

# **Platforming Heritage: The Mediation of Kashmiri Pashmina on Instagram**

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## **Abstract**

The study examines how Kashmiri Pashmina Heritage is represented and mediated on Instagram through a quality analysis of the Pashmkaar platform. Moving beyond the assumption that social media functions as a neutral tool of cultural preservation, the study investigates how visibility, authority, and value are unstructured within a platform environment. Using a multimodal approach, the analysis draws on images, videos, captions, hashtags, and audience interactions from posts published between July 2025 and February 2026. The findings indicate that while craft possesses and artisans are actively documented, their representation is shaped by centralised narrative framing, fragmented content formats, and platform-driven engagement patterns. Value is constructed through the temporal and symbolic narratives, emphasising devotion continuity and Labour intensity, while visibility is unevenly distributed through platform affordances. The study also highlights a gap between visibility and access, as audience engagement reflects aspirational participation without clearly structured pathways. Overall, the paper argues that digital preservation is not a neutral reproduction but a mediated process in which cultural heritage is recognised within the conditions of platform visibility

**Keywords:** *Craft Representation, Digitalization, Digital Heritage, Instagram, Social Media, Visibility*

## **Introduction**

Kashmiri handicrafts occupy a distinctive position at the intersection of cultural heritage and economic livelihood. Among these pashmina weaving stands out not only for its material value but also for its deep historical lineage and symbolic significance (Kaur & Taneja, 2025). Fruited in generations of artisanal knowledge, these crafts embody both aesthetic refinement and cultural continuity, functioning as markers of identity as well as sources of income for large sections of the population (Pashmina, 2024). The handicraft sector in Jammu and Kashmir contributes significantly to employment generation, export activity, and the sustenance of rural economies, while also reflecting the region's longstanding traditions like skilled craftsmanship (Manawer & Khan, 2026)

They want your economic importance. These artefacts represent all lived cultural practices. They are not merely commodities but expressions of community knowledge shaped by local materials, inherited techniques, and social context (Duan, Tan, Choon, & Zhang, 2023). The enduring relevance of Kashmiri crafts, particularly pashmina, known for its fine texture and intricate workmanship, lies in this dual character as both cultural symbol and market product, loan (Tiwari, Lakhani, & Trivedi, 2023). Historically supported through systems of patronage and sustained through generational transmissions, these practises have adapted to changing economic conditions, including the pressure and opportunities introduced by globalization (Dillon, 2019).

In recent years, the expansion of digital technologies has introduced new conditions for the circulation of cultural heritage. Social media platforms, in particular, have enabled forms of visibility that extend beyond traditional markets and physical exhibitions (Pesce & Franze, 2025). Crafts that were once locally embedded are now presented to geographically dispersed audiences, allowing for border recognitions and new modes of engagement (Munda, 2023). Digital platforms have thus increasingly been waived as tools for cultural preservation, enabling documentation dissemination and interaction in ways that were previously unavailable (Prandi, Ceccarini, Tumedei, & Salomoni, 2025).

At the same time, this shift raises important questions about how heritage is represented within digital environments (Poulopoulos & Wallace, 2022). While social media expands access and visibility, it also introduces new forms of mediation. The presentation of craft is shaped not only by the artefact itself but by visual framing, narrative voice, and the affordance of the platform through which it is circulated (Turvy, 2025). Digital media does not simply transmit cultural content; it structures how that content becomes visible, meaningful, and engaging to audiences (Yao, 2025).

Existing scholarship has largely emphasised the enabling role of digital technologies in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. However, data remains limited in attention to how representation is organised within platform environments, particularly in relation to questions of authority, visibility, and value. In the context of artisanal practises such as Pashmina weaving, this gap becomes significant as digital platforms increasingly mediate the relationship between producers, products, and audiences.

It's within this context that the present study is situated. Focusing on the Instagram page of Pashmkaar, the study examines how Kashmiri Pashmina Heritage is represented and mediated in a digital setting. The study seeks to understand how patterns of visibility, authority, and value are structured within the platform environment. The study is guided by the following research question.

How is Kashmiri Pashmina heritage represented and mediated on Instagram, and what patterns of visibility, authority, and value construction emerge from this digital presentation?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The relationship between digital media and cultural heritage has increasingly been understood through the lens of preservation, accessibility, and global dissemination (Jin & Liu, 2022). A substantial body of literature suggests that technological advancements, particularly digital platforms, have transformed how cultural artifacts are documented, shared, and sustained across time and space. Early discussions in this domain emphasize the capacity of new media to extend the reach of traditional art forms beyond their local contexts. For instance, (Kolay, 2015) argues that the integration of traditional art with new media paradigms creates new forms of visual communication that enable wider dissemination of cultural knowledge, allowing artefacts and

identities to be documented and accessed irrespective of geographical limitations. This perspective situates digital media as an enabling infrastructure that expands the communicative potential of heritage.

