



## ZARI-ZARDOZI BEYOND TROUSSEAU: RETHINKING THE STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE CONTEMPORARY CONSUMERS

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### Abstract

*Zari-Zardozi embroidery, historically associated with luxury and ceremonial attire, faces the challenge of remaining relevant in contemporary markets. While its opulent aesthetic continues to dominate bridal and festive wear, this narrow positioning restricts its potential. This study explores strategies to reposition Zari-Zardozi beyond trousseau wear through design innovation, branding, and sustainable practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach of artisan interviews, consumer surveys, and secondary data, the paper examines shifting consumer preferences toward lighter, versatile, and ethically produced products. Case studies, including experimental applications such as Zardozi-embellished sports shoes, illustrate the scope for diversification. Findings emphasize that integrating Zardozi into lifestyle fashion, accessories, interiors, contemporary wear and formal wear etc. can enhance its global appeal and secure artisan livelihoods.*

**Keywords:** *Embroidery, Preferences, Products, Reposition, Strategies*

### Introduction

Zari-Zardozi embroidery, a centuries-old craft characterized by the use of metallic threads, sequins, and beads, occupies an important place in the textile heritage of India. Once patronized by royalty and nobility, it has long symbolized luxury, opulence, and artistic refinement. Its intricate workmanship and rich materials made it especially desirable for ceremonial garments and festive occasions, where grandeur and ornamentation were celebrated.

Over time, however, Zari-Zardozi became strongly confined to the realm of wedding attire, festive ensembles, and other occasional wear. While this association enhanced its status as a marker of prestige, it also restricted the craft's perception to that of something reserved only



for special events. For everyday fashion and contemporary lifestyles, Zari-Zardozi remains largely absent, seen as impractical or inaccessible for regular use. This narrow positioning has hindered its broader presence in global markets, especially among younger and global consumers.



**Fig 1: Zardozi Craft and different products usually made**

Despite its enduring heritage, the craft today faces challenges of relevance and adaptation. There is a noticeable lack of innovative strategies to reposition Zari-Zardozi beyond its conventional “special-occasion” identity, which limits both consumer engagement and market expansion.

This research paper seeks to address this gap by exploring approaches to reimagine Zari-Zardozi for contemporary audiences and fashion contexts.



**Fig 2: Reimagining Zari-Zardozi Craft**

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

- To study consumer preferences and perceptions regarding the use of Zari-Zardozi embroidery in contemporary apparel and lifestyle products beyond ceremonial and bridal wear.
- To identify branding, and marketing strategies for increasing consumer engagement in supporting the sustainable growth of the Zari-Zardozi craft sector.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Craft heritage and cultural value of Zardozi**

Zardozi embroidery, derived from the Persian words *zar* (gold) and *dozi* (embroidery), is one of the most celebrated textile traditions of South Asia. It developed under Mughal patronage, using gold and silver threads along with beads and sequins to decorate fabrics (Mishra & Singh, 2025). Traditionally, Zardozi was used for royal attire, ceremonial garments, and home décor, symbolizing wealth and prestige (Nishitha, n.d.).

Today, Zardozi remains a key part of India’s intangible cultural heritage. The craft has received formal recognition through a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for “Lucknow Zardozi,” which



protects its regional identity and authentic techniques (Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, 2013). However, studies show that artisans still face challenges such as unstable incomes, middlemen dominance, and declining apprenticeship, which threaten its continuity (Management of work and income scenario..., 2021).

Bhopal has emerged as another important center for Zardozi embroidery, though it has not yet received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag like Lucknow. Artisans in Bhopal are known for adapting traditional zari and zardozi techniques to contemporary designs, producing bridal wear, festive garments, accessories, and home décor items. The city benefits from its position as a hub for handicrafts in Madhya Pradesh, where government craft fairs and exhibitions provide platforms for artisans to showcase their work. However, the sector faces similar challenges to other craft clusters, including limited recognition, dependence on middlemen, and fluctuating demand. In the absence of GI protection, Bhopal's Zardozi workers rely heavily on local markets and seasonal demand, which makes their livelihoods vulnerable. At the same time, the growing interest in sustainable and handmade luxury offers an opportunity for Bhopal's artisans to reposition their craft for broader consumer segments.

