Explaining the Tamil Nadu Anomaly: Federal Trust Asymmetry and Artisan Engagement with the PM Vishwakarma Scheme

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Abstract

The Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Scheme has offered an entry point to cases of Tamil Nadu. Despite a strong artisanal base and welfare infrastructure, its participation is abnormally low. The study used what it called "a convergent mixed methods" design rooted in theories of diffusion of innovation and information asymmetry, and was carried out in two ways: by survey, with 412 artisans, and with 184 semi-structured interviews. But for the most part, the main predictors of scheme knowledge and application are still governed by which districts have higher digital readiness, higher basic education and have more structured information channels. Women in Kanyakumari had significantly higher odds of awareness by the time of the study, and the odds of participation were lower by 48% among beneficiaries of Tamil Nadu's own state scheme, the Kalaignar Kaivinai Thittam; together these suggest a clear displacement effect in operation. Trade-wise, potters had the lowest odds of awareness, and goldsmiths had the highest. In particular, they identify bureaucracy, digital scepticism, misinformation, language, and lack of intermediary networks, as interdependent factors which act concurrently as barriers beyond simple lack of awareness. Overall, the study concludes that the persistence of institutional capacity gaps, digital unpreparedness, and Federal trust asymmetry in favour of state-led schemes, circumscribe PMVS uptake in Tamil Nadu. The study's authors offer several suggestions in this regard, such as co-branded delivery models, vernacular digital designs, S.H.G.-linked facilitation and trade-sensitive policy adaptations to strengthen federal–state coordination to create more inclusive artisanal welfare pathways.

Keywords: PM Vishwakarma Scheme, Artisanal Livelihoods, Welfare Uptake, Information Asymmetry, Bureaucratic Barriers, Tamil Nadu Anomaly, Structured Information Channels, Trade-specific Disparities, Policy Diffusion.

Introduction

India's carpenters, goldsmiths, tailors, potters, masons, weavers and other hereditary artisans support themselves through the ancient crafts they practice in villages and market towns throughout the country. The system is inherently

fragile due to poor market integration, lack of infrastructure, no formal recognition for the profession and declining intergenerational transmission. In addition, the socio-economic sustainability of this industry has been constantly low because of several long-term factors (Mizrahi et al.).

The Government of India launched the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Scheme (PMVS) on 17 September 2023 as a multidimensional policy program to support artisans' work and increase their income. The scheme, under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, aims to provide women with an official identity as artisans via a digital certificate. The scheme components include skill enhancement, a toolkit e-voucher, subsidised loans up to Rs. 3 lakh for business expansion, incentives on digital transactions and marketing support through linkages with e-commerce platforms(G. Nirmalkumar, G. Kanagavalli). However, empirical studies on the level of knowledge, understanding and application of artisans in different spatial settings are limited.

The study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by examining how women in Kanyakumari, a highly digitalized coastal district and Theni, an agrarian and infrastructurally poor rural district of Tamil Nadu State use these resources. The inquiry recognizes that the lack of proper channels, uneven distribution of information and poor understanding are likely to lock out the intended beneficiaries. The study also draws theoretically from the diffusion of innovation and information asymmetry theories to examine the district, trade and institutional factors that influence informal traders' behaviour towards PMVS.

Empirically, this study employs a mixed method design combining descriptive statistics, chi-square test and multinomial logistic regression analysis with qualitative narratives. This methodological convergence enables a deeper understanding of the socioeconomic, institutional and technological forces affecting the artisan cooperative's engagement with the scheme. Policy approaches to bridge the scheme inequities gap can leverage SHG-based dissemination, mobile registration camps, vernacular digital literacy and institutional synergies as illustrated by Chandigarh, where the municipal corporation organized a mass registration drive. O1To assess the overall awareness levels; O2To evaluate the depth of knowledge regarding eligibility and benefits; O3To analyse socio-demographic and enterprise-level determinants; O4To compare district-wise and trade-wise variations in scheme awareness; O5To identify causes of non-participation among those aware of the scheme; O6To diagnose institutional, digital, socio-cultural and political bottlenecks to scheme implementation; O7To evaluate the influence of various information channels on awareness levels; and O8Propose policy pathways for enhancing trust, accessibility and equality. Together, these objectives aim to investigate how the PM Vishwakarma Scheme can be improved for the benefit of India's artisan communities.

