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Perceptions towards Jamdani Saree: A Study on the Young Female Consumers of Dhaka City

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Abstract

Jamdani saree is a unique female clothing item in Bangladesh. The traditional weaving technique of Jamdani was declared a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013. And in 2016, Bangladesh received Geographical Identification (GI) status as the origin of the Jamdani saree. Interestingly, the consumer's perception and practice involving this Jamdani are changing. This study used focus groups and survey to explore and verify perceptions of young female consumers towards Jamdani saree. It found that young females prefer to wear Jamdani sarees and view them as fashionable and comfortable dresses. They think it is moderately priced, but they wear it only occasionally. These young females are more willing to buy Jamdani from shopping malls rather than from traditional saree outlets or stores. The study opens a new direction to the researchers and marketing practitioners in the Jamdani sub-sector of the handloom industry of Bangladesh. The findings may help improve the manufacturing and marketing practices of Jamdani and increase the consumer base.

Keywords: Jamdani, saree (alternative spelling *sari*), perception, consumer behavior.

1. Introduction

The tradition of weaving cloth by hand constitutes one of the richest aspects of Bangladesh's culture and heritage. The earliest mention of Jamdani and its development as an industry is found in Kautikaya (circa 300 BC), where it is stated that this fine cloth was used in Bangla and Pundr (Chakrabarty, 2016).



Azmeri Haque Badhon, a Bangladeshi Actress, wearing a Jamdani saree at the 74th Cannes International Film Festival (Source: *Dhaka Tribune*, July 11, 2021)

Clothing serves as a nonverbal language that allows a message to be created and understood (Holman, 1980; McCracken and Roth, 1989; cited in Auty and Elliot, 1998). In Bengali culture, the saree has a strong appeal to women. As the culture evolves (Hill, 2016) the dress code of people changes. Young consumers value fashion perhaps more than any other age group (Koester and May, 1985). Teenagers or young consumers have significant discretionary spending power and thus are influential trendsetters. Many research has been conducted on the attitudes of the consumers in the purchase of clothing (Phau & Leng, 2008). Most of the studies focused on buying behavior of fast fashion in the context of the Western economy. The literature on buying behavior of classic fashion items in the context of a less developing economy like Bangladesh is scarce. Hence this study intends to explore young female consumers' perceptions towards Jamdani saree - a long flowing piece of cloth, part of which is wrapped around the waist, and the rest climbs and flows over the shoulder.

2. Literature Review

Handloom Sector of Bangladesh: The level of artistry and intricacy achieved in handloom fabrics are unparalleled and unique. The handloom can produce fabrics of different qualities from extremely fine fabric for special use or more common fabrics of daily use. The industry has survived the test of time and adapted itself to the changing needs of modern times (The Daily Star). This handloom industry has more than 180,000 handloom units with 510,000 handlooms. According to Handloom Census 2003, 88,000 workers were employed in this sector (Islam et. al., 2016). Approximately 1,000,000 weavers, dyers, hand spinners, embroiderers, and allied artisans have been using their creative and manual skills to produce around 620 million meters of fabrics per annum (<https://www.blf-bd.org/handloom/>). It shares 63% of the total fabric production in the country designed for domestic consumption. It contributes more than 10 billion takas annually to the national exchequer as a value addition (BLF, 2021). The handloom industry makes up a significant

Table-1: Distribution of Looms

Loom type	Total Loom	Operational	Loom in operation (%)
Pit loom	169700	107066	63.1
Frame loom	2212	18410	63.0
Chittarangan loom	150407	105410	70.1
Banarasi or Jamdani loom	12383	9997	80.7
Komar or waist loom	141684	69588	49.1
Power loom	2170	1380	63.6
Total looms	505556	311851	61.6

Source: Handloom Census, 2003 (cited by Islam & Hossain, 2012)

portion of the nation's economy and it is the biggest segment of the greater handicraft industry in Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2001). The handloom sector is

contributing approximately 80% supply of the country's principal non-food consumption goods, cloth (Islam & Hossain, 2012). In recent decades, the production of handloom is decreasing while the powered mills are becoming more common. Looms in Bangladesh are classified into six categories: Pit loom, frame loom, Chittaranjan loom, Banarasi or Jamdani loom, Komar or waist loom, and power loom.