## **2.2 Consumer behaviour in craft-based luxury markets**

Consumer studies highlight authenticity and craftsmanship as central to the appeal of handmade luxury products. Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, and Farrelly (2014) identify originality, continuity, and naturalness as dimensions of brand authenticity that build consumer trust. Similarly, Beverland (2006) shows that heritage and craftsmanship strongly influence luxury consumption.

Recent research suggests that modern consumers are moving towards “quiet” or “inconspicuous” luxury, where subtle design and high-quality materials are preferred over flashy branding (Wu & Li, 2022). This shift offers opportunities for traditional crafts like Zardozi to reposition themselves through authenticity and subtle design adaptations.



### **2.3 Role of sustainability, branding, and design intervention**

Luxury markets are increasingly engaging with sustainability. While many consumers see luxury and sustainability as opposites, they also appreciate luxury items when they emphasize durability, quality, and repairability (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). Reports on the fashion industry encourage circular practices such as recycling, reuse, and extending product life, which resonate with artisanal methods of production (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Moreover, craft-based economies are being linked with climate action, as they promote local materials and eco-friendly processes (British Council, 2024).

Branding also plays a critical role in promoting crafts. The case of Fabindia shows how storytelling of provenance, local supply chains, and community partnerships can successfully connect consumers with crafts (Chattopadhyay, Wee, Sabhaney, & Chainani, 2015). Similarly, design interventions, when done sensitively help artisans expand their product categories while preserving traditional motifs and techniques (Sharma & Mittar, 2014).

### **2.4 Market challenges and opportunities for craft revival**

Despite its rich heritage, Zardozi faces limited demand outside of weddings and festive occasions. Heavy embroidery and high costs restrict its usability for everyday fashion (Mishra & Singh, 2025). At the same time, changing consumer preferences toward sustainable luxury, subtle aesthetics, and authentic craft experiences provide new opportunities for repositioning. Through design adaptation, branding, and sustainable production practices, Zardozi can be integrated into modern lifestyles without losing its traditional value.

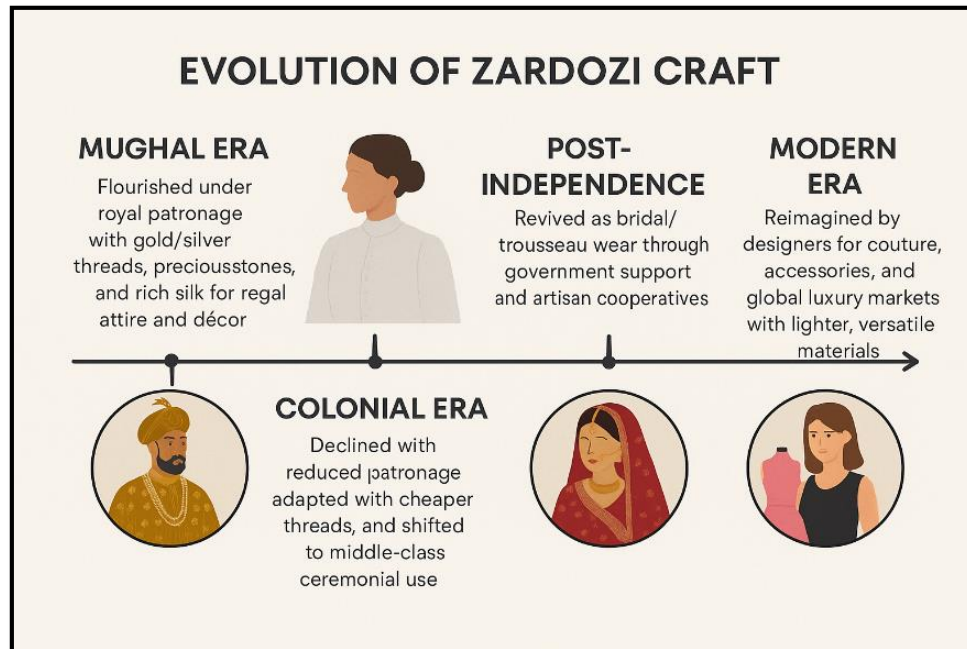


Fig 3: Evolution of Zardozi Craft

### 3. Methodology

The present study was conducted to explore consumer perceptions and preferences regarding the application of Zari-Zardozi embroidery beyond traditional bridal and ceremonial wear and to identify suitable strategies for engaging contemporary consumers. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. It focused on understanding contemporary consumer attitudes, product preferences, and market possibilities for Zari-Zardozi embroidery in modern apparel and lifestyle products.

