

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING HANDMADE BUSINESSES IN
UZBEKISTAN

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1. Abstract

Social media has become an indispensable tool for promoting small-scale businesses worldwide. In Uzbekistan, where craftsmanship is deeply rooted in cultural traditions, platforms like Instagram, Telegram and YouTube provide artisans with opportunities to reach global markets and showcase their handmade products. This study explores the impact of social media on the growth and visibility of handmade businesses in Uzbekistan. It identifies strategies artisans employ, challenges they face, and the role of digital platforms in fostering innovation and economic growth. The research findings highlight the transformative potential of social media in promoting traditional crafts and boosting local economies.

Key Words: Social media, handmade businesses, Uzbekistan, digital marketing, artisans, e-commerce

2. Introduction:

Handmade businesses are an integral part of Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage, offering unique and artisanal products that reflect the country's traditions. In the textile sector, crafts include suzani embroidery, carpet weaving, and silk weaving. Metalworkers, such as blacksmiths and jewelers, produce both functional and decorative items. Regions like Bukhara are renowned for goldwork embroidery, while Samarkand is famous for its ceramics and silk weaving (Creative tours, 2023).

However, traditional marketing methods often limit artisans' access to broader markets. The emergence of social media has provided a cost-effective and powerful solution to this challenge. Artisans utilize platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook etc. to showcase their work to a global audience, engage with customers, and build brand recognition. This online presence not only helps in preserving traditional crafts but also contributes to the economic development of local communities by reaching markets beyond their immediate geographic area. This article explores the role of social media in promoting handmade businesses, highlighting how digital platforms are transforming traditional crafts into globally recognized art forms.

2.1 Research hypothesis

Considering the limited data on the specific role of social media and the widespread preference for platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram in Uzbekistan, this study presents the following hypothesis:

“The adoption of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram significantly boosts the market reach and sales outcomes of handmade businesses in Uzbekistan.”

3. Literature Review

The advent of social media has transformed business operations globally, offering unprecedented opportunities for marketing, customer engagement, and sales. Handmade businesses, characterized by unique, artisanal products, have particularly benefited from these platforms. In Uzbekistan, a country with a rich tradition of craftsmanship, social media serves as a vital tool for artisans to reach both local and international markets. This literature review examines the role of social media in promoting handmade businesses globally, drawing insights from various studies and publications.

3.1 Global Perspective on Social Media and Handmade Businesses

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Etsy have become essential channels for artisans worldwide to showcase and sell their products. These platforms enable direct communication with customers, personalized marketing, and access to global markets. A study on the utilization of social networking as a promotional medium for handicraft businesses in Palembang found that 35% of craft businesses used social media for promotion, citing minimal cost, ease of recognition, and global reach as primary advantages. Similarly, research on social media marketing for African handmade accessories companies highlights the effectiveness of platforms like Facebook and Instagram in enhancing brand visibility and sales (Tanui, 2016)

3.2 Social Media Marketing Strategies for Handmade Businesses

Effective social media marketing strategies are crucial for the success of handmade businesses. Key components include developing successful product lines, understanding copyrights and trademarks, taking high-quality product photographs, utilizing analytics to boost online sales, and engaging with customers through fairs, shows, and other retail outlets. Kelly Rand's book, "Handmade to Sell," offers comprehensive guidance on these aspects, emphasizing the importance of a well-rounded approach to social media marketing (Rand, 2014). Additionally, Timothy Adam's "How to Make Money Using Etsy" provides insights into leveraging Etsy as a platform for selling handmade products, highlighting the significance of product presentation and customer engagement.

3.3 Case Studies and Practical Applications

Practical applications of social media marketing in the handmade sector are evident in various case studies. For instance, a project report titled "The Effect of Social Media Marketing as a Catalyst for the Success of Art and Craft E-Business" explores how social media serves as a catalyst for the success of art and craft e-businesses, emphasizing the role of these platforms in reaching wider audiences and enhancing sales (Mizaj and Vemballur, 2021).

