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Bagh Print for Gen Z: Cultural Storytelling through Print and Pattern

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Abstract: Bagh print is a traditional hand-block printing art practiced in Bagh village of Madhya Pradesh. Known for natural dyes, geometric arrangements, and unique red-black color palette, this craft is a representation of cultural memory and artisanal knowledge passed across generations. However, modern consumer culture, fast fashion, and digital buying patterns have reduced public understanding of handmade textiles. On the other hand, Generation Z is emerging as a consumer group that values authenticity, sustainability, personal identity, and visual storytelling. This research explores how Bagh print can become a bridge between heritage and youth culture. It studies the complete printing process, analyses the challenges faced by artisans, and explains how storytelling, documentation, and modern design innovations can attract Gen Z. The research concludes that the survival of Bagh print depends on combining tradition with contemporary communication—especially digital media, designer collaborations, and transparency in production.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian textiles are a tapestry of history, technique, philosophy, and culture. Bagh print is one such textile craft, practiced mainly by the Khatri community in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. The motifs are inspired by nature—ferns, flowers, jali patterns, and architectural shapes—and printed using carved wooden blocks.

Even though Bagh print is traditional, it has the potential to appeal to modern sensibilities. Generation Z is tech-savvy, socially aware, environmentally conscious, and deeply engaged with visual culture. Their purchasing behaviour is influenced by:

- 1) Storytelling,
- 2) Ethical production,
- 3) Hand-made value,
- 4) And products that represent identity.

If Bagh print is positioned correctly, it can become relevant not only as a heritage textile but also as a contemporary design language.

II. PROCESS OF BAGH PRINTING





A. Fabric Selection

Cotton, mulmul, tussar silk, and chiffon are commonly used. Natural fabrics are preferred because they absorb dyes better.

B. Washing and Pre-treatment

Raw fabric contains starch, chemical residue, and dust.

- 1) It is washed in flowing water (preferably river water).
- 2) After washing, it is treated with *harad* (myrobalan powder) which acts as a natural mordant, helping the dye bind strongly.

C. Block Making

- 1) Blocks are hand-carved by skilled craftsmen.
- 2) Each motif can take several hours to carve.
- 3) Traditional designs include:
 - o *Nariyal jaal* (coconut grid)
 - o *Leheriya waves*
 - o *Jhumka motif*
 - o *Phool bel* (flower vine)

A single design sometimes requires 3 different blocks: outline, filling, and detailing.

D. Dye Preparation

The uniqueness of Bagh lies in **natural dyes**:

Color	Natural source
Red	Madder root (aal)
Black	Iron rust, jaggery, tamarind seeds
Brown	Alum and iron mixture

These dyes require fermenting, filtering, and heating—a chemical process learned through experience, not textbooks.

E. Printing

- 1) The fabric is stretched on long tables.
- 2) The artisan dips the block into the dye tray.
- 3) The block is stamped with rhythm and precision.
- 4) Mistakes are rare because skill is inherited through practice from childhood.
- 5) After printing, the fabric must rest and dry.

F. Bhatti Process (Boiling)

Printed fabric is boiled in large copper vessels with natural chemicals.

Benefits:

Color fixing

Removing excess dye

Bringing brightness and shine

G. Final Finishing

The cloth is dried under sunlight and ironed.

Each finished product reflects 100% handmade effort.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite its cultural and artistic value, Bagh print faces serious survival challenges:

Issue	Explanation
Lack of awareness	Many young people cannot differentiate real Bagh from machine-print imitations.
Economic instability	Hand printing takes days, but machine fabric is cheaper and floods the market.
Design gap	Traditional layouts do not always match modern fashion silhouettes.
Digital absence	Most artisans are not trained in branding, social media, or online sales.
Cultural loss	Younger generations of artisans lose interest due to low income.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

- 1) Craft Heritage Studies: Multiple textile research papers highlight that Indian crafts are rich sources of cultural identity. Hand-block printing symbolizes memory, migration, tradition, and social meaning.
- 2) Semiotics and Motifs: Studies in visual communication show that motifs are a language. Each element—flower, lattice, geometric line—can represent values like purity, prosperity, protection, and cultural celebration.
- 3) Sustainable Fashion and Gen Z: Fashion studies reveal that Gen Z prefers eco-friendly, cruelty-free, and ethically paid artisanal work. They often reject mass-produced fast fashion.
- 4) Digital Media Impact: Research indicates that Instagram, YouTube Shorts, and Reels are powerful tools for showcasing handcraft techniques. Craft videos receive high engagement as people love watching the process.
- 5) Craft Revival Case Studies

Brands working with Ajrakh, Kalamkari, and Ikat have succeeded through:

- o Designer tie-ups
- o Limited-edition collections
- o Transparent artisan-credit systems
- o Storytelling tags and documentaries

This literature suggests that Bagh print can also follow similar revival strategies.

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

- 1) Secondary research from journals, government craft reports, fashion trend studies, and NGO case studies.
- 2) Online observation of Bagh prints on Instagram, Pinterest, and craft marketplaces.
- 3) Proposed primary research:
 - o Interview 10–15 Bagh artisans about challenges and expectations.
 - o Survey 200–300 Gen Z buyers on what kind of handmade fashion interests them.

