Journal of Communication and Management

ISSN: 2583-617X (Online)

Journal home page: https://jcoma.com

Review Article

DOI: 10.58966/JCM20265208

Socio-economic Empowerment of Women in Handloom Sector: A Systematic Literature Review

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 25 March, 2026
Revised: 18 April, 2026
Accepted: 28 May, 2026
Published: 23 June, 2026

Keywords:
Women's Empowerment; Handloom Industry; Livelihood Generation; Bibliometric Analysis.

ABSTRACT

This article extensively studies the literature on women's empowerment and livelihood generation in the handloom industry. The focus is to identify the structural and thematic limitations present and suggest future research directions for interdisciplinary studies. We combine qualitative content and bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review (SLR) to unravel thematic evolution and intellectual structure in this underexplored area. We use VOSviewer software to analyse sixty-two articles from Google Scholar and twenty-five articles from the Scopus database, published between 2010 and 2026. Our analysis provides a qualitative synthesis that highlights conceptual patterns and research gaps. Extant literature has looked at themes like socio-economic development, women's empowerment, employment, and livelihoods. However, important issues such as digital inclusion, sustainability and market integration remain scantily discussed. Results show weak collaboration networks, fragmented knowledge structures and limited thematic diversity. The study also offers insights for development agencies, policymakers, and practitioners to promote sustainable livelihood generation and inclusive growth in the handloom sector.

Introduction

The handloom sector is India's second-largest source of employment after agriculture, with around 35.22 lakh workers (Ministry of Textiles, 2020; PMF IAS, 2023). It plays an important role in preserving heritage through weaving and crafting. The Indian handloom industry is recognised globally for its eco-friendly products and plays a vital role in the global market for handwoven fabrics (Singh et al., 2025). Exports of Indian handlooms to faraway lands like Rome, Egypt, Persia, and China were recognised by scholars (Broudy, 1993; McLaughlin, 2010; Wild & Wild, 2004). The handloom industry in India operates with minimal capital and energy. Despite facing significant challenges in marketing, infrastructure, and finance, it remains the country's second-largest rural employer (Chakraborty, 2021), directly and indirectly supporting over 3.5 million people.

Women constitute 78% of the workforce in the handloom sector. Chompa (2022) highlights the role of women in the sustainable development of the nation. The empowered women population has the capacity to work as "change agents" in national growth (Jain & Gambhir, 2015). As per the 2013 National Handloom Census, around 54.59% of total adult workers in the handloom sector in M.P. are women. Out of 1834 women weavers in M.P., around 86.86% are full-time weavers. In this context, the women workforce in the handloom industry presents a crucial sample that needs to be considered to obtain a complete understanding of the socioeconomic empowerment of women in India.

Government plays an important role in the socio-economic empowerment of women workers in handloom by offering various schemes for their welfare, development and upliftment at national and state levels. These are

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Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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meant to create financial independence and a better social status for women weavers. Some of these include the SAMARTH Scheme for skill development and TRIFED schemes for tribal women weavers. Literature contains evaluative studies on schemes' effectiveness, which is crucial for the socio-economic improvement of women weavers.

In this paper, we undertake a systematic review of the literature on the socio-economic empowerment of women weavers. We focus on key factors affecting the socio-economic empowerment of women in the handloom sector and the channels through which these factors operate. Next, we look at challenges faced by women workers. Lastly, we study the literature on the role of government policies in empowering women in the handloom sector.

A large number of studies on the socio-economic empowerment of women weavers provide an opportunity to observe patterns in the results obtained. These studies cover geographically, culturally, and socio-politically distinct samples, and thus present an opportunity to glean the multidimensionality hidden in the singular issue of "socio-economic empowerment". VosViewer software is used to conduct a systematic literature review. Results show that the research domain remains structurally fragmented and thematically concentrated. Though the literature strongly addresses women's empowerment, it shows limited engagement with emerging perspectives such as sustainability and digital transformation. Additionally, dominance of localised studies highlights the need for broader comparative research.

Section 2 provides the theoretical background. Methodology is discussed in Section 3, and results are presented in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the results and insights generated therein. Section 6 concludes the paper.

Theoretical background

Handloom weaving is not only associated with livelihood, but it also represents the traditional art and cultural heritage of the place it belongs to. It signifies a rich heritage and legacy passed on from one generation to another (Chakraborty et al.,2026). Many of the handloom clusters in India are honoured with a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, emphasising their cultural importance.

Women in the handloom sector

India's handloom is a traditional craft that employs thousands of people in both rural and urban areas. In Indian society, the connection between gender and the economy is quite significant. Women in India play a crucial role in all economic endeavours, including domestic work, farming, industry, and the service sector (Rao et al., 2018).

Home-based industries in Assam's Sonitpur district can uplift women's socio-economic status with policy support. Since commercial banks frequently give preference to men and formal enterprises, women face substantial obstacles in availing financial services. This financial exclusion limits their ability to engage in economic activities and contributes to greater financial hardship and poverty (Kalita, 2019; Branali Maity, 2016). Socioeconomic advancement of women is known as empowerment. Empowerment is measured in terms of decision-making for family, significant purchases for family, participating in important economic decisions, meeting family needs, being able to buy fixed assets, and meeting the household's fundamental needs (Jain & Gambhir, 2015).

Handloom Sector and Women's Empowerment

Empowerment is an abstract concept that manifests in multiple aspects of life. An indicator or variable as a measure of social or economic autonomy is not reflective of the multifaceted nature of empowerment (Sedai et al., 2022). The literal definition of empowerment is "to invest with power". Hence, empowerment gives women the capability to take charge of resources and build mental and physical capacity to question the dominant gender norms. The process of enhancing people's well-being from the cycle of poverty, giving them social identity, and access to resources like education, jobs, health care, and other services to improve their lives is known as socio-economic empowerment. The goal of the procedure is to improve their quality of life going forward and equalise social disparity (Miftahorrozi, 2022).

Social respect, recognition, and agency are intertwined with economic gains. In the state of Assam, weaving is profoundly rooted in community and domestic life. The participation of women in handloom and related activities improves their respect and position within the community and family. Though many women artisans still face challenges like restricted mobility. domestic violence and humiliation. Women act as custodians of the traditional skills (e.g., Muga and Assam silk), and this art of weaving breaks the conventional gender roles, improves the cultural preservation, and to some extent plays an important role in the cohesiveness of the community (Sarkar & Pradeepa, 2024).