Furthermore, the utilization of social networking as a promotional medium in the handicraft business in Saudi Arabia demonstrates the effectiveness of social media in expanding market reach and increasing brand awareness. The research shows that Instagram gave an opportunity to Saudi females to start their crafting businesses. Its global reach, visual-centric features, and interactive tools enable entrepreneurs to engage customers, build trust, and expand their markets, empowering

women to balance work and personal lives while fostering financial independence. Even one of the females mentioned that without Instagram, she never imagined becoming a businesswoman or establishing her brand during an interview with the MBC channel (Alkhowaiter, 2016)

Another study in the Egyptian handicrafts sector highlights the importance of social media to gain a competitive edge. The handicraft sector boosts Egypt's economy by creating jobs, using simple techniques that lower training costs, producing customizable products for customers and tourists, and utilizing local raw materials to promote balanced urban and rural development. By leveraging social media, marketers can enhance brand awareness and loyalty by sharing the stories behind handicrafts and their cultural significance (Zekry, Khairy Fayyad and Ghaly, 2024).

Social media plays a significant role in promoting handmade businesses, offering artisans tools to reach wider audiences, engage with customers, and increase sales.

4. Problem Statement

While social media has proven transformative for many businesses, its potential remains underutilized by handmade businesses in Uzbekistan. Limited awareness of effective marketing strategies, digital literacy gaps, and infrastructural challenges hinder artisans from fully leveraging social media platforms. Despite the growing popularity of handmade Uzbek crafts in global markets, many artisans struggle to maintain a sustainable online presence. This study aims to address these gaps by providing insights into how social media can be optimized for promoting handmade businesses in Uzbekistan.

6. Research Questions

1. How do social media platforms influence the visibility and sales of handmade businesses in Uzbekistan?
2. What role does active engagement in social media play in influencing customers' decision-making?
3. How does social media foster innovation and cultural preservation in the handmade sector?

A framework for analysis was developed for this study based on the research questions. The main goal was to determine whether customers use social media to purchase handmade products. The research also focused on identifying the factors that influence customers' decision-making processes and their trust in crafting businesses.

Additionally, this paper explores the types of content that attract more customers and influence their purchasing decisions on social media. It examines how discounts, special offers, and giveaways on these platforms encourage consumers to buy handmade products.

Lastly, the study highlights the importance of customer feedback in building trust among potential buyers and fostering confidence in the business.

7. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine how different types of social media usage influence the purchasing decisions of customers regarding handmade products in Uzbekistan. Additionally, the study seeks to understand how customers use social media to form impressions and make buying decisions.

First, it explores how posts, updates, and other content shared on social media platforms shape customers' perceptions of handmade businesses. This includes analyzing the type of

information provided about products, the craftsmanship process, and the stories behind the businesses, which influence customers' interest and trust in these products. The research also investigates how customers interact with each other on social media when discussing handmade products. This includes examining what questions they ask, the advice they share, and how they exchange information, such as recommendations, reviews, or videos related to handmade items.

Moreover, the study aims to compare the behavior of different customer groups, such as younger versus older buyers, to understand how age influences their use of social media for gathering information and making purchase decisions. This comparison helps uncover patterns about how different age groups prioritize specific types of content or engagement when considering handmade products.

Finally, the study evaluates the role of these interactions on social media in shaping customers' decisions to purchase handmade products. It seeks to determine whether social media engagement helps customers make informed choices or if it creates biases based on the types of content they encounter most often. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide insights into how social media can be effectively used to promote handmade businesses in Uzbekistan.

8. Research Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the role of social media in promoting handmade businesses in Uzbekistan. The methodology consisted of the following components:

1. Survey

A survey was conducted to gather opinions from customers about their experiences using social media when buying handmade products. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions to capture quantitative data on customer preferences and behaviors, as well as qualitative insights into their perceptions of handmade businesses promoted through social media. The survey targeted a diverse demographic of respondents, including different age groups and geographic locations, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of customer perspectives.

2. Online Research

Online research was conducted to analyze case studies of successful crafting businesses that utilized e-commerce and social media to grow their customer base and increase sales. This involved reviewing articles, blog posts, and online reports that highlighted strategies, challenges, and outcomes of these businesses. The research provided valuable examples of how social media can be effectively leveraged for promoting handmade products.