B. Data Analysis

- 1) Compare what artisans produce vs. what Gen Z demands.
- 2) Study common motifs and their cultural meaning.
- 3) Identify content types (photos, reels, stories) that attract young audiences online.

C. Research Approach

- 1) Qualitative, descriptive research.
- 2) Observation + digital ethnography + surveys.

VI. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

A. Why Gen Z is a suitable audience

Gen Z likes:

- 1) unique products, not mass copies
- 2) eco-friendly and handmade work
- 3) meaningful designs for self-expression
- 4) brands with social responsibility

Bagh print naturally fulfills all these values.

B. Problems Found

- 1) Machine-printed fake “Bagh style” fabric confuses customers.
- 2) Artisans do not earn profits equal to effort.
- 3) No large-scale branding or storytelling.
- 4) Dull presentation in modern stores makes youth ignore it.
- 5) Limited product diversification (mostly dupattas, sarees).

C. Opportunities for Growth

- 1) Streetwear using Bagh prints (hoodies, bucket hats, denim jackets)
- 2) Home décor (cushion covers, lamps, wallpapers)
- 3) Limited-edition capsules with youth designers
- 4) QR code product tags linking to artisan stories and videos
- 5) Social media reels showing printing steps and dye preparation

D. Communication Strategy

- 1) Storytelling: Every product should explain its motif and artisan.
- 2) Visual marketing: Close-up shots of blocks, hands, and dyes.
- 3) Influencer tie-ups: Youth icons wearing Bagh print garments.
- 4) Workshops: Schools, colleges, fashion institutes.

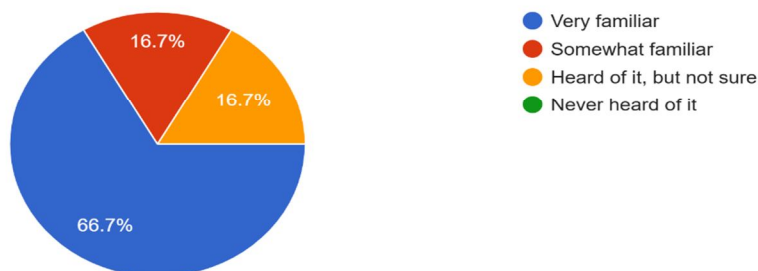
E. Cultural Value

If Gen Z starts using Bagh print, the craft will stay alive.

The craft is not only fashion—it is history, hand-skill, environment care, and community memory.

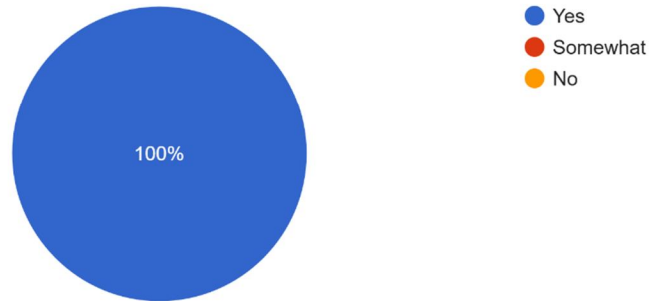
How familiar are you with Bagh print before this survey?

6 responses



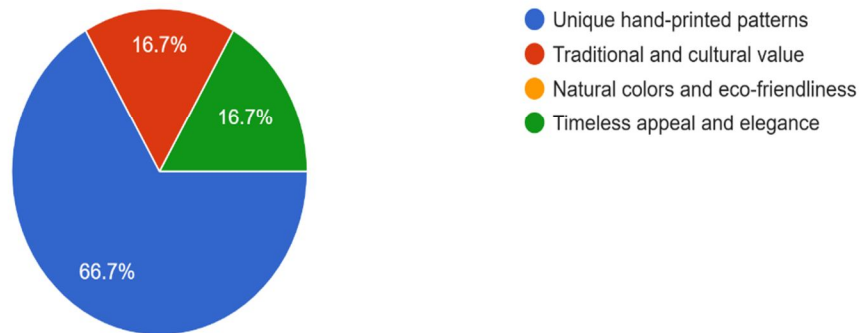
Are you interested in traditional textile arts such as Bagh printing?

6 responses



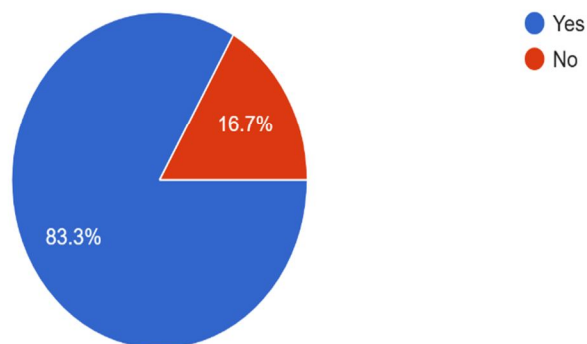
What do you love most about Bagh prints?

