Tourism Development (Independent variable)

For Tourism Development, descriptive statistics were conducted to reveal favourable perceptions among participants. This variable included 15 items with mean scores ranging from 3.14 to 4.31, while the majority of items scored above 3.5. It suggested moderate or overall agreement associated with tourism growth. In TD7, the highest mean was observed, i.e., 4.25, along with TD10 (4.31). It shows robust support for some aspects of tourism.

On the other hand, the lowest mean for TD was observed (3.14) with the highest SD (1.327). It shows higher variability in perceptions related to a specific item. Median values have constantly demonstrated central tendency (4.00) for agreeing with certain opinions, while SD from 1.327 to 0.819 indicates moderate variability in responses. Participants usually perceive TD positively, though greater variability is exhibited by some items (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Tourism Development

Name	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Tourism has led to the rise of job opportunities for residents (TD1)	3.890	4.000	1.232
Tourism development has improved financial incentives for local artisans (TD2)	3.770	4.000	0.835
Tourism plays a vital role in improving my annual income (TD3)	3.140	3.000	1.327
Income and living standards of artisans have been improved (TD4)	4.130	4.000	0.976
Handicrafts are in high demand by tourists (TD5)	3.680	4.000	0.958
Quality of life has been improved (TD6)	3.630	4.000	1.222
Demand for local handicrafts has increased (TD7)	4.250	5.000	1.004
Tourism industry promotes traditional crafts among foreign and Indian tourists (TD8)	3.900	4.000	0.819
Artisans can promote handicrafts to other regions due to infrastructure development (TD9)	3.820	4.000	1.161
Local fairs and festivals are helpful for artisans and tourists (TD10)	4.310	5.000	0.945
The income source has increased by selling handicrafts to tourists (TD11)	3.900	4.000	0.843
Local events revived the business of local artisans (TD12)	3.840	4.000	1.111
Tour operators promote handicrafts through their packages (TD13)	4.170	5.000	1.059
Tour agencies have indirectly increased sales by promoting local crafts (TD14)	3.870	4.000	0.844
Artisans are making more profits by making and selling handicrafts (TD15)	3.830	4.000	1.068

Handicraft Entrepreneurship (Dependent variable)

On HE, the responses have indicated positive perceptions with a Mean value (3.51 to 4.24). The highest average scores were recorded in HE1 and HE10, suggesting strong authorisation of entrepreneurship. The lowest mean was observed by

HE11, i.e., 3.51, though it still shows moderate agreement. For all items, the median was stable at 4.00 and 5.00. The value of SD was varying from 0.91 to 1.161, indicating moderate dispersion. Participants have supported the growth and development of HE, with consistent agreement (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Handicraft Entrepreneurship (HE)

Name	Mean	Median	Std. deviation
I have added innovative designs to my crafts (HE1)	4.180	5.000	1.108
Kashmiri handicrafts blend modernity and traditional designs (HE2)	3.850	4.000	0.910
Artisans have adopted innovative practices like collaborating with digital platforms to increase sales (HE3)	3.930	4.000	1.107
I have expanded my business over the past few years (HE4)	4.050	4.000	1.161
I feel confident about growing and sustaining my business (HE5)	3.770	4.000	1.047
I am working with other artisans to expand my business (HE6)	3.750	4.000	1.143
I could increase sales through both online and offline modes (HE7)	4.210	4.000	0.962
I promote products through digital platforms or social media (HE8)	3.820	4.000	1.081
I engage in craft fairs and local exhibitions regularly (HE9)	3.600	4.000	1.149

Government Initiatives (Mediator variable)

When it comes to Government Initiatives (GI), responses showed higher mean values to some extent in comparison to other items, with mean values from 3.61 to 4.37. In GI4, the highest mean score is observed (4.37), with a low SD of 0.783. It suggests a positive perception of this initiative. With a median of 4.00 to 5.00, all items show central tendency for agreement. While government initiatives show positive perceptions, more diverse opinions are observed in some aspects. Overall, participants have demonstrated favourable views related to regulatory support, which may promote both handicraft entrepreneurship and tourism development (Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Government Initiatives (GI)

Name	Mean	Median	Std. deviation
Artisans get financial support or subsidies from the state government (GI1)	4.240	5.000	0.950
I get timely updates about funding options and new finance schemes (GI2)	3.510	4.000	0.995
Government training programs have been beneficial to me (GI3)	3.850	4.000	1.178
The government has also introduced awareness programs about their schemes (GI4)	4.370	5.000	0.783
The government never make policy changes or decisions without consulting artisans (GI5)	3.740	4.000	1.006
The J&K administration has been successful in supporting local artisans with skill development (GI6)	3.760	4.000	1.209
Registration has been easier and more convenient for artisan benefits (GI7)	4.050	4.000	1.023
It has been easier to monitor and evaluate government schemes (GI8)	3.630	4.000	1.055
I have expanded my business due to government initiatives (GI9)	3.610	4.000	1.256

Hypotheses Testing

When it comes to reliability testing, Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted using PLS-SEM software before hypothesis testing. Cronbach's Alpha value equal to or above 0.7 is usually considered acceptable. When it comes to GI and HE, Cronbach's Alpha value was above 0.7, while it was 0.668 for tourism development (slightly below the threshold). However, the values of 0.6 and 0.7 are acceptable when exploratory research is conducted (Figure 7).

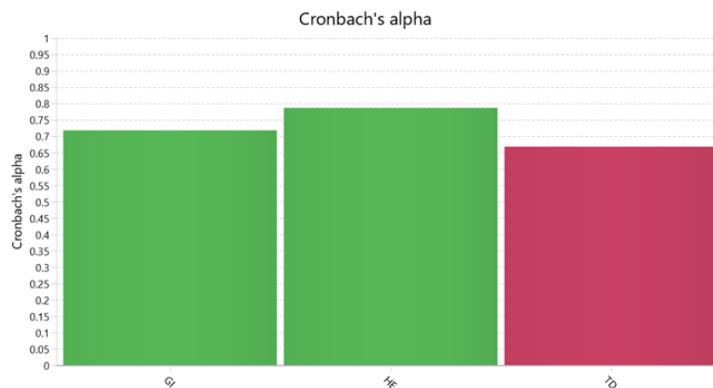


Figure 7. Cronbach's Alpha results on TD, GI, and HE

H1 - There is a significant and positive impact of tourism development on handicraft entrepreneurship

On the path of Tourism Development (TD) → Handicraft Entrepreneurship (HE), the structural model suggests a weak direct relationship with the positive coefficient of 0.138 (Figure 8). However, a non-significant result was observed in bootstrapping ($p > 0.05$) with maximum indicators at the item level, which showed non-significant loadings. It suggests that there is no direct and statistically significant impact of TD on HE. Even though tourism generates consumer demand and opportunities for artisans, there is still a lack of sufficient statistical support for H1. The findings of this study are aligned with previous studies related to complex entrepreneurship development, where tourism is not

the only driver for robust entrepreneurial growth. It needs enabling factors, such as funding, infrastructure support and skill development (Deller et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2021).

H2 – There is a significant and positive impact of government initiatives on handicraft entrepreneurship

There is a moderate path coefficient of 0.691 from GI to HE, which suggests a strong hypothetical relationship (Figure 8), while bootstrapping findings show a significant p-value of 0.000, which suggests a significant relationship. The government often introduces policies to support and regulate sustainable practices in response to the growth of tourism. However, actual effectiveness and implementation vary significantly as per governance, political will, and allocation of resources, even though tourism development may seek the attention of policymakers.

H3 – Government initiatives mediate the relationship between tourism development and handicraft entrepreneurship

When testing the third hypothesis, it is found that GI positively influences HE (0.691) on the path from Government Initiatives (GI) → Handicraft Entrepreneurship (HE). This effect is reported by the bootstrapping model as significant ($p < 0.05$) (Figure 9). It again shows a theoretical relationship, not giving significant results. Mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrapping. Previous studies have observed that inefficiencies and gaps in implementation often undervalue their impact, even though government programs are aimed at empowering entrepreneurs, including training, microfinance, and infrastructure development (Morrison, 2006). While a meaningful relationship was observed in the structural path, policy and actual implementation could be different. While there was no direct effect of tourism development on entrepreneurship, this study has observed indirect effects of government initiatives. Findings of this study align with the criteria of Baron & Kenny's (1986) framework, which is again consistent with guidelines related to PLS-SEM mediation (Hair et al., 2021).

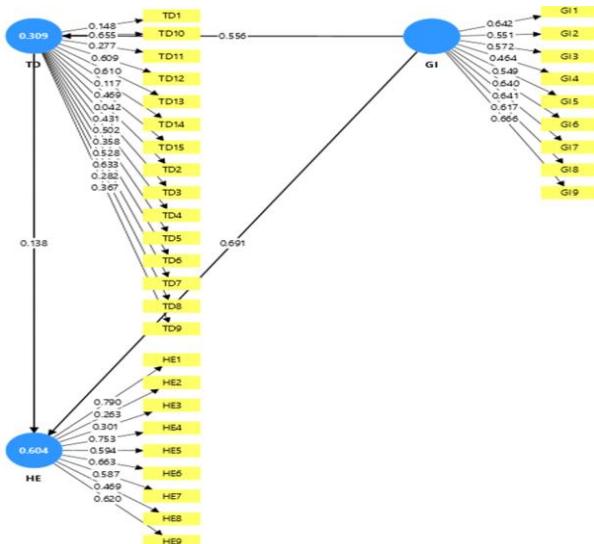


Figure 8. Linear Regression Analysis for TD, HE, and GI

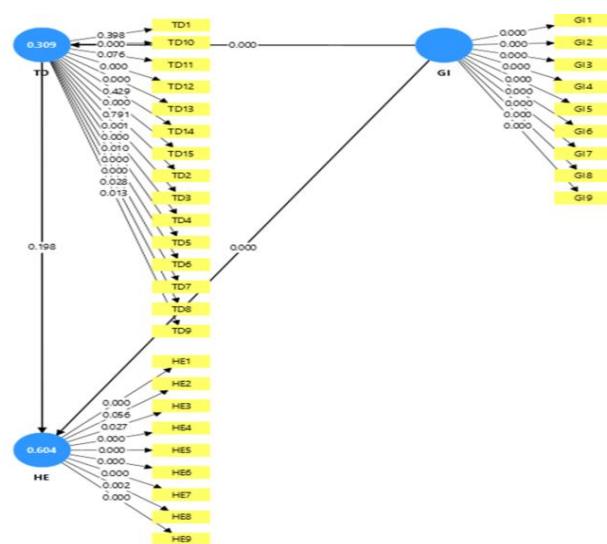


Figure 9. Bootstrapping Results between Variables

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to determine the influence of tourism development (TD) on handicraft entrepreneurship (HE) in Kashmir and whether government initiatives (GI) mediate the relationship between TD and HE. Data was collected from a sample of 300 local artisans and tourism stakeholders. With the PLS-SEM structural test, a non-significant relationship is observed between tourism development and handicraft entrepreneurship (H1). At the same time, there was a stronger relationship between government initiative and handicraft entrepreneurship (H2). However, government initiatives fully mediate the relationship between TD and HE. Mean scores for TD ($M = 3.14$ to 4.31) signal positive perception of participants towards tourist inflows, tourism infrastructure, and destination marketing. The highest approval was recorded for items related to visible improvements, such as promotional campaigns and road connectivity. Many artisans have observed tangible benefits of tourism development in this study, while others have concerns over the post-conflict recovery of tourism in Kashmir (Sharma, 2025).

When it comes to handicraft entrepreneurship, this study has observed relatively positive responses with high means (3.51 to 4.24) and medians (4-5). The respondents observed proactive adaptation and willingness to meet tourism demand. However, there is a lack of shared commitment towards entrepreneurship (with narrow SD 0.91-1.16) and persistent gaps in capability building (like digital marketing) that NGO initiatives and the government should fill. Finally, participants value government initiatives (with higher means of 3.61-4.37). However, there is a lack of awareness among participants about some programs. Further qualitative evidence is needed to find out any possible wage or gender disparities in policymaking (Dristi IAS, 2024). When it comes to testing the quality of the measurement model, Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted using the PLS-SEM tool. The value for GI was 0.718, and HE was 0.787, which easily surpassed the threshold of 0.70, but it was slightly short for TD (0.668). This survey fails to prove a direct and significant influence on HE ($p = 0.116$) and accepts H01. The craft sector in Kashmir has constantly faced competition from artificial imitations, which have dampened the marginal benefits for artisans due to heavy tourist flow. In addition, security conflicts have consistently reduced demand, forcing artisans to diversify their sources of income, such as wage labour or farming. Finally, there is also a lack of design innovations and digital reach for entrepreneurs to monetise the flow of tourists fully. Tourism grows only when the local supply market, finance, training, and knowledge grow (Andrade-Valbuena et al., 2022).

