3. Globalized Creative Economies: Rethinking Local Craft, Provenance, and Platform Design

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Abstract
In this chapter, I examine algorithmic platforms' misinterpretation of handmade creative wares that are constructed in the Global South. This serves as an example of Western creative platforms' misinterpretation of local cultural norms. As demonstrated by artisans that are selling both mass-produced and handmade objects, for instance, I argue that Western platforms must reconsider their traditional models of the creative economy. As the primary sites that serve to platform creative wares for a global consumer base, I call on these technology-enabled services to carefully consider the types of creativity that they uplift. Without such considerations, Western technology platforms impose their own assumptions about creativity on a global user base, thereby inhibiting local cultures' creative norms.

Keywords: interface design, creator economy, artisans, algorithmic platforms, creativity

Can you recognize your friends' and family members' hand gestures? People have distinctive gestures: maybe your friend clasps her hands when she's nervous, your mom taps her fingers together when she's excited, or your cousin wags two fingers when making an argument. Now, imagine local artisans who handmake their wares. Their hand gestures are implicit in the production of an object. Creative labour is inherently embodied, requiring physical movements to produce a creation. By extension, this creation is unique to its maker's body. Previous research has demonstrated the large

Arora, P., U. Raman, and R. König (eds.), *Feminist Futures of Work: Reimagining Labour in the Digital Economy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023
DOI 10.5117/9789463728386_CH03

role that embodiment plays in creative processes, whereby the artisan's physicality is imbued within their output (Freedberg and Gallese 2007). In addition to forming a cornerstone of the creative process, embodiment also plays a key role in the downstream perception of such creations. The audience's response to a creative object is influenced by their perception of the creator's embodiment.

Indeed, archaeologists have found Indian potters' personal gestures can help identify the maker of a given pot (Gandon et al. 2018). In this way, a maker's gestures form an identifiable signature that is inherent in the object they've made. Furthermore, certain tribal groups may exhibit long-standing artistic practices that signal the origin of a piece through its materials, the tools by which it was made, stylistic selections, and other meaning-making choices.

In this chapter, I explore the embodied artisanal practices of makers in the Global South, and demonstrate how Western-born technology platforms may exhibit preconceptions that are ill-suited to users in non-Western contexts. It is dangerous for these platforms to assume that their offerings are truly universal, without considering the local cultural norms that may impact the technology's usage.

The Handmade Premium

In the Western economy, a premium is placed on handmade wares: shoppers are consistently willing to pay more for objects that are handcrafted by individuals. Particularly in an era of global outcry surrounding climate change—of which industrial fabrication is a major contributor—consumers are seeking out objects that evoke home-grown craftsmanship. Media scholars have studied consumers' reactions to handmade objects (Fuchs, Schreier and Van Osselaer 2015), finding that objects that are handmade are more "attractive" to consumers. They describe attractiveness as the participants' attitudinal or behavioural disposition towards the object, including their willingness to purchase it. This level of attractiveness and value is illustrated by Dior creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri's recent collaboration with local artisan couple Madhvi and Manu Parekh at the Chanakya School of Craft in Mumbai, India. The company proudly shared in *Harper's Bazaar* that the resulting fabrics "took between 500 and 2,800 hours each to complete." By highlighting the role of local artisans, the handmade nature of the pieces, and the sheer amount of time invested in each object, Dior seeks to offer a premium product for its elite clientele.

Maria Grazia Chiuri describes the artisan's traditional cultural process as bringing "added value."

Indeed, Fuchs et al. revealed that their study participants' preference for handmade objects persists both in comparison to objects that are explicitly machine-made as well as "control" objects for which no information about production was provided. They claim that consumers perceive the artisans' love (which they define as an emotion of strong or passionate attachment) as being imbued in the handmade object and distributed with the object as it is sold. Importantly, this perceived "distributed love" can be for either the ultimate end-product that is created *or* the process by which the object was created. Other researchers (Newman and Bloom 2012) have shown that consumers' estimates of the value of a creative object increase according to the level of direct physical contact between the creator and the object during the creation process. To this end, showing the *process* by which an object was made (if it is handmade) will further enhance the attractiveness of the object to consumers.

In a recent study, my collaborator Angel Hwang and I examined what factors influenced Western users' perceptions of creativity online (Herman and Hwang 2022). We found that viewers also evaluate the *creativity* of an output according to the perceived process by which it was made. Those items that involved more complex processes—and particularly those that are handmade—were rated as more creative (and therefore, more valuable) than those that were not. The viewers' focus on the making process may be explained by theories of embodied cognition (Chiel and Beer 1997; Gallese and Lakoff 2005; Wilson 2002), in which one's perception is grounded in "mimesis," the embodied mimicry of an action (Gebauer and Wulf 1995; Zlatev 2008). Previous neuroscientific studies have demonstrated that dancers will neurally "mimic" the dance when viewing the performance of other artists (Calvo-Merino et al. 2005). In a similar way, the people who participated in our study were mentally "experiencing" the process of creating the creative piece, developing physical empathy for the artisan's process. If that process involved particular expertise, the viewer would find more value in the creative work.

When interpreting the process and subsequent value of each piece, viewers accorded a premium to those pieces that contained physical representations of handmade processes such as visible brushstrokes (Chamberlain et al. 2018). Such physical manifestations of the handmade process render the creator's process visible through their use of the medium, thereby enabling an enhanced perception of process. Therefore, visual and physical representations of handmade-ness, as well as advertising and brand messaging touting handmade processes, serve to increase creative value. Chiuri's comments in *Harper's Bazaar* are a prime example of such messaging.

Globalizing Creative Value

This proclivity to objects made via handmade processes is part of a broader trend towards local, organic, recycled, handmade, unique, and artisan purchasing behaviour. It is worth noting that much of this trend focuses on Western audiences. The perceived value and/or attractiveness of handmade objects is likely to be different for consumers in "developing" countries. For instance, machine-made objects may be deemed more valuable due to a perception of those objects as more advanced or modern. However, a preference for the handmade is also emerging among elites who are reviving the popularity of their local craft cultures, for instance, the revival of handloom *saris* in India (Sharma 2020).

The situation in India exhibits further nuance, as evidenced by a recent conversation with Harshit Agarwal, a contemporary Indian artist, who described a societal association of traditional handmade wares with certain socially marginalized castes. Indeed, the context in which the item is handmade may play a key role: while scholars such as Fuchs and team (Fuchs, Schreier and Van Osselaer 2015) examined objects handmade in a Western context by local artisans, they did not examine consumers' reactions to products that may be handmade at a distance from them. For instance, an object that was handmade in the Global South may be deemed less valuable by Western consumers. Along with the location of creation, the conditions of creative labour may also play a role: indeed, Western consumers are less willing to purchase objects made in "sweatshop" conditions, prioritizing the well-being of the objects' creators. It's worth noting here that many Western companies (including luxury fashion houses) have long relied on outsourced, uncredited artisans in the Global South to produce their wares. The new development, as illustrated by Chiuri's claims in *Harper's Bazaar*, is the industry's *acknowledgement* of the role that global craftspeople are playing in the creative process. Meeting customers' demands for transparency and inclusivity, brands are now touting pieces that are "Made in India" just as they previously highlighted pieces that were "Made in Italy."

However, Western tropes cannot be neatly mapped onto Southern realities. As Payal Arora highlighted in a recent podcast (Shields 2021), Western ideals exhibit a dichotomy between "handmade" objects and mass production: it is viewed as contradictory for an item to be both handmade and mass produced. That is, Western populations expect that only a small quantity of a given handmade object exists. However, Arora pointed out that in Indian contexts, many artisans are both handmaking and mass-producing traditional objects as part of their collective cultural practice in

craft making. In many cases, these mass production sites represent poor working conditions and tireless bodily effort, where locals—women, in particular—toil for hours on end to handmake a large quantity of a given object.

Here, we are beginning to see how biased assumptions may be baked into Western-born technology platforms, exhibiting detrimental downstream effects on local communities in the Global South.

Designing for Creative Justice

Global South artisanal practices present a predicament for digital platforms on which such items might be sold. Western interfaces and economies begin to unravel when confronted with the sale of objects that are both handmade and mass-produced. For instance, a platform like Etsy—purportedly designed for the sale of handmade objects—uses algorithms to deprioritize objects that appear to be mass-produced. This results in an unfair disadvantage for such women artisans in the Global South. Furthermore, the platform maintains minimal accountability due to the "black box" nature of algorithmic decision-making.

Indeed, online platforms have resulted in many such disadvantages for populations in the Global South. As internet platforms are primarily developed by Western companies, Western norms of data governance are implicitly imposed upon an increasingly global user base. Furthermore, the data produced by these users are harvested and exploited in a manner that has been described as "data colonialism" (Couldry and Mejias 2019). This is particularly concerning when this data extraction occurs unbeknownst to the communities providing the data.

In the cultural sector, the assumptions inherent in Western-born platforms may represent a new form of appropriation. For instance, algorithms developed by Western entities are being used to "authenticate" artistic outputs (Mind Matters 2019; Cascone 2017). However, creation processes in the Global South—which are often communal—do not necessarily follow a Western construction of provenance. Similarly, algorithms that are used to determine whether an object is legitimately handmade for the purposes of value creation (e.g., eligibility for Etsy platforming) may subscribe to the Western handmade/mass-produced dichotomy described above, thereby improperly classifying the outputs of traditional Indian models of creative work.

It is a connected platform's *design* with which a community interacts: as the only tangible and user-facing aspect of users' online experience, an

interface's affordances shape data, usage, and privacy decisions. Therefore, it is imperative to consider how such interfaces may be designed in ways that are inclusive—rather than dismissive or even exploitative—of local cultural communities. When platforms are designed in an inclusive manner, access to a global audience of consumers may further reverse the colonialist power dynamic by providing local artisans with avenues for development, empowerment, and financial security.

The first step in designing platforms that are inherently inclusive is to conduct research into the diverse range of users that may interact with the platform. This will formulate a foundation of empathy upon which truly inclusive platforms may be designed. By understanding local creative processes, for instance, a platform may be designed that fits into existing cultural practices, rather than demeaning or obfuscating current modes of creative expression.

Nanako Era, Molly Bloom, Francesca Kazerooni, Liza Meckler, Emma Siegel, and Erica Ellis, and I have written a guide to inclusive research (Herman et al. 2021). While it centres the experience of people with disabilities, many of the approaches will resonate with those interested in conducting research that is inclusive of other attributes, including cultural identity. For instance, one must carefully consider the mechanisms by which participants are recruited: rather than cold, individual outreach, building relationships with trusted community groups could be most beneficial for the communal nature of creative collectives in the Global South. (Though, of course, it's worth considering who may be excluded from such collectives.) Similarly, access is a key consideration; in the guide, we offer tips for ensuring that a participant is not excluded from research due to the devices they use or their mechanisms of transportation.

In the case of artisans that are selling both mass-produced and handmade objects, Western platforms must reconsider their traditional models of the creative economy. As the primary sites that serve to platform creative wares for a global consumer base, these technology-enabled services must carefully consider the types of creativity that they uplift. Without such considerations, Western technology platforms impose their own assumptions about creativity on a global user base, thereby inhibiting local cultures' creative norms. In sum, it is imperative for Western technology companies to conduct rigorous research (or, ideally, hire on-the-ground employees) in the bevy of global markets that they seek to infiltrate. Otherwise, Western assumptions and biases will be encoded into their products, resulting in ill-fated local experiences.

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