

Customised Garment Making as the Category for Sustaining Micro Enterprise in the Scenario of Industry 4 Revolution

SMS Journal of Entrepreneurship & Innovation
6 (1) 28-40
<https://doi.org/10.21844/smsjei.v6i01.17662>

Bikas Agrawal*

Abstract

The fast pace of industry at present is unprecedented thanks to the revolution which is taking place post the advent of various facets of Information Technology. The whole world is discussing about Machine learning, Internet of things, block chain , robotics etc. Manufacturing as well as the service sector are largely affected by these disruptive technologies. Keeping in tune with the latest developments has become a huge challenge for the Industry as a whole. Those who are ignorant about the changes are losing faster than they might have thought. Small enterprises are also getting affected by new technologies. Many of the small enterprises are feared to become non- existent. Survival for micro business is necessary, this sector has to adapt suitable and sustainable strategies for its survival. The micro enterprise has to find the intellectual aspect of business that can remain unaffected by the sudden rapid changes in Industry as a whole. Advent of power looms threatened the very existence of handlooms; fabric manufacturing saw a shift from handloom to power looms. Still the appeal of that handmade factor attached to handloom fabric excites quite a large group of people. Garment manufacturing has a similar story of shift from handmade customised garments to factory made ready to wear garments. This paper tries to talk about the appeal of handmade garments which still attracts consumers thanks to multiple factors and can be adapted as a profitable micro enterprise.

Key words: *Industry 4.0, disruptive technology, handmade, customised, appeal of hand crafted goods.*

Introduction

Twenty first century has been witnessing very rapid developments in the field of technology and other fields. Information technology in particular is becoming more and more pervasive, be it any field. Be it agriculture , manufacturing industry or service industry, use of new tools of information technology are making things possible with such ease that was unthinkable even at the beginning of this millennium. This ever growing demand to innovate something new and quick is a big challenge for the whole industry and the small entrepreneurs having low capital are in a trouble.

For a long time, apparel manufacturing had been under the cottage and small scale industry in India due to its labour intensive nature. After the dismantling of multi fibre arrangement post the year 2004, garment export industry is also facing a stiff competition from the other manufacturing countries like China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka to name a few. The Indian Government also allowed for larger investment in apparel manufacturing companies to face the challenge from the global competitors. Big international apparel brands also entered into India during the last three decades and almost all of them are now manufacturing garments in India itself. Under the

*Associate Professor, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Kolkata E-mail: bikas.agrawal@gmail.com

present circumstances, once considered low capital intensive, the garment manufacturing business has taken a different shape impacting the small players who thought it to be a safe product to manufacture and sell. So in this situation innovation is required in this field, just starting a small unit catering to a small market niche can also be difficult. The customised manufacturing category is also being catered to by big manufacturers like Raymond (In menswear category), augmented reality mirrors and apps for taking body measurements very quickly, as in the case of MTailor, the company claims that their apps are taking measurements in 30 seconds and with more accuracy. Things seemingly a farfetched idea becomes common with more and more companies very quickly as the World has been witnessing due to big data, artificial intelligence and other disruptive technologies. Mobile phone is the small device helping people in shopping each and every stuff. In short, the micro enterprises, manufacturing garments, need to modernise their way of work. They have to understand the demand for customised garments, devise the ways of catering to the demand without hassles. The customers want a hassle free, quick and pleasant experience of consumption and they have to be satisfied by the small enterprises. Ways have to be found the way the start ups like Swiggy and Zomato and others have found, though these two names run in a different type of business models but their innovative thoughts are inspiring and encouraging for new small entrepreneurs. Small garment manufacturing also has to be smart, quick and intelligent, so that they can create loyal customers and keep increasing the number. Lot of intelligence and in depth study of the customer attitude is required to understand how it can be done. First thing to be understood is whether there is a demand of customised clothes. Further section will deal with understanding the need and how the need can be catered to. In a small business set up, customised clothing has two major types, the first is a tailoring

shop which caters to the customer order only and materials are provided by the customers themselves. The tailor shop charges for the conversion only. This set up has the necessary machines for sewing and finishing. The other type is providing materials also along with the conversion of materials into clothing items. They are catering to a larger customer base and provide more varieties. Value addition and creating contemporary designs are expected from such business entities, which may also involve a designer. The ones who do not have designers involved in the business, draw design ideas from catalogues, internet pages and trade magazines (This fact is based upon a market survey done in two areas of Kolkata and one area of Howrah (West Bengal), both having concentration of all sorts of clothing goods and materials). This paper is an effort to cater to both the types in its research.