Literature Review

The current discourse on traditional craftsmanship as a cultural heritage and a tool for sustainable development identifies the following challenges. Global scholarship on handmade traditions and their valorisation as part of heritage conservation and ethical production practices (Bishnoi et al.). As a result, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 established that craftsmanship is an important source of cultural diversity and social resilience (Brown and Vacca). UNESCO (2012) notes that the handmade objects of memory and traditional knowledge enable rural people to diversify income sources and access markets.In India, the policy soundness of UNESCO assimilation into programmes such as Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana and handloom clusters has not been robustly evaluated (NCAER). Building upon this legacy, the Government of India announced the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Scheme (PM Vishwakarma) in 2023 for the holistic development of eighteen traditional trades by offering identity, training, toolkit, loan, digital and marketing support (Government of India). Preliminary enrolment statistics indicate a robust national response (Press Information Bureau, Over One Crore Artisans Register for PM Vishwakarma Scheme).

The Tamil Nadu government introduced the Kalaignar Kaivinai Thittam (KKT) in 2024. Unlike

the centre-driven PM Vishwakarma, the state-led KKT is deeply contextualised to local and regional socio-economic realities and offers enhanced credit subsidies, wider caste eligibility and age relaxations (18-45 years) on 25 artisanal trades with strengthened market-linkage measures(Press Information Bureau, Tamil Nadu Government Expands Artisanal Welfare Coverage). The initial rollout of the scheme, which involved substantial monetary allocations in the form of loans and subsidies to artisanal beneficiaries, underscores the government's dedication to reviving this essential sector . PM Vishwakarma and KKT together form a multi-layered policy field (IFMR LEAD), where interventions operate between the national and state levels and sometimes intersect. District-level experiences reinforce this differentiated picture. Kanyakumari is distinguished by high literacy and tourism-related demand for the products and services targeted under SHG initiatives. It also benefits from the AHVY program targeting Sudar Ozhi embroidery, which creates a dense marketing network for SHGs in the clusters (NABARD). Theni is moderately less urbanised and the predominantly agrarian economy suggests possible structural barriers to awareness, organisation and information access. Literature therefore proposes a four-level policy implementation approach (global, national, state and district) to enable artisans to earn decent livelihoods and promote inclusive economic growth.

Research Gap: Despite the program's ambitious design to formally recognise and support artisans through subsidised credit, training and digital market pathways, only one person had registered in Tamil Nadu upon roll-out (PIB, 2023). This has a direct implication on the rich cultural history of artisanal craftsmanship in Tamil Nadu, which includes weaving, pottery, tailoring, goldsmithing, carpentry and allied activities (Government of Tamil Nadu, Tamil Nadu Human Development Report 2017). Research on analogous programs has highlighted several structural impediments such as lack of awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, digital inaccessibility and poor trust in financial institutions(Choudhary)(NCAER; NABARD). However, the academic analyses tend to concentrate on the states in Northern and Eastern India, whereas Tamil Nadu has its distinct socio-political environment with high female literacy, emphasis on social welfare policies and linguistic regional political identity.

The possible gap between the rural agricultural-based Theni district and the urbanised Kanyakumari district regarding awareness, implementation trust and technological readiness remain unexplored. This study aims to investigate the institutional, informational, socio-cultural and political factors behind the near-zero uptake of PM Vishwakarma in Tamil Nadu.

Conceptual Framework: The study seeks to situate the "Tamil Nadu anomaly" within the broader framework of welfare uptake in other settings and policy diffusion. The national enrolment numbers on PMSP are high in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar(Press Information Bureau, Tamil Nadu Government Expands Artisanal Welfare Coverage). However, they are negligible in Tamil Nadu. The theoretical basis of the framework is that knowledge is not enough to ensure the intervention implementation in a strategic hierarchy. Complementary literature identifies additional determinants like awareness of eligibility criteria, digital literacy and trust in implementing institutions as critical for uptake (NCAER; IFMR LEAD).

Due to the strong state welfare traditions in Tamil Nadu, KKT might affect how people perceive PM Vishwakarma as being "redundant" or "remote" due to the possible substitution effect (Government of Tamil Nadu, Kalaignar Kaivinai Thittam: Scheme Guidelines). The model distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative factors affecting information ecosystems, digital readiness, socio-demographics and education through SHGs, trade unions and local structures (Berg et al.; Sharan et al.; Ghosh, S., & Roy; Berg, E., Rajasekhar, D., & Manjula), as well as behavioural/political identification/trust in bureaucratic credit systems (Berg, E., Rajasekhar, D., & Manjula; Harriss).