#### 3.2 Sample Selection

The study included two categories of respondents:



- **Consumers** – A sample of approximately 100 consumers was selected using purposive and snow ball sampling. Respondents mainly included young adults, working professionals, students, and fashion-conscious consumers within the age group of 18-40 years.
- **Artisans, Designers, and Retailers** – A small group of 20 artisans, fashion designers, and retailers associated with Zardozi products was selected purposively to obtain insights regarding innovation, diversification, and market challenges within the craft sector.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Primary data were collected through:

- Structured questionnaires for consumers
- Informal interviews and discussions with artisans, designers, and retailers

Secondary data were collected from Research papers, Journals, Books, Fashion trend reports, Government and craft-related websites, Online fashion platforms and market studies related to handcrafted and sustainable fashion.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The collected quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as Frequency distribution, Percentage analysis, Weighted mean, Ranking method. The qualitative responses obtained from artisans and designers were analyzed descriptively to identify major themes related to innovation, diversification, branding, and market opportunities.

### 3.5 Scope of the Study

The study primarily focused on the contemporary application of Zari-Zardozi embroidery in apparel and lifestyle products beyond bridal and ceremonial usage. The research emphasized consumer acceptance, changing fashion preferences, and sustainable strategies for the future growth of the craft sector.



## **4. Result & Discussion**

Zardozi embroidery, once synonymous with bridal and ceremonial attire, is increasingly being repositioned within the spectrum of contemporary fashion and lifestyle products. Traditionally valued for its opulent gold and silver embellishment on trousseau garments, the craft is now undergoing a shift from exclusivity to versatility.

### **4.1 From Heavy Trousseau to Lifestyle Fashion**

Contemporary consumers-particularly urban, younger buyers-are seeking lighter, functional, and adaptable designs. As a result, Zardozi motifs are being scaled down and applied to day-to-day fashion items, allowing the craft to move beyond the confines of wedding wardrobes. This transition reflects broader trends in the Indian fashion industry, where heritage crafts are being reinterpreted for wider markets.

### **4.2 Expanding Applications**

The use of Zardozi has diversified into multiple domains:

- **Accessories** such as clutches, footwear, and belts feature miniature motifs that retain luxury appeal without overwhelming weight.



Fig 4: Application of zardozi in Accessories

- **Menswear**, including jackets, bandhgalas, and pocket squares, integrates subtle Zardozi highlights for festive and couture wear.



Fig 5: Application of zardozi in Menswear

- **Home interiors**, including cushion covers, wall panels, and table runners, incorporate metallic threadwork to create artisanal décor with a heritage touch.



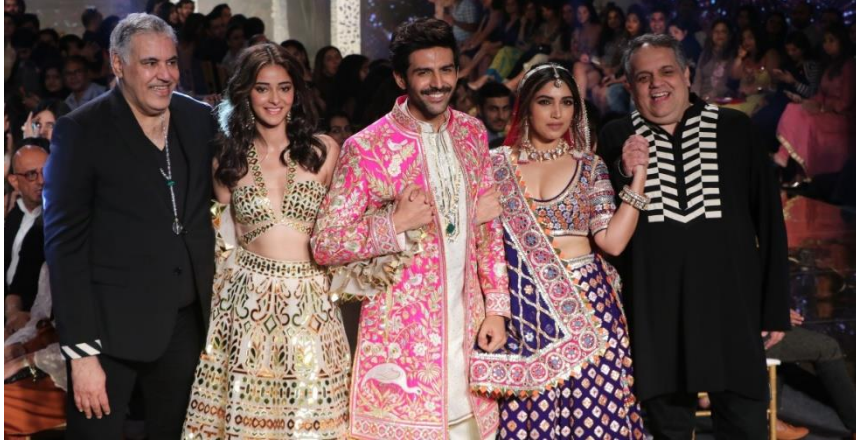


**Fig 6: Application of zardozi in Interiors**

- **Couture and ready-to-wear fashion** increasingly use Zardozi as surface detailing combined with lighter fabrics, sequins, and contemporary cuts to appeal to global audiences. However this is still a growing area in zardozi application but has a huge potential to attract global and younger audiences. Designers and local boutique owners are still experimenting with the variety of products to increase the reach and sale of the zardozi products.