Jamdani Sub-sector: Jamdani originated in Sonargaon, Bangladesh, and this industry expanded along the Shitalakkha river (Noireet, 2019).

It is not known exactly when Jamdani came to be adorned with floral patterns of the loom. It is, however, generally believed that during the early period of the Mughal reign (1556–1627), the figured or flowered muslin came to be known as the Jamdani. In *Textile Manufactures and Costumes of the people of India*, Forbes Watson stated that Muslin was always considered the most expensive productions of the Dhaka looms because of its complicated designs (Wikipedia, 2021).

The practitioners of the traditional art of Jamdani weaving are composed of more than 5,000 expert craftspeople, apprentices (most of whom are family members learning the craft) and helping hands who are responsible for the preparation of the raw materials for Jamdani weaving. Among the weavers, a handful of Master Weavers play the key role in weaving because of their long experience, exceptional skills, and great sense of design. These skilled and unskilled people are collectively known as the *Jamdani Shilpa Community*. A few NGOs, entrepreneurs, and the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh are involved in the promotion of Jamdani weaving. These stakeholders maintain link with the weavers through their showrooms and supply network.

Jamdani Work: The word Jamdani came from two Persian words - *jam* meaning flower and *dani* meaning a vase or a container. Although mostly used for sarees, Jamdani is also used for scarves and handkerchiefs. The present-day Jamdani has evolved from the ancient cloth-making techniques of Bengal and the fine Muslins produced by Bengali Muslims since the 16th century. Jamdani is the most expensive product of Dhaka looms since each piece of saree requires several weeks or months to produce for a dedicated worker. The geometric patterns of Jamdani include plants and flowers and are said to have been influenced by Persian designs of antiquity. Due to the exquisite painstaking methods of production, Jamdanis were very expensive

and only aristocrats and royal families were able to afford such luxuries (Wikipedia, 2021).

Weaving Process of Jamdani: Jamdani weaving is a time-consuming and labour-intensive way of fabric production by hand on a traditional loom primarily built with wood and bamboo. The unique characteristic of Jamdani is that the designs are not embroidered or printed but are created directly on the loom during the process of weaving. This intricately designed cotton fabric is perhaps the finest cotton cloth ever produced manually. It effectively combines the intricacy of design with muted or vibrant colours. Jamdani is also a very light or thin cotton cloth that is very comfortable in the hot and humid conditions of Bangladesh. It represents Bangladesh's rich textile heritage, contains a historic value, and recognized a major cultural heritage of the country. Jamdani weaving has survived and thrived due to the growing popularity of Jamdani fabrics among Bengali women both at home and abroad. Women wear more charming or elaborately designed Jamdani saris during festivities and on formal occasions (Chakraborty, 2016).

Unique and key features of Jamdani saree: The most unique feature of Jamdani is the geometric design. The expert weavers do not draw the design on paper but instead work from memory. They assign unique names like *panna hajar*, *dubli lala*, *butidar*, *tersa*, *jalar*, *duria*, and *charkona* to differentiate their designs. The modern Jamdani sarees have geometric patterns of rose, jasmine, lotus, a bunch or a hand of bananas, a bunch of ginger, and sago.

A Jamdani with small floral patterns on the fabric is known as *Butidar*. If these flowers are in a reclined position, it is called *tersa* Jamdani. It is not necessary that these designs are made of flowers (Chakraborty, 2016), only; there can be designs with peacocks and leaves of vegetations or vines. If the designs cover the entire field of the saree, it is called *jalar naksha* (Chakraborty, 2016).

Table-2: Features of Jamdani

Technique	Handloom
Place of origin	Dhaka, Bangladesh
Manufacturing hubs	Dhaka and West Bengal
Type of fabric	High-quality muslin
Colors	Earlier only in grey, now in a variety of colors
Motifs	Prominent floral motifs along with other motifs like paisleys, fish, lamp, and lotus
Distinguishing factor	Motifs appear raised on the sheer fabric
Materials used	Cotton yarn
Weaving time	1 month to 1 year (Dhakai Jamdani takes minimum 9 months)
Varieties	Dhakai, Tangail, Shantipur, Dhaniakhali
Price	BDT 3000 minimum
Care	Dry clean, wrap in a clean cloth, and store in a plastic bag

Source: Chakrabarty, 2016

Marketing mix strategy: Marketing mix strategies in Jamdani sub-sector are as follows:

Table-3: Marketing Mix Strategy in the Jamdani Sub-sector

Mix Element	Strategy
Product	Marketers try to include different features, designs, modern artistic concepts, traditional values so that customers can buy the product for uniqueness.
Price	Jamdani saree market is a mature market; marketers try to emphasize augmented features (new design, print, color combination, etc.) and set value pricing.
Promotion	Activities include trade shows, advertising, displays, and free samples to the reputed retailers.
Distribution	Through traditional saree stores, specialty stores, shopping malls, online stores, saree <i>mela</i> (seasonal or temporary market and fair), Jamdani mela, and cultural heritage centers.

(Based on researchers’ observations and discussions with the weavers)

Consumer behavior: The consumer behavior is essentially an attitude, i.e., an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes that relates to our environment (Krech & Crutchfield, 1984; cited by Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010). The theory of reasoned action, or TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), is perhaps the most prominent contemporary attitude theory. The TRA suggests that intentions are the direct outcome of attitudes together with subjective norms.

Consumers’ Fashion awareness is the level of involvement with the styles and fashion of clothing practiced in society. A person does not have to be either a fashion opinion leader or a fashion innovator to be considered fashion aware or conscious. Rather, fashion consciousness is characterized by an interest in clothing and fashion, and in one’s appearance (Summers, 1970; Jonathan and Mills, 1982). A consumer’s involvement with a particular type of product results from multiple factors including risk perception, the importance of the product to the consumer, and its capability to improve their lifestyle and self-image (Sirgy, 1982).

Among the consumers, the youthful elders are more willing to try new product brands, are more likely to seek product information, are more self-confident in their decision making and are more likely to be opinion leaders who may switch brands (Barak and Gould, 1985; Sherman *et al.*, 1988; Silvers, 1997) than their younger counterparts. The mentally young consumers also exhibit greater fashion interest and may be more active consumers of apparel fashion products (Wilkes, 1992; Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994). The marketing and apparel literature is unanimous in reporting that fashion leaders tend in general to be young consumers (Gutman and Mills, 1982; Goldsmith *et al.*, 1991). Consequently, the young consumer group is the target for most of the fashion consumption research (Goldsmith *et al.*, 1996; Workman and Kidd, 2000). The young consumers have the courage and interest to try on new items and designs; new fashion often starts with the young.

The traditional view of our society is that shopping and buying clothes are issues that relate to women, and that they more appearance conscious than men (Bakewell *et. al.*, 2006). In line with this involvement, women are better at decoding the communicative language of fashion statements (McCracken and Roth, 1989) and they are more likely to assign positive characteristics to the owners or users of fashion products (Mayer and Belk, 1985). More they are involved in fashion, more likely they are to use clothing and fashion as a means for “self-definition and self-identity” (O’Cass, 2000, Gould and Stern, 1989). However, the importance of dress and appearance for social events varies among individuals according to their characteristics (Joung & Miller, 2006).

Some studies (e.g., Low & Freeman, 2007) reveal the “fashion-conscious” consumers, particularly the younger ladies, prefer bright colors such as red, rose/pink, or white. The urban women like to wear fashionable clothes and like to be viewed as sophisticated. In contrast, women in rural areas tended to be more conservative in their dress than women living in urban areas. Many of these rural women when coming to the cities want to dress well and look good (Low and Freeman, 2007).

Personal preference and design play a significant role to buy fashion apparel whereas brand, local culture, and habit play the least significant role in the buying decision process of fashion apparel (Leung & Taylor, 2002). Factors that influence purchasing of clothing are the comfort of clothes, the trendiness of clothes, clothes that match with personal style, look similar to the ones used by friends, and are the right fit to the body (Dias, 2003).

Young females wear Jamdani sarees on special occasions and festivals. Often they wear Jamdani saree to represent Bangladeshi culture or to ascertain their native cultural identity. Young female consumers like unique designs and comfortable Jamdani saree. They consider it is fashionable and hence they wear Jamdani saree.

Bangladesh has a growing economy, the rate of which was 8.15% in 2019. Due to the recent Covid 19 pandemic, the growth rate dropped to 3.8% in 2020, but is increasing once again in 2021 (BBS, 2021). In the 1960s the Bengali females started to use sleeveless blouses with chiffon saris and body-hugging shalwar-kurtis as a fashionable dress and this practice remained as such for the next four decades. But from the early 2010 sarees were trending back again, only this time the blouses were altered in various ways to give a new fusion look. Jacket blouses, net blouses, halter necks, and many other designs became the highlight of a saree (Chowdhury, 2017). Jamdani saree is an integral feature of Bangladeshi culture and fashion, yet no comprehensive study has been made to explore the consumers' perceptions towards Jamdani. Hence the purpose of the study is to fill in this gap in the literature by exploring consumers' perceptions towards this specialty item.

3. Research Question & Research Objective

The research question of this exploratory study is as follows:

- What are the perceptions of young female consumers towards Jamdani?

The specific objective of the study is as follows:

- To explore and verify the perceptions of young female consumers towards Jamdani saree.

4. Methodology

The study used a mixed strategy of qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect data for this exploratory research. First, an in-depth interview of eight young female consumers was conducted in Dhaka focused on identifying perceptions towards Jamdani saree. To have the ideas and views of the respondents, i.e., to find out young females' perceptions towards Jamdani saree and their shopping habits of Jamdani, a sample survey method was used.

The convenience type of non-probability sampling technique was used to select the respondents. A self-completion questionnaire was used to obtain the opinion of the respondents which was pretested before the fieldwork. Respondents were given necessary explanations during the interview, and they were encouraged to answer accurately to increase the validity of the information. Data for the study were gathered from 100 respondents. Sample respondents were chosen from the different parts of greater Dhaka city. Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel.

5. Results and Discussions

The in-depth interview suggested that females look for different features to buy a Jamdani. The features include price, design, attractiveness, color, fashion orientation, and comfort. The focus group suggests that young females perceive Jamdani as a fashionable, comfortable, gorgeous, prestigious, and beautiful dress to wear. As per the objective of the study a quantitative study is conducted in the second stage to verify and support the findings of the qualitative study. The outcome of the data collected by the survey method has been analyzed as follows:

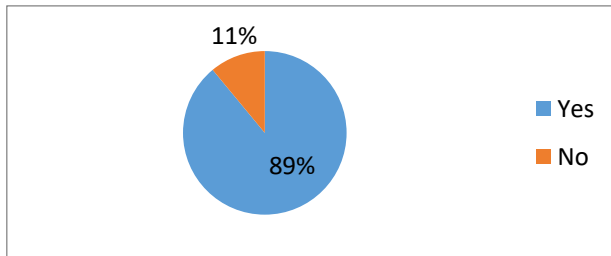


Figure-1: Preference towards wearing Jamdani Saree

The study shows that 89% of the young females prefer to wear Jamdani saree where 11% of the respondents expressed their unwillingness to wear Jamdani.

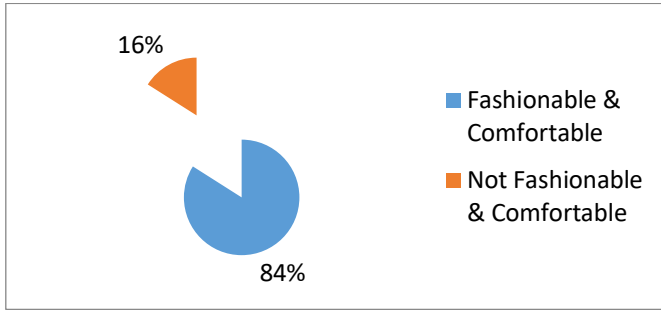


Figure-2: Perceptions about Jamdani Saree- Fashionable & Comfortable

The study reveals that 84% of the young females see Jamdani as a fashionable and comfortable dress to wear whereas 16% of the young female respondents see Jamdani as not fashionable and comfortable.

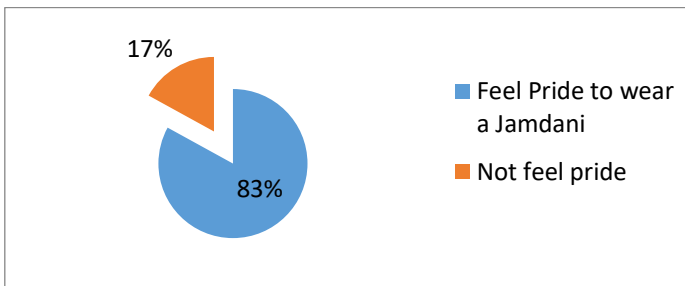


Figure-3: Perceptions about Jamdani Saree- Feel Pride

The study shows that most of the respondents (83%) feel the pride to wear a Jamdani saree whereas 17% of the female respondents expressed that they do not have this type of feeling.

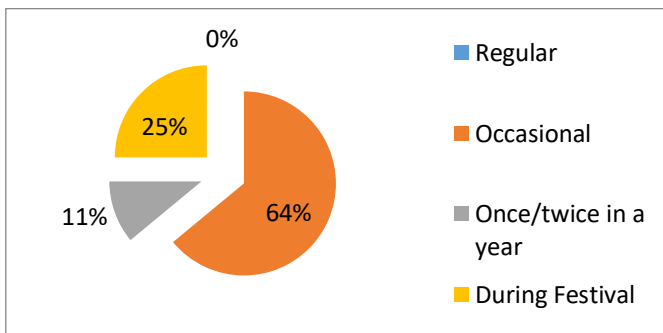


Figure-4: Usage Pattern of Jamdani Saree

It shows that young females wear Jamdani occasionally (64%) and during festivals (25%) mainly not on a regular purpose.

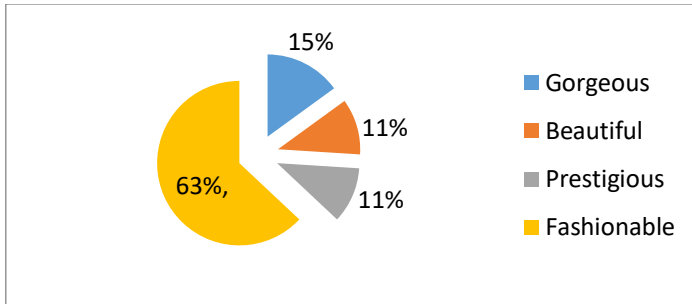


Figure-5: Unique Feature of Jamdani Saree

63% of young female respondents perceive Jamdani as a fashionable product, 15% of young females see this as a gorgeous product; whereas other respondents perceive this Jamdani saree either as beautiful or as a prestigious product.

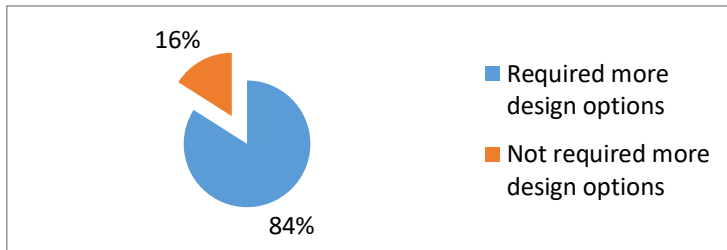


Figure-6: Design Requirements

The study finds out that 84% of young females desire to have more design options whereas 16% of the respondents are satisfied with the available designs.

