

Accessing the millennial mass consumer demand for Khadi

Vasundhara Saluja¹, Dr Vibha Kapoor²

^{1,2}Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan

Abstract – "Sustainability" has been a popular word these days; people the world over has realized the need to produce and consume responsibly. Fashion businesses are not behind, often discussing the concepts of recycling, reuse, repair, rent, environmentally friendly fabrics, and many more, which are sold as environmental lifesavers. As sustainable fashion shows gain mainstream attention and designers experiment with sustainable production processes, Khadi has also gained popularity as a sustainable fabric. Not just government initiatives have been leveraged to the fabric of freedom, but a few Indian textile makers have also taken up the initiative to adopt Khadi clusters and produce more of it. The aim is to revive Khadi, the fabric that once symbolized freedom, as it may be losing its relevance today. Though the statistical figures for KVIC and luxury designers using Khadi show a rise in sales, they are still far behind the numbers needed to catch up with the sales of any fast fashion product, nor is it a common choice for millennials. This research aims to understand modern-day mass consumers' perceptions of the fabric. A survey will be conducted to understand the preferences so that the fashion makers can use it as a business opportunity.

Keywords: Khadi, Mass market, Millennials, Consumer Perception

1.INTRODUCTION

Consumer Preferences Towards Sustainable Fashion

The garment industry is facing a major shift with environmental concerns, ethical production standards, and shifting consumer values having an increasing impact on buying behavior. Fast fashion, a model originally praised for its cheap and fast trend cycles, has become deeply problematic because of its environmental damage, overuse of resources, and social impacts. Thus, customers, millennials in particular, are more and more in favor of sustainable products, which align with their personal beliefs and responsible buying habits. This change has revived interest in traditional fabrics like Khadi, which have inherent environmental, social, and cultural benefits. But, despite its environmental characteristics, Khadi has yet to gain mainstream favor among young urban shoppers.

So, we have to understand the dynamics affecting millennials' desire to re-position Khadi as a current fashion cloth.

Consumer Behavior and Sustainable Fashion:

Sustainable fashion is not just the use of eco-friendly materials but it includes the whole product lifecycle from ethical sourcing, responsible production, fair labour practices, durability and end-of-life disposal (Niinimäki et al., 2020). It encourages the shift from overconsumption to thoughtful consumption and sustainable usage of products. Environmental consciousness is on the rise and consumers are not only looking at the price and appearance of a product but also at the environmental and social impact of the product.

Recent research has shown that the customer attitude towards sustainable fashion is influenced by several interrelated elements including environmental concern, product quality, perceived value, trust, and personal values (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). However, the literature frequently mentions an attitude-behavior gap, where consumers indicate good attitudes towards sustainability but may not necessarily transfer their intentions into actual purchasing behavior. Often, favorable opinions of sustainable garments are offset by price sensitivity, limited availability, lack of trendy designs, and insufficient information, which deter consumers from purchasing sustainable apparel.

As a result, more and more brands of sustainable fashion emphasize the balance of ecological responsibility and aesthetics, comfort, usefulness, and affordability. This shows that sustainability is not a sufficient condition for market success, but customers demand sustainable items to be similar to traditional fashion in terms of style and value.

Millennials: Green Fashion Shoppers

Millennials, usually defined as those born between 1981 and 1996, are one of the most significant consumer groups in defining the future of the fashion industry. Millennials, who were raised at a time of fast technology development and more knowledge of global environmental concerns, are more open to sustainable consumption than prior generations (PwC, 2024).

They make purchase decisions with a focus on transparency, authenticity, and ethical company operations.

Studies have shown that millennials are willing to support firms that they see as sharing their values, particularly in relation to environmental protection, fair trade and social responsibility (Deloitte, 2024). But product design, brand image, peer-to-peer recommendations, visibility on social media and perceived quality still affect most buying decisions. Fashion is still a way to express yourself, therefore looks are also a key factor in a buying decision, along with sustainability.

Some surveys indicate that millennials care about using ecologically responsible items but still want them to be trendy, modern and easy to get. Sustainable items are typically seen as “old-fashioned, hard to style, or expensive,” and hence have trouble becoming mainstream. The future of sustainable textiles is thus increasingly dependent on the successful combination of responsible manufacturing with contemporary design innovation and effective branding initiatives.

2. Khadi: The Eco-Friendly Fabric

Khadi maintains a special place in Indian textile legacy based on historical importance, cultural symbolism and environmentally sustainable manufacturing technique. Khadi is hand-spun and hand-woven with minimum mechanization, using far less energy than industrial textile manufacture, while also producing jobs in rural areas and supporting traditional craftsmen (Khadi and Village Industries Commission [KVIC], 2024). The decentralized production approach also helps in local economic growth and preservation of indigenous craftsmanship.