#### **4.2 Case Studies of Design Interventions**

Several Indian designers have pioneered this transition. For instance, Abu Jani–Sandeep Khosla integrate Zardozi with modern silhouettes, while Manish Malhotra reimagines the embroidery in fusion wear and accessories. Sabyasachi Mukherjee has used Zardozi in home décor lines, extending the craft into lifestyle branding. At a regional level, boutique designers in Bhopal and Lucknow are experimenting with Zardozi-embellished stoles, tunics, and contemporary evening wear. These interventions not only expand the market but also create new opportunities for artisans by linking them to diversified product categories.



**Fig 7: Designer’s work using zardozi craft (Source: The Voice of Fashion)**

Recent innovations in Bhopal highlight the potential of Zari-Zardozi beyond its conventional association with bridal or occasional wear. Designer Mumtaz Khan, for instance, has experimented by applying intricate Zardozi embroidery on sports shoes, transforming them into glamorous footwear for parties and special occasions (Free Press Journal, 2024). Such creative interventions not only preserve the craft but also expand its consumer base by making it relevant to younger and more fashion-forward audiences. This underscores the need for design diversification and product innovation-taking Zari-Zardozi into everyday lifestyle segments such as accessories, contemporary apparel, and global fashion markets-to ensure its sustainability and wider reach.



**Fig 8: Zari-Zardozi on shoes-A Modern Approach for its growth**

The repositioning of Zardozi craft beyond bridal wear is vital for its long-term sustainability. By embedding traditional embroidery into multiple consumer touchpoints-from couture to interiors-the craft can avoid seasonal dependency on wedding markets and achieve relevance



in everyday fashion and global luxury contexts. The consumer survey conducted in Bhopal highlights a shifting perception of Zardozi craft, particularly among the younger demographic. While the embroidery continues to be strongly associated with heritage, luxury, and bridal attire, consumers increasingly aspire to see it integrated into lighter, versatile, and ethically produced products. Survey results indicate that a significant portion of respondents, especially in the 18-40 age group, value Zardozi for its cultural symbolism but express concerns about its weight, maintenance, and cost. Consumers demonstrate a preference for scaled-down applications-on accessories, contemporary apparel, and formalwear-rather than the heavily ornate versions traditionally linked with trousseau garments. This reflects a shift towards products that balance craft authenticity with everyday functionality.

Product Category	Examples	Consumer Acceptance	Remarks
Bridal / Trousseau Wear	Lehengas, sarees, heavy anarkalis	Very High (Traditional Stronghold)	Core heritage market, symbolic of luxury and status.
Accessories	Clutches, handbags, footwear, belts	High	Popular among younger consumers seeking statement pieces.
Menswear	Jackets, bandhgalas, pocket squares	Moderate–High	Growing niche; acceptance higher in festive/couture wear.
Contemporary Womenswear	Tunics, gowns, fusion wear, stoles	High	Increasingly favored for lightweight, versatile designs.
Everyday / Formalwear (Light Zardozi)	Kurtas, shirts, co-ord sets, jackets, vests, office tunics, blouses	Moderate (Rising Trend)	Appeals to urban professionals seeking subtle elegance.
Home Interiors	Cushion covers, wall panels, table runners	Moderate	Emerging market, mainly urban elite and export-oriented.
Couture / Luxury Brands	Designer collections, global runway items	Very High	Strong repositioning as global heritage luxury.

**Table 4.1: Mapping of Product Categories vs. Consumer Acceptance of Zardozi**



### 4.3 Consumer Perception Towards Contemporary Application of Zari-Zardozi Embroidery

The present study explored consumer perceptions regarding the adaptation of Zari-Zardozi embroidery beyond bridal and ceremonial wear into contemporary apparel and lifestyle products. The findings revealed that although Zari-Zardozi is traditionally associated with weddings, festive attire, and luxury ethnic garments, consumers showed positive acceptance toward its integration into modern silhouettes and contemporary fashion products.