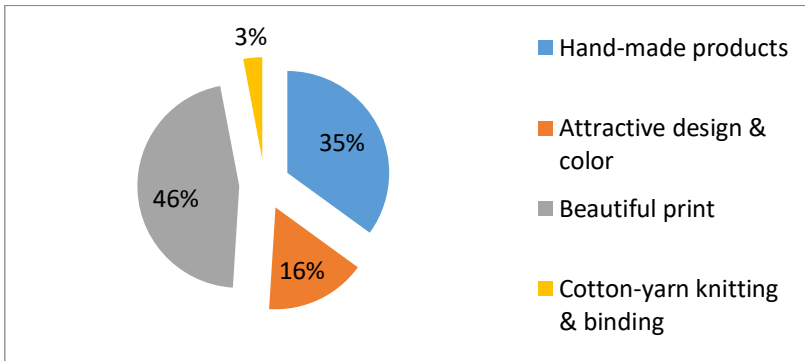


Figure-7: Reasons to buy Jamdani

The study shows that 46% of the young females buy Jamdani because of its beautiful print; 35% of the respondents buy because it is a hand-loom product; Other factors that influence purchase decisions are attractive design and color (16%) and cotton-yarn knitting and binding (3%).

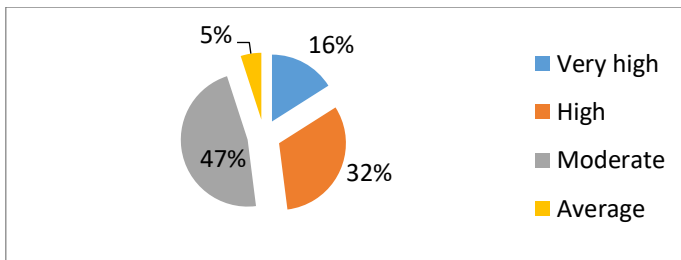


Figure-8: Perceptions of Price of Jamdani

Only 16% of the female respondents pointed out that the market price of Jamdani is very high; 52% of the respondents expressed Jamdani as either a moderately priced or averaged priced product; whereas 32% of the respondents see Jamdani as a high-priced product.

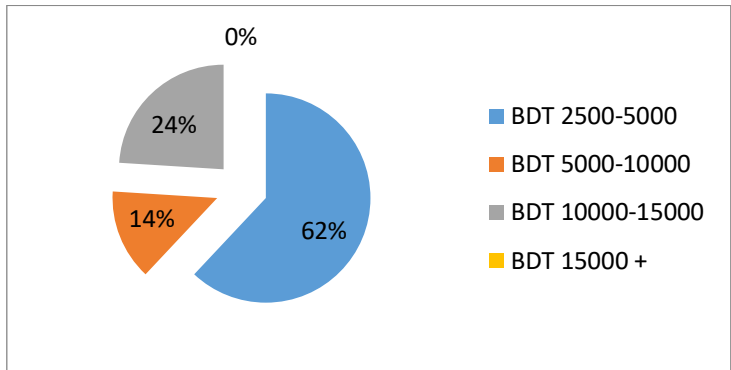


Figure-9: Preferred Price Range of Jamdani

It shows that 62% of the young female respondents prefer to buy Jamdani with a price range of BDT 2500-5000; whereas 38% of the respondents prefer to buy more expensive Jamdani saree.

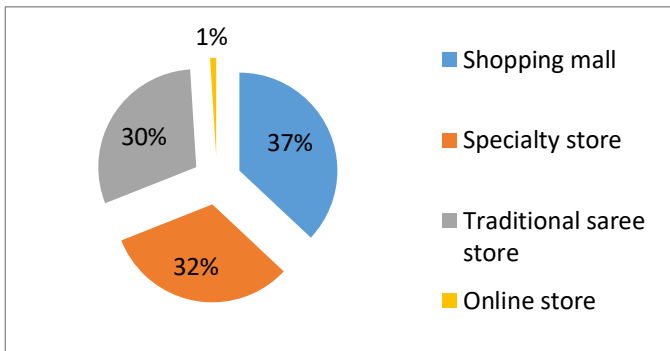


Figure-10: Preferred Shopping Place

Data shows that 37% of the female consumers prefer to buy Jamdani from shopping malls; 32% of the respondents expressed that they prefer specialty stores to buy Jamdani; whereas 30% of the respondents show their preferred shopping place as the traditional store. Only 1 respondent (1%) prefers to buy online.

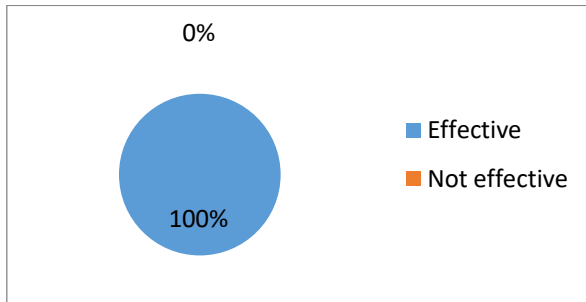


Figure-11: Perceptions-Promotional Effectiveness

All respondents (100%) agreed that promotional activities during festivals and events are effective to introduce new offerings and attracting more customers.

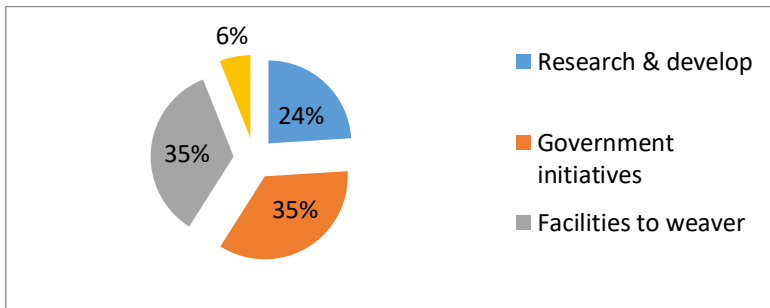


Figure-12: Ways to Develop Jamdani Sub-sector

Respondents (70%) point out that to develop this Jamdani/hand-loom sector government initiatives are needed and weavers in this hand-loom sector need more facilities. 24% of respondents also expressed the need for research and development.

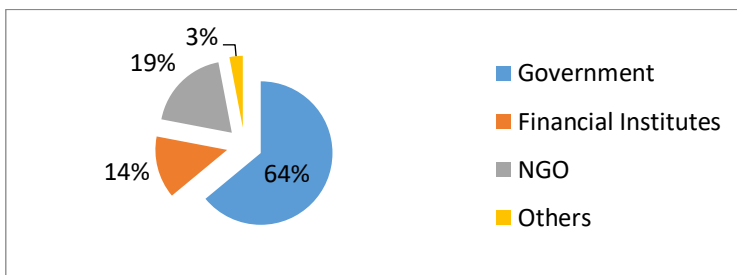


Figure-13: Requirements of Support

64% of the respondents expressed that to sustain the Jamdani heritage government support is required. Some respondents also expressed that financial institutes and NGOs can extend their support to sustain the Jamdani heritage of our Bengali culture.

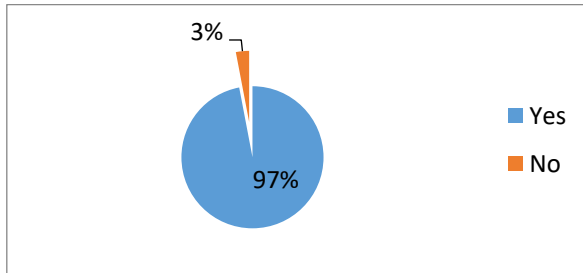


Figure-14: Opportunities in the International Marketplaces

97% of customers mentioned that there exist business opportunities in the export markets for Jamdani.

