

# EPCH keen to revive Barmer's Shilpgram and make it functional

EPCH NWR Regional Convenor calls on concerned Govt. Departments to expediate the process

**Jaipur; 1st April 2021** : For the promotion and development of handicrafts and craft cluster of Barmer district, a Shilpgram was constructed during 2008. The objective of Shilpgram is not yet fulfilled for the purpose it was constructed for. During the year 2017, several meetings were organised with Shri Ratan Lahoti, IAS, then Divisional Commissioner and District Collector, Barmer and it was decided that Shilpgram premises will be handed over to Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts on MOU basis for its restoration and to make it functional, so that crafts persons of Barmer can be benefited. Upon consultation with District Collector Barmer, a draft MOU was finalised and submitted to District Collector Barmer for approval and the same has been forward to Panchayati Raj Department for the approval.

As the necessary approval is expedited, EPCH NWR Regional Convenor - Mr. Lekhraj Maheshwari met with Mr Harish Choudhary,

Revenue Minister, Govt. of Rajasthan and Ex-MP Barmer, to submit a presentation regarding revival of Barmer Shilpgram. Mr. Choudhary assured that he'll discuss the matter with district authorities and resolve it at the earliest.

Further, EPCH has submitted a Memorandum of Additional Suggestions for the Rajasthan State Handicrafts Policy to Mr. Ashutosh A. D. Pednekar, Secretary-Industries Department & Managing Director, Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation; and Mrs. Archana Singh, Commissioner-Industries Department, Rajasthan. This is in addition of Pre-Budget Memorandum, submitted earlier to Government of Rajasthan for the formation of State Handicraft and Handloom Policy. During the meeting Mr. Maheshwari also emphasised for Container Subsidies for Rajasthan based exporters. Mr Pednekar assured that he will look into the matter and take it forward. ■

## NRF: US Consumers could help propel economy to fastest growth since the 1980s

The US National Retail Federation (NRF) is growing more bullish on its outlook for 2021. The industry association's chief economist, Jack Kleinhenz, pointed to a variety of factors that suggest economic growth of 6.6% this year, the highest level since 7.2 percent in 1984.

"The consumer is nearly always the key driver in the economy, and with the consumer in good financial health, a sharp demand is expected to unfold over the coming months," Kleinhenz said. He noted the latest edition of the Federal Reserve's Beige Book affirms that U.S. growth is beginning to accelerate. Key signposts indicate unemployment benefits, government stimulus checks and tax refunds are boosting personal income and purchasing power. Consumers are "sitting on a stockpile of cash" that could become "a spring-loaded spending mechanism," Kleinhenz said. U.S. households saved \$2.4 trillion during February alone, approximately twice the amount of average monthly savings during pre-pandemic 2019. That adds to savings accumulated over the past year as consumers hunkered down instead of dining out, traveling or attending sports and entertainment events.



In addition, the use of consumer credit is up, with outstanding credit surging in February to its highest level since late 2017. The increase in borrowing "highlights a consumer who is growing more confident as the economy

accelerates, job growth picks up and more states lift burdensome restrictions," Kleinhenz said. He cautioned that comparisons with 2020 are challenging given the disruptions caused by the pandemic, hurricanes, wildfires and other unique events. "While there is a great deal of uncertainty about how fast and far this economy will grow in 2021, surveys show an increase in individuals being vaccinated, more willingness to receive a vaccination, increased spending intentions and comfort with resuming pre-pandemic behaviors like shopping, travel and family gatherings," Kleinhenz said. NRF has forecast that 2021 retail sales – excluding autos, gas and restaurants – will grow between 6.5% and 8.2% over 2020 to between \$4.33 trillion and \$4.4 trillion. ■ *Source: Home Textiles Today*

# Australian Consumers spent \$30.7 billion in stores and online in March

Retail sales are still going strong for 2021, with \$30.7 billion spent in stores and online in March, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). However, retail sales volumes for the March 2021 quarter fell by 0.5 per cent as shoppers cut back on discretionary purchases and return to pre-pandemic spending patterns. "The quarterly volume fall was driven by households spending patterns gradually returning to those seen before Covid-19," Ben James, Director, Quarterly Economy Wide Surveys, says.



"Food retailing (-2.7 per cent) led the falls while household goods also fell (-1.6 per cent). The falls were partially offset by a rise in cafes, restaurants and takeaways (5.8 per cent), as eating out increased, while functions and events continued to return."

Australian Retailers Association (ARA) CEO Paul Zahra says while year on year sales growth is still positive, it's significantly lower than previous months, driven by a decrease in supermarkets which are cycling the panic buying period from last year.

"Household goods were up \$518 million or 10 per cent, clothing, footwear and personal accessories were up \$880 million or 54 per cent, department stores were up \$368 million or 25 per cent and cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services were up \$1 billion or 33 per cent." Australians continue to embrace online shopping with sales up 37.4 per cent in March compared to the same time last year."

Indeed, online sales made up 9.4 per cent of total retail sales in March 2021 and contributed to 7.1 per cent of total retail sales in March 2020. According to National Retail Association (NRA) CEO Dominique Lamb the March figures demonstrate that it is still a volatile time for retailers. "The 12 months to March 2021

has undoubtedly been the most turbulent period retail has experienced in living memory," she says.

"Panic-buying, lockdowns, supply chain disruptions and myriad other challenges has at times seen retail sales go wildly from one extreme to the other. But we're now starting to see shoppers slowly return to their pre-pandemic shopping habits.

"Lockdowns continue to have a material effect on retail sales. Both Victoria and Western Australia surged in March following February lockdowns in both states, while the three-day Brisbane lockdown plunged Queensland into negative turnover for the month." Lamb says that while it was always expected that spending levels would begin to taper off, she hopes to see measures in tonight's Budget that will keep consumer spending on track. "Extending the tax offset for low and middle income earners for a further 12 months will help to encourage consumer spending. While we also hope to see initiatives that help small business and encourage economic activity.

"Maintaining a strong level of demand will be crucial to ensuring a quick economic recovery and help to safeguard jobs in Australia's second-largest workforce." ■

Source: Australian Giftguide

# Canadian Consumers Yearn for a Wardrobe Refresh Post Pandemic

More than 50% of Canadian consumers plan to purchase new clothing once pandemic restrictions are relaxed, according to a new report from The NPD Group\*. The desire for a wardrobe refresh is even stronger when it comes to consumers aged 18-34 as over 25% plan to purchase and wear only new clothing once restrictions are lifted. This represents a significant growth opportunity for the industry as the 18-34 consumer segment represents over 37% of apparel sales. The pent-up demand is good news for the Canadian apparel industry, which has struggled greatly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. According to The NPD Group, the apparel industry declined by -13% in the 12 months ending March 2021.

"March data gave us a glimpse as to what we can expect once we come out of the third wave," said Tamara Szames, Canadian Retail Industry Advisor with The NPD Group. "The demand is there and fashion categories such as women's jeans are starting to recover from the impact of Covid-19."

Perhaps surprisingly, nearly a quarter of Canadian consumers plan to continue doing most of their shopping online even after pandemic restrictions are removed, this percentage jumps to almost 1/3rd of consumers when looking at the under 44 age segments.

Nearly 60% of the recent declines among the 18-34 Canadian apparel consumer were driven by "social" events. This is apparel purchased with the end use of work, school, special occasions, weekend social and religious services. Apparel for social events represent 1/3rd of the sales for 18-34 consumers. And while comfort has reigned supreme over the last 12 months, consumers aged 18-34 suggest that style and fashion trends are just as important as comfort when it comes to purchasing post-pandemic clothing. "Canadians are ready to start socialising again and these



gatherings, whether big or small, will start to become events that lead to opportunities for brands and retailers," said Szames. "While we know comfort is here to stay, we also know that consumers are ready to start feeling good again and for the 18-34 consumer that also means staying current with trends." ■ Source: NPD

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## Women Lead Kitchen and Bath Improvement Spending in the U.S.

Nearly half of the U.S. population made a kitchen and bath home improvement purchase online or in stores in 2020, and women accounted for more than half of those buyers. According to Checkout information from The NPD Group, women were more likely to buy kitchen and bath products than lawn and garden, paint, hardware, or other home improvement products. Last year, women accounted for nearly 60% of kitchen and bath products sold online, and 52% of in-store sales.

Ecommerce accounted for 28% of kitchen and bath improvement sales in 2020 but, with few exceptions, both online and in-store purchases of the products grew by double-digits

across all U.S. regions. The rise in home improvement market purchases by women also tracks with higher rates of home purchasing by women in 2020. According to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), single, female buyers accounted for 19% of the homes purchased in 2020, the highest it's been in 10 years. The median age of single, female repeat home buyers is 59. According to NPD's Checkout information, women age 55 and up spent the most on annual kitchen and bath home improvements, while women age 18 to 24 posted the largest annual spending increase. It is incumbent upon retailers to continue to address evolving lifestyle needs. ■ Source: NPD

# Canada imposes duties on upholstery from China and Vietnam

Upholstered furniture from China and Vietnam sold in Canada now is subject to country-wide duties of 295.5% and 101.5%, respectively, after a preliminary determination of dumping by the Canadian International Trade Tribunal. CITT found “reasonable indication” that dumping and subsidizing of upholstered seating made in China and Vietnam has or is threatening to damage Canada’s domestic furniture manufacturing industry. The CITT will continue its inquiry and expects to issue its ultimate finding by Sep. 2.

A letter from the Canada Border Services Agency notified importers that provisional duties will be collected on subject merchandise as of Wednesday, May 5. 28 Chinese manufacturers were assigned separate rates ranging from 20.65% to 226.45%, while 7 manufacturers in Vietnam received separate duty rates ranging from 17.44% to 89.77%. Under Canada’s Special Import

Measures Act, importers are required to declare their company’s liability, if any, for provisional duties and taxes on any subject goods imported into Canada, and it is their responsibility to inform their customs broker if they are importing goods subject to provisional duties and to ensure proper declaration of subject goods and proper payment of duties. Importers can go here for a self-assessment. CBSA launched the investigation in December based upon a complaint filed by Palliser Furniture and supported by fellow Canadian manufacturers Elran Furniture Ltd., Jaymar Furniture Corp., EQ3 Ltd. and Fornirama Inc. The move looks to limit the penetration of motion upholstery and leather stationary furniture from China and Vietnam into Canada. According to CBSA, the Canadian market for such merchandise has been estimated at \$675 million annually. ■ *Source: Furniture Today*

## Vietnam overtakes China as largest exporter to US

In one of the most dramatic shifts in the recent history of furniture imports, Vietnam has overtaken China as the largest exporter of finished goods to the U.S. market. According to Furniture Today research, Vietnam shipped just over \$7.4 billion in furniture to the U.S. in calendar year 2020, up 31% from the \$5.7 billion it shipped in 2019. By comparison, China shipped \$7.33 billion to the U.S. in the same 12-month period. That number was down 25% from the \$9.7 billion China shipped in 2019.

While the gap is relatively small, Vietnam’s position on the world stage shows how it has grown in importance over the years. This, of course, started slowly with Vietnam emerging as a force in wood bedroom in response to Chinese bedroom manufacturers being hit with antidumping duties starting in June 2004. An even more dramatic shift has occurred over the past two and a half years as the U.S. government imposed tariffs as high as 25% on almost all furniture categories. Even mattresses migrated to other countries outside China once duties were assigned to that category.

A dramatic shift occurred in 2019, when China shipments fell 28% to \$9.7 billion. Vietnam’s shipments meanwhile rose

35% to around \$5.7 billion. Miscellaneous wood furniture was the largest category out of Vietnam with \$1.9 billion in shipments, up 43% from the year before. But the largest increase in terms of major product categories was in wood frame upholstered seating. It rose 83%, to \$1.25 billion from the year before.

The next largest categories in order from Vietnam were wood bedroom furniture, where shipments fell 5% to \$1.1 billion; wood frame upholstered chairs, which rose 22% to nearly \$912 million and wood beds, which rose 11% to \$778.9 million. ■

*Source: Furniture Today*





# A more sustainable lifestyle is important : 94% of US consumers

“Sustainability & Consumerism: U.S. Consumer Behaviors and Preferences” a study by Compose[d], a digital creative services and strategy agency, and MaCher, a brand solutions company, found that while sustainability alone doesn’t determine consumer purchasing behaviour, it is of growing importance across all generational demographics. This is based on a survey of 1,000 consumers (age 18 to 75) in the U.S. in March 2021.

“Consumers are getting more savvy about sustainability,” said Jason Parkin, president and chief creative officer, Compose[d]. “It can’t just be one product. It has to be a full company buy-in.” Even finding one product can pose a challenge for some consumers, the study found. One in three reported having difficulty finding sustainable options across all product categories, with 32.5% of respondents saying so for furniture and décor.

**Recycled product content ranked high**, with 64% of consumers saying they would rather use products made from recycled materials. The word “recycled” is also the word most likely to influence Baby Boomers (65%), Gen X (52%) and Gen Z (52%). The word “green” is of great impact for Millennials (51%) and Gen Z (43%). Respondents were also highly attuned to the consequences of manufacturing, with 64% identifying products produced with minimal environmental impact to be the top

marker of sustainability. Many consumers (47%) said they are **willing to pay more for sustainable products**. On average, Baby Boomers and Gen Z are 30% more likely than Gen X and Millennials to agree on that. And 60% of adults said it is too expensive to always shop sustainable. In addition, 43% of consumers wish there were more information about living sustainably. Parkin believes companies have to educate their customers about the sustainability of the products they are offering as well as what their businesses are doing to advance a cleaner environment.

60% of consumers say reusable products are more sustainable, 43% would pay more for reusable products with women being 25% more likely than men to pay more. Men are 43% more likely than women to say sustainability is very important to their purchase decision making, particularly Millennial men (60%). 35% of Millennials and Gen Z have recently **reduced their volume of purchases for environmental reasons**. Baby Boomers and Gen X are two times more likely to donate clothes for reuse and to actively reduce their use of single-use plastics, while Millennials and Gen Z are two to three times more likely than older consumers to be vegetarian/vegan and to ride a bike instead of driving. ■ *Source: Furniture Today*

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## Consumer Behavior Indicates Rise in Home Décor Spending

The thought of returning to in-store shopping and inviting guests back into homes has consumers excited about updating their home décor this year, according to a recent Sullivans Home Décor Consumer Behavior Survey. With 76% shoppers looking to purchase the same or more décor products than in previous years, retailers should feel optimistic about sales in the months to come.

This year’s sales are expected to be strong, and it appears consumers’ primary goal for updating décor may be a result of spending more time at home during COVID-19. More than one-third (37%) of respondents remarked that “adding comfort to their home” was the main motivation behind the need to purchase

home décor, rather than showing personality, which scored the highest last year. In the post-pandemic world, consumers want to create a feel-good space that’s safe and comfortable.

A solid majority (63%) of the participants indicated that they prefer in-store shopping to find inspiration and new ideas when buying home décor. While respondents listed social media (39%) and television/movies (31%) as the next best methods to find inspiration, it’s obvious that shoppers are ready to get back to browsing stores to find the perfect items. While most people are excited to get back in store, one consumer group stands out as the most opportunistic: home décor hobbyists.. ■

*Source: Gifts & Decoratives*