Through a comparative analysis of the service-based economy in Kanyakumari with the agricultural economy in Theni, this framework contextualises intra-state welfare inequality within its broader theoretical model of policy diffusion and welfare behaviour. Awareness, information flow and procedural knowledge are the immediate factors

for participation while trust, political rhetoric and saliency as intervening factors determine how awareness is applied for participation. Thus, the framework contributes to the theoretical discussion on the reception and implementation of central schemes in federal democracies.

Hypotheses and Research Questions: Leveraging the conceptual tensions identified in the study regarding Tamil Nadu's relatively low awareness of the PM Vishwakarma Scheme, the following hypotheses are advanced, focusing on exploring structural, informational and perceptual factors. The first hypothesis states that district-level factors do not significantly impact artisans' knowledge of the schemeH01. The first research question seeks to explore possible causes for some artisans' lack of application despite their knowledge about the fund RQ1. In addition, the hypothesis that educational level has no significant effect on awareness and understanding H02 is closely associated with the question of how local information ecology and community knowledge sharing affect artisans' knowledge and perception of the scheme RQ2. Additionally, it hypothesizes that digital readiness does not significantly affect awareness and application behaviours H03, necessitating an examination of specific digital pain points like access, navigation and language barriers that women face when attempting to use portals RQ3.

And no difference exists between getting information via organised setup (SHGs, cooperatives and trade unions) and passive channels (social media and word of mouth) H04. And, RQ4 on whether the state's well-established welfare programmes substitute or complement the central scheme. Procedural complexity H05 postulates that bureaucratic requirements do not significantly impact willingness to apply among artisans already aware of the scheme. Conversely, RQ5 seeks to establish how artisans' interactions with banks and frontline officials impacted their willingness to engage. Lastly, there is an assessment of the interconnectedness between trade-specific features (such as seasonality, capital intensity and profitability) and H06 perceptions about PM Vishwakarma policy practicality and relevance RQ□. These research questions and hypotheses together form a coherent analytical framework for investigating the socio-economic, digital, institutional and political factors behind Tamil Nadu's marked disengagement from the scheme.

Methodology

The study adopted an in-depth, convergent mixed-methods design and combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to examine artisans' awareness, experiences, and perceptions of the PM Vishwakarma scheme in Tamil Nadu. Two districts Kanyakumari and Theni were selected to reflect contrasts in digital infrastructure and districts' socio-economic context. The sample included 412 artisans across the selected districts and represented the major notified trades. We used a stratified purposive approach to ensure adequate representation of family-owned and individual businesses, as well as increased representation of artisans from Kanyakumari. The quantitative component drew on a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 27 questions designed to focus on awareness, attitudes, digital literacy, and perceived barriers. Instruments were validated by expert review and initial factor analysis, and found to have acceptable reliability. Study data were obtained using tablet-based surveys and audio-recorded interviews in Tamil, and were collected from May to September 2015. We used both descriptive and inferential quantitative methods and analysed qualitative narratives thematically according to Braun and Clarke's framework. Our mixed-methods convergence design enabled triangulation of structural, informational and perceptual dimensions, allowing us to interpret statistical patterns in meaningful ways alongside participants lived experiences.(Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark; Braun and Clarke)

Results

Table 1 Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Kanyakumari (n=248)	Theni (n=164)	Total
Constant	Mean ± SD	38.7 ± 9.6	39.3 ± 10.1	38.9 ± 9.87

	22–30	55	37	92
Age (years)	31–40	71	47	118
	41–50	67	42	109
	51–56	55	38	93
	Male	131	93	224
Gender	Female	102	66	168
	Transgender	15	5	20
	Higher Secondary	93	70	163
Education	Graduate	105	65	170
	Postgraduate	50	29	79
Years in Family Business	1–3 years	64	50	114
	>3 years	184	114	298
	Individual	118	76	194
Business Ownership	Family-owned	99	68	167
	Partnership	31	20	51
	Cooperative	0	0	0
	Rural	120	91	211
Location	Semi-urban	75	44	119
	Urban	53	29	82
	Mean ± SD	26,200 ± 11,450	25,100 ± 11,900	25,800 ± 11,600
	<10,000	15	14	29
Household Income (INR)	10,000–25,000	105	73	178
	25,000–40,000	81	49	130
	>40,000	47	28	75

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 Measurement Model: Factor Loadings, Communalities

Item	Awareness	Attitudes	Digital Readness	Barriers	Facilitators	h²
Heard of scheme	.78					.64
Eligibility knowledge	.74					.59
Financial benefits	.72					.57
Application process	.70					.55
Peer beneficiaries	.68					.51
Livelihood improvement		.73				.58
Trust in government		.75				.61
Fair delivery		.71				.55
Transparency		.70				.52
Artisan respect		.68				.49
Smartphone comfort			.79			.65
Portal access			.77			.61
Simple digital forms			.74			.58

Uses WhatsApp/social media			.73			.57
Digital payments			.71			.55
Bureaucratic delays				.73		.59
Unclear guidelines				.70		.55
Documentation burden				.69		.53
No guidance				.68		.51
Poor follow-up				.66		.49
Association support					.76	.62
Official support					.73	.58
Community awareness					.71	.54
Peer encouragement					.70	.52
Media campaigns					.68	.49

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 Reliability & Variance Explained

Factor	α	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)
Awareness Depth	.773	7.84	29.0	29.0
Attitudes & Perceptions	.756	3.66	13.6	42.6
Digital Readiness	.824	2.91	10.8	53.4
Barriers	.734	2.41	8.9	62.3
Facilitators	.781	2.07	7.7	70.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 4. District Differences in Awareness (H_{01})

Component	Kanyakumari	Theni	Indicator	Result
Mean Awareness	3.72 (0.92)	3.18 (0.85)	Mean Diff = 0.54	Higher in Kanyakumari
Assumption Check			Levene's F (1,410) =2.13, p=.145	Equal variances assumed
t-Test			t (410) =6.31, p<.001	Significant difference
Effect Size			Cohen's d = 0.63 (0.38–0.70)	Medium–large
Logistic Regression			B=0.540, Wald=7.29, p=.007	District predicts awareness
Odds Ratio			OR=1.72 (1.17–2.53)	72% ↑ odds
Model Fit			−2LL=479.28; R²=.092; HL p=.64; AUC=.71	Good model fit
Hypo Decision			H_{01} Rejected	District significantly affects awareness

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 Education Effects on Awareness (H_{02})

Education	Awareness	χ^2	p	Cramer's V	Logistic B	OR (95% CI)	p-value	Decision
Higher Secondary	38.7%					1.00 (ref.)		
Graduate	52.4%	χ^2=8.95 (df=2)	.011	.147	0.420	1.52 (1.11–2.09)	.009	Significant
Postgraduate	40.5%				0.150	1.16 (0.81–1.66)	.405	Not significant
H_{02} Decision								Rejected (partially)

Source: Primary Data

Table 6 Digital Readiness → Awareness and Application (H_{03})

Component	B	SE	Wald	p	OR (95% CI)	Interpretation
Awareness Model						−2LL=479.28; HL p=.64; R²=.092
Digital Readiness	0.500	0.160	9.78	.002	1.65 (1.20–2.27)	↑ Awareness by 65%
District	0.540	0.200	7.29	.007	1.72	Strong predictor
Education	0.420	0.161	6.81	.009	1.52	Positive effect
Application Model						−2LL=212.45; HL p=.67; R²=.124
Digital Readiness	0.430	0.190	5.12	.024	1.54 (1.06–2.25)	↑ Application by 54%
H_{03} Decision						Rejected

Source: Primary Data

Table 7 Information Channels and Awareness/Application (H_{04})

Channels	Aware.	Appli.	χ^2	p	Cramer's V	OR (95% CI)	Note
Structured (n=142)	68.3%	12.7%	28.42	<.001	0.26	2.48 (1.58–3.90)	Strong positive effect
Passive (n=270)	38.9%	3.7%				1.25 (0.93–1.69)	Not significant
Model Fit			−2LL =562.34			R²=.26; HL p=.43	Good fit
H_{04} Decision							Rejected

Source: Primary Data

Table 8 Procedural Complexity and Application Completion (H_{05})

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	OR (Interpretation)
Perceived Complexity	−0.780	0.290	7.24	.007	Decreases completion sharply
Digital Readiness	0.610	0.250	5.95	.015	Facilitates completion
Trust in Government	0.520	0.210	6.12	.013	Positive contributor
District	0.340	0.180	3.58	.050	Marginal

Model Fit	−2LL=154.32; HL p=.49; AUC=.81; R²=.321	Excellent discrimination		
H_{05} Decision				Rejected

Source: Primary Data

Table 9 Barriers Factor Structure

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance	α	Key Loadings
Digital Access	2.43	32.1	.81	Internet (.82), Smartphone (.79)
Bureaucratic Friction	2.14	28.4	.78	Documentation (.81), Bank processes (.78)
Trust & Perception	1.60	21.3	.75	Govt confidence (.83), Fairness (.76)
Factor Correlations	F1×F2=0.28; F1×F3=0.21; F2×F3=0.33	–	–	Promax rotation
Suitability Tests	KMO=0.842; Bartlett's χ²=786.42, p<.001	–	–	Suitable for FA