Most respondents perceived Zardozi embroidery as a symbol of Indian craftsmanship, elegance, and cultural heritage. However, respondents also emphasized the need for lighter, minimal, and more versatile applications suitable for contemporary lifestyles. The study indicated that younger consumers preferred fusion styling and functional garments over heavily embellished traditional designs.

Particulars	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Aware of Zari-Zardozi embroidery	95	95
Associate Zardozi mainly with bridal wear	79	79
Interested in contemporary Zardozi apparel	76	76
Prefer minimal/lightweight embroidery	84	84
Consider Zardozi suitable for formal/fusion wear	72	72

**Table 4.2: Consumer Awareness and Perception Towards Contemporary Zari-Zardozi Products**

The findings indicate a gradual shift in consumer attitudes from traditional ceremonial usage toward contemporary and multifunctional fashion applications.



#### 4.4 Consumer Evaluation of Developed Garment Designs

Ten contemporary garment designs incorporating Zari-Zardozi embroidery were digitally developed using CorelDRAW and Clo3D software. The designs were created by integrating traditional Zardozi elements with modern silhouettes suitable for contemporary consumers. The developed garments included blazer, co-ord set, sheath dress, shirt, top with pencil skirt, tailored suit, kurta, A-line dress, T-shirt, and pre-draped saree.

The developed designs were presented to consumers for evaluation based on aesthetic appeal, modern appearance, suitability for contemporary wear, uniqueness, and overall acceptability.



**Blazer**  
Overall Zardozi Flower Motif Design



**Sheath Dress**  
Zardozi Flower Motif Design on the waistline,  
Sleeve and Hem



**Coord-Set**  
Zardozi Flower Motif Design on collar,  
top and bottom hem



**Tailored Suit**  
Zardozi Flower Design on collar,  
pant belt and hem



**Top with Pencil Skirt**  
Zardozi Flower Design on top-tieup  
and skirt hem



**Draped Denim Saree**  
Zardozi Parrot Design on both the Pockets



**A-Line Dress**  
Zardozi Flower Design on buttons and pocket



**Kurta**  
Zardozi Peacock Design on the collar and side cut



**Shirt**  
Zardozi Vase Design on the Pocket



T-Shirt  
Zardozi Elephant Design in the Centre

**Fig 9: Developed Designs of Zari Zardozi Contemporary Products**

Garment Design	Mean Score	Rank
Blazer	4.72	I
Sheath Dress	4.61	II
Co-ord Set	4.54	III
Tailored Suit	4.46	IV
Top with Pencil Skirt	4.38	V
Pre-draped Saree	4.29	VI
A-line Dress	4.18	VII
Kurta	4.10	VIII
Shirt	3.96	IX
T-shirt	3.74	X

*(5-point rating scale: 1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent)*



### Table 4.3 Consumer Preference Ranking of Developed Zari-Zardozi Garment Designs

The results revealed that structured contemporary garments such as blazers, sheath dresses, co-ord sets, and tailored suits received the highest preference scores among respondents. Consumers appreciated the balance between traditional embroidery and modern silhouettes. Minimal and strategically placed Zardozi embellishment was found to be more acceptable than heavily ornamented surfaces.

The comparatively lower preference for T-shirts indicated that consumers still associate Zardozi embroidery with premium and semi-formal fashion rather than highly casual apparel categories.

#### 4.3 Consumer Preference Regarding Styling and Design Features

The study further analyzed consumer preferences related to styling, motif application, and design presentation within the developed garments.

Styling Features	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Minimal embroidery placement	82	82
Fusion/Indo-western styling	75	75
Neutral and pastel color combinations	69	69
Contemporary silhouettes	78	78
Lightweight surface ornamentation	86	86
Traditional heavy embellishment	34	34

**Table 4.4 Consumer Preference Regarding Styling Features in Contemporary Zardozi Garments**

The findings suggest that consumers preferred subtle and sophisticated applications of Zari-Zardozi embroidery suitable for office wear, social gatherings, and semi-formal occasions.



Contemporary silhouettes with controlled ornamentation were perceived as more practical and wearable for modern lifestyles.

#### 4.4 Factors Influencing Consumer Acceptance of Contemporary Zardozi Products

Several factors influencing consumer acceptance and purchase intention toward contemporary Zardozi products were identified during the study.

Factors	Mean Score	Rank
Aesthetic Appeal	4.76	I
Uniqueness of Handcrafted Design	4.58	II
Social Media Presentation	4.42	III
Contemporary Styling	4.35	IV
Brand Image	4.20	V
Cultural and Heritage Value	4.08	VI
Sustainable/Handmade Appeal	3.94	VII

**Table 4.5 Factors Influencing Consumer Acceptance and Purchase Intention**

The findings presented in Table 4.4 reveal that Aesthetic Appeal emerged as the most influential factor affecting consumer acceptance of contemporary Zari-Zardozi products, securing the highest mean score (4.76). Consumers were highly attracted towards the elegance, richness, and decorative beauty of Zardozi embroidery. Uniqueness of Handcrafted Design ranked second (4.58), indicating that respondents valued the exclusivity and artisanal nature of handmade products. The handcrafted identity of Zardozi was perceived as distinctive compared to mass-produced fashion products. Social Media Presentation secured the third rank (4.42), highlighting the important role of digital platforms, influencer marketing, and visually appealing product presentation in attracting contemporary consumers.

The factor Contemporary Styling ranked fourth with a mean score of 4.35, suggesting that consumers preferred modern silhouettes and fusion styling that make Zardozi embroidery more wearable and suitable for present-day fashion needs. Brand Image obtained the fifth rank



(4.20), indicating that professional branding and product positioning positively influence consumer confidence and purchase intention towards craft-based fashion products.

Overall, the findings suggest that consumers are more influenced by design aesthetics, modern presentation, and contemporary fashion relevance while accepting Zari-Zardozi products beyond ceremonial wear.

#### **4.5 Branding and Marketing Strategies for Contemporary Consumer Engagement**

Based on consumer responses and design evaluation, several branding and marketing strategies were identified to improve the market reach and sustainability of the Zari-Zardozi craft sector

<b>Strategy Area</b>	<b>Suggested Approaches</b>
Product Positioning	Contemporary handcrafted luxury and fusion fashion
Branding Strategy	Artisan storytelling and heritage branding
Design Strategy	Minimal and lightweight embroidery applications
Social Media Promotion	Instagram reels, influencer collaborations, fashion campaigns
Product Diversification	Workwear, dresses, jackets, accessories, lifestyle products
Market Expansion	E-commerce platforms, exhibitions, designer collaborations

**Table 4.6: Suggested Branding and Marketing Strategies for Contemporary Zari-Zardozi Products**

The study findings indicate that contemporary adaptation, digital marketing, and strategic branding can significantly improve consumer engagement with Zari-Zardozi products. Positioning the craft within modern fashion contexts can help attract younger consumers while supporting the preservation and sustainable growth of traditional craftsmanship.

The results of the study demonstrate that consumers are increasingly receptive toward the adaptation of traditional crafts into contemporary fashion products. Although Zari-Zardozi embroidery continues to hold strong associations with bridal and ceremonial wear, modern consumers showed considerable interest in garments that combine traditional craftsmanship with contemporary aesthetics and functionality.



The higher preference for garments such as blazers, sheath dresses, co-ord sets, and tailored suits reflects changing fashion preferences influenced by fusion fashion trends, social media exposure, and growing appreciation for handcrafted luxury products. The study also highlights the importance of minimalism, versatility, and comfort in contemporary apparel design.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that branding, storytelling, and digital promotion play an important role in increasing consumer engagement with traditional crafts. The integration of Zari-Zardozi embroidery into modern silhouettes and lifestyle-oriented products can contribute to both market diversification and the long-term sustainability of the craft sector.

#### **4.5.1 Aspirations of Younger Population**

The younger population views Zardozi not only as a marker of tradition but also as a fashion statement aligned with identity and lifestyle aspirations. Many respondents associate handcrafted embroidery with exclusivity and heritage pride but seek expressions that resonate with their modern, cosmopolitan identities. In particular, urban professionals favour subtle Zardozi accents on co-ord sets, jackets, vests, and office-appropriate tunics, suggesting that the craft is finding resonance beyond occasional use.