From an angle of social empowerment, which is measured with freedom of choices, mobility, and self-confidence (Raj & Anitha, 2024). Evidence from Varanasi's weaver families shows that despite women's indispensable labour in handloom weaving, husbands dominate decisions on household purchases, mobility, children's education, finances, fertility, and sexual relations (Shaw et al., 2016). This contrasts with findings from rural Assam, where income from handloom activities significantly improves women's decisionmaking ability and reduces domestic violence, though patriarchal constraints persist (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016).

Social empowerment is significantly influenced by

nearly all social variables. Income, self-employment, involvement in home decision-making, autonomous handling of personal affairs, credit management, leisure, unpaid labour, self-confidence, and social acknowledgement are key components of achieving high overall economic empowerment (Senapati & Ojha, 2019).

Literacy rate among women in the handloom sector is very low, which is largely a consequence of their economic condition. Women are not permitted to acquire formal education, and their training and life identity are limited to handloom weaving. Women weavers also disproportionately bear the consequences of adversities faced by the sector (Premsundar & Kannan, 2013). Competition from power looms requires a technological upgrade of the handloom sector. Lower literacy levels among women weavers also create challenges (Raju, 2014), such as difficulty in finding alternate employment (Panda & Bhuwania, 2022). It is recommended that literacy among women weavers should be increased (Barooah & Dedhia, 2015). Provision of technical training, education and awareness generation for women weavers is recommended (Panda & Bhuwania, 2022).

Major issues faced by women weavers include a lack of skill upgradation and know-how on marketing of the textiles produced (Poongodi & Jayanthi, 2022). Women seem to have little autonomy and empowerment (Shaw et al., 2016). The role of women weavers in decision-making is limited (Raju, 2014). It is noted that the earnings of handloom weavers accorded them a role in family decision-making. Women face fewer obstacles that are gender specific due to their independent economic status (Barooah & Dedhia, 2015).

Determinants of Empowerment

Studies show that engagement in homebased handloom work improves women's economic position. Subsequent earnings increase women's intrahousehold bargaining power, decisionmaking ability, control over income and assets, mobility, and reduced domestic violence (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016). Women report better status due to increased earnings from weaving after joining SHGbank linkage programmes (Hazarika, 2020).

Handicraft studies in Rangpur, Bangladesh, show employment, working hours, and monthly income as significant positive predictors of empowerment (Rahman, 2021). In Kangra (Himachal Pradesh), most women agree that handloom work minimises financial dependency and improves social status, recognition, and participation in SHGs/cooperatives (Sharma & Sharma, 2024). Social enterprises in the handloom cluster of Madhya Pradesh's Maheshwar have contributed to the financial independence and empowerment of marginalised women (Kishnani, 2021).

Amartya Sen, in his capability approach, conceptualises development and empowerment not merely as an increase in material wealth, but as the freedom to achieve, the expansion of an individual's capabilities to lead a life they have reason to value.

At the firm/cluster level, there are multiple determinants that shape women's empowerment. Work experience positively influences women's empowerment, while distance to markets constrains it (Hazarika, 2020). Education, income, family support, and specialised training significantly increase women workers' aspirations, whereas inadequate working capital, rising input costs, low wages, competition from powerlooms, and limited credit access impede their empowerment (Mukherjee, 2024).

Empowering women to make independent choices in healthcare, purchasing, and transportation is crucial for their overall empowerment. Surveys measuring women's socioeconomic empowerment focus on their decision-making roles (Mukherjee et al., 2005). A "Socio-Economic Empowerment Assessment" highlights that family dynamics, financial behaviour, psychological health, and structural poverty impact women's empowerment (Hawkins & Kim, 2012). The Maruthamunai handloom cluster empowers women economically, allowing female weavers to use their earnings for home needs, children's education, healthcare, clothing, bills, donations, and supporting the underprivileged, while also helping them save money (Safna & Nufile, 2016).

Challenges for women in the handloom sector

Major challenges faced by women weavers include long working hours and health issues. Women workers in Pollachi (Tamil Nadu) face low wages, seasonal variability in income, problems with raw material supply, and low access to sources of financing (Poongodi & Jayanthi, 2022). Women are not credited for their pre-weaving work and sometimes are not paid directly. Dependence on middlemen and limited access to the market are among the major issues in the handloom sector (Raju, 2014).

Female weavers received lower wages than male weavers. Since the mobility of women is restricted, they face issues in marketing their products effectively. Weavers require financial support to continue production. However, market uncertainties deter them from taking loans from financial institutions. Women workers have been exploited by master weavers (Devi, 2013). Availability of microfinance contributes to the socio-economic upliftment of women weavers (Baishya, 2019).

Several cooperative societies are dedicated to women weavers (Raju, 2014). Self-employed weavers earn higher wages than weavers employed with cooperative societies and merchant weavers. Weavers can fully benefit from government schemes, obtain financial support such

Table 1:

Dimensions	*Inclusion*	*Exclusion*	*Rationale*
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, dissertations, theses, reports, and unpublished manuscripts	To ensure academic quality, rigor and reliability of evidence
Publication Period	Studies published between 2010 and 2026	Studies published before 2010	Including contemporary developments in women's empowerment in the handloom sector
Language	Articles published in English	Non-English publications	For consistency in review and interpretation
Population	Studies focusing on women weavers, women artisans, women entrepreneurs, or female workers in the traditional handloom clusters.	Studies focusing exclusively on men or mixed populations.	Aligning with the study objective of understanding women's empowerment.
Sectoral Scope	The studies related to handloom weaving, handloom enterprises, artisans, handicrafts, and weaving-based livelihoods	Studies from unrelated sectors such as energy, healthcare, banking, agriculture, manufacturing, or general entrepreneurship without handloom relevance	Maintains sector-specific focus
Empowerment Dimension	Studies focusing on economic empowerment, social empowerment, livelihood-based decision-making, agency, financial inclusion, or institutional support	Studies that do not examine empowerment-related outcomes	Ensures direct relevance to research questions
Geographic Scope	Studies conducted in India and comparable developing-country contexts with relevance to handloom livelihoods	Studies with no contextual relevance to women's livelihood or empowerment in traditional industries	Broadens understanding while maintaining contextual relevance
Methodological Scope	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, conceptual, and review studies with clear methodological descriptions	Studies lacking methodological transparency or insufficient empirical/ theoretical contribution	Enhances methodological rigor
Accessibility	Full-text articles available through databases or institutional access	Abstract-only publications and inaccessible documents	Allows comprehensive evaluation of evidence
Quality Assessment	Studies meeting predefined quality criteria (relevance, methodological clarity, data adequacy, and contribution to research objectives)	Studies scoring below the quality threshold during assessment	Ensures robustness and credibility of findings

as insurance and loans, and a marketing network if cooperative societies are strengthened (Devi, 2013). Government financial assistance and schemes for the development of weavers should be introduced. Welfare schemes for women weavers are not available (Barooah & Dedhia, 2015).