Objective:

1. Coming up with understanding of demand for customised clothes.
2. Preparing a plan for the business of customised clothes.

Methodology :

Methodology to prepare this paper includes mainly question based primary research about preferences of customised clothing, followed by study and review of published papers, books, journals and web based articles/ journals. Government policies to support micro enterprises are also studied in order to understand if any such support is required for funding the micro enterprises catering to the category in discussion. Personal interviews of some of the apparel company executives and small entrepreneurs are also taken to understand their views about the practicality of innovative ideas in business of customised clothing. This type of business is age old, that is the reason why

innovative ideas need to be used for its survival and revival both.

Need of the study

The study on customised garment making is done for certain purpose, where feedback is directly taken from the consumers themselves apart from collecting secondary data. It is of utmost importance to understand if this sort of business is in demand or not. Few important findings emerged out of the primary study which are listed down in the section below, where the questionnaire is summarised. One very interesting point emerged that the young men do not prefer customised clothing much but women do prefer this category of garments. Young men not preferring customised clothing points out the need of creating interest for young men in this category of clothing. Another perspective to carry out this study is finding small business idea having less risk factor that can be started with a small investment that requires very less amount of working capital. One more fact is important to understand is, the amount of interest women are showing towards customised clothing. India being a country of multiple cultures, multiple festivals, traditions and celebrations provide high chance of growth in customised clothing. Theme based parties during weddings have created interest of people in traditional clothing again. Although the traditional clothing is manufactured by the mass manufacturers also, a large chunk of women prefer customised attire to stand apart in the crowd. Women are less inhibited about their grown up and old age now and are ready to experiment with various categories of garments but their body structures push them towards customised clothing as the mass manufacturing is not really catering to the sizes beyond a certain range.

Significance of the study

Study of the topic is significant in terms of

understanding the current challenges that the micro entrepreneurs dealing in apparel manufacturing are facing due to the rapid technological advancement. The otherwise safe micro business is now challenged by the big corporate like Raymond for example, which has entered into the business of mass customization. Raymond is catering to the customised demand through their own established stores, and at the back end they are manufacturing men's customised suits in their state of the art factories. In such circumstances, some innovative ideas can help the small business surviving and sustaining. This study is based on a survey of people of different ages stating their views on customised garments. Basically, the respondents expressed their views about whether they prefer or do not prefer customised garments and if they do, then what are the reasons for that and what exactly they want from the customised manufacturer. Along with the customer's various preferences regarding the fit, quality, timely schedule and prices, sustainability and environmental wellness are also important to many of the customers and it can provide an edge to the small business if sustainability factor is kept in mind. This study is an effort to understand the customers' exact requirements, so that they can derive satisfaction from the quality of product and services rendered to them.

Literature review

In order to write this paper, a literature review is done to understand various factors like entrepreneurship challenges, innovative ideas, advancement in technology, current trends in customised garment making, history of garment making, consumer preferences etc. Apart from published books, published journals and online papers have also been studied. The important points are mentioned below :

Entrepreneurship: Essence of entrepreneurship

is recognising the opportunities and using the useful ideas into practice, It is the process that motivates the individuals pursue opportunities without even control over the current resources they use. Barringer and Ireland

Technological advancements: Improvement in hardware, software and accessories has advanced the Information technology a lot and it continues to grow fast. 3-D technology has made the virtual stores look much more similar to a real environment. Virtual worlds such as Second life and Webkinz are examples whose popularity and use is increasing continuously .Even fabric textures can be simulated in this virtual environment . Lynda Gamans

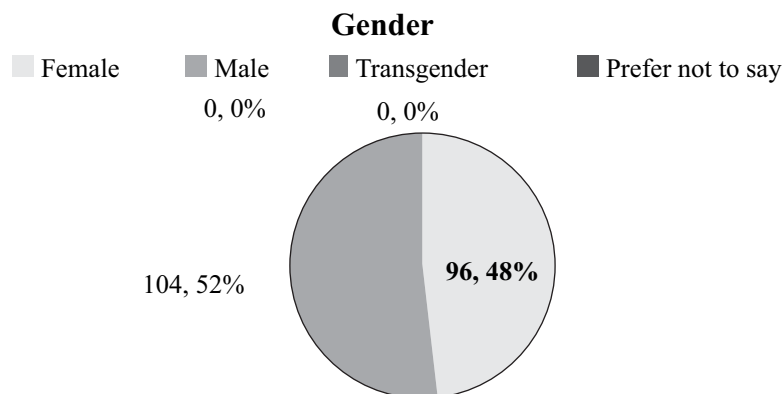
Sustainable fashion considerations: To remain sustainable the fashion business should focus on three areas, that are, society, environment and economy. All these factors should be considered in sync with one another to remain sustainable. Alison Gwilt