Building on this, a growing body of research highlights the role of digital platforms in reshaping the economic and cultural landscape of traditional industries. (Mathur & Ranawat, 2024) noted that digital platforms have significantly altered the traditional handicraft sector by offering artisans direct access to global markets, thereby reducing dependence on intermediaries and expanding opportunities for cultural visibility. Similarly, studies such as Liang Airtel 2020 demonstrate how digital tools enhance archival practices, enabling Richard documentation and deeper engagement with cultural heritage through technologies such as mapping and digital repositories (Panayot, Rizk, Yassine, Kawtharani, & Asmar, 2025). These developments suggest that digitalization not only preserves artifacts but also recontextualizes them with a new system of circulation and interpretation

A parallel strand of literature focuses on digital archiving and preservation technologies. Scholars such as (Tsiipi, Vouyioukas, Loumous, Kargas, & Varoutas, 2023) emphasises the importance of digital repositories, imaging techniques, and virtual documentation in safeguarding cultural assets. These technologies are seen as Essential for ensuring longevity, accessibility, and restoration, particularly in the face of physical degradation or loss (Vivian, Olagunju, Kanayo, & Anunobi-Maliki, 2024). (Parsad, 2011) further extended this argument, highlighting the integration of libraries, archives, and museums through digital systems, suggesting that digitalization has ushered in a new phase of cultural preservation characterised by interconnected and accessible knowledge systems. Together, these studies frame digital media as a protective mechanism that secures cultural memory for future generations.

At the same time, Scholars have increasingly turned attention to the role of social media in cultural preservation. Unlike traditional digital archives, (Briciu, et al., 2025) argue that social media provides two opportunities for safeguarding and promoting cultural artefacts while also enabling creative engagement and communication. Similarly, (Ghorzang, 2025) highlights how social media bridges generational gaps by facilitating the sharing of traditional stories and practices, thereby contributing to the continuity of cultural knowledge. (Idress, Munawer, & Aslam, 2025), it further suggests that media platforms support the maintenance of cultural identity by enabling

communication to actively disseminate their traditions and engage with global audiences. In this sense, social media is positioned not only as a repository but also as a dynamic space of cultural interaction.

Within this border discourse, cultural heritage is consistently understood as a reflection of collective identity that requires active preservation. (Zriba & Gharbi, 2025) emphasises that heritage embodies the value and identity of communities and must be safeguarded for future generations, particularly in the face of technology and social change. This concern is especially relevant for intangible cultural practises which are more valuable and vulnerable to disappearance without sustained documentation and transmission. Studies focusing on specific cultural contexts, such as (Bashir, Mahmud, & Khan, 2021) reinforce the importance of preserving regional craftsmanship by highlighting the distinctiveness and global recognition of Kashmiri Handicrafts, including their design durability and cultural significance.

However, while the existing literature strongly emphasises the enabling role of digital technologies in preservation and dissemination, it often treats digital platforms as neutral tools (Alsaleh, 2024). Much of the scholarship foregrounds excess visibility and continuity, but pays comparatively less attention to how digital environments structure Representation itself. Questions regarding who immediate sculptural narratives are distributed to and how value is constructed within platform settings remain relatively unexplored.

This gap becomes particularly significant in the context of social media platforms such as Instagram, where visibility is shaped by platform affordance engagement dynamics and narrative framing. While digital technology undoubtedly expands the reach of cultural heritage, they also introduce new forms of mediation that influence how heritage is presented, interpreted, and circulated (Burkat, 2024). This existing literature provides A strong foundation for understanding the importance of digital preservation, but it offers limited insight into the internal structuring of digital representation within platform environments.

It is within this gap that the present study is situated by focusing on the Instagram page of Pashmkaar. The study moves beyond the assumption that social media simply preserves culture and examines how heritage is represented and mediated within a platform context. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the emerging conversation on digital heritage by shifting attention from

access and preservation to the patterned organisation of visibility, authority, and value in digital cultural spaces.

### **Objective**

To understand how the Kashmiri Pashmina heritage is represented and mediated on Instagram, and what patterns of visibility, authority, and value construction emerge from this digital presentation.