Government-organised training programs for handloom workers have significantly improved their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deo et al., 2010). Recommendations include enhancing the supply of raw materials, facilitating financing, supporting technological upgrades and training, and creating a conducive work environment for women, including medical facilities (Raju, 2014). Family issues, lack of funding sources, lack of experience, technical training, exposure and information, unfavourable working environment and work-life balance are obstacles to women's economic empowerment (Jain & Gambhir, 2015).

Women in the handloom sector have low-paying and low-productivity roles. They also face gender discrimination in market access and overall welfare. As a result, gender inequalities persist in the handloom sector. The gap in the income of female and male handloom workers arises from the better status of men in education

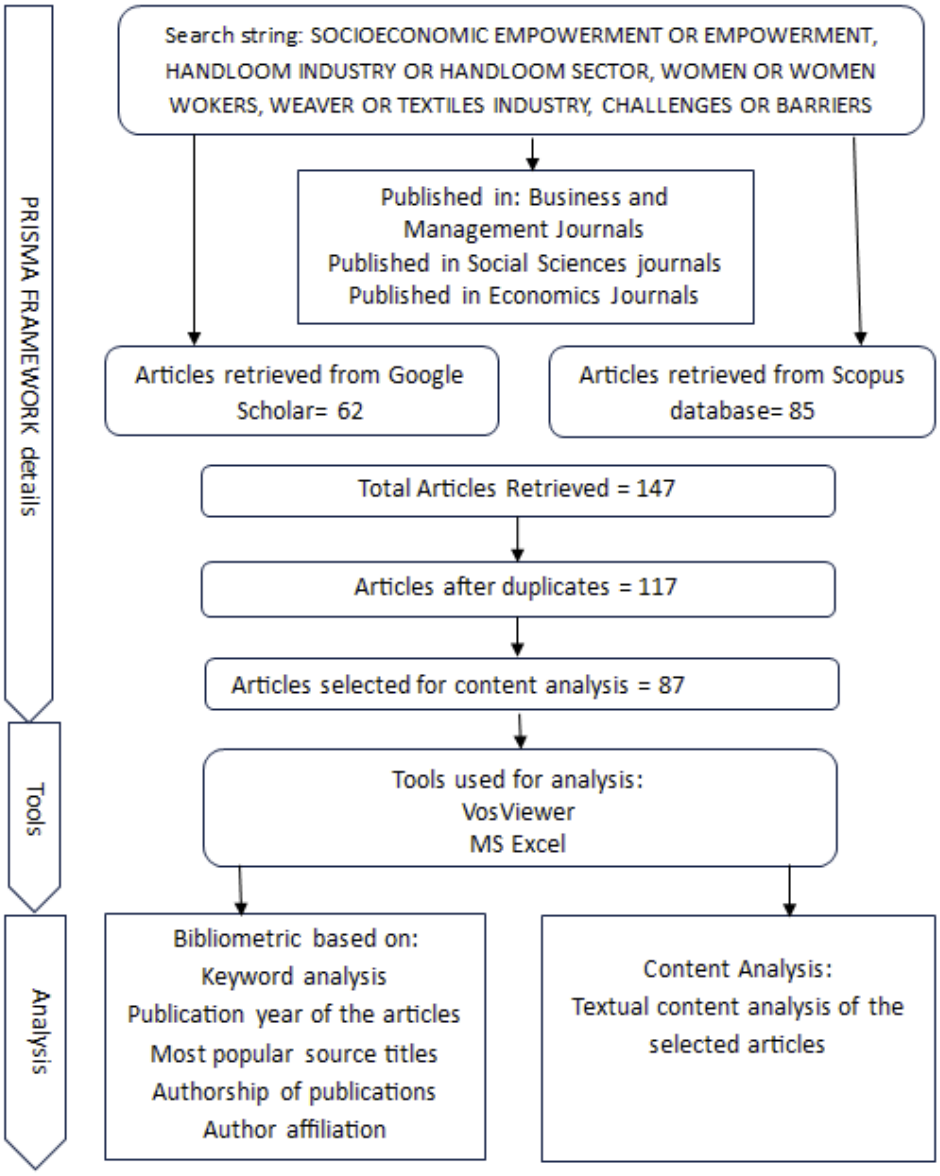

Figure 1:

and financial literacy. Other differences between male and female workers, such as risk attitude, technology use and SHG membership, also contribute to the gender income gaps among handloom micro-entrepreneurs. Women tend to have higher risk aversion and weaker entrepreneurial management (Hazarika, 2020).

Health and working conditions are important drivers of empowerment outcomes. Women weavers are known to experience health issues in Assam. This impacts their performance and income. Studies suggest that in the absence of a better work environment and ergonomic improvements, economic gains may not be sustained (Bori, 2021). Additionally, market access and entrepreneurial attitude may have distinct effects on men and women, leading to disparities in returns between the sexes (Hazarika, 2020; S. Gupta et al., 2024; Sinha et al., 2024; Todi & Deb, 2025; Huq, 2019; Bortamuly & Goswami, 2012).

Role of institutions/cooperative societies/NGO

Institutional measures are taken to support and encourage women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs are given preference in loans from nationalised banks and other financial institutions (Sarma, 2014). Studies of SHGs and social enterprises indicate that collective organisation, training and leadership support strengthen women's selfconfidence, networking and ability to initiate ventures, thereby deepening empowerment beyond income (Gupta, 2021).

Intermediary organisations are seen as empowerment enablers. Microfinancelinked SHGs facilitate access to

Table 2: Most Prolific Authors

Author	Documents	% of total documents*	Citations	Total link strength
Goswami, Kishor	3	10.00	53	4
Bortamuly, Alin Borah	2	6.67	39	3
Hazarika, Bhabesh	2	6.67	37	3
Panakaje, Niyaz	2	6.67	23	4
Rahiman, Habeeb Ur	2	6.67	23	4
Siddiq, Abbokar	2	6.67	23	4

Source(s): Authors' presentation using MS Excel and Vosviewer

credit, improve earnings from weaving, offer ownership and enhance socioeconomic status (Baishya, 2019). NGOs and SHGs in Uttarakhand provide training, information on government schemes, and support for venture creation, thereby promoting empowerment (Khanduri & Datta, 2021). Social enterprises in Madhya Pradesh's handloom sector combine income generation with social objectives but are geographically constrained by economies of scale and low awareness (Kishnani, 2021).

