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Cultural Identity in Motion: How Youth are Adopting Block Print in Everyday Fashion

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Abstract: ***This research investigates the growing adoption of block-printed textiles among youth and its implications for cultural identity and contemporary fashion. Block printing, a traditional handcrafted technique with deep historical roots, is being reinterpreted by young consumers who integrate it into daily wear, blending heritage aesthetics with modern style. Through an analysis of fashion trends, social media influence, and sustainable consumption practices, the study demonstrates how youth use block-printed garments to express individuality, cultural pride, and ethical values. The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, positioning block printing as a living craft that continues to shape cultural identity in motion.***
Keywords: Block Printing, Youth Fashion, Cultural Identity, Traditional Crafts, Contemporary Style, Sustainable Fashion, Heritage Textiles, Artisan Craft, Fashion Trends, Social Media Influence

I. INTRODUCTION

Block printing is one of India's most treasured textile crafts, deeply rooted in cultural heritage and traditional artistry. This age-old technique involves stamping patterns on fabric with hand-carved wooden blocks and naturally prepared dyes. Each region in India has developed its own distinctive style — from the earthy tones of Bagru and Sanganer in Rajasthan to the geometric motifs of Ajrakhpur in Gujarat and the bold contrasts of Bagh in Madhya Pradesh. Every design carries a story inspired by nature, spirituality, and local traditions, making block printing not only a visual art form but also a reflection of India's cultural identity.

In today's era, however, the perception of block printing is shifting. What was once limited to traditional attire such as sarees and dupattas is now being reimagined in modern silhouettes like shirts, dresses, and co-ord sets. With rising awareness about sustainability and handmade fashion, young consumers are beginning to appreciate the authenticity, imperfections, and eco-friendly nature of block-printed textiles. They see it as a way to express individuality and cultural connection in an increasingly globalized world.

Through social media exposure, fashion collaborations, and lifestyle trends, block printing has successfully entered contemporary wardrobes. This evolution represents more than a revival — it is a cultural transformation where the youth embrace heritage crafts as part of their modern identity. Thus, block printing continues to evolve as a living tradition, bridging the gap between rural craftsmanship and urban fashion, and redefining what cultural pride looks like in the 21st century.

II. PROCESS



Fabric Preparation: The fabric is washed, dried, and laid flat for printing.

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Dyeing: The fabric is first dyed completely



Printing: A chemical is used to remove color from specific areas, creating patterns and designs.



Drying: The printed fabric is dried in the shade or sun.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

During my field visit to Ujjain to study the traditional craft of block printing, I observed that most artisans continue to produce conventional items such as sarees, dupattas, and home décor fabrics. Although these products beautifully represent the heritage and skill of block printing, they mainly appeal to traditional buyers. At the same time, insights collected through an online Google Forms survey revealed that younger consumers—especially those from Generation Z—are interested in wearing block-printed clothing, yet they often feel that the available designs are too traditional, repetitive, or not suited to their everyday fashion choices.

This shows a clear disconnect between the traditional block-printing practices of artisans and the modern aesthetic preferences of today's youth. While block printing holds strong cultural and artistic significance, it struggles to resonate with younger audiences who prefer more contemporary, minimalistic, and experimental styles. Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore new design approaches that reinterpret block printing for casual wear, street fashion, and Indo-Western styles. Such innovation can help preserve the craft's cultural identity while ensuring its continued relevance in a rapidly changing fashion landscape.

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IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to R. Preetha (2024), block printing is among the oldest and most significant textile arts in India, practiced for centuries in regions such as Sanganer and Bagru in Rajasthan. Her study highlights how artisans have managed to sustain this traditional craft by incorporating new motifs, experimental colour palettes, and innovative layout designs that appeal to modern buyers. Preetha emphasizes that tradition survives only when it evolves with time, and block printing serves as a strong example of how heritage crafts can adapt while maintaining their authenticity.

Similarly, Anjali Pandey (2022) explores the relationship between block printing and sustainable fashion practices. She points out that this craft relies on natural dyes, eco-friendly materials, and hand-based techniques that minimize environmental impact. Her research shows that today's consumers are increasingly conscious of sustainability, preferring fabrics that are ethical, organic, and locally produced. Pandey concludes that block printing aligns perfectly with the global movement toward slow and responsible fashion, where handmade and environmentally conscious products are gaining renewed importance.