Environmental Perspective From an environmental perspective, Khadi is quite similar to the concepts of sustainable textile as it requires less carbon emissions, less energy usage and the environmental impact is comparatively less throughout the manufacture. Furthermore, its permeability, longevity, degradability, and versatility in various climatic situations further enhance its status as an environmentally benign fabric for sustainable fashion uses.

But even with these strengths, some academics have said that Khadi is still mostly connected with traditional dress, political symbols, and ceremonial wear, not modern lifestyle products.

This image has reduced its popularity with younger buyers who want trendy, interchangeable clothing that can be worn every day. This shows that the problem is not with Khadi's sustainable credentials but with its commercial placement and consumer perception.

3. Perception of Khadi among Youngsters: Changing Perception

Khadi has slowly evolved over the last 10 years with many designers, government and commercial endeavors to bring it into the mainstream trend. The designers of today have tried out new shapes, surface embellishments, digital printing, natural dyeing and fusion garments to display the adaptability of Khadi in apparel, accessories and lifestyle products.

Government efforts such as “Khadi for Fashion” and tie-ups with fashion designers have elevated the visibility among the urban consumer. More participation in fashion weeks, e-commerce platforms and designer collections have helped redefine Khadi beyond the conventional image. However, the reality is that consumer uptake is still patchy, especially among the millennial segment who still regard Khadi as a costly, less varied or ethnic wear only.

According to consumer research, younger shoppers are increasingly looking for authenticity, narrative and local workmanship, which means there is a lot of promise for Khadi if it can be positioned as a luxury but modern sustainable material. Digital marketing, influencer partnerships and creative retail experiences have also become essential tools for altering consumer attitudes and driving trial purchases.

3. Demand for Khadi and Consumer Preferences:

The consumer desire for fashion products is a function of a combination of utilitarian, emotional and symbolic aspects. The elements influencing purchasing intention found in the context of Khadi include comfort, fabric quality, durability, environmental benefits, originality and cultural identity. However, when it comes to the ultimate buying decision, practical aspects like as price, availability, variety of designs and ease of care generally override sustainability concerns.

Research shows that customers are more eager to buy sustainable fashion, when products meet ethical demands as well as lifestyle needs. Attractive product design and modern shapes, various styling possibilities and powerful brand communication contribute considerably to purchase intentions.

The trust in sustainability promises is also the key factor affecting the customer confidence, especially among the technologically informed millennials who are on the lookout for transparency with respect to the product origin and production procedures.

Fashion branding also has a major role in consumer preference. Younger people are more likely to be attracted to brands that can communicate craftsmanship, authenticity and sustainability, while still preserving aspirational value. Hence, re-engineering Khadi also implies shifting from legacy marketing to lifestyle advertising that connects with consumer desires of today.

4. Importance of Branding and Repositioning of Market

Brand repositioning is gaining importance in extending the consumer base of traditional textiles. Marketers are trying to pitch Khadi as a premium, trendy and eco-friendly fabric that suits modern-day life, instead of just portraying it as the fabric of India's freedom struggle.

In marketing literature it is said that for effective repositioning, innovation in product design, branding, retail experience, pricing strategy and communication is required. Consumers are no longer just buying items based on their functional utility, but they are buying brands that express personal identity and social values. Millennials' view of brands is driven by digital engagement, visual storytelling, influencer endorsement and immersive shopping locations.

Therefore, the success of the repositioning of Khadi hinges on the fusion of its historic virtues with the contemporary fashion demands. Such a method can spread its appeal beyond the niche of sustainable consumers, to the greater mainstream market, while still maintaining its cultural authenticity.

5. Gap in research

The existing literature widely covers sustainability, ethical fashion and historical importance of Khadi but not much empirical research has examined the millennial customer demand based on primary consumer preference data. While much of the prior research has focused on production techniques, artisan livelihoods, government initiatives or designer interventions, little emphasis has been paid to analyzing the perceptions of Khadi among millennials as a modern fashion product.

Moreover, present research usually investigates single characteristics such as sustainability awareness or buying intention without simultaneously considering product preferences, price perceptions, design expectations, accessibility, branding, and purchasing behavior. Little research has been done on the interplay of these variables, especially in the context of India's fast-evolving sustainable fashion market.

The current study tries to bridge this gap by investigating the consumer preferences, behavioral patterns, perceived hurdles and purchase intentions of millennial consumers. This study offers empirical evidence through a consumer-centric view that can assist designers, marketers, policy makers and Khadi institutions to re-position Khadi as an attractive and competitive sustainable fashion material for the general market.