### **Methodology**

This study is guided by a research question as to how Kashmiri Pashmina Heritage is represented and mediated on Instagram and what patterns of visibility, authority, and value construction emerge from this digital presentation. The study approaches Instagram not merely as a platform for dissemination but as a mediated environment that shapes how cultural heritage is presented and understood.

To address this question, the study adopts a qualitative multimodal analytical approach. The analysis considers multiple dimensions of Instagram posts, including images, videos, captions, hashtags, and audience interactions. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how representation operates within the platform.

The case selected for the study is the verified Instagram page Pashmkaar, which focuses on Kashmiri Pashmina and related handicrafts such as Sozni, Tilla Ari, and Carney Weaving. The page was chosen because it consistently documents craft processes, features artisans alongside finished projects, and engages with both local and global audiences.

The dataset consists of posts published between July 2025 and February 2026 (7 Months). It is bounded timeframe was selected to capture recurring patterns of representation across different types of content. All relevant posters who engage you directly through draughts processes, artisan representation, or platform interaction were included. This approach allowed for thematic depth while avoiding arbitrary selection.

The data analysed includes visual content (images and videos), textual elements (captions and hashtags), and interactional features (comments, likes, and collaborative tagging). Comments were examined particularly for patterns such as employment enquiries and audience engagement, while engagement indicators were interpreted qualitatively as visible signals of differential attention.

Purposive sampling within a defined temporal boundary was adopted. All posts from July 2025 to February 2026 were considered relevant to the research. The sample included 500 pictures, 105 videos, and all the comments under these posts.

The study relies entirely on publicly available data and does not include interviews or access to internal platform Analytics; as such, the findings are limited to observable patterns of representation and interaction. Claims are therefore restricted to what is visible within the platform and do not extend to economic structures, private communications, or algorithmic processes that are not publicly accessible.

### Description of the Page

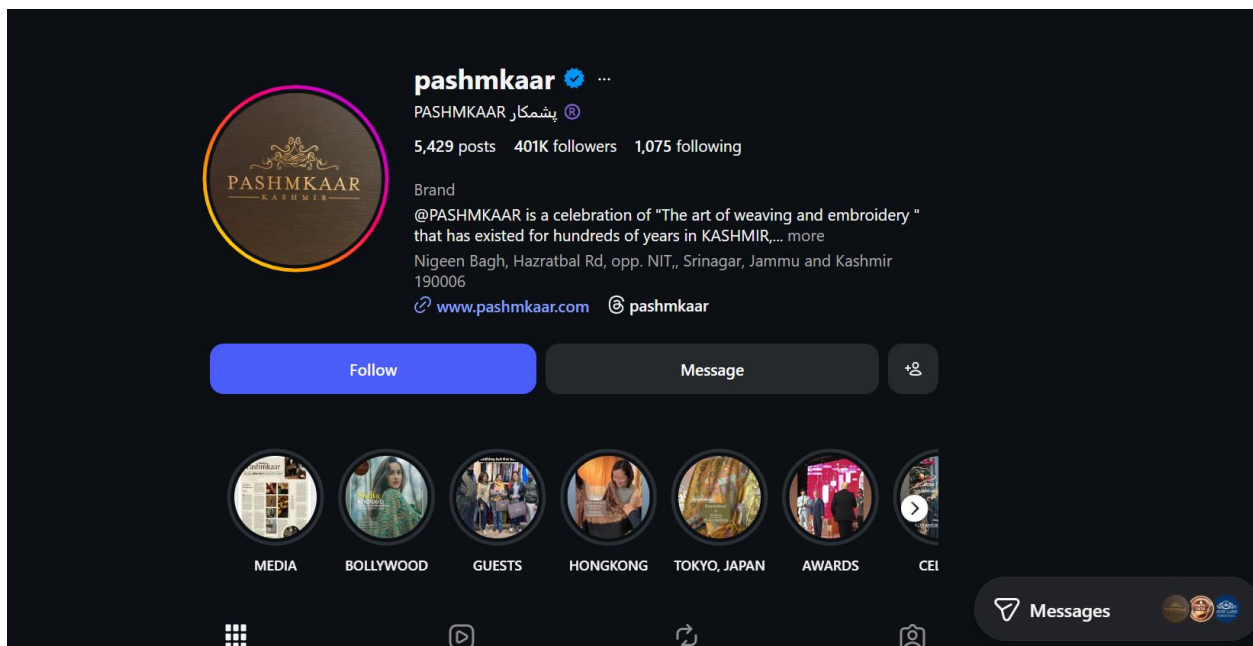


Figure 1 The Pashmkaar Page on 01- 05-2026

The page Pashmkaar is a verified Instagram page. It is widely known for its exclusive focus on Pashmina and other Handicrafts, including weaving, embroidery, tilla, Sozni, etc. By the end of February 2026, the page had attracted 400K followers, and this number might have increased since then. On average, the posts on the page receive 100,000 views. Moreover, Pashmkaar has received many awards and recognitions for its contribution to cultural preservation and global outreach. The brand has outlets in Hong Kong, giving the Kashmiri crafts international recognition.