Government programs for women weavers offer machinery and financial incentives. Modern weaving equipment boosts their productivity and earnings, elevates their status in the community, empowering women. Educational attainment is crucial. Regulations should ensure women's participation in development initiatives and girls' education. However, education without job opportunities won't improve rural women's lives (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016). The handicraft sector is the primary income source for women. It fosters self-worth, independence, and self-sufficiency and promotes qualities like initiative and inventiveness.

Literature on women empowerment in handloom clusters largely focuses on income generation, livelihood improvement and employment opportunities. The overall evidence remains fragmented across various regions and contexts. Few studies have explored the broader dimensions, like social empowerment, agency, decision-making, institutional support, and challenges faced by women in these traditional handloom clusters. The role of government initiatives, cooperatives and other supporting mechanisms in women's empowerment remains unexplored. Given these gaps, a systematic literature review is necessary to develop an understanding of factors affecting women's empowerment in the handloom sector. We aim to address the gaps with the following research questions

RQ1: What are the key factors affecting the socio-economic empowerment of women in the handloom sector?

RQ2: How do these factors empower women engaged in the handloom sector?

RQ3: What are the major challenges women face in the handloom sector?

RQ4: What roles do government policies/cooperative societies play in the empowerment of women in the handloom sector?

Methodology

We conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) to review, evaluate and synthesise the existing body of research on women's socioeconomic empowerment in the handloom sector. We ensure transparency, rigour, and repeatability by adhering to standardized procedure of SLR (Tranfield et al., 2003). In new research fields where knowledge is dispersed and lacks theoretical coherence, SLR is an appropriate study method (Hardies et al.,2023). To improve analytical depth, we combine qualitative content analysis with bibliometric analysis. This enables identification of structural patterns and underlying thematic linkages in the literature (Baas et al., 2020; Zupic & Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021).

Data Sources and Search Strategy

We used an extensive literature search for complete coverage. Scopus is identified as the main database due to its comprehensive coverage of relevant peer-reviewed articles across a broad spectrum of topics. We also use Google Scholar for backward citation monitoring (Martín-Martín et al., 2017). Search strategy included the use of Boolean operators and field-specific filters. Main search phrases/themes were interaction of women, handloom/textile industry, and socioeconomic empowerment was the main search. Final search strings used are provided below:

Group 1: ("women empowerment") AND (handloom)

Group 2: ("socioeconomic empowerment") AND (women) AND (weaver)

Group 3: ("economic empowerment") AND (women) AND (weaver)

Group 4: ("financial inclusion") AND (women) AND (handloom)

Group 5: ("women entrepreneur") AND (handloom) AND (women OR weaver)

Group 6: ("skill development") (women) AND (handloom)

Group 7: ("sustainable livelihood") AND (women) AND (weaver)

Group 8: ("rural development") AND (women) AND (handloom)

Group 9: ("sustainable development") AND (women) AND (handloom)

Group 10: ("market access") AND (handloom sector) AND (women)

Table 3: Most Referenced Studies

Document	*Title*	*Year*	*Citations*	*Citations/Year*
Mahapatra et al. (2019)	Alignment in the Base of the Pyramid Producer Supply Chains: The Case of the Handloom Sector in Odisha, India	2019	23	3.29
Bortamuly and Goswami (2012)	Determinants of occupational choice of workers in the handloom industry in Assam	2013	23	1.77
Hazarika and Goswami (2016)	Do home-based micro-entrepreneurial earnings empower rural women? Evidence from the handloom sector in Assam	2016	14	1.40
Sedai et al. (2022)	Electrification and Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women in India	2022	25	6.25
Bortamuly and Goswami (2012)	Factors influencing wage structure of handloom workers in Assam	2012	16	1.00
Devi (2013)	Handlooms for livelihood in north-eastern region: Problems and prospects	2013	19	1.46
Jain (2020)	Microfinance Services and Women Empowerment in Biratnagar Metropolitan, Nepal	2020	11	1.83
Maity (2016)	Microfinance: Women from the margin to the mainstream	2016	10	1.00
Panakaje et al. (2023)	Socio-economic empowerment in rural India: Do financial inclusion and literacy matter?	2023	20	6.67
Senapati and Ojha (2019)	Socio-economic Empowerment of Women Through Micro-entrepreneurship: Evidence from Odisha, India	2019	24	3.43

Source(s): Authors' presentation using MS Excel and Vosviewer

Inclusion and Screening Process

First search yielded 1120 documents. These were subjected to multiple stages of screening. First, duplicate records were removed. Secondly, the abstracts and titles were analysed to develop a thorough understanding of the papers. Third, we use pre-established criteria for full-text screening. Criteria used for retention of articles, considered trustworthy and significant, included peer-reviewed articles, English as the article language, and published between 2010 and 2026 (Lombardi & Secundo, 2021). Studies unrelated to the handloom/textile industry, women's empowerment, or socioeconomic factors were excluded. This screening process yielded 147 articles. Of these, 62 were from Google Scholar, and 85 were from Scopus.

In the next stage, we removed duplicate entries, resulting in 117 distinct papers. The complete procedure resulted in a final sample of 87 articles. Documentation of the screening procedure was done with the PRISMA framework, for openness and repeatability (Page et al., 2021). Articles on women's empowerment in unrelated sectors such as biodiversity conservation, non-textile occupations, and waste management were excluded. Articles that address questions directly related to traditional textile livelihoods, the handloom sector, handicrafts, women weavers and associated empowerment outcomes were retained for final analysis.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are based on high-quality and relevant studies addressing women's socio-economic empowerment in the handloom sector, which were retained for analysis. The screening process was conducted in multiple steps, including title screening, abstract review, full-text assessment, and quality evaluation. This procedure enhanced the transparency, rigour, and reproducibility of the systematic literature review in accordance with PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

Selected articles were analysed using a two-stage approach. One, a bibliometric analysis was done using VOSviewer to examine authorship patterns, citation relationships, and keyword co-occurrence. This analysis provided insights into the evolution of the research domain and its intellectual framework.

Second, recurring themes, conceptual linkages, and research needs were identified through qualitative content analysis. The selected works were thoroughly examined. This approach helps us better understand the institutional and socioeconomic facets of women's empowerment in the handloom sector. To make sure that interpretations were

Table 4: Keyword Frequency

Keyword	Occurrences	Frequency%	Frequency%
Assam	4	0.78	0.13
Employment	4	0.78	0.13
Empowerment	4	0.78	0.13
India	9	1.76	0.29
Socio-Economic Empowerment	6	1.18	0.19
Women Empowerment	4	0.78	0.13

Source(s): Authors' presentation using MS Excel and Vosviewer

supported by substantial evidence from the reviewed papers, the results of the bibliometric analysis were triangulated using qualitative content analysis. By using an integrated strategy, the study's validity is improved, and the risk of reliance on bibliometric indicators is decreased.

Results

Prolific Authors and Collaboration Structure

With 30 documents and 58 authors, authorship distribution in Table 2 shows a fragmented research landscape. Goswami is the most productive contributor with three papers and highest citations. Authors Bortamuly, Hazarika, Panakaje, Rahiman, and Siddiq submitted two studies each.

The RQ1 has been addressed by identifying the significant research on the empowerment of women in the handloom sector. Few studies and low collaboration strength show the field is still emerging. There is a lack of a well-established collaborative research network in this area. The fragmentation may explain the diversity of research and methodological approaches observed across studies.

Influential Documents

Table 3 illustrates the impact of the most referenced studies; higher citations suggest growing scholarly interest in this theme. The major research focuses on women's empowerment, livelihood and financial inclusion, showing emphasis on socioeconomic aspects.

This finding of this table addresses RQ1 by demonstrating that socio-economic empowerment remains the major intellectual part of the literature. The citation profile suggests that research examining empowerment with the income, livelihood generation and entrepreneurial participation of women.

Keyword Co-occurrence

Table 4 reflects the literature's thematic organisation and distribution of keywords. The keywords appearing at least four times in the database were included in the analysis for "author terms" in the bibliometric study.

Predominance of word empowerment shows a significant connection to development outcomes, and dominance of "India" shows the geographical concentration of studies. The keyword structure directly addresses RQ2 by identifying the dominant thematic areas of literature. The dominant terms such as "socio-economic empowerment," "women empowerment," and "employment" show that the literature largely focuses on empowerment based on livelihood generation and economic participation of women in the handloom cluster.

Table 5: Citation Profile

Document	*Citations*	*Links*
Mahapatra et al. (2019)	23	0
Baruah and Saha (2022)	2	1
D'costa (2022)	4	0
Agnihotri (2015)	2	0
Bortamuly and Goswami (2012)	23	0
Hazarika and Goswami (2016)	14	0
Sedai et al. (2022)	25	0
Islam and Lemberger (2026)	0	0
Raj and Anitha (2024)	4	0
Ali and Peerlings (2011)	5	0
Bortamuly and Goswami (2012)	16	0
Rai (2024)	0	0
McEwan et al. (2014)	9	0
Devi (2013)	19	1
Dey et al. (2023)	2	0
Rani and Sundaram (2023)	5	0
Mohammed, Z. (2014)	6	0
Jain (2020)	11	0
Maity (2016)	10	0
Panakaje et al. (2024)	3	0
Panakaje et al. (2023)	20	0
Senapati and Ojha (2019)	24	0
Sahharon (2019)	3	0
Huq (2019)	4	0
Total	229	

Table 6: Citation Overview

Total Documents	*Total Citations*	*Average Citations*
24	229	10.48

Table 7: missing

S.No.	*Theme*	*Key Findings*	*Representative Studies*
1	Economic Empowerment	Participation in handloom activities enhances income generation, financial independence, household economic contribution, and entrepreneurial opportunities for women. Increased earnings strengthen women's bargaining power and economic security.	Hazarika & Goswami (2016); Hazarika (2020); Senapati & Ojha (2019); Sharma & Sharma (2024)
2	Social Empowerment and Agency	Engagement in handloom production contributes to greater self-confidence, social recognition, mobility, and participation in household and community decision-making processes.	Shaw et al. (2016); Sarkar & Pradeepa (2024); Safna & Nufile (2016); Singha & Singha (2020)
3	Challenges and Structural Constraints	The handloom sector provides a significant source of employment and sustainable livelihood opportunities, particularly for rural women and marginalised communities.	Devi (2013); Khanduri & Datta (2021); Sinha et al. (2024); Singh et al. (2025)
4	Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development	Entrepreneurial orientation, micro-enterprise development, and self-employment opportunities within the handloom sector facilitate women's economic advancement and self-reliance.	Dutta & Radha (2022); Mukherjee (2024); Sarma (2014); Kishnani (2021)
5	Institutional Support and Financial Inclusion	Microfinance, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), NGOs, government schemes, and cooperative institutions enhance access to credit, training, market information, and capacity-building support.	Baishya (2019); Gupta (2021); Senapati & Ojha (2019); Ministry of Textiles (2020)
6	Sustainability and Market Development	Sustainable livelihood strategies, market diversification, geographical indication (GI) protection, branding, and improved distribution channels are increasingly recognized as mechanisms for enhancing women's economic resilience.	Khanduri & Datta (2021); Verma (2025); Todi & Deb (2025); Sinha et al. (2024)
7	Emerging Research Areas	Digital marketing, e-commerce adoption, technological innovation, climate resilience, and integration into global value chains remain underexplored themes requiring further investigation.	Mukherjee (2024); Verma (2025); Todi & Deb (2025)

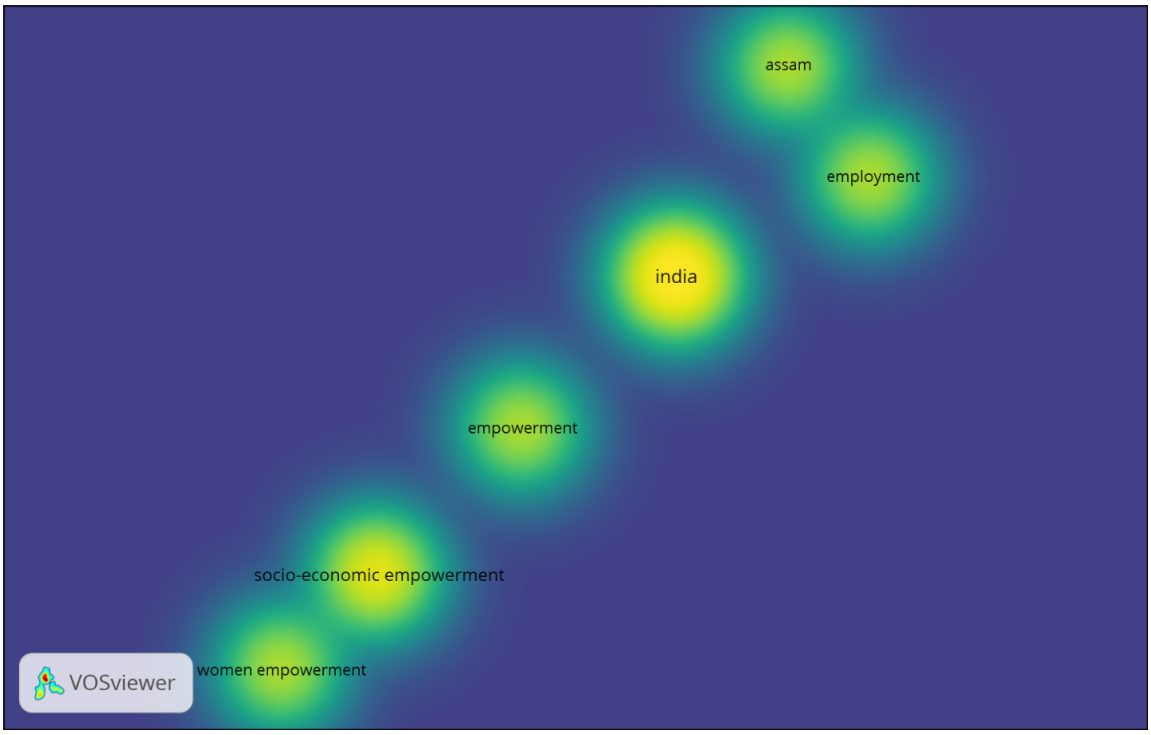

Figure 2: Keyword density visualisation (VOSviewer output)

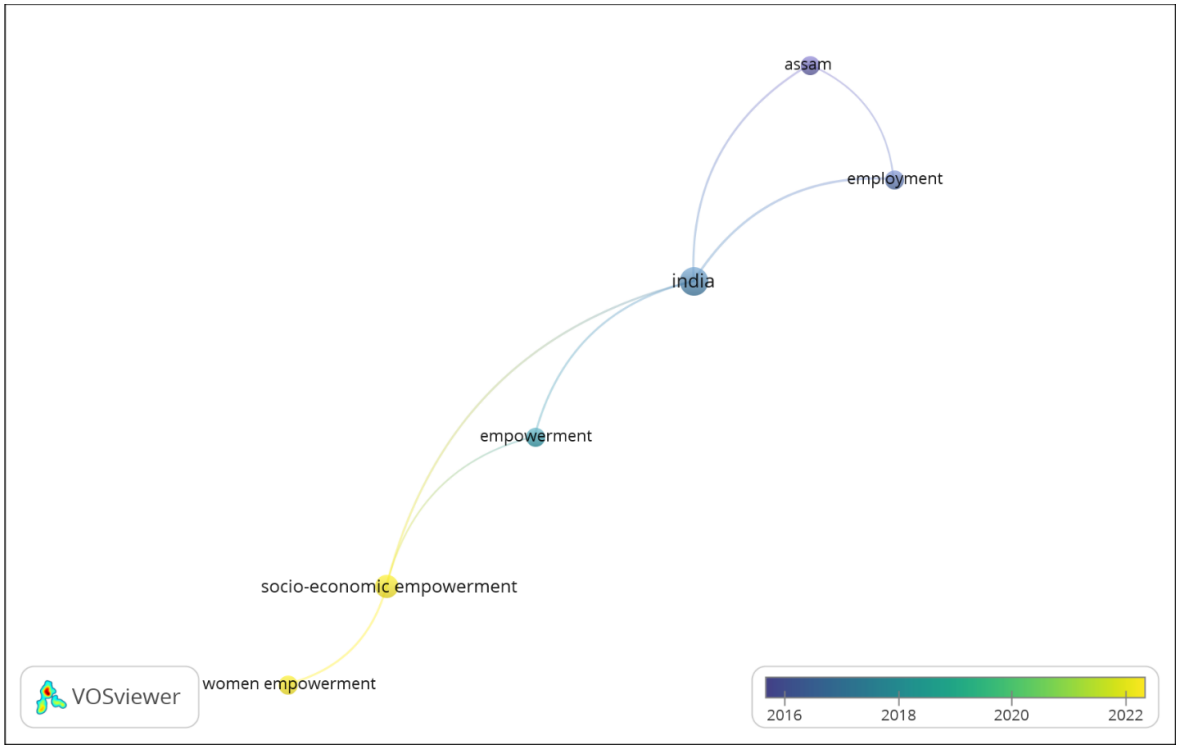

Figure 3: Overlay visualization of keyword evolution.

Citation Structure

Table 5 summarises the overall citation profile of the dataset.

The citation count shows moderate scholarly engagement and limited interconnections among the research studies. This suggests a fragmented knowledge structure and weak theoretical association. The finding supports RQ3 by demonstrating that research on women's empowerment in the handloom sector remains dispersed across multiple themes. This observation suggests a research gap, and there is a need for a systematic study to synthesise existing evidence.

Synthesis of Findings

The results show that the research domain is thematically concentrated and structurally fragmented. Though literature strongly addresses women's empowerment and livelihood aspects, it does not cover the emerging perspectives, such as digital inclusion and sustainability. Though localised studies are dominant, this highlights the need for broader comparative research.

Integration with Qualitative Insights

Qualitative study supports bibliometric findings by providing greater insights into institutional limitations, income inequality, and structural impediments affecting women in handloom industry. It also draws attention to the discrepancy between initiatives for skill development and real economic results. A thorough grasp of the area is provided by integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, which support both theoretical development and research pertinent to policy.

Thematic Synthesis of Reviewed Literature

The thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature will provide complete insight into the empowerment, challenges, institutional support, and emerging research directions of research on women in the handloom sector.

The thematic synthesis reveals that women's empowerment in the handloom sector is multidimensional, extending beyond income generation to include social agency, entrepreneurship, livelihood security, and institutional support. While the literature consistently highlights the economic and social benefits of handloom participation, it also identifies persistent structural challenges such as low remuneration, market constraints, and limited access to finance. Emerging themes related to sustainability, branding, digitalisation, and market integration suggest important directions for future research and policy interventions.