6. Empirical Investigation

To fill the indicated research gap, an empirical consumer survey was conducted with 107 appx. respondents. The poll aimed to know how the modern customer views Khadi beyond the historical and cultural backdrop and if it meets their expectations of sustainable fashion.

The questionnaire had a series of questions related to factors affecting customer demand, such as awareness of Khadi, buying behavior, favorite product categories, perceptions of sustainability, comfort, quality, pricing, availability, branding, and design innovation. In addition, respondents were asked about the drivers of their buying decisions and the constraints that limit the adoption of Khadi in their everyday wardrobes.

The study gives significant insights into growing expectations of millennial customers and reveals the key drivers that influence their propensity to embrace Khadi as a contemporary sustainable fashion material by examining consumer responses across various dimensions. Empirical results constitute the basis for assessing market demand and for making recommendations for the designers, marketers, policymakers, and Khadi organizations.

7. Results Analysis & Discussions

Overview of Consumer Survey : To study the consumer demand for Khadi as a sustainable fashion material, a structured questionnaire was circulated among 107 respondents of varied demographic backgrounds. The survey explored the consumers' awareness of sustainable fashion, knowledge about Khadi, buying behaviour, perception about product features, desire to embrace sustainable items, barriers to purchase, and future purchase intentions. The findings provide empirical proof of the changing expectations of current customers and their acceptance of Khadi in the sustainable fashion sector.

Variable Category		Frequency Percentage (%)	
Gender	Female	81	75.7
	Male	25	23.4
	Other	1	0.9
Age	Below 20 years	4	3.7
	21–30 years	48	44.9
	31–40 years	41	38.3
	41–50 years	7	6.5
	Above 50 years	7	6.5

The poll is mostly based on young adult customers as the respondents' belong to the age group of 21-40 years as more than four fifth of respondents. This is particularly important as millennials are one of the primary consumer groups supporting sustainable fashion purchasing. The sample comprises roughly three quarters of female respondents which indicates stronger participation in the study and gives significant information on purchase habits in the fashion sector.

Knowledge on Sustainable Fashion and Khadi

The results show a very high degree of awareness about sustainable fashion among the respondents. Almost all participants claimed to have heard of sustainable fashion before, which indicates that environmental issues and responsible consumerism are becoming more and more familiar concepts among today's customers. Moreover, the level of awareness of the respondents was found to be typically moderate to high, suggesting that sustainability is no longer a niche notion but has made its way into the mainstream consciousness of consumers.

Similarly, there was extensive knowledge about Khadi. Almost all the respondents were aware of Khadi items and a considerable majority had purchased at least one Khadi product in the past. The results indicate that Khadi is well accepted by the customers and has a firm base on which future market expansion can be built.

However, awareness alone does not definitely ensure frequent purchasing behavior. While people recognize the environmental importance of Khadi, actual adoption is still driven by other criteria such as product design, pricing, accessibility and lifestyle fit. This finding is in line with the well discussed attitude-behavior divide in sustainable fashion literature, where strong environmental attitudes do not always lead to consistent purchasing decisions.

Consumer Perception towards Sustainable Purchase

The poll also looked at the extent to which environmental issues impact decisions to buy. A majority of the respondents said that they think about the environmental impact when they buy fashion products, often or occasionally. This means that sustainability has become an essential assessment factor, but it competes with traditional buying drivers, such as design, quality, comfort and price.

Respondents also had moderate readiness to pay premium for ecologically sustainable products. While many customers said they would be willing to pay a bit more for sustainable alternatives, fewer strongly agreed to pay much higher prices. These results imply that customers indeed appreciate sustainability but are also price sensitive in actual buying decisions.

Consumer Perception of Khadi

Consumer perception towards Khadi was found to be generally good on different dimensions. Respondents connected Khadi with eco friendliness, comfort, longevity and genuineness. The survey also suggested a good attitude towards Khadi becoming part of contemporary urban lifestyles if product innovation and trendy styling continue to evolve.

The participants agreed that cooperation with designers, better branding and current product design would go a long way in boosting the Khadi brand amongst the youth. This research shows that customers do not consider Khadi as a traditional textile alone and are increasingly viewing it as a trendy and sustainable lifestyle product.

Obstacles to Consumer Adoption

The poll indicated that although customer perceptions of Khadi were generally good, a number of hurdles prevented further commercial acceptance. The most common issues raised were linked to modern product design, product selection, pricing, availability, branding, and fabric care. Also, some qualitative replies revealed that Khadi is still perceived as traditional apparel, which lowered its attractiveness to consumers looking for versatile fashion for everyday wear.

The study suggests that the main difficulty for Khadi is not customer awareness but market positioning. Modern aesthetic demands are being matched by a growing demand from consumers for sustainable products, which also reflect environmental responsibility. