

Eco–Stories That Stick: Sustainability–Focused Digital Marketing Strategies by Rustic Hue

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Rustic Hue, India

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines Rustic Hue® (RH), a sustainable fashion brand committed to ethical practices, cultural heritage, and environmental protection. RH faced challenges in effectively communicating their orientation and commitment to social, economic and environmental sustainability while differentiating themselves in a crowded market. To overcome this challenge, RH implemented strategic digital storytelling in an innovative manner. They utilized their own digital media, including social media and the website, to showcase collaborations with weaving communities, highlight design innovations and customer testimonials. These approaches helped RH to foster trust, transparency, enhanced market recognition, and establish cultural relevance. Beyond sharing product-oriented stories, they also emphasize and publish on environmental responsibility through their “Jugaad” line, which promotes upcycling and zero-waste practices. Furthermore, RH documents the lives and practices of these communities and shares research findings to promote public awareness and appreciation.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-5395-0.ch006

1. ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Rustic Hue®(RH), an award-winning, research-based, conscious design label, uniquely blends rural inspiration and vibrant colors. Established in June 2016, the base studio was initially set up in the capital city of Bhubaneswar in Odisha, while the registered office is located in Burla, a small town surrounded by premier government educational institutions. Swikruti Pradhan, a sustainable fashion researcher and designer, is the founder and creative director of RH. She is an alumna of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and the Odisha University of Technical Research (formerly College of Engineering & Technology), Bhubaneswar. After a brief stint in a consulting firm in Bangalore, she decided to return to her native place in Odisha and start her clothing label. Since the beginning of the label, she has been certain about the grounded values with which she will run the label. Rustic Hue was built on the fundamental belief of ethics, which is difficult to maintain without compromising many opportunities. There have been many instances where the label has faced a dilemma and had to choose between authenticity, ethics and tempting (evil-good) opportunities. It has never compromised its true self for fast growth. 'Rustic Hue' combines two words: 'Rustic' refers to the countryside, and 'Hue' means color. The label combines rural flavors and unusual colors to create contemporary handwoven and handcrafted clothing and accessories. Its soul is connected to the roots of the villages.

In mid-2022, the base studio moved to Bangalore, Karnataka, while continuing to work with the handloom weaver communities in Odisha. RH is a conscious design label practicing many forms of sustainability representing the dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions. The first three dimensions are often widely discussed, but the cultural aspect needs more attention (Pradhan & Khandual, 2020). The label is committed to sustainability and focuses on working with local communities of handloom weavers like Meher Bhulia and Kosta in the western part of Odisha who practice traditional handloom techniques such as Sambalpuri Ikat, Bomkai, and Three-shuttle weaving with natural fibers. It also focuses on craft revival and cultural sustainability. The label's environmental commitment to the environment is evident in its 'RH Jugaad' line, which ensures maximum utilization of raw materials by upcycling and reusing post-production leftovers into unique and functional products (textiles, accessories, garments, etc.), thus instilling a sense of responsibility (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). Each piece is unique and thus a special addition to the consumer's wardrobe. The label is synonymous with sustainability, zero waste and handmade. It cherishes Indian culture, local communities and traditions. As a research-based label, it explores traditional handloom weaving techniques and focuses on reviving craftsmanship and local practices combined with a touch of urban silhouettes that appeal to the global market.

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