In another study, Garg and Singh (2020) discuss the transformation of block printing from a rural handicraft into a contemporary urban fashion element. They note that artisans and designers are now experimenting with bold motifs, vibrant colours, and modern silhouettes to cater to the preferences of younger generations. Their research reveals that this fusion of traditional printing methods with modern aesthetics has successfully bridged the gap between rural craftsmanship and the global fashion industry, giving block printing a new identity in urban markets.

Eiluned Edwards (2016) also contributes valuable insights by framing block printing as a form of cultural identity and self-expression. Her research explains that young consumers increasingly view traditional prints as symbols of pride and individuality. By wearing block-printed garments, they express a sense of belonging while embracing cultural heritage in a modern context. Edwards further observes that these prints are now being incorporated into western and Indo-fusion styles, proving that the craft's versatility enables it to transcend traditional boundaries.

Lastly, Smriti Saha (2024) examines the influence of digital media on the revival of block printing. She emphasizes that platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and Etsy have played a major role in promoting handcrafted textiles to younger audiences. According to her, social media provides artisans and small brands with global visibility, enabling them to showcase their creativity, connect with eco-conscious buyers, and tell the stories behind their work. This online presence not only increases market reach but also ensures that traditional block printing continues to thrive in a digital-driven world.

Together, these studies highlight that block printing is not merely a craft of the past but a living art form that continues to adapt and inspire. Through sustainability, innovation, and digital engagement, the craft has successfully evolved into a meaningful expression of modern cultural identity.

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V. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach to understand how the traditional art of block printing is being adapted by today's youth in everyday fashion. The aim is to explore how a centuries-old handcraft continues to evolve with modern trends while maintaining its cultural value. By combining field experiences, artisan interactions, and design observation, this research provides an in-depth look at how cultural heritage and youth identity intersect through fashion.

A. Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and exploratory design, as it focuses on observing and describing real experiences and transformations within the world of block printing. This design helps in exploring how artisans preserve traditional techniques while also experimenting with new colour combinations, motifs, and garment styles to appeal to young consumers. It also allows for the analysis of how youth interpret block prints in their everyday clothing choices—particularly through casual and Indo-Western wear. The study connects the traditional craftsmanship of rural artisans with the modern preferences of urban youth, showing how fashion can become a bridge between two worlds: heritage and modernity.

B. Data Collection

To gain meaningful insights, both primary and secondary data were collected.

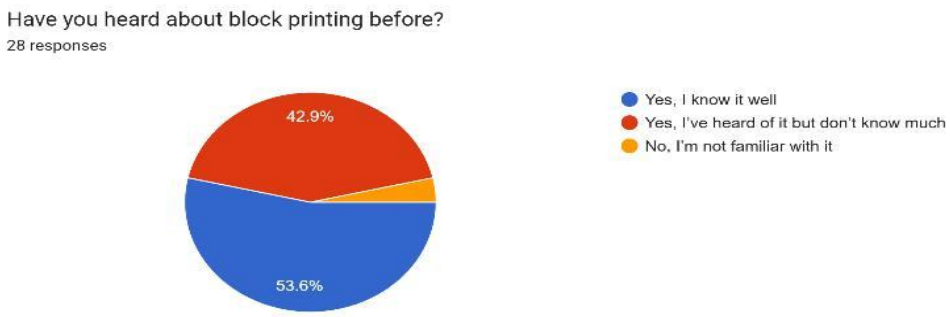
1) Primary Data: - The primary data was gathered through a field visit and workshop participation in *Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh*, where the researcher engaged directly with local block print artisans. Observing the printing process—from carving the wooden blocks to dyeing and stamping the fabric—helped in understanding the time, effort, and creativity involved in each piece. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with artisans to learn about their design inspirations, challenges, and opinions on how the younger generation perceives their work. Additionally, informal discussions were held with fashion students and young consumers to understand their interest in block-printed casual wear. Their feedback offered valuable insights into what kind of prints, fabrics, and colour schemes appeal to them the most.

2) Secondary Data: - Secondary information was collected from books, journals, research papers, design magazines, and online fashion reports related to traditional crafts, textile history, sustainable design, and youth fashion. These sources provided theoretical support and helped to compare the findings from fieldwork with existing literature on cultural identity, sustainability, and fashion innovation.