### **Analysis and Themes**

The analysis of the Instagram page Pashmkaar's content indicates that the platform operates not only as a site of cultural display but as a structured environment in which Kashmiri Pashmina Heritage is mediated through recurring patterns of representation. Across the data set, craft artisans and value are made visible through interconnected dynamics involving narrative authority, visual framing, temporal emphasis, gendered positioning, and platform-driven visibility. These patterns do not function independently; rather, they collectively shape how heritage is organised and encountered within the platform environment.

#### *Mediated authority and narrative structuring*

A consistent feature across the data set is the central presence of the founder as a mediating and interpretive figure. He appears repeatedly in videos engaging directly with artisans discussing colour combinations, evaluating embroidery at repairs, selecting design seals, and explaining craft processes to customers. These interactions are often conducted in Kashmiri, reinforcing the essence of authenticity and proximity to the craft tradition.

While artisans are visibly present, named and actively engaged in demonstrating their work, for example, Mr Niyaz, Mr Ashraf, Mr Shabbir, and Ms Anjali, the structure of these interactions positions them within a mediated frame. Even in "behind-the-scenes" or "candid conversations" formats, Artisans rarely address the audiences independently; their presence is embedded within a dialogue-led or framed by the founder. Aesthetic decisions, particularly regarding colour combinations, design approval, and quality assessment, are frequently shown as passing through his evaluation.

This does not negate artisan visibility but suggests that digital representation is organized through centralized narrative authority. Craft is not only displaced but interpreted, with meaning and coherence structured through a recognizable figure within the platform (Crouzet, Pollinger, & Langenberg, 2025).