6 responses



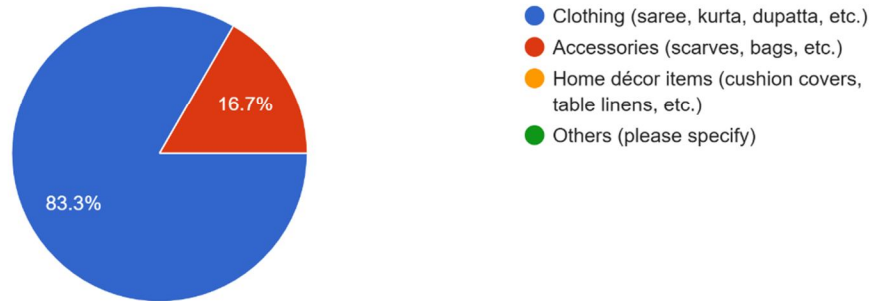
Have you ever purchased any product made with Bagh print?

6 responses



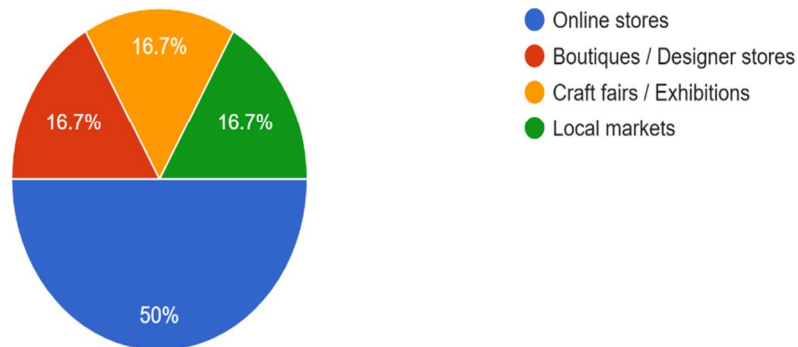
If yes, what type of product did you purchase?

6 responses



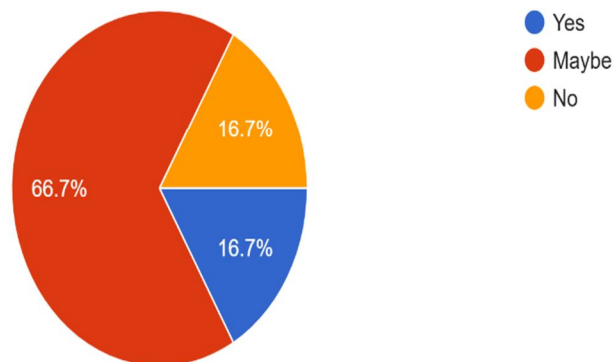
Where would you prefer to buy Bagh print products?

6 responses



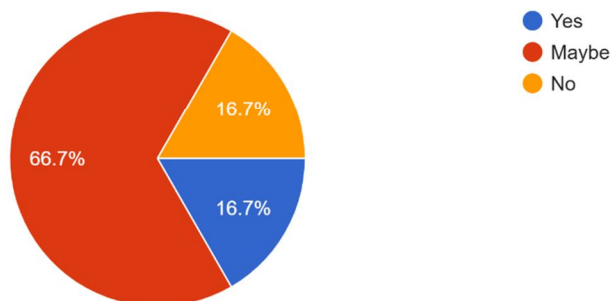
Would you be willing to pay a higher price for genuine handmade Bagh print products?

6 responses



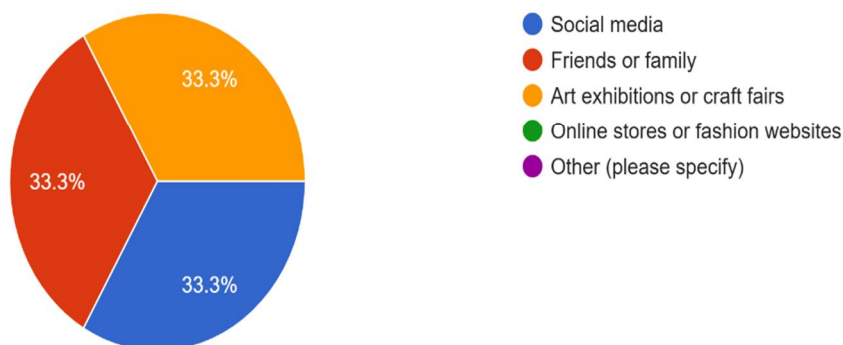
Would you be willing to pay a higher price for genuine handmade Bagh print products?

6 responses



Where did you first come across Bagh prints?

6 responses



VII. CONCLUSION

Bagh print is a living heritage that communicates culture through colors, blocks, motifs, and human effort. To reach Generation Z, it must be presented as:

- 1) sustainable fashion,
- 2) a form of identity expression,
- 3) and a meaningful story rather than just cloth.

By combining tradition with technology—like social media, designer collaborations, QR storytelling, and modern silhouettes—the craft can renew its relevance and increase artisan income.

If these steps are implemented, Bagh print can survive not only as a museum craft, but as a modern cultural symbol worn proudly by today's youth.

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