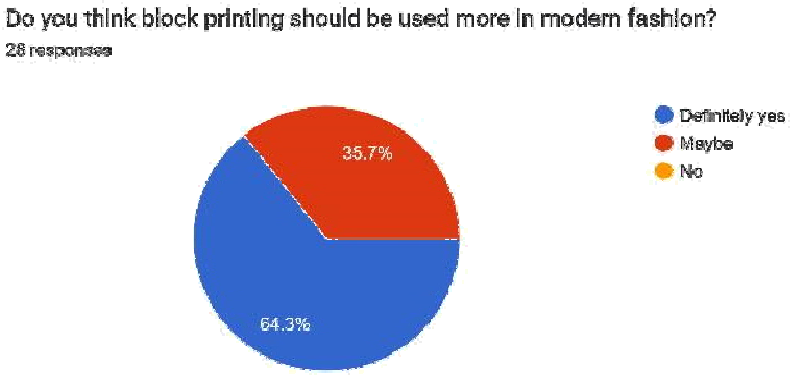
3) Data Analysis: - After collecting all the information, a thematic analysis approach was used to organize and interpret the data. The interviews and field notes were carefully reviewed to identify common themes such as *heritage preservation, sustainability, modern adaptation, and youth engagement.* Visual observations from the workshop were also analysed to understand how design elements—like motifs, colours, and patterns—are evolving to suit modern styles.

Comparing the artisans' viewpoints with those of young consumers helped highlight the gap between traditional production and modern fashion expectations. It also revealed a growing desire among youth to wear clothes that are both stylish and meaningful—those that reflect cultural roots but also match their modern lifestyle

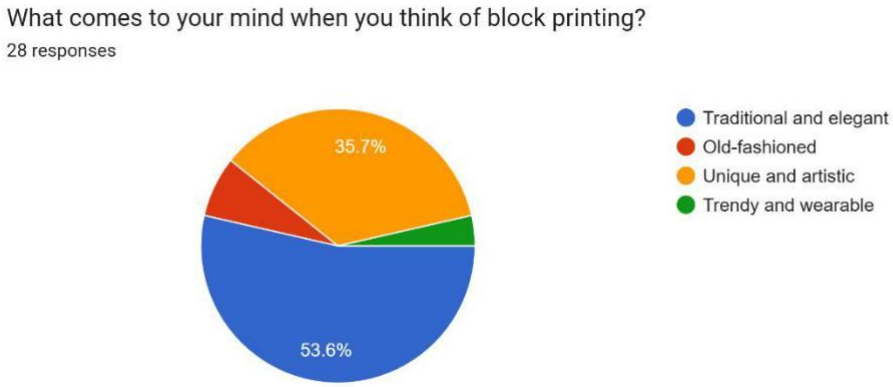
VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION



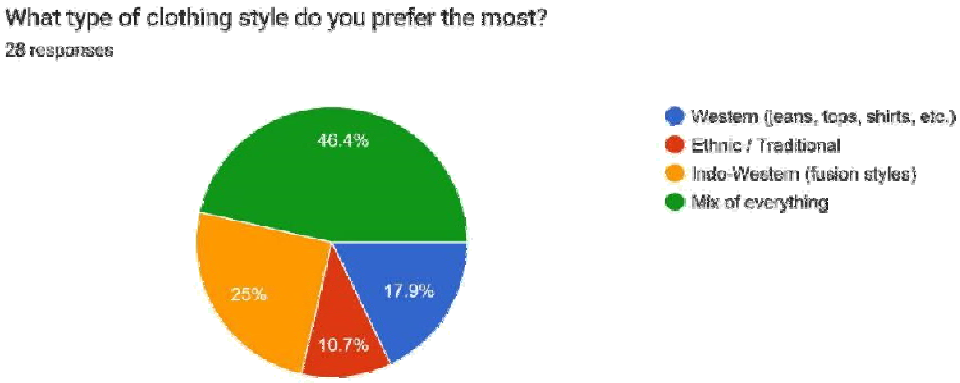
The survey indicates a **high level of awareness** of block printing, with **53.6%** of respondents knowing it well and another **42.9%** having heard of it but not knowing much. Only a minimal percentage (**3.6%**) were unfamiliar with the technique.