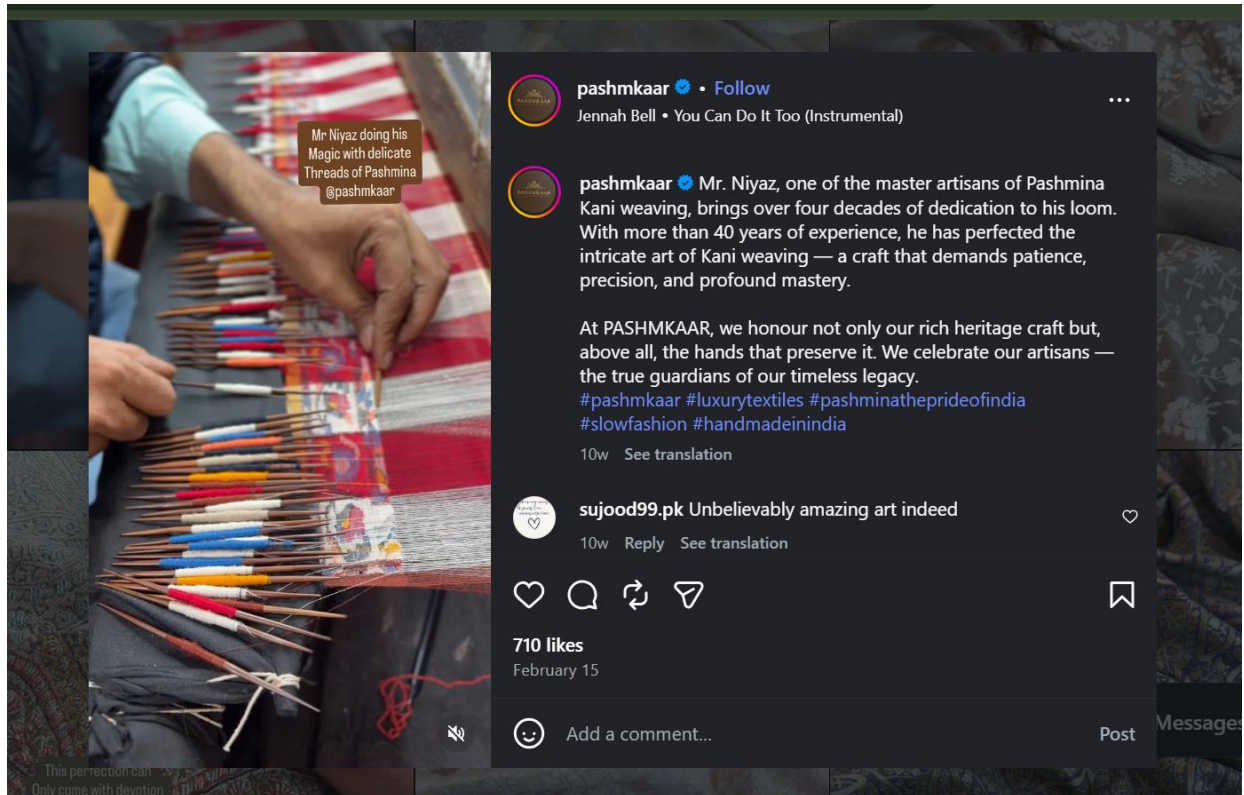


Figure 2 Post containing the name of the artisan

### *Fragmented Visibility and Platform-Bound Narratives*

A notable feature of the content is the short and fragmented nature of video storytelling. Almost all the videos are brief, typically 10 to 15 seconds, often ending mid-conversation or without narrative closure. Even when artisans explain complex processes such as the time-intensive nature of Carney waving, the intricacies of Sozni embroidery, or the preparation of threads, the explanations remain partial.

To assess whether these fragments formed part of longer narratives, attempts were made to locate extended versions of these videos on other platforms, including YouTube and Facebook. However, within the scope of this study, no corresponding full-length versions were identified. This suggests that Instagram functions as a primary site of representation, where craft knowledge is presented in condensed and incomplete forms.

As a result, Heritage is made visible through fragments rather than continuous documentation. The platform privileges glimpses of moments of process, brief explanations, partial conversations, and extended narratives. The moral of this presentation aligns with platform formats that prioritise short-form repetitive engagement via incompleteness, which may sustain viewer curiosity and ongoing interaction (Manic, 2024).

### *Temporal death and the construction of craft value*

Across posts, time emerges as a central narrative device in constructing the value of Pashmina. Repeated references are made to the duration required to produce a single piece, ranging from days of embroidery Patches to months or even years for complete shawls. Processes such as Khani waving are described as requiring not only technical skill but also specialised knowledge, including familiarity with version design scripts, extended preparation of rap and web, and sustained manual labour.

These temporal narratives are reinforced through specific examples, references to 3 million states, year-long work, and artisans with decades of experience, for example, 40 to 60 years of practise. So these representations of time become a visible marker of authenticity and distinction.

The value is not constructed solely through the finished product but through the duration, effort, and continuity embedded in its meaning. The emphasis on time situates pashmina within a framework of reality and endurance, distinguishing it from mass-produced alternatives (Angela Jey, 2025).



Figure 3 Description and the text to caption highlighting the time taken on a single shawl

### *Craft devotion to the moral framing of Labour*

In addition to temporal emphasis, craft is consistently framed through moral and spiritual language. Captions and descriptions repeatedly refer to weaving as devotion, “prayer”, or “sacred work”, and artisans are described as individuals who have “dedicated their lives” to the craft. The making of a pashmina is presented not only as a livelihood but as a meaningful and disciplined practice.

This framing elevates artisanal labour, symbolically positioning it within a narrative of dignity, continuity, and cultural responsibility. At the same time, it foregrounds moral value over material conditions; labour is rendered visible primarily through dedication and skill, while economic arrangements remain outside the representational frame (Ocak, 2025).

### *Gendered visibility and symbolic positioning*

Woman artisans appear prominently across the data set, particularly in the post documenting Sozni embroidery and hand spinning. These representations emphasise both skills and social roles, often

highlighting women as contributors to household income while maintaining domestic responsibilities (Subiyantoro, 2021). Descriptions frame them as “independent, strong”, and essential to the continuity of the craft.

A post featuring an elderly woman sipping Pashmina wool stands out as the most engaged post within the data set, receiving significantly higher interaction than most others. This suggests that representation of women, especially in traditional and intimate settings, carries strong, effective resonance within the platform.



Figure 4 Representing elderly women in the posts by Pashmkaar

However, while women are visible and central to the craft processes, their representation remains within a symbolic frame of continuity and care. Decision-making, design direction, and narrative framing continue to be structured elsewhere. This indicates a distinction between visibility and interpretative authority, where women’s labour is foregrounded but not equally positioned within narrative control (Almamari, 2015).