#### **4.5.2 Demand for Lighter, Versatile, and Ethical Products**

A notable insight is the rising demand for Zardozi products that are lighter, comfortable, and more versatile, making them suitable for multiple occasions. Ethical concerns also surfaced in consumer responses, with interest in fair-wage practices, sustainable materials, and eco-friendly processes. This signals a growing alignment of Zardozi consumption with global discourses on responsible fashion.

These findings suggest that craft revival strategies must extend beyond bridal markets to capture consumer aspirations for versatile and ethically positioned luxury. Designers and retailers who align Zardozi with lightweight fashion, accessories, and sustainable practices are likely to attract a broader and younger consumer base, ensuring long-term market viability of the craft.



### **4.5.3 Branding & Engagement Strategies**

For Zardozi craft to thrive in contemporary markets, effective branding and consumer engagement strategies are essential. The findings from both artisan and consumer perspectives indicate that while the craft is admired for its heritage and opulence, its positioning needs to evolve to align with modern consumer aspirations and global fashion dynamics.

### **4.5.4 Storytelling and Heritage Branding**

Brand narratives rooted in craft lineage, artisan voices, and cultural symbolism play a crucial role in consumer engagement. Storytelling through labels, packaging, and brand campaigns can highlight Zardozi's historical association with Mughal courts, its survival through colonial decline, and its present-day revival. By emphasizing authenticity and heritage, brands can connect emotionally with consumers who seek products with cultural depth and meaning.

### **4.5.5 Digital Marketing and E-Commerce**

The digital ecosystem offers unprecedented opportunities for craft-based branding. Instagram reels, influencer collaborations, and curated visual content can make Zardozi more visible to younger audiences. Local boutiques in Bhopal, when paired with e-commerce platforms, can extend market reach beyond regional boundaries. Additionally, online storytelling through blogs, digital catalogues, and live craft demonstrations builds transparency and consumer trust.

### **4.5.6 Positioning as Sustainable Luxury**

With increasing awareness of ethical consumption, Zardozi has strong potential to be positioned as sustainable luxury. Its handcrafted nature, slow production process, and artisanal skills resonate with values of exclusivity and responsibility. By certifying fair wages, eco-friendly practices, and heritage preservation, Zardozi products can differentiate themselves in luxury markets increasingly defined by purpose-driven choices.



#### **4.5.7 Collaborations and Global Markets**

Collaborations with lifestyle brands, couture designers, and international retailers can reposition Zardozi as a versatile craft beyond bridalwear. Integrating Zardozi in global fashion weeks, lifestyle accessories, and interior design lines can expand its consumer base. Partnerships with NGOs, export houses, and design institutions can ensure artisans are connected to global value chains, while also sustaining local employment.

Strategic branding through heritage storytelling, digital engagement, sustainable positioning, and cross-sector collaborations can transform Zardozi from a niche ceremonial craft into a globally recognized luxury category. This transition not only secures new markets but also ensures cultural continuity and socio-economic empowerment for artisans.

#### **4.6 Challenges & Limitations**

Despite its cultural prestige and design potential, the Zardozi craft ecosystem faces structural and market-level challenges that constrain its growth and sustainability.

- **High Cost of Production**

The labor-intensive nature of Zardozi embroidery, combined with the use of metallic threads and skilled craftsmanship, results in high production costs. This restricts affordability for middle-income consumers and limits the craft largely to high-end and bridal markets. In the absence of economies of scale, artisans and retailers often struggle to balance quality with competitive pricing.

- **Declining Artisan Base**

The younger generation of artisans is increasingly migrating to alternative livelihoods due to inconsistent demand, low earnings, and lack of social recognition. This has led to a gradual decline in the skilled artisan base in cities like Bhopal, threatening the continuity of traditional techniques. Without structured incentives, vocational training, and fair wages, the sustainability of the craft is at risk.