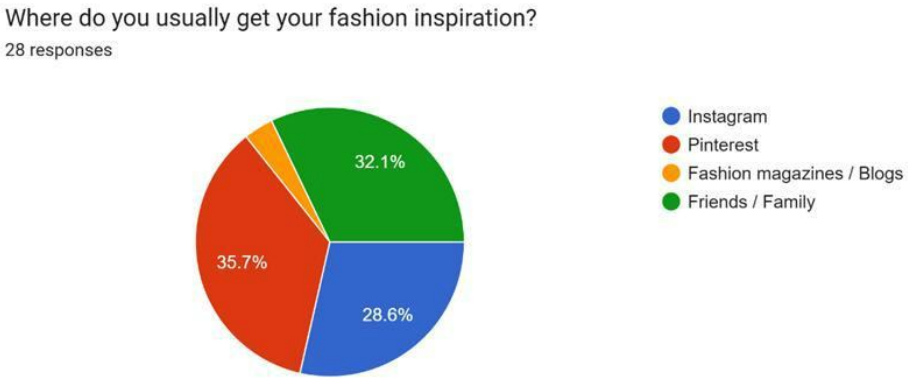
There is strong support for integrating block printing into modern fashion, with 64.3% of people saying it "Definitely yes" should be used more. An additional 35.7% responded "Maybe," indicating nearly unanimous potential for its greater use.



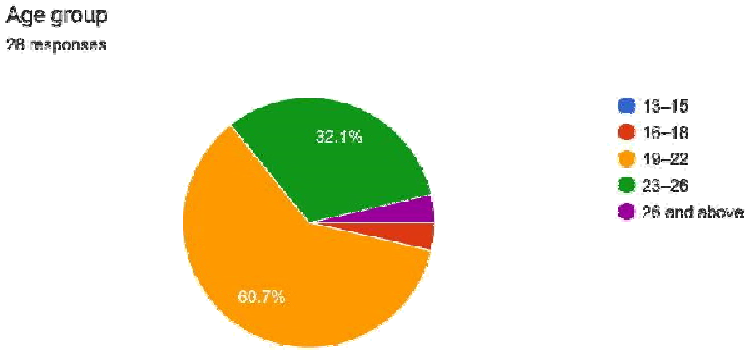
Most respondents perceive block printing positively: 53.6% find it "Traditional and elegant", and 35.7% see it as "Unique and artistic". The view of it being "Old-fashioned" is low (7.1%), and very few consider it "Trendy and wearable" (3.6%).



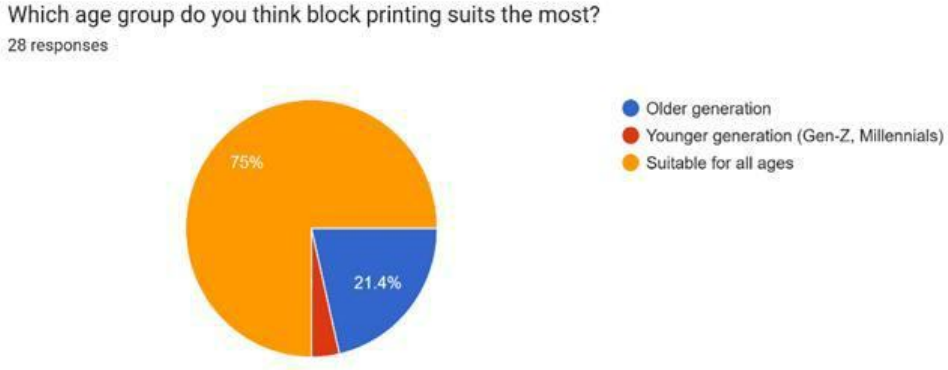
The most preferred clothing style is a "Mix of everything" (46.4%), indicating a preference for versatile wardrobes. This is followed by Indo-Western (fusion styles) at 25% and then Western styles (17.9%)



The primary sources of fashion inspiration for the respondents are Pinterest (35.7%) and Friends/Family (32.1%). Instagram is the third most popular source at 28.6%, with very few people referring to fashion magazines/blogs (3.6%), highlighting the dominance of social media and personal circles for style ideas.