Figure 5 Celebrating Women artisans on the eve of Women's Day

### *Personalization, kinship, and humanization of craft*

The page incorporates a notable degree of personalization in its representation of artisans. Individuals are introduced by name, shown in Informal contexts, and occasionally depicted beyond their craft roles, Such as in casual interactions, tea conversations, or personal anecdotes. This creates the essence of familiarity and relational depth, distinguishing the content from purely product-oriented branding.

At the same time, certain relationships, such as references to artisans being relatives of the founders, for example, a cousin, indicate the presence of kinship networks within the production and representation of craft. While not extensively elaborated, these moments suggest that the digital narrative is shaped not only by professional structures but also by informal and familial connections (Sharma, Tiwari, & Neha, 2024).

These elements contribute to the humanisation of artisans while also revealing that representation is embedded within relational networks that extend beyond purely commercial interactions.

### *Engagement patterns and effective circulation*

Engagement across post various considerably depending on content type. Posters featuring intimate craft processes, elderly artisans, or culturally resonant imagery tend to receive higher interactions compared to exhibition announcements, rewards, or institutional recognitions. For instance, while international exhibitions and media features, including Vogue, are prominently highlighted, they generate relatively less engagement than posters depicting everyday craft practises.

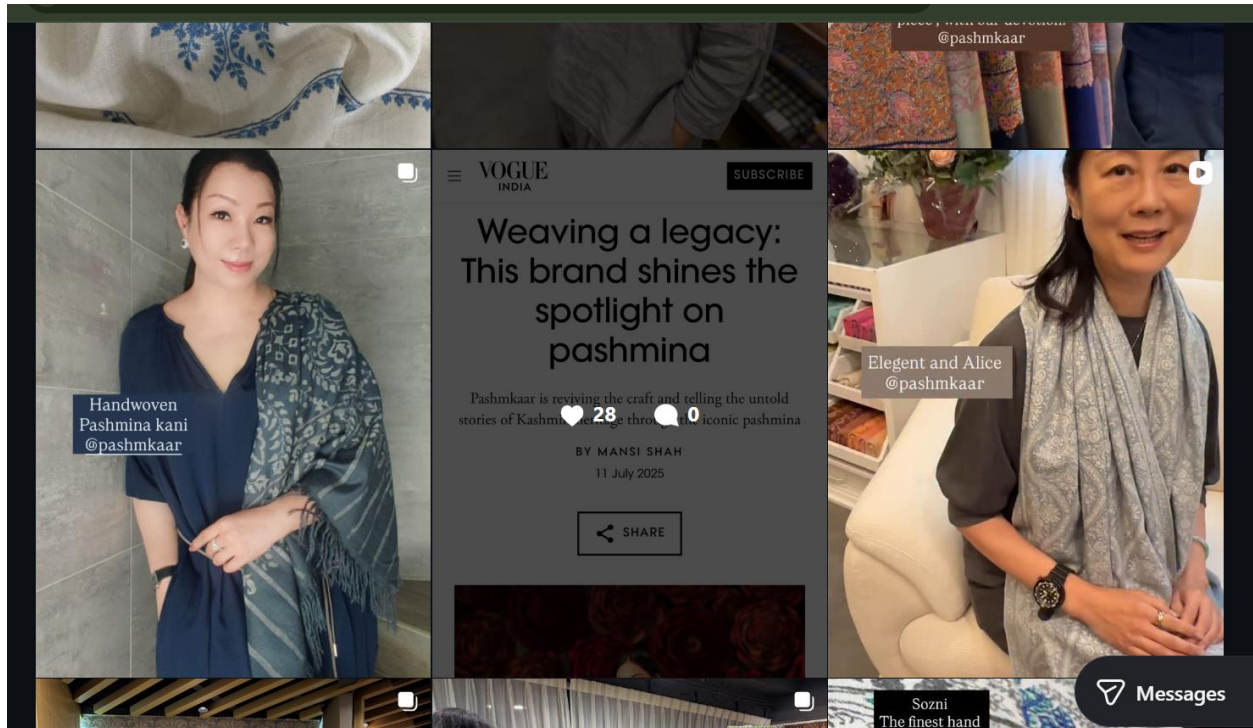


Figure 6 Featuring Vogue in the posts for recognition

This pattern suggests that effective content grounded in lived experiences, tradition, and human presence circulates more prominently within the platform environments. While an engagement matrix cannot be interpreted as a direct measure of audience perception, visible differences indicate that emotional resonance plays a role in shaping visibility (Ahmed, Sharif, Ting, & Sharif, 2024).