Source: Primary Data

Table 10 Displacement Effect of State Schemes (H_{06})

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	OR (95% CI)	Interpretation
TN Scheme Participation	−0.650	0.280	5.40	.020	0.52 (0.30–0.89)	48% ↓ willingness
Awareness Score	0.520	0.180	8.33	.004	1.68 (1.18–2.38)	Strong predictor
District	0.210	0.150	1.96	.162	1.23	Not significant
Interaction	0.120	0.160	0.56	.455	1.13	No moderation
Model Fit	−2LL=181.34; R²=.248; HL p=.54; AUC=.81	Excellent fit				
H_{06} Decision						Rejected

Source: Primary Data

Table 11 Trade-Level Awareness Differences

Trade	High	Moderate	Low	Kanyakumari vs Theni	χ²	p	Interpretation
Carpentry	23.7	49.5	26.9	+9.4	23.62	.050*	Moderate awareness
Blacksmithing	20.7	50.0	29.3	+9.3	12.84	.076	Urban advantage
Goldsmithing	37.2	51.2	11.6	+25.5	–	–	Highest awareness
Tailoring	29.5	50.8	19.7	+12.3	–	–	Urban exposure effect
Pottery	14.3	38.1	47.6	+8.2	–	–	Lowest awareness
Masonry	19.1	47.6	33.3	+7.1	–	–	Procedural barriers

| Weaving | 27.6 | 51.7 | 20.7 | +9.1 | – | – | Digital limitations |
| Overall | 25.2 | 48.5 | 26.2 | +13.3 | 23.62 | .050 | Trade matters; district amplifies |

Source: Primary Data

Quantitative Findings

District-Level Differences

Awareness was significantly higher in the Kanyakumari cohort (M = 3.72, SD = 0.92) than in the Theni cohort (M = 3.18, SD = 0.85). An independent-samples t-test revealed a highly significant difference and a medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's d = 0.63), t(410) = 6.31, p < .001. A logistic regression confirmed district as a significant predictor of awareness (B = 0.540, p = .007, OR = 1.72).

Education and Literacy Effects

Maximum reported level of education was significantly associated with awareness (χ^2 (2) = 8.95, p = .011; Cramer's V = 0.147). In terms of education, graduates were 52 per cent more likely to have heard of the scheme than higher-secondary artisans (B = 0.420, p = .009, OR = 1.52). There is no statistical difference between the graduates and postgraduate group.

Digital Readiness and Capability

Of the characteristics we examined, digital readiness was one of the strongest predictors of awareness, application and overall engagement. For every one-unit increase, odds of awareness were increased by 65 percent (B = 0.500, p = .002, OR = 1.65) and odds of application were increased by 54 percent (B = 0.430, p = .024, OR = 1.54). Initial predicted probabilities were 28 percent and 65 percent, respectively (i.e., close to a doubling).

Role of Information Channels

Passive channels (social media, word of mouth) were trumped by structured networks (SHGs, cooperatives, trade associations). Respondents who noted more passive channels had much lower levels of awareness, just 38.9 percent, than those who identified structured sources, 68.3 percent (χ^2 = 28.42, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.26). Multinomial logistic regression identified structured channels as the most powerful predictor (Wald = 18.92, p < .001, OR = 2.48).

Bureaucratic and Procedural Barriers

Completing an application was less likely the more complex the computer screen. This suggests that for every additional two tasks, people did 0.78 fewer tasks because they thought the task was more complex. This sharp drop in productivity meant that going from low to high complexity was associated with a decrease in the predicted probability of applying from 0.72 to 0.21. Specifically, the effects of digital readiness become stronger if trust in government increases.

State Welfare Substitution Effect

Tamil Nadu's KKT scheme were 48% less willing to apply for PMVS. The effect was small but significant, B = −0.650, p = .020, odds ratio = 0.52. District, was not significantly significant in affecting this displacement effect (p = .455).

Trade-Specific Awareness

Goldsmiths had the strongest awareness, with 37.2 percent of the sample, whereas potters, with 14.3 percent, were the weakest group. Applied to these data, the chi-square test confirmed trade-based differences (χ^2 = 23.62, p = .050, Cramer's V = 0.17), assuming a traditional α level of .05. However, even in Kanyakumari, the district where overall awareness was highest, some trades had been left behind.