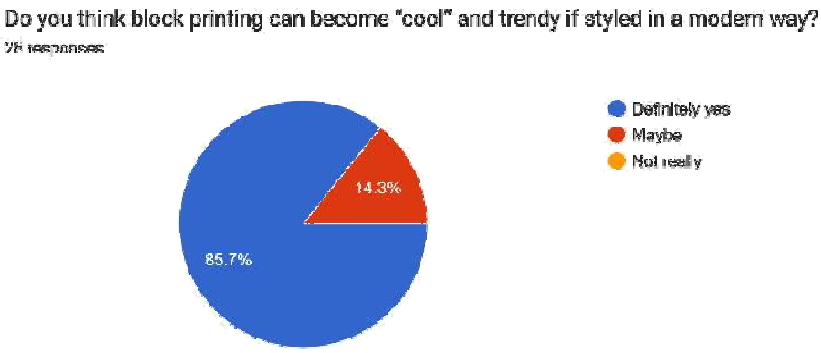


The survey primarily targeted a young adult demographic. The 19–22 age group accounted for the largest share at 60.7%, followed by 23–26 at 32.1%. Other age groups (13–15, 16–18, and 26 and above) made up less than 10% combined**.**

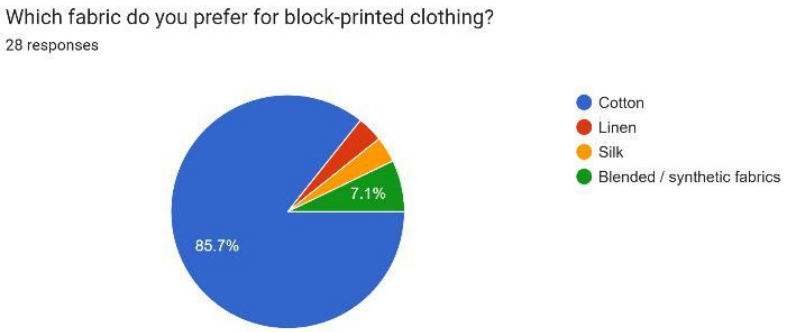


The majority of respondents (75%) believe block printing is "Suitable for all ages." Among the specific groups, the "Older generation" was deemed suitable by 21.4%, while the "Younger generation (Gen-Z, Millennials)" was favoured by less than 5%.

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Respondents overwhelmingly believe block printing can become "cool" and trendy if styled modernly, with 85.7% agreeing with "Definitely yes." The remaining 14.3% chose "Maybe," showing high confidence in its modern appeal.



Cotton is the overwhelmingly preferred fabric for block-printed clothing, chosen by 85.7% of respondents. Other natural fabrics like Linen and Silk received minor percentages, while blended/synthetic fabrics were the least preferred at 7.1%

VII. ARTISANS



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MOHAMMAD AHSAAN
Gender – Male
Age – 40
Years of Experience - 20 Years
Mohammad Ahsaan, a 40-year-old craftsman with two decades of experience, discussed the challenges artisans face in connecting traditional block printing with modern youth preferences. He mentioned that while safeguarding heritage brings great pride, there is an urgent need to combine traditional motifs with contemporary cuts and patterns to appeal to younger audiences and keep the craft alive in today's fashion market.



MOHAMMAD SHARIF
Gender - Male
Age -55
Years of Experience - 40 Years
Mohammad Sharif, a 55-year-old block printing artisan with over four decades of experience, emphasized that preserving the traditional hand-printing and natural dyeing processes is essential to maintaining the authenticity of block printing. He explained that although screen and digital printing are becoming popular, the slight irregularities of handcrafted block prints give each fabric its unique character and charm.

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AKBARI BANO
Gender – Female
Age – 45
Years of Experience - 20 – 25 Years
Akbari Bano, aged 45 and working for nearly 25 years in block printing, shared valuable insights into the crucial role women play in this craft. She highlighted that the use of natural dyes and eco-friendly materials not only enhances the sustainability of the process but also improves the safety and working conditions of artisans. According to her, these sustainable practices are helping increase both local and global demand for handcrafted block-printed textiles.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This research shows that block printing is more than just an old craft — it's a living part of India's culture that continues to change with time. During the study, it was clear that young people are giving new life to this traditional art by using it in casual and everyday fashion. They see block-printed clothes as something that connects them to their roots while also matching their modern style. Artisans, on the other hand, are trying to keep traditional methods alive while also experimenting with new designs and colour ideas that appeal to today's youth.