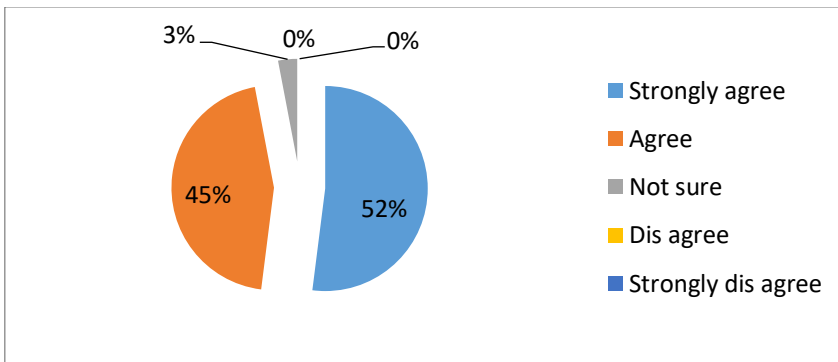


Figure-15: Requirements of Promotion in International Markets

97% of the respondents expressed that promotional activities are required to do business in the international marketplaces.

6. Conclusions

The primary focus of this study was to explore and verify perceptions of young female consumers towards Jamdani saree. Based on the findings the following conclusions are drawn:

- Young female consumers show positive attitudes towards Jamdani saree, they prefer to wear it.
- Most of the respondents perceived Jamdani as a fashionable and comfortable product. To them, it creates extra value when they wear it.
- As Jamdani represents our culture and hence most of the respondents mentioned that they feel proud to wear a Jamdani.
- Though young females prefer to wear Jamdani they wear it only occasionally or once or twice a year.
- Young female consumers believe that Jamdani is a prestigious product and it gives the user a gorgeous look.
- Respondents viewed that one of the key features of Jamdani is its beautiful print. Some consumers like it as a handmade product, while others like it for its color and design. The study also reveals that young females want to have more design options.
- The findings of the study show that as a handmade product, the pricing of Jamdani is moderate or average. The study also shows that Jamdani of 2500–5000-taka price range has the largest market potential.
- Young females prefer to buy Jamdani from the shopping mall, which is followed by specialty stores. With technological advances such as fast electronic payment, systematic shipping and distribution services, internet shopping has expanded dramatically (Park et.al, 2008) but the study reveals young females are reluctant to buy fashion clothes from online stores/ e-commerce websites which is online with Low & Freeman (2007).
- All the respondents viewed that as a handloom product it needs more promotional support to penetrate both domestic and international marketplaces, they also mentioned that promotional activities during festivals and events may enhance the business potential of Jamdani sarees.

- The study shows that support from the government, financial institutes, and NGOs is very much required to give a boost to the Jamdani industry.

7. Managerial Implications and Further Research

Marketers need to identify the preferential rankings of consumers towards different features and evaluation criteria and by combining the right combination of attributes that provide benefits to fulfill a need or solve a problem. The marketers and weavers in the Jamdani sub-sector of the handloom industry can add more value for their consumers. This could be used as a guideline for marketers to develop marketing strategies to convince the consumers and influence their decision to Jamdani sarees.

The findings of this study might not be generalised as convenience-type nonprobability sampling is used. Moreover, the respondents were selected from a limited number of places in Dhaka city. At present, no studies are investigating the consumers' perceptions towards specialty handloom products like Jamdani and to verify the significance of different attributes on the consumer buying decision process. Therefore, more comprehensive research is required in broader settings, with different criteria /attributes and sample populations to verify and generalise the findings of this study and to determine other factors if any. In conclusion, this study could lead to further research on consumer perceptions towards buying a specialty handloom product.

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