On the other side, H2 is strongly supported ($p < 0.001$), which means government initiatives have a direct influence on entrepreneurial gains, probably because of easy loans, capacity-building workshops, or branding platforms in rural projects (Times of India, 2025). Government schemes also lift entrepreneurial performance and orientation in small and medium enterprises. Those interventions at the sensitive zones level the playing field and buffer existential shocks for artisans (Prasannath et al., 2024). In addition, H3 was accepted with positive and significant TD → GI path ($p < 0.001$). Tourism growth also triggers policymaking by drawing the attention of decision-makers and funds for the development of tourist destinations (Sharma, 2025). Entrepreneurs rely on friendly and supportive policies and government bodies to transform opportunities into venture creation (Alarjani et al., 2020). Similarly, state government initiatives usually carry or expand entrepreneurial outcomes, especially in developing countries, which often face market failures (Prasannath et al., 2024). Structured policies should be developed to channel entrepreneurial actions.

There are structural constraints like market access, instability after conflict, and digital literacy, which are responsible for the lack of direct effect of tourism development on handicraft businesses. While the flow of tourists generates demand, artisans usually are not able to use such opportunities due to a lack of government support. Hence, governance played a strong mediated role with targeted policy involvements like branding, financial incentives, and skill development programs.

Implications for policymakers and Entrepreneurs

For policymakers, there is a need to develop digital literacy programs and skill development workshops to address unmet needs for handicraft entrepreneurship development. Artisans value state-organised branding in this study, with awareness campaigns. Design institutes in Kashmir could partner with artisans to promote innovation. For entrepreneurs, there is a need to promote local artefacts in Kashmir through various campaigns to increase demand for crafts.

Limitations for Future Research

Future studies may need context-based, shorter scales that are created in collaboration with artisans. Future studies could also consider a longitudinal survey to determine whether constant tourism further promotes the chain of mediation. Comparative studies could also be conducted around other states in India, implementing external generalizability.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it is concluded that tourism development is not the only factor contributing to handicraft entrepreneurship in Kashmir. Instead, well-planned government initiatives are needed, like branding, training platforms, and credit subsidiaries, which mitigate imperfections in the market. Hence, policymakers must perceive craft and tourism promotion as complementary, rather than parallel, programs. Along with economic growth, promoting this cooperation adds deeper value for tourists and richer preservation of culture for artisans. Both practitioners and policymakers can gather important insights from the practical and policy implications offered by the study. Policymakers can gather concerns, opinions, and thoughts of residents related to tourism growth while promoting the delivery of information about tourists at the same time.

This way, tour planners can be equipped with a more detailed understanding of locals' sentiments who have direct interaction with tourists, so that they can gather the necessary feedback for strategic tourism development projects. It reduces the extreme effects of tourism and promotes tourism growth, while controlling concerns related to adverse effects on the region. Local population supports future expansion of tourism when they observe positive effects of tourism in terms of cultural, social, economic, and environmental well-being. To promote community support for tourism growth, it is possible to implement several measures, for example, more inclusive planning, which covers all stakeholders, such as the host community. Stakeholders should be involved in the planning process for future tourism growth.

This study was focused on the demographic profile and attitudes of participants. Hence, future studies may consider variables like engagement with tourists, community attachment, proximity to tourism centres, and tourist knowledge. Future studies may compare the attitudes of tourists and locals, as this study focused on the perspectives of residents regarding their interactions with tourists. Longitudinal research is needed in future for further generalizability.

All in all, this study proves that tourism is not the only factor to drive handicraft businesses in the Kashmir Valley. Government initiatives are also needed for artisans to transform the potential of tourism into sustainable platforms. This study focuses on the need for inclusive, coordinated, and grounded policy works.

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