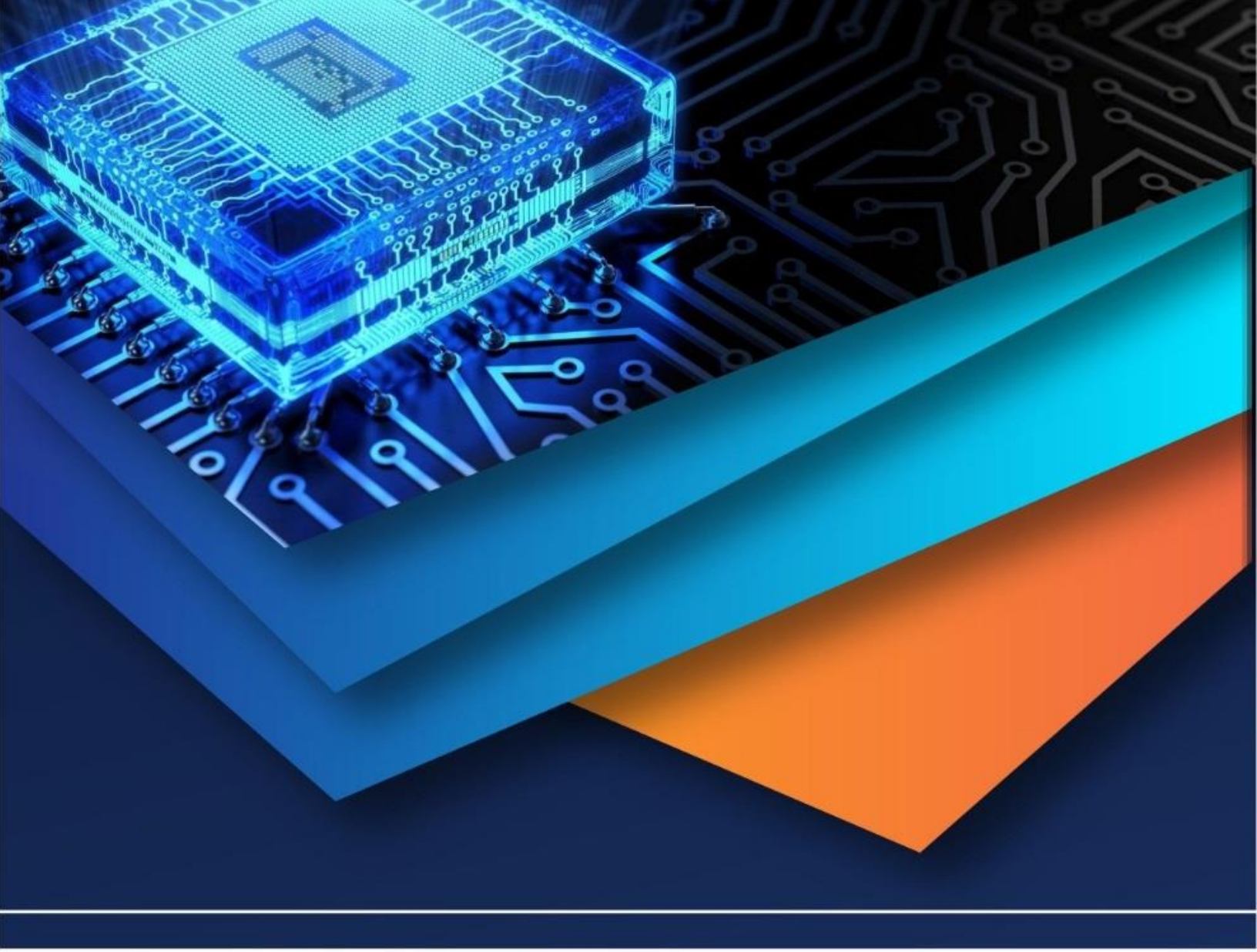
The study also found that block printing fits well with the idea of sustainable and handmade fashion, which many people now prefer. By mixing old techniques with fresh ideas, this craft is finding its place in the modern world again.

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In short, block printing has moved from being something traditional to something trendy and meaningful. It represents both cultural pride and creativity — showing how tradition can grow and stay alive when people continue to value and adapt it.

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