Factor Structure Validation

The five factors identified by the model Depth of Awareness, Attitudes, Digital Readiness, Barriers and Facilitators accounted for 70 percent of the variance. Factor loadings were all above 0.68 and Cronbach's α for all factors ranged from 0.734 to 0.824. The KMO was 0.842, and the Bartlett's test was significant (p < .001), indicating that the data was well-suited.

Qualitative Insights From Artisans

The qualitative strand of the study illuminates

the lived realities, institutional frictions and socio-cultural meanings that shape artisans' engagement with the PM Vishwakarma Scheme. These three factors district, digital readiness and sources of information were the main predictors of difference. The survey data could only tell us what three predictors of difference were; the qualitative stories helped tell us why they mattered in the Tamil Nadu context.

Procedural Anxiety is a "Barrier to Entry"

A less intimidating, more straightforward process shared across trades and regions. Without procedural clarity and local guidance, respondents were unable to translate their awareness into action. The narratives below illustrate that "knowledge" is not synonymous with "navigational capacity." As procedural barriers arose, they were experienced as psychological barriers.

A Kanyakumari tailor who spoke on condition of anonymity said:

"We know that there is a scheme, but there is no one to take us through it. No one is there to lead the team."

And if it takes for the Theni potters to collect all the papers, they've already lost interest. Maybe we have no one teacher, mentor, guide to tell us how to start.

Information Ecology: The Power of Trusted Channels

We understand this intuitively and over time, as we navigate the information ecology around us, interacting with channels that we find credible. But we also recognize that it's a checkered, that is, fractured, uneven information ecosystem, a source of contradictory and inconsistent information. This means that artisans continue to rely heavily on SHGs, associations, panchayat meetings, and trade leaders, and when made to choose, trust these channels over social media, hearsay and political rhetoric.

But the confusion was succinctly captured by a blacksmith from Theni:

"One person says it is only for carpenters, and another person says it is for North Indians.". Whom do we believe?"

In Kanyakumari, participants who often cited NGOs and cooperative networks as reference points assumed that, if such groups synchronized with each other, they stabilized information and muted misinformation. Theni artisans also reported a "floating" landscape of rumours and disengagement. If true, it diagnoses the world as one in which people are not transmission belts of information but actively make meaning of it socially. But trust is a key ingredient that transforms information into credible, actionable, lasting knowledge.

Digital Readiness: Use, Fear and Functional Limitations

A framework to understand user capability. Digital readiness was a continuing, daily struggle. Phones overwhelmingly were reported as being used only for basic, familiar functions calling, texting, and the like. For instance, one weaver glumly told me that since "we only need a phone because we only use it to call and use WhatsApp" overall internet coverage hasn't been a priority for her or her neighbours. Filling government forms? That is not possible."

But OTP failures, English-only interfaces and unreliable rural connectivity all compound digital anxiety and make the application process a high-risk, low-confidence task. Many of those surveyed in the two districts had paid browsing-centre agents to submit the forms but did not know whether their application had been processed. This confirms a clear quantitative relationship between digital capability and scheme participation.

Degree of Asymmetry that Federalism's Political and Geographic Distances Impose

The standard argument is that, politically, perceptions of fairness dominate: how much citizens trust the institutions of the federal state is the crucial psychological filter that determines their welfare behaviour. Artisans were more confident about the Tamil Nadu government's Kalaignar Kaivinai Thittam (KKT) than centrally administered programmes.

A goldsmith from Kanyakumari explained that, whereas earlier messages were viewed with suspicion, greater trust was created when the state was heard speaking their language and reaching them directly: it was finally being taken seriously. "People

have been aware, but they were careless," he said, referring to the misinformation. Project name "PM Vishwakarma" sounds distant from their context.

Their perception of the central scheme as "distant," "politicized" or "not for Tamil Nadu" shows that, for people to engage in welfare programs, they respond not only to the benefits on offer but also to the institutional familiarity, linguistic proximity and regional political identity.

Bureaucratic Encounters and Administrative Discouragement

Artisans reported that their willingness to engage was driven primarily by their interactions with front-line bureaucrats and banks. Even so, many artisans were reluctant to take part. While some people report that it has been a positive experience for them, most tell a story of frustration and disillusionment.

"Every time you went, they wanted new papers, she said. The harassment was never ending," said a carpenter from Theni. After three trips, I lost hope."

Connecting these stories to the quantitative results also shows that perceived procedural complexity dramatically reduces the likelihood that an applicant completed an application. They excluded people through unintended bureaucracy.

Trade-specific Rationalities that did not Fit the Economics that Firms Faced

Many artisans did not participate. For some, these schemes didn't make sense economically. While we make some money some months, we make nothing in other months.

High-capital artisans like goldsmiths criticized the toolkit grants for covering only a fraction of their expenses ("*Our tools cost ten times more than what the scheme provides," said one*), and tailors and embroidery workers appreciated the training components to upgrade their skills but lamented the lack of local centres. Just as important, these trade-sensitive insights highlight an urgent need for policy that is constructed in tune with the economic rhythms of production rather than offering blanket, one-size-fits-all incentives.

Gendered Pathways of Trust and Participation

When women artisans particularly tailors and weavers did speak, they stressed the role S.H.G.s play as safe, credible intermediaries. Their choice of whom to participate with, is shaped by mobility constraints, domestic burdens and what they perceive as a safe institution. Men, by contrast, talked more about bureaucratic frustration and distrust in official systems. These gendered differences suggest that women engage through collectivises because shared structures help them sustain participation, whereas men disengage through bureaucratic fatigue to distance themselves from those same institutional demands.

Dynamics Fuelled Collective Confidence, they also Fuelled Collective Disillusionment

Besides the "cluster effect," in which popular narratives of participation shaped local trends of participation, some of the most striking themes that emerged concerned which young people opted for which types of programs and why. In the communities where early applicants experienced delays, confusion and poor communication, disenchantment spread fast. And in the villages with active co-operative leaders, the most trusted local figures, the impact of those leaders being knocked off course is catastrophic.

Policy Suggestions and Implementation Pathways

The study finds that low uptake of the PM Vishwakarma Scheme in Tamil Nadu does not stem from a single constraint but arises from interlocking informational, digital, institutional, and federal trust asymmetries. Moving beyond previous efforts that focused on only awareness campaigns, tackling these challenges requires a multi-actor, multi-level approach. We have broken down our recommendations by stakeholder arena.

For National and State Policymakers
Co-branded Federal–State Delivery Models

While suggestive rather than conclusive, the evidence of a displacement effect from Tamil Nadu's Kalaignar Kaivinai Thittam (KKT) a state-run skill development scheme suggests the importance of institutional familiarity, trust and

continuity. Co-branding and co-delivering the PM Vishwakarma Scheme with state governments could enhance synergies, and policymakers must stop seeing state schemes as competitors to engage them more productively. The federal government, along with state Medicaid programs, must forge visible partnerships with PMVs through joint branding efforts, shared public-facing materials and coordinated promotion of eligibility. This kind of cooperative federalism could reimagine regulatory authority so that PMVs are a "compliment, rather than a substitute, to Medicaid."

Vernacular Framing and Contextual Naming

In qualitative narratives of people's experiences, they give a sense of the scheme that determines salience for people who are close in linguistic and cultural space. Policymakers can encourage states to have their own colloquial naming or subtitles for centrally sponsored schemes, buttressed by regional specific messaging that resonates with regional artisanal histories and trade identities. This symbolic nearness not only reduces the senses of mistrust but also enhances emotional legitimacy.

Trade-Sensitive Policy Differentiation

The program proceeds as if one size fits all, but in practice it fails to align with the diverse capital intensities and seasonal rhythms of artisanal trades. Policymakers can help by creating trade-specific benefit slabs, flexible credit timelines and modular training solutions. High-capital trades, such as goldsmithing, rely on credit-heavy support, while low-capital trades benefit more from market access support, as well as gradually increasing skills.

Specific Suggestions for how the Government can Establish Institutions and Bureaucratic Interfaces to Better Coordinate Such Systems
Assisted Application Ecosystems

While the study highlights that awareness, planning and feedback without navigational supports eventually lead to disengagement, it also suggests that guidance can sustain user engagement. Assisted application models should be institutionalized by implementing agencies — through tangible measures such as mobile facilitation camps, doorstep documentation support and guided digital form filling. First-time applicants and digitally reluctant artisans.

Frontline Capacity Building and Sensitization

Banks and field-level officials serve as critical gatekeepers to participation and adjust how they engage communities based on who and how people choose to participate. Regular and repeated sensitization of bank staff and field officers to artisanal livelihoods, informal work patterns and gendered impediments to access is required to reduce unintentional exclusion. Procedural empathy should be acknowledged as a fundamental administrative skill and prioritized in training, assessment, and day-to-day practice.

Process Transparency and Feedback Loops

Not knowing the status of their application was a key source of frustration. To tackle early-stage drop-offs, institutions must provide easy-to-understand status-tracking mechanisms and responsive grievance redress arms.

An Information-sharing Strategy can Enable Hubs of Community-level Intermediaries Conducting Outreach through SHGs, Cooperatives, and Trade Associations

Reach was greatest where there were networks that were organized; informal channels did not perform as well. The government agencies involved should commit to engaging formally with S.H.G.s, cooperatives, N.G.O.s and artisan networks as recognized dissemination and facilitation partners. By supporting these intermediaries, we can mitigate misinformation and build overall content integrity.

Peer Champion and Cluster-Based Outreach Models

In some villages, early applicants faced bureaucratic delays, but frustration quickly spread to everyone. Programs should encourage peer champions who can vouch for the initiative and help guide others through it. Local leadership of cluster-based dissemination systems at scale can transform individual success into collective confidence if taken up and sustained by communities.

Gender-Responsive and Socially Inclusive Pathways

SHG-Anchored Women-Centric Facilitation

Mixed community forums are often seen as formal and intimidating, but engaging with SHGs allowed them to feel more trusting and at ease. PMVS delivery should be embedded within women-led collectives, providing training and applications as a group, with flexible timelines that accommodate domestic duties.

Addressing Bureaucratic Fatigue Among Men

Increased administrative burdens, in the form of repeated requests for documentation, were a major reason for withdrawing, particularly among men. Agencies can re-engage this population by recognizing their previous involvement in state programs; if they don't have to fill out duplicative forms, the chances of their giving up because of bureaucratic fatigue would likely be reduced.

Strategic Implication for Welfare Governance

The study highlights an important lesson for the governance of welfare in federal democracies: If policymakers want universal takeup, they have to design programs that provide material benefits that people value and that build trust, familiarity and procedural experience that shape how citizens actually respond. Otherwise, even in states with high administrative capacity, programs that exclude these dimensions by design risk excluding citizens. Institutional coordination, contextual sensitivity, and relational governance need to be built into the DNA of institutional designs to deliver inclusive welfare.

Conclusion

This study attempts to understand why participation by artisans from Tamil Nadu in the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Scheme is abysmally low. In a mixed-methods design, this outcome was shown not to be the result of ignorance. Instead, it is the interplay of low digital readiness, administrative complexity, fragmented information ecologies, trade-specific economic considerations and, most of all, a significant trust deficit between state and central institutions that matters. In making the case for the centrality of these intersecting processes, the study provides an important theoretical addition to the literature on policy diffusion in federal systems, demonstrating the way regional political identity, institutional familiarity, and perceived cultural proximity influence how national welfare initiatives are received. By applying diffusion of innovation and information asymmetry theories to the sphere of sub-national government, it introduces the idea of "federal trust asymmetry" as a crucial predictor of welfare uptake.

In practice, it reminds us that centrally-designed, technology-dependent welfare delivery will struggle if digital literacy is varied, and institutional loyalties are intensely local. The Kalaignar Kaivinai Thittam's displacement effect shows that welfare schemes compete and overlap in a layered policy environment. The emphasis for improving the efficacy of the PM Vishwakarma Scheme in Tamil Nadu must therefore move beyond raising mass awareness to sustained support for traditional craftspeople. They should focus on decentralising facilitation and vernacular digital interfaces, while integrating trusted intermediaries like self-help groups, co-operatives and local associations. High capital trades like goldsmithing and carpentry require finance that meets real demand because there is a significant upfront capital that needs to be incurred to do business, while in the case of seasonal trades like pottery and weaving there is a need for finance to be able to handle cliff like demand. Coupled with an evident and collaborative partnership between central and state agencies, these measures will help restore credibility to institutions, and, over time with consistent application, would lead to more inclusive participation.

The study points to several promising avenues of future research. Future studies could also expand to other districts, states and regions to test whether this trust asymmetry with the federal level is generalisable to other Indian governance contexts. Longitudinal research can also explore how policy changes and digital tools can bring about longer-term increases in artisans' uptake of schemes. When viewed from the vantage point of younger generations of craft workers, their withdrawal represents a larger crisis in the continuity of traditional livelihoods. Systematic comparison of different welfare regimes may reveal that the architecture of layered governance determines which welfare packages people choose. Its main

provocation, then, is a call to action: it implores future studies to root the design and evaluation of welfare in more culturally relevant, institutionally sensitive and regionally specific lenses.

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