Customised garment making: Customised garment making or bespoke garments were the only source of clothing till the mid of nineteenth century. The term "bespoke garment" means, made for an individual customer. During the nineteenth century, efforts to make mass patterns for garments can be evident in books and journals. Aldrich Innovation: " Every problem is an opportunity for a

creative person. Creativity is a major tool for the survival of an entrepreneur. It not only gives one the edge for recognizing needs , generating business and marketing ideas, but it also helps in solving problems. The person who faces problem and finds a novel solution or is able to quickly convert the problem into an opportunity , will be a survivor in a field while the others, less flexible and less creative, will be left behind". (Vasant Desai)

Discussion and findings:

A survey was done to find the expectations of consumers from customised cloth manufacturing. A simple set of questions were given to people encompassing various age groups. 200 people responded to the questions, some of them answered in "No" when they were asked if they use customised clothes or not. Thus some of the further questions were not answered by the ones who responded negatively to the questions. Still these respondents put forward their suggestions towards some of the points as is evident in the analysis of the questions. It was seen interestingly that the male respondents from the age group --ranging from 15 years to 30 years said that they do not wear customised clothing at all but even then they had certain suggestions in response to some of the questions, as was seen from their further answers to other question, thus showing their interest in customised clothing, provided that certain improvements are offered by the manufacturers. Summary of the whole survey is as follows:



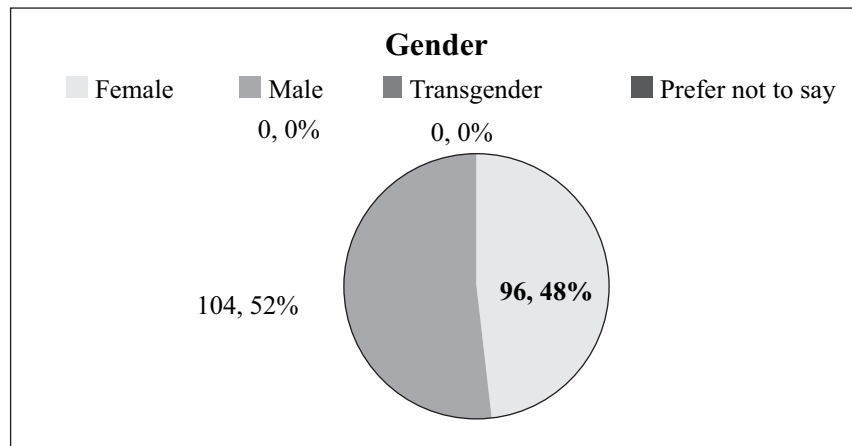


Figure 1

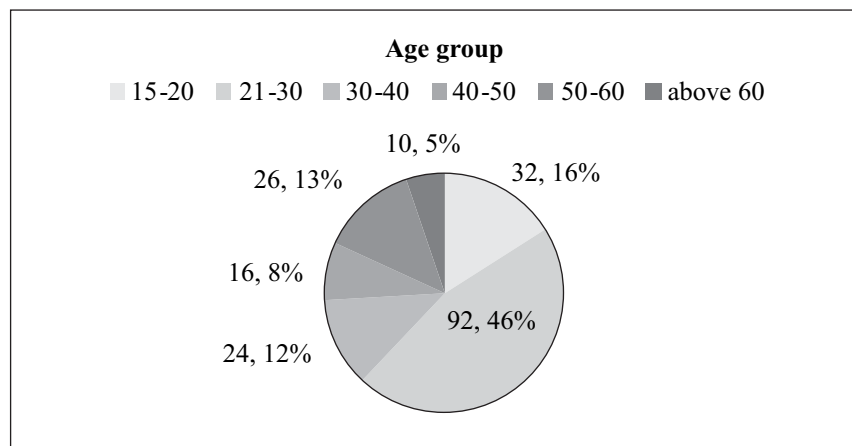


Figure 2



Figure 3

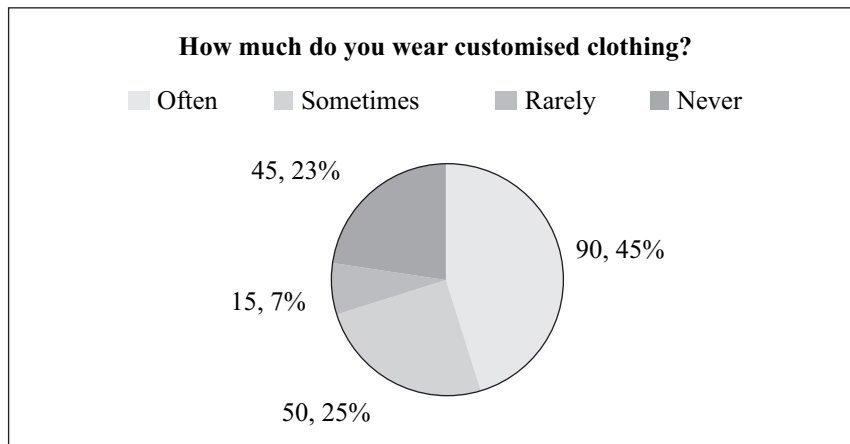


Figure 4

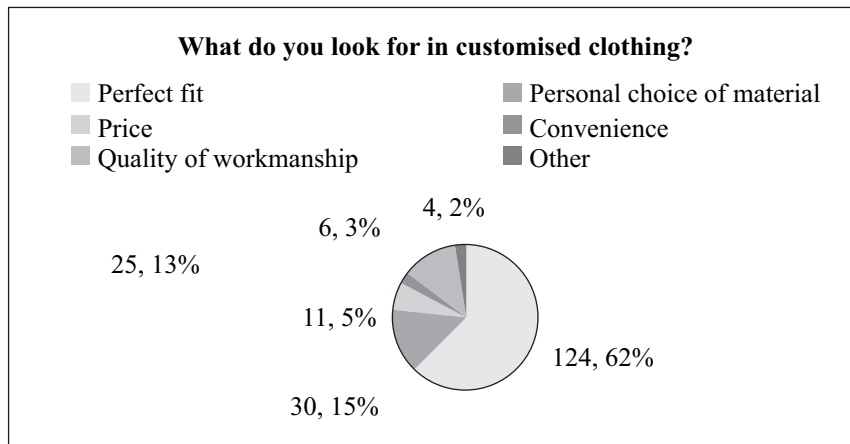


Figure 5

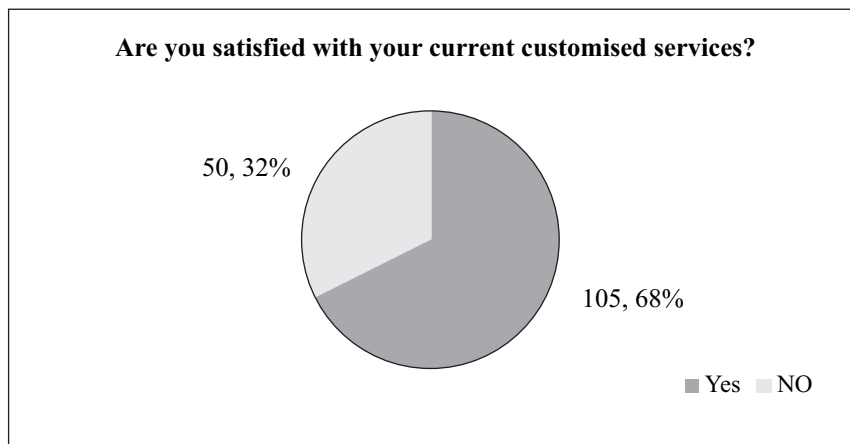


Figure 6

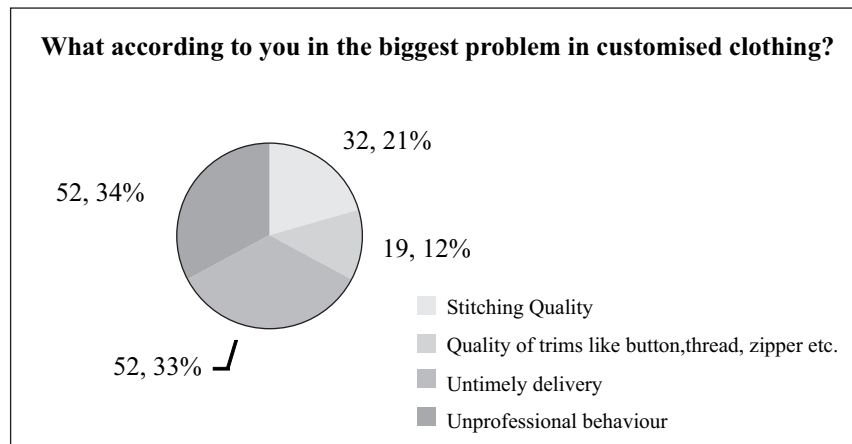


Figure 7

The following questions were answered in a scale from 1 to 5, 5 being the most preferred.

1. How much will an app showing progress of the order enhance your experience?

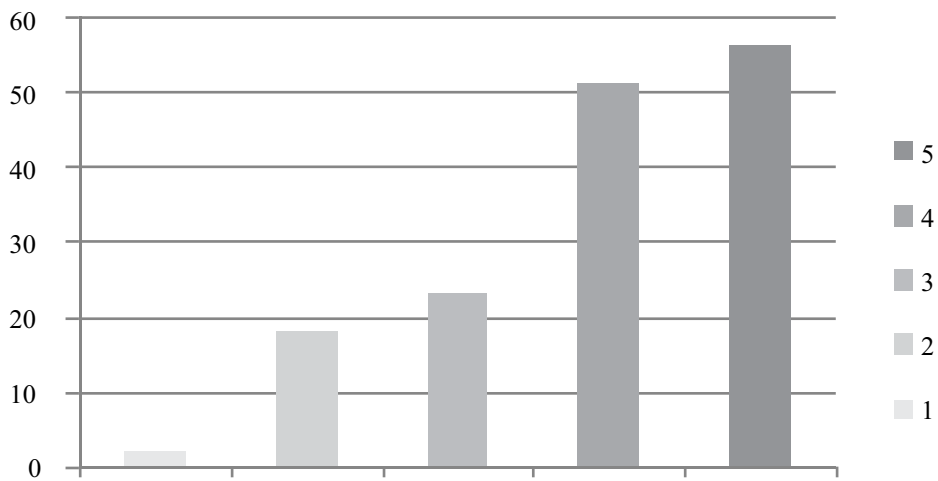


Figure 8

2. Use of industrial machines will give a better product.

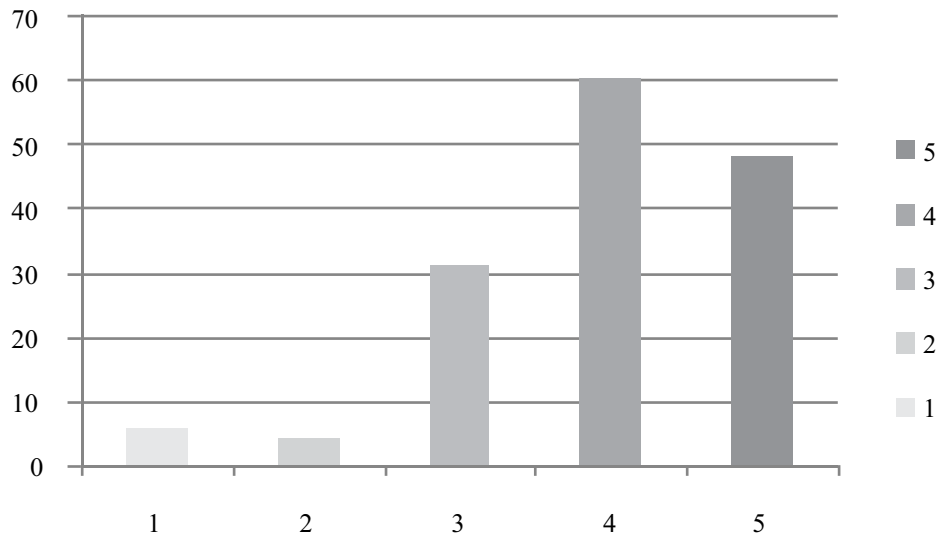


Figure 9

3. Will home delivery be a better option?

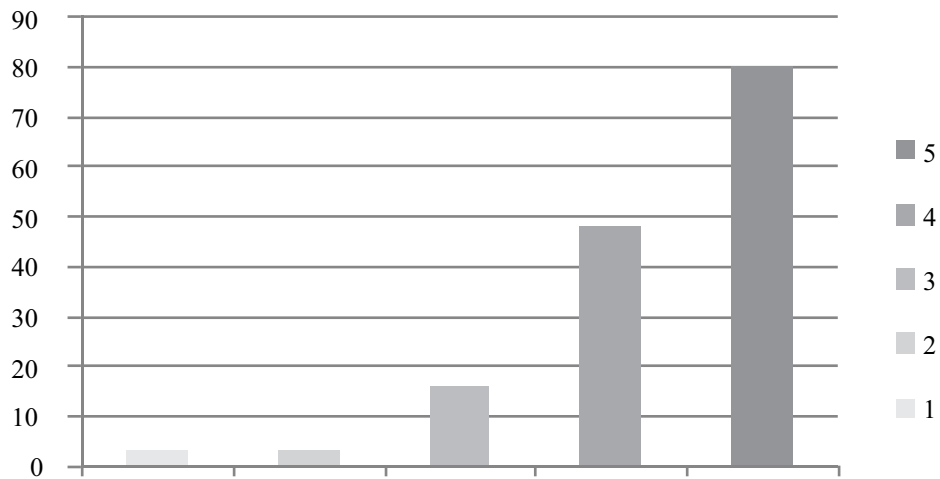


Figure 10

4. How do you prefer a free after sale service for a few months?

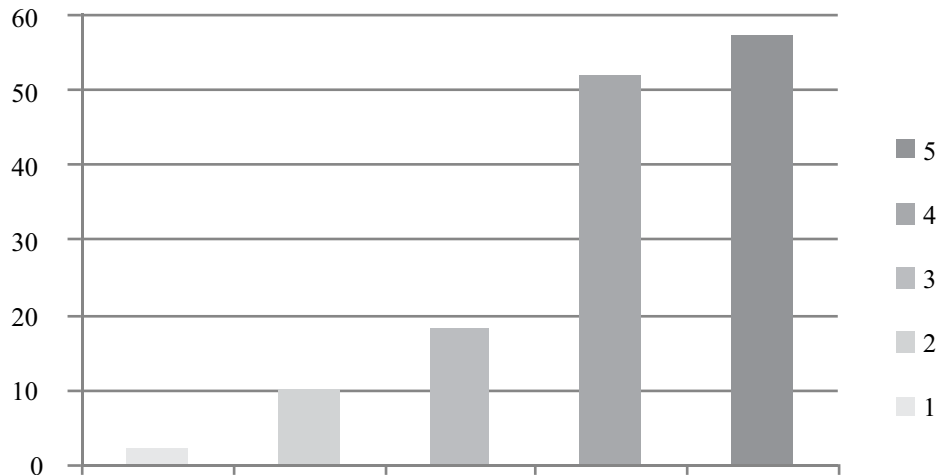


Figure 11

Apart from the above questions, the respondents were given the choice to put forward their suggestions for a better customised clothing experience. The measure aspects that can be derived from the suggestions are:

Trained professionals: Poor skill and unprofessional behaviour of business involved with customised clothing is a very big concern that deters people from this sort of business. Customised clothing can only be satisfactory if the work is done by a trained person who understands the body measurements well and is capable of producing the product with a good finish.

Availability of materials according to latest trends: Since customised clothing can be further divided into two categories easily : first type is the one where only tailoring is done and the material is bought by the customer, in the second type , the material and making up of the product, both are done by the business. In the later type it is required that latest trend is followed in using the materials. Even in the first type of business, trims (button, thread, zipper) etc. should be according to the latest trends. Thing to be noted here is that some of the trims also follow fashion trends.

Facility of trials before the final delivery: Since the

clothing is made for a particular person, the facility of trial before the final delivery is also suggested by some of the people.

Better quality of trims and accessories is also a point to be noted by the prospective business in this field. Failure of a trim like zipper or button within the product life cycle does create a bad impression and repeal customers.

Use of modern technology: Consumers now a days are well aware of the technological changes in all sort of products. Complete lack of modern machines and equipment in making the customised clothes is a deterrent. For example: a button hole done with hands can spoil the look of the garment completely and an peeled off interlining may damage the whole look. Same goes with seam finishes. Better seam finishes require modern machines and they are not only highly productive but also reduces machine down time to a great extent. Bad interlinings used by customised tailoring businesses is a very common problem. Fusible interlinings (bukram) come off very commonly if technical requirements are not met with, during the application of them. A fusing press machine should be used instead of common iron press.

Sustainability factor in the small business: Some of the respondents also put stress on the sustainability aspect of customised clothing manufacture, they particularly mentioned that hazardous dyestuff must be avoided in block prints and dyeing. A few mentioned re cycling of materials wherever possible and organised and responsible disposal of the wastages.

Points to be kept in mind for starting a small business of customised clothing :

As evident by the question based survey, the entrepreneur should keep in mind some points before starting a customised clothing business. This part is not discussing the capital requirement and may be considered as a limitation of the study. Below are the points:

I. Young men are less attracted by the customised clothing, but they can also be targeted as customers if are catered with better quality of garments. Also, they can be attracted if trendy clothes can be customised. Indian ethnic wear with nice fit and impeccable finishing can attract this group of people at least to a few categories of clothes.

II. Bad stitching quality is the biggest issue that distract consumers, hence the business has to ensure a good stitching quality and finish in the garment. As a suggestion to improve the quality without putting any monetary burden is: use of machine guides, folders, small templates to ensure straightness of stitch lines, right type of seams with a faster production etc. can be considered.

III. Untimely delivery: Not completing the order within the promised time is a very common problem which further distracts consumers from customised clothing. A business with a perfect delivery time can be an example in this field. Cloud kitchen based food supply services are growing thanks to right timing apart from other satisfactory

supply points, similarly the business being discussed here should also think doing in the same manner for survival and growth.

III. Good quality of trims and accessories like zippers, buttons, sewing threads etc. as mentioned once earlier, will also provide a good reputation. with a very small extra amount invested in trims of good quality can enhance consumer satisfaction to a great extent.

IV. Professional behaviour: Unprofessional behaviour in this field is too common. Reasons can be many, but for the existence and growth of business, responsible and professional behaviour is highly commendable. A trained workforce usually shows more professionalism and handles queries and objections by the customers with ease and try to improve themselves, hence, training of the workforce about the involved job is of utmost importance. Strong supply chain and back end are necessary to cater to the consumers satisfactorily. A small Customised clothing business has to depend on outsourcing the things like embroidery and other value addition work to a great extent. For smooth running of business and timely delivery of satisfactory clothes, lot of attention is required on timely outsourcing.

V. Use of modern technology can also enhance the quality of products, timely delivery and can uplift the total image of the business. In this, use of few industrial machines like over lock, button hole, elastic inserter, industrial ironing and pressing equipment can change the appearance of the clothing completely, giving them a neat and professional look. The machines specified alone are being suggested here as this paper is not making any effort to set up a highly automated machines, which are more apt for a large mass scale factory. Work aids (as mentioned in a point above) can be used with the machines for accuracy in sewing and for reducing handling time, thus increasing

productivity.

VI. Sustainability is a vital issue: People are more aware of pollutions and their causes these days, being responsible towards environment is a good idea for growth of business along with fulfilling the social and environmental obligations. A small business should also think about not generating unnecessary wastes and should try to re cycle and up cycle fashion where possible.

VII. Development of mobile app and social media pages: Mobile apps have provided lot of ease for consumers and the providers equally, as evident from the successful use of apps by various business of various standard and volume. App can be developed to show the progress of the order, the probable date for trial of the fit and the delivery schedules. Options like showing the new styles and new fabrics can also be done for keeping consumers engaged and interested, in the same time customers can give their valuable feedback through the app for further improvement in the business. Similarly, social media pages can be used for advertisement and business expansion. Few small business in this field of customised clothing manufacture, have been interviewed in reaching the conclusion.

Future scope of the study

The current study provides for future scope which are mentioned below:

I. Specific study can be done on young men's preferred categories in customised clothing. Particularly the Indian traditional wear can be the subject for study. Such study can lead to the idea of offering more variety of products in the traditional as well as fusion clothing for young men.

2. Another point to be studied can be the product basket offered by the customised clothing

manufacturers catering to women consumers. In this, the possibilities of manufacturing western clothing and fusion clothing (Indo western) can be explored. It is to be understood in the study what lacunae is/are there in the ready to wear western and fusion garments that stops women from wearing such garments with ease and confidence. Most of the western and fusion garments are manufactured keeping in minds a particular type of figure of women within a certain range. More discussion and more feedbacks from the subjects will help the entrepreneurs understanding about the fine tuning of the customised products according to the actual needs of the women. Similarly, study on more varieties of Indian clothing of different states can be done to know if clothes from various states can be attractive or not.

3. One important point to be researched can be the recycling of garments and Sarees which are in good condition but are not intended to be used by the consumer in their current form. It can be seen whether the consumers can be encouraged to DIY (do it yourself) mode where the consumers can give their own inputs to the customised manufacturers for converting the old clothing into a new one. The current interest of women towards substituting sarees with trendy lehanga and fusion garments can provide room for discussion between the manufacturer and the consumer, increasing possibilities of loyal customers thanks to their active participation in making the garments.

Suggestions :

After the small survey and secondary research, the paper intends to give suggestions to the prospective entrepreneurs from two different perspectives. While one type of suggestions are related to government schemes which can help the new ventures, the other is about technical and other aspects of apparel business which can be appealing to the current demands of the prospective consumers. Suggestions are presented as below:

1. The ambitious scheme of the Central Government, under the "Ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship" "Pradhan Mantri Koushal Vikas Yojna" was approved by the cabinet on 20th march 2015 and was launched in July in the same year . The scheme was started with a vision to impart and develop the human skill in a large scale, with a high speed implementation and good quality. Post the successful implementation during the 1st year , the Union Cabinet approved the scheme for another four years (2016-2020). The " PMKVY" provides the guidelines in their official website "pmkvyofficial.org". The guidelines provides the details about the various training schemes, certification and identification of current skills, placement, special projects etc. The new entrepreneur in customised garment field can have people trained under these schemes of trainings.

(Source : Pradhan Mantri Koushal Vikas Yojana guidelines -2016.)

2. Capital and technical knowhow are the two big factors hindering new ventures in any field. For fulfilling financial needs, the website of Ministry of Micro, small and medium enterprises under the Central Government of India (msme.gov.in) can be very helpful. The ministry of MSME has their own incubation schemes, details of which can be found in their website, a new business enterprise can avail the facilities given by the Government.

3. There are certain machines for finishing the garments like programmable button holes, fusing press, steam irons etc. costs a lot and would be difficult to purchase for each of the micro enterprise. To overcome the problem a number of entrepreneurs can join hands and can create a common facility which can cater to each one of them and even can cater to more entrepreneurs beyond their own group on payment basis.

3. For the business, it is suggested that they can

provide theme based products during occasions like weddings, wedding anniversary, pre wedding party, festivals etc. Now a days theme based parties are gaining popularity . Some photo shoots showing some particular occasion in particular theme can be done and published in the social media page and app of the enterprise.

4. Various styles in men's kurta, churidar pyjamas, stylish dhoti etc. can be displayed in the catalogues to attract youths. Some hint of western style along with Indian traditional style can also be kept in the product basket to attract young men. All such new innovative ideas can be given in app and social media of the company. Suggestion for developing app is mentioned before in a previous section also.

5. Use of local traditional fabrics in the final product can be an idea to attract people who take pride in promoting their state/ regional culture. Using handloom fabrics and other local crafts is a sustainable idea and attracts consumers these days. Some valuable suggestions are given by the subjects surveyed and are listed in a section before and hence are not being repeated here.

Conclusion: This paper, based largely on primary survey concludes that there is still a demand for customised clothing, but the changing preferences of consumers cannot be ignored. Consumers in this category want their clothes with a desired quality , on their desired time. They encourage the idea of technological intervention in this sort of small business also, not only in terms of machines and equipment but also in terms of apps and social media pages. Another challenge in front of such business is maintaining their back end, the skilled workers and logistics. Any new small entrepreneur in this business must remember the facts how important it is for them to be on time, polite in their behaviour, maintaining the right quality and also they have to create a customer base by catering to their small but very specific needs. Such business can be started with comparatively small

investments and the prevailing policies of MSME loan by the Central Government of India can be studied to understand and avail the facilities.

References:

Aldrich, W.(2000), "Tailor's cutting manuals and the growing provision of popular clothing, 1770-1870", Textile History ,31

Barringer and Ireland, "Entrepreneurship, successfully launching new ventures", Pearson, fifth edition (July, 2015)

Cook, M. and Golding, J. (1815), The tailor's Assistant or Unerring Instructors, J. Rush, London
"Entrepreneurial and managerial development of S M E s t h r o u g h i n c u b a t o r s " policy.www.msme.gov.in

Godley, A. (1997), "The development of the clothing industry: technology and fashion", Textile History, 28.

Gwilt, Alison , "A practical guide to sustainable fashion" Bloomsbury visual arts (July, 2008).

Jeannette A., Jarnow" Inside the fashion business" Macmillan, USA

K. Ramchandran, " Entrepreneurship development, Indian cases on change agents" Tata Mcgraw Hill Edu (p) ltd. New Delhi

Lynda Gaman Poloin, " Multichannel Retailing" , Fairchild books, (2009) pmkvyofficial.org (website of Government of India for PMKVY)

Zimmers, Scarborough and Wilson" Essentials of Entrepreneurship and small business management (5th edition), PHI learning (p) ltd.