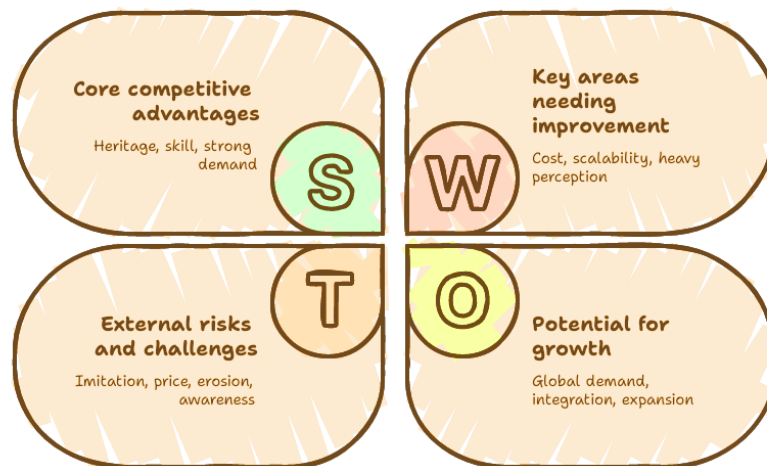


- **Counterfeit and Machine-Made Versions**

The availability of cheaper, machine-produced imitations has diluted the market for authentic Zardozi. Consumers often fail to distinguish between handcrafted and machine-made products, leading to reduced willingness to pay a premium for genuine embroidery. This not only impacts artisan livelihoods but also undermines the authenticity of the craft.

- **Consumer Education Gaps**

While Zardozi is admired for its aesthetic appeal, there are gaps in consumer awareness regarding its history, techniques, and socio-economic significance. Many consumers perceive it merely as ornate decoration rather than a heritage practice requiring skilled labor. This lack of awareness hampers the ability to build value-based demand and to position Zardozi as sustainable luxury.



**Fig 10: SWOT Analysis**

Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions, awareness campaigns, and stronger branding mechanisms. Subsidies for raw materials, artisan cooperatives, and intellectual property protections could mitigate production and imitation issues. Simultaneously, consumer



education through digital platforms and heritage branding could bridge the knowledge gap, ensuring long-term sustainability.

## 5. Recommendations

To ensure the continuity and global relevance of Zardozi craft, targeted interventions are required at both the **design and systemic levels**. Based on field insights and market analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Design Innovation**

Zardozi requires lightweight and functional adaptations to expand beyond bridalwear. Designers should focus on experimenting with minimal motifs, contemporary silhouettes, and versatile applications in formalwear, accessories, and interiors. Blending traditional handwork with modern fabrics and styles will widen consumer appeal while retaining craft identity.

- **Policy and NGO Interventions**

Government agencies, NGOs, and craft councils can play a pivotal role in reviving artisan clusters by providing structured training programs, raw material subsidies, and access to design resources. Establishing artisan cooperatives in Bhopal and other centers can ensure collective bargaining power, transparency, and equitable income distribution.

- **Skill Upgradation and Market Linkages**

Continuous skill enhancement workshops are needed to train artisans in new techniques, design trends, and digital literacy. Simultaneously, market linkage strategies such as partnerships with designers, e-commerce platforms, and international buyers will connect artisans to broader consumer segments, reducing dependency on local bridal markets.



- **Export Promotion and Cross-Industry Collaborations**

Positioning Zardozi as part of India's luxury export basket requires focused promotional campaigns at trade fairs, fashion weeks, and global lifestyle exhibitions. Collaborations with industries such as home décor, hospitality, and sustainable fashion brands can diversify applications and generate new revenue streams for artisans.

Together, these recommendations address both product innovation and structural challenges. A multi-pronged approach—spanning design, policy, skill development, and market expansion—can secure Zardozi's place as a sustainable heritage luxury craft while ensuring socio-economic empowerment of its artisan base.

## 6. Conclusion

Although contemporary designers have made commendable attempts to reposition Zardozi through innovative collections, its incorporation into formalwear and mainstream contemporary fashion remains limited. The craft continues to be predominantly perceived within the domain of bridal and occasional attire, thereby restricting its wider adoption. Existing design interventions illustrate the potential of Zardozi to adapt to modern silhouettes; however, this trajectory is still in its formative stages. Further scholarly attention, coupled with sustained efforts in design innovation, market diversification, and consumer engagement, is essential to strengthen the presence of Zardozi within the broader landscape of contemporary and formal fashion.

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