#### *Comment spaces and Aspirational Access*

The comment sections across multiple posters reveal recurring patterns of audience interactions. In addition to appreciation and Price enquiries, a notable number of comments express interest in employment, collaboration, or direct contact with the brand. This request is often included in

appeals for work opportunities or attempts to establish a connection with the founder. Within the visible interface, search enquiries rarely receive direct responses, while private communication channels such as direct messaging remain outside the scope of observation. The public comment spaces reflect an important dynamic that visibility generates aspiration. The platform becomes not only a site of cultural representation but also a perceived point of access to livelihood (Gazi, Rahman, Rabbi, & Masum, 2024).



Figure 7 Picture showing the audience's aspirational labour

### *Visibility, concentration, and platform affordance*

The use of Instagram's collaborative tagging feature further illustrates how visibility is structured within the platform. In instances where posts are co-tagged with the founder's personal account, visibility appears to be amplified through overlapping audience networks. However, similar amplification mechanisms are not extended to artisans whose presence remains within the boundaries of the brand's account.

This creates a layout structure of visibility; artisans are visibly central within content, yet digital reach and amplification are organised around central profiles. The platform's affordance shapes how attention is distributed, concentrating visibility even within inclusive representational frameworks (Cunningham & Craig, 2019).

### *Institutional Recognition and Global Positioning*

The dataset also reflects efforts to position Pashmkaar within broader institutional and global contexts. Post document exhibitions in Locations such as Hong Kong and Delhi. Collaborations with galleries and recognition through awards and media features. Appearances by public figures and celebrities further extend the visibility of the brand.

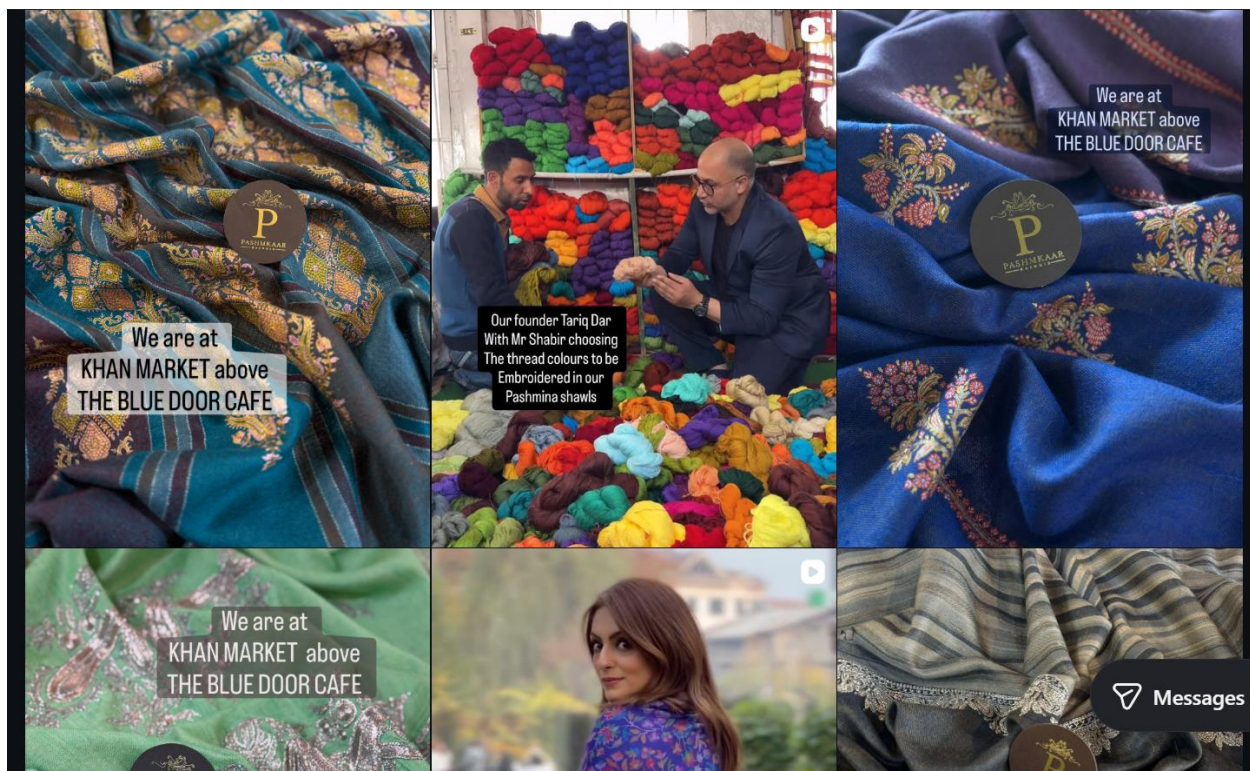


Figure 8 Picture highlighting the Events organized by Pashmkaar

These elements situate Kashmiri Pashmina within global and elite circuits of recognition. However, they have relatively lower engagement compared to process-oriented or artisan-focused posts, suggesting that institutional legitimacy operates differently from effect-driven visibility within the platform environment (Lim & Rasul, 2022).



Figure 9 Picture showcasing the grand opening of the Pashmkaar branch internationally

## Limitations

This study is based on the analysis of publicly available Instagram content and is therefore limited to observable patterns of representation and interaction within the platform interface. It does not include interviews with artisans, the founder, or audiences, and thus does not capture perspectives beyond what is visually and sexually presented. Similarly, private communications such as direct messages, as well as economic arrangements including wage contracts or revenue distributions, remain outside the scope of this research.

The study is also bounded by a defined timeframe, which allows for pattern and identification but does not account for longer-term shifts in content strategy or audience engagement. Additionally, while efforts were made to locate extended versions of video content on other platforms, the analysis remains limited to what was accessible within the Instagram environment.

Finally, engagement metrics such as likes and comments are interpreted qualitatively as indicators of visible interaction rather than precise measures of audience perception or platform algorithms, which remain opaque.

## **Discussion**

The case indicates that representation of heritage within a platform environment is shaped by the interplay of narrative authority, framing, and platform affordance. The platform organises its visibility through identifiable mediating structures. This is evident in the way interpretation, evaluation, and narrative coherence are consistently rooted through central figures, while artisans remain visibly present yet situated within the mediated frame. In this sense, digital visibility does not eliminate hierarchy but recognises it within the platform environment (Zhang & Zhang, 2024).

At the same time, the study highlights how value is constructed through symbolic and temporal narratives. The repeated emphasis on devotion, continuity, and the time-intensive nature of production situates pashmina within a moral and cultural framework that extends beyond its material form. This suggests that digital representation does not simply communicate craft but effectively participates in shaping how its value is understood. The prominence of such narratives reflects broader tendencies within digital environments, where meaning is often constructed through storytelling that aligns with audience engagement patterns (Kantaros, Ganetsos, & Nakou, 2026).

The findings further complicate the assumption that increased visibility through social media leads to expanded access or participation. While artisans are named, shown, and positioned at a central to the craft's visibility remains structured within the affordance of the platform. Engagement patterns, collaborative tagging practices, and come and interactions indicate that attention and reach are unevenly distributed. Visibility generates recognition and aspiration, but pathways to participation are not equally visible within the digital interface (Singh, Hisrich, & Guo, 2022).

Importantly, these dynamics do not negate the role of Instagram as a site of cultural preservation. The platform clearly enables documentation of processes, recognition of artisans, and dissemination of craft practises to broader audiences. However, preservation in this context. Heritage is sustained, but its digital form is shaped by platforms' specific modes of presentation, circulation, and engagement (Panchal & Mago, 2024).

This study, therefore, contributes to existing scholarship by shifting attention from the question of whether digital media preserve culture to how such preservation is structured within platform environments. It suggested that understanding digital heritage requires examining not only visibility but also the conditions under which visibility is produced, organised, and circulated.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored how Kashmiri Pashmina Heritage is represented and mediated on Instagram through equality to an analysis of the Pashmkaar platform. The findings demonstrate that while digital media facilitates the documentation and dissemination of cultural practises, this process is not neutral. Representation is shaped by platform affordances that influence narrative authority, visibility, distribution, and the construction of value (Filosof, 2025).

The case shows that heritage, when mediated through Instagram, is both preserved and recognised. Craft processes are made visible, artisans are acknowledged, and cultural continuity is emphasised at the same time digital representation reflects structured patterns of mediation, while storytelling, effective resonance, and centralised visibility play a key role in shaping how heritage is encountered (Divon & Krutrok, 2025).

By focusing on mediation rather than assuming preservation, the study provides a grounded perspective on the relationship between cultural heritage and digital platforms. It highlights the need to examine how platform environments shape not only access to culture but also the firms through which culture becomes visible and meaningful.

Future research can extend this Work by exploring audience interpretations of the economic dimensions of Digital craft economies and comparative analysis across multiple platforms or cases. Such enquiries would further deepen understanding of how heritage operates within evolving digital environments.

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