3. Interviews with Craftsmen

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two to three local craftsmen who actively use social media to promote their handmade products. The discussions focused on their experiences, the benefits they have observed from using social media, and the challenges they face in managing online platforms. These interviews provided first-hand insights into the importance of social media for artisans in Uzbekistan and its impact on their business growth.

The combination of survey data, online research, and interviews allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the role social media plays in promoting handmade businesses. This mixed-methods approach ensured that the study captured perspectives from both customers and business owners, providing a well-rounded understanding of the subject.

9. Findings

Online research shows that social media usage is increasing daily, providing a valuable opportunity for handmade businesses to engage with more customers. In particular, Instagram is widely popular among people in Uzbekistan.

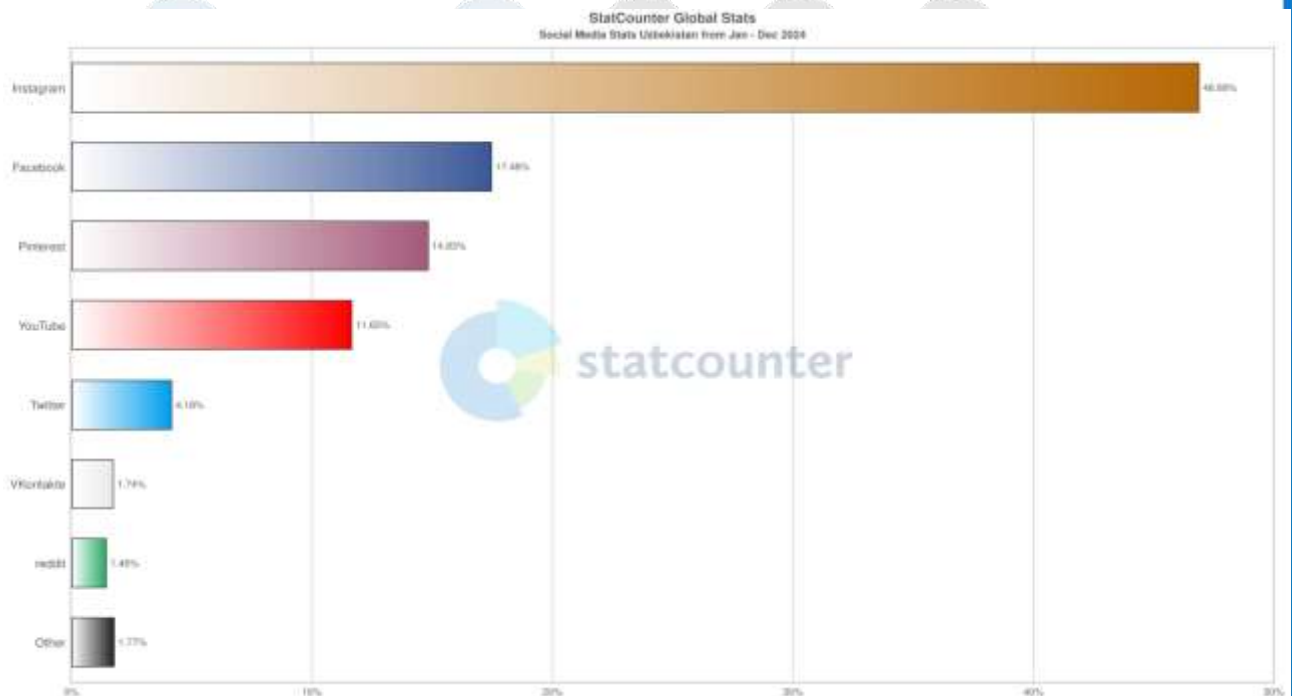
E-commerce as gateway to market for handmade businesses in Uzbekistan

Platforms like Instagram and Facebook are particularly popular among Uzbek artisans. For example, "The Ceramics" is an Instagram page dedicated to showcasing and selling handmade ceramics from Uzbekistan, utilizing the platform's visual-centric nature to attract customers. Similarly, "Uzbek Craft and Art" uses both Facebook and Instagram to promote Uzbek craftsmanship, helping artisans reach a broader audience and facilitating sales through online platforms.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) has also recognized the potential of e-commerce as a gateway to market Uzbekistan's traditional apparel. By establishing online stores on platforms like eBay, artisans have been able to sell handmade Uzbek and Tajik national clothes to international customers, thereby expanding their market reach and increasing sales (ITC News, 2019).