Keyword Density Visualisation

Figure 1 presents keyword density visualisation generated using VOSviewer, illustrating concentration and intensity of research themes in the dataset.

Higher research intensity is indicated by brighter (yellow) locations on the density map, whereas lower

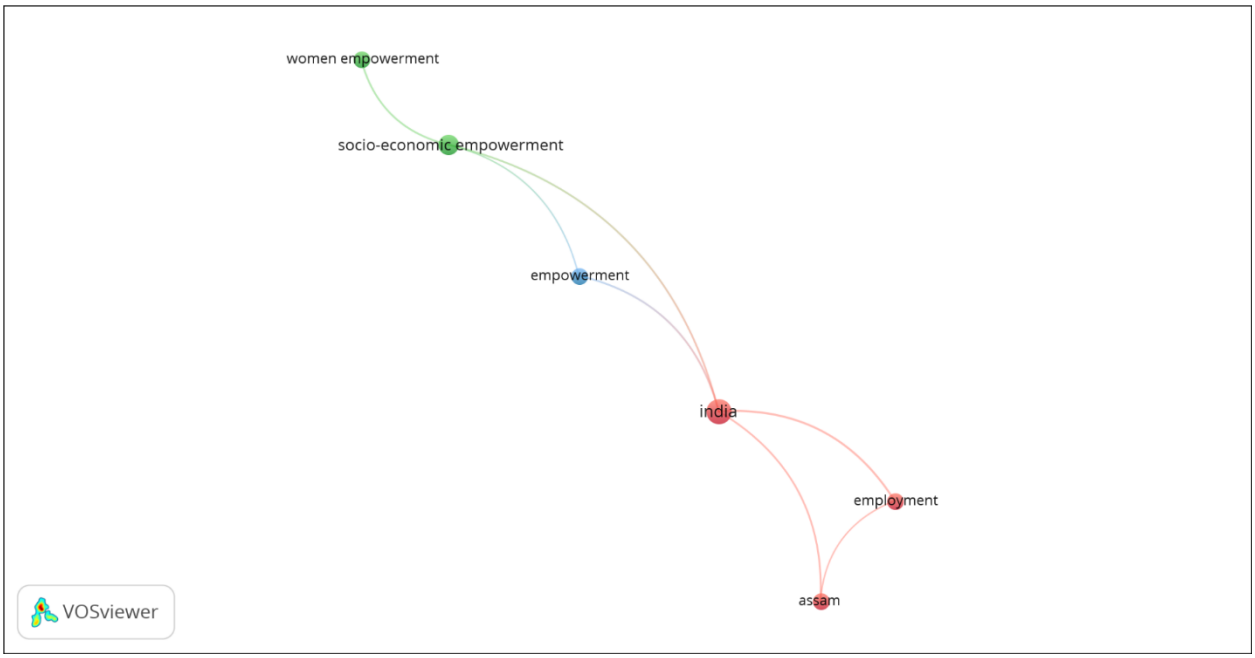

Figure 4: Keyword co-occurrence network

intensity is indicated by darker (blue) parts. The most common and closely related term is "India," suggesting that a sizable percentage of research has an Indian setting. Terms like "employment," "empowerment," and "socio-economic empowerment" surround the centre node, indicating that these issues constitute literature's primary focus. Furthermore, the predominance of localised case studies is reflected in region-specific terminology like "Assam" in higher-density zones.

Strong conceptual overlap is demonstrated by the proximity of "women empowerment" and "socio-economic empowerment." Literature is heavily concentrated around a small number of development-oriented issues, with a strong geographic bias towards India, as shown by the density structure. Lack of new buzzwords like digital transformation or sustainability in high-density areas indicates that the field has not yet expanded into more recent multidisciplinary fields.

Overlay Visualisation

Overlay visualization depicts temporal progression of research subjects by average publication year (see Figure2). Colours in this chart show change in research, from older studies (blue) to recent ones (yellow). Graphic shows that recent studies have gravitated toward "socio-economic empowerment" and "women empowerment" whereas earlier research (2016–2018) concentrated on "empowerment".

Conceptual shift from broader empowerment discourse to focused socio-economic and gender-specific analyses is seen over time. Nonetheless, themes remain limited, suggesting that the change does not substantially extend into new conceptual domains. This indicates a gap in integration of modern concerns like digital inclusiveness, climate resilience, and sustainability.

Network Visualisation (Keyword Relationships and Clusters)

Figure 3 shows relationships between main research themes. A network map displays structural relationships among terms through nodes and connecting links. Node size indicates frequency of occurrence, and linkages show co-occurrence associations. "India" serves as the main connecting node between several thematic clusters, including "employment," "empowerment," and "Assam." There are two noticeable clusters: (i.) development cluster comprising region-specific livelihood studies ("employment," "Assam," and "India"), (ii.) empowerment cluster comprising gender and social outcomes ("women empowerment", "socio-economic empowerment").

Low thematic complexity and weak links between concepts are suggested by a comparatively simple network structure with fewer nodes and connections. Conceptual narrowness, limited connectivity, and focus on a few key issues in the literature are confirmed by network structure. Predominance of "India" as a bridging node suggests that connecting various research strands requires a strong geographic context. Weak link density and a small number of clusters, however, point to a lack of theoretical integration and diversification in the subject.

Discussions

The bibliometric analysis identified empowerment, employment, socio-economic empowerment, and India as dominant themes in the literature. These findings were further corroborated through qualitative synthesis, which revealed that income generation, self-employment, financial inclusion, institutional support, and decision-making autonomy are the principal determinants of women's socio-economic empowerment in the handloom sector. We find creation of income, business decisions, and self-employment as primary determinants of economic empowerment in response to RQ1. Income, spending, and business decision-making are the main economic factors that contribute to improved empowerment (Senapati & Ojha, 2019). Social empowerment is significantly influenced by nearly all social variables. Empowerment is often operationalised through decisionmaking and autonomy (Shaw et al., 2016). Studies of SHGs, NGOs and social enterprises indicate that collective organisation, training and leadership support strengthen women's selfconfidence, networking and ability to initiate ventures, thereby deepening empowerment beyond income (Gupta, 2021). The SHG microfinancelinked facilitates aid in access to credit, improves the earnings from weaving, and enhances the overall socioeconomic status (Baishya, 2019). The emerging work points to information technology and social media as new empowerment tools (Verma, 2025).

The thematic synthesis shows that economic empowerment is the most studied dimension within the handloom literature. Studies have shown that women's participation in handloom clusters enhances women's income, financial independence, and contribution to household finances (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016; Senapati & Ojha, 2019; Sharma & Sharma, 2024). These findings support the argument that access to productive economic opportunities strengthens women's bargaining power within households and improves their ability to make financial decisions. From the perspective of the Capability Approach, increased income expands women's capabilities by providing greater freedom to pursue valued livelihood outcomes.

Concerning RQ2, handloom work boosts women's economic status, enhancing their household bargaining power through better decision-making, income/asset control, mobility, and reduced domestic violence (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016). Research is evident that digital technologies enhance skills, knowledge, income, and market access, improve women's position and enable them to participate in all walks of life. The marketing of digital platforms aids women weavers to reach out to a large number of customers, gradually increasing their sales and Income. This also improves their brand awareness and equity for handloom products (Verma, 2025). Women engaged in weaving activities report greater self-confidence, enhanced social recognition, increased mobility, and improved participation in household decision-making processes (Shaw et al., 2016; Sarkar & Pradeepa, 2024). These findings align with the capability approach, which emphasises agency as the ability to define goals and act upon them.

Regarding RQ3, the issues related to family restriction, patriarchal, lack of funding, collateral security, lack of experience, attitude of society towards them, lack of technical training, disrespect, material management, exposure and information, unfavourable working conditions, and work-life balance are some dominant challenges in women's economic empowerment (Kaushik & Jain, 2015). The central barrier to women's empowerment is access to credit (Basu, 2023). Body pain and other health issues are widespread and reduce performance and income. It signals that economic gains may be fragile without ergonomic improvements and a better work environment. Working conditions and health also mediate empowerment outcomes (Bori, 2021). Most weavers work in fragmented and unorganised markets, often lacking proper access to distribution channels. (Todi & Deb, 2025). Automation risks erasing cultural handloom techniques amid fierce market competition from modern looms (Singha & Singha, 2020). Major issues faced by women weavers include low wages, seasonal variability in income, problems with raw material supply, and low access to sources of financing (Poongodi & Jayanthi, 2022). Pay disparity, with female weavers receiving lower wages than male weavers, was found (Devi, 2013). Due to their lack of access to reasonably priced, suitable, and equitable financial products and services, women who are financially excluded are less able to fully engage in social and economic activities, experience greater financial hardship and poverty (Maity, 2016). Despite the significant contributions of women in the handloom sector, they persistently face several challenges. Challenges include low wages, market-related uncertainties, access to credit, lack of infrastructure, occupational health issues, and competition from mechanised production systems (Bori, 2021). These challenges, to some extent, limit the extent to which economic participation translates into meaningful empowerment, highlighting the need for targeted policy interventions.

In terms of RQ4, India supports women entrepreneurs through institutional measures, prioritising them for loans from nationalised banks and other financial institutions (Sarma, 2014). NGOs and SHGs in Uttarakhand push women toward entrepreneurship by providing training, information about government schemes, and venture assistance (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016). Madhya Pradesh's handloom social enterprises combine social objectives with revenue generation (Khanduri & Datta, 2021). Cooperative groups were found to be suitable, particularly for women artisans. After participating in SHG-bank linkage programs, women in Assam's microfinance-

linked handloom SHGs earn more money with improved socioeconomic standing (Hazarika, 2020). These findings of past studies (Baishya, 2019; Gupta, 2021) underscore the importance of collective action and institutional support in transforming economic participation into sustainable empowerment.

Conclusions

In India, the handloom sector is a significant source of rural non-farm employment, where 70% employees are women. Contributions from women are often "invisible" due to deeply rooted patriarchal norms and institutional inequities. Empowerment includes financial empowerment through income and asset ownership, psychological empowerment with boosted self-confidence, and social empowerment with mobility and decision-making. Past studies have shown women's challenges like access to formal credit, a wide gender pay gap, and health issues due to working in uncomfortable settings. Market volatility and the digital divide pose a severe threat to women working in traditional handloom clusters. The study sheds light on the importance of institutional support (SHGs, cooperative societies, training and digital literacy programs) to transform their skills and labour into meaningful socio-economic empowerment.

Theoretical implications

Study illustrates that empowerment is about "freedom to achieve" and transcends income-centric measures using Amartya Sen's definition. As suggested, digital abilities and literacy are transforming agents that allow women to transform available resources into their agency, well-being and financial empowerment. Results support the idea that mere economic engagement does not lead to empowerment until patriarchal norms are addressed. The paper states that for empowerment in traditional sectors like handloom, policy must shift from "labour-focused" initiatives to "relation-focused" ones that bridge the split of reproductive and productive labour. The study adds a modern theoretical component by contending that socioeconomic position is increasingly determined by digital inclusion. This implies that to ensure livelihood sustainability in the face of global capitalist competition, "digital agency" is a crucial extension of traditional craftsmanship in the modern informal economy.

Policy implications

According to recent research, economic gains are fragile because of structural problems like the gender pay gap, market instability, and the digital divide. Since digital literacy is a crucial conversion factor that enables women to translate their craft into market-facing activity, effective policy should promote the digital agency of weavers.

Recommendations and propositions

This study finds that women's socioeconomic empowerment in the handloom industry is a complex process influenced by self-employment, business decision-making, and income production. Financial aspects like asset ownership and credit management, social factors like respect, recognition and self-assurance are significant determinants of empowerment. These elements strengthen women's negotiating power inside households, enhance their ability to make decisions and lessen domestic violence. Major challenges faced by women include restricted access to formal credit, ongoing gender pay disparities, difficulty with the supply of raw materials, and health issues due to inadequate ergonomics. Study emphasises that the efficacy of institutional support through schemes depends on collective organisations like cooperatives and SHGs, which serve as crucial "conversion factors" of labour into socio-economic agency.

Limitations and scope for future research

Limitations include fluctuations in the number of articles and citations in Scopus and GS databases due to regular revisions. Scientific mapping and profiling processes in quantitative approaches enable a thorough investigation of subject areas. There are several restrictions on the use of keyword co-occurrence analysis. Additionally, bibliometric databases may not accurately represent some articles. Writers have little control over indexing systems' assessment of the quality of co-word evaluation (Di Vaio et al., 2022). Consequently, future research projects ought to take a methodical strategy that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: Mewafarosh, R,. Joshi, S. Aditi Singh. (2026). Socio-economic Empowerment of Women in Handloom Sector: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 5(2), 71-85. DOI: 10.58966/JCM20265208