(Statcounter, 2024)

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey data are presented



in this section. The results are organized around the main objectives of the survey, which include demographic information, the frequency and intent of social media use, the impact of social media on purchasing decisions, and thematic insights derived from open-ended questions, specifically focusing on the role of social media in promoting handmade businesses in Uzbekistan.

Demographics

With 74 participants in the survey, the age and gender distribution can help craft targeted marketing strategies for these businesses.

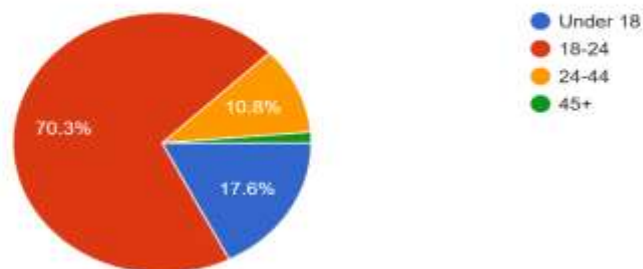
1. Age Distribution:

70.3% of respondents are aged 18-24, the most significant group. This indicates that young adults are the primary users of social media in Uzbekistan, making them a key demographic for handmade businesses. Marketing strategies should be tailored to the interests and preferences of this age group, such as using Instagram, which is highly popular among younger audiences. The 24-44 age group accounts for 10.8 % while the under-18 group represents 17.6%, which are smaller but still relevant segments. Businesses can focus on this groups by offering products that appeal to adults and younger audiences looking for unique, affordable artisanal goods or promoting convenience and quality. The 45+ age group has the least representation, indicating that older audiences may be less engaged on social media platforms for handmade business promotion. While still important, this group might require different strategies, such as targeted ads on Telegram or direct outreach (Kamolovna, 2024).

2. Gender Distribution:

What is your age group?

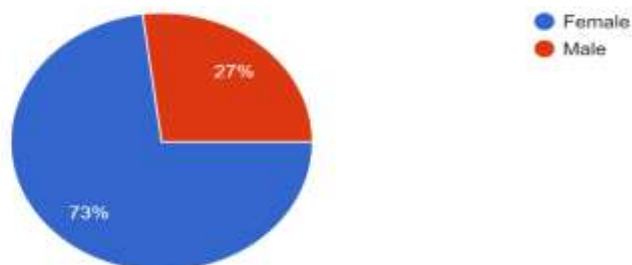
74 responses



73% of respondents are female, while males make up 27% of the responses. Handmade businesses can leverage this by creating products that appeal to women’s interests and using social media campaigns that cater specifically to female customers. However, they should also consider smaller but still significant male audience when making promotions.

Gender:

74 responses



Social media usage

Knowing which social media platforms people use is essential for crafting effective marketing strategies, especially for promoting handmade businesses. The survey results reveal that

52.7% of respondents use Telegram, 40.5% use Instagram, and 6.8% use YouTube. This information is crucial for several reasons:

1. Targeted Marketing:

With 52.7% using Telegram, businesses can prioritize this platform for customer engagement and promotion. Since Telegram is widely used in Uzbekistan, it provides a direct communication channel for businesses to share updates, offer discounts, or run community-based campaigns. Telegram's group and channel features allow for building loyal customer communities, which is beneficial for small handmade businesses.

2. Visual Promotion on Instagram:

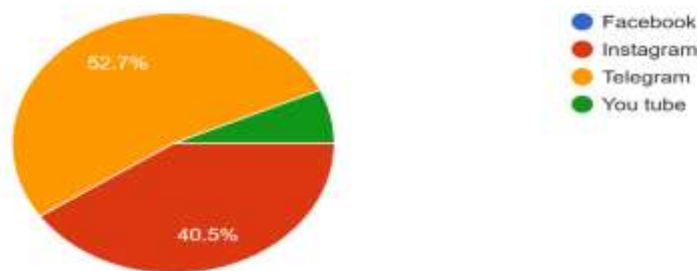
42.9% using Instagram indicates that a significant portion of the audience is active on this visually-driven platform. Handmade businesses can leverage Instagram's image-focused nature to showcase their products creatively, post customer testimonials, run influencer collaborations, and create stories or reels to boost visibility. Since Instagram is popular among younger audiences, it's an ideal platform for visually appealing products like handmade bags, jewelry, and accessories.

3. YouTube as a Supplementary Platform:

While only 7.1% use YouTube, the platform can still be valuable for businesses that want to create more detailed content such as behind-the-scenes videos, tutorials on how to make products, or customer reviews. YouTube helps establish a deeper connection with the audience and can be used to educate potential customers about the craftsmanship and uniqueness of the handmade products (Kamolovna, 2024).

Which social media platforms do you use most frequently?

74 responses

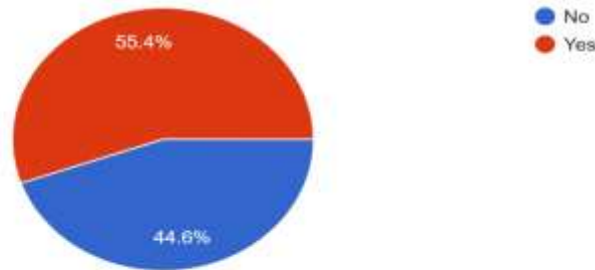


Influence on Decision-Making

It was also evaluated to what degree respondents' decisions are influenced by social media when purchasing handmade products. It shows that most people are more likely to buy crafting items after seeing it on social media.

Content Types and Impact

Have you ever purchased handmade products after seeing them on social media?
74 responses

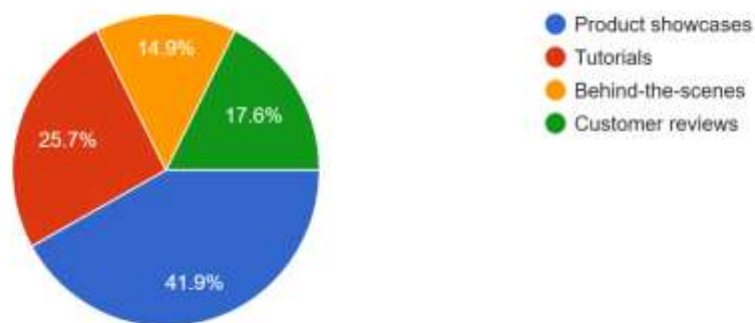


The research indicates that customers have a clear preference for different types of content:

- 41.9% prefer product showcases.
- 25.7% are interested in tutorials.
- 17.6% find customer reviews valuable.
- 14.9% enjoy behind-the-scenes content.

This suggests that product demonstrations and instructional content are the most effective ways to engage customers, while behind-the-scenes and reviews play a smaller but still important role.

What type of content do you prefer when following handmade businesses on social media?
74 responses



The importance of customer reviews

The survey highlights the significant influence of customer feedback and reviews on social media before making a purchase:

- 56.8% of customers find it extremely important.

- 37.8% consider it slightly important.
- 5.4% think it is not important at all.

Why it's Important?

Positive reviews act as social proof, assuring potential buyers that the product is high-quality and worth the investment. This is especially vital for handmade items, where quality and craftsmanship may vary, and customers rely on others' experiences. Besides that, seeing other customers' experiences helps establish trust, particularly when purchasing items that can't be physically inspected beforehand. With over half of customers considering reviews extremely important, businesses can directly impact conversion rates by ensuring reviews are visible and accessible. The most important, reviews also provide valuable feedback, helping businesses improve their products and services, which is key for growth.

So, businesses should actively ask customers to leave reviews and share their experiences on social media and offer incentives like discounts or promotions for those who share feedback. Company should respond to both positive and negative reviews to show that they value customer feedback. This not only enhances their brand's reputation but also helps build a loyal customer base (Kamolovna, 2024).

How important is it for you to see customer feedback or reviews on social media before making a purchase?
74 responses



The effect of discounts in decision- making

The survey reveals that discounts and special offers on social media influence customers' buying behavior regarding handmade products. 36.5% customers said that they always make purchases where there is a discount on product and it sometimes affects to 45.9% respondents. While 8.1% people said that they buy rarely products in discounts, 9.5 % respondents show that special offers never influence to their choices

Why Knowing This is Important for Businesses?

The fact that 82.4% of customers (combining "sometimes" and "always") are motivated by discounts and offers indicates that price incentives can play a significant role in encouraging purchases. Knowing this helps handmade businesses tailor their marketing strategies to include promotions that can effectively boost sales. Special offers and discounts often create a sense of urgency or exclusivity, which can prompt customers to act quickly. Understanding when and how

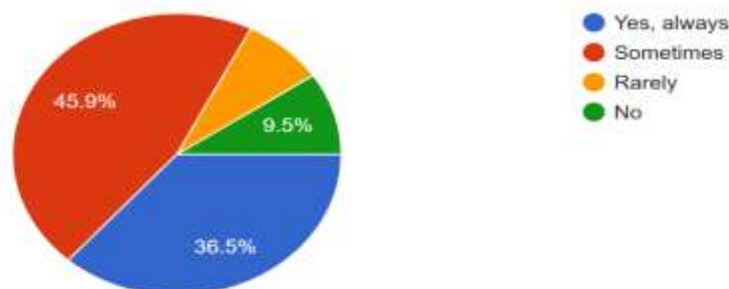
often customers respond to these incentives can help businesses optimize their timing and approach to promotions.

How can Handmade Businesses apply this data?

1. **Strategic Offer Planning**
2. **Promote Social Media Exclusivity**
3. **Loyalty Programs**
4. **Time-Limited Promotions**
5. **Targeted Marketing**

Use the data to plan regular discounts, limited-time offers, or special bundles that appeal to customers who are motivated by promotions. For instance, offering discounts during peak shopping periods or on new product launches can attract more buyers. Highlight exclusive offers available only through social media platforms to encourage followers to stay engaged and make purchases. This creates a sense of community and exclusivity. Introduce loyalty or referral programs that offer customers discounts on future purchases, rewarding those who make repeat purchases or recommend your products to others. For those who responded "sometimes," consider creating time-sensitive offers that create urgency, such as flash sales or countdown deals, to convert those who might hesitate into buyers (Kamolovna, 2024).

Does discounts, giveaways or special offers on social media encourage you to buy handmade products?
74 responses



Open- ended questions are also given in this inquiry which helps to understand customer preferences and tailor contents according to their interests.

9.1 Summary of findings

The findings demonstrate that social media platforms are important in promoting handmade businesses in Uzbekistan, with Telegram and Instagram being the most influential channels. Young adults, especially women, are the primary consumers of handmade products, and businesses should tailor their marketing strategies to engage these groups. Content that showcases products, offers tutorials, and shares customer reviews resonates most with customers, indicating that businesses should prioritize these content types in their social media efforts. Discounts and special offers are powerful motivators, and businesses should consider incorporating regular promotions and loyalty programs to drive sales. Customer feedback, both in terms of reviews and

engagement, is essential for building trust and loyalty. Additionally, e-commerce platforms like Instagram and Facebook are critical for reaching broader audiences, both locally and internationally.

10. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role that social media plays in promoting handmade businesses in Uzbekistan. As digital platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and other e-commerce sites become more integrated into everyday life, they offer unique opportunities for artisans to reach a global audience and expand their customer base. Through the use of social media, craftsmen in Uzbekistan can showcase their products, share the stories behind their crafts, and engage with potential buyers directly. This research confirms that social media not only increases the visibility of handmade products but also builds trust and loyalty among customers through personal interaction and customer feedback. However, the study also revealed some challenges faced by artisans in Uzbekistan, such as limited digital literacy and the need for consistent content creation. To overcome these barriers, there is a need for more educational initiatives that help artisans optimize their social media presence and digital marketing strategies.

11. Suggestions for Future Research

Further research could explore the specific preferences and behaviors of different demographic groups across various social media platforms to help businesses fine-tune their marketing strategies. Also, they could investigate the role of influencers and collaborations in increasing visibility and sales for handmade businesses in Uzbekistan. Since platforms like eBay have been used to reach international customers, research on the effectiveness of e-commerce in expanding the market for handmade products outside Uzbekistan could be beneficial for businesses looking to scale. As digital transformation creates limitations for artisans, future researchers can make investigations on the ways of overcoming challenges and helping handmade business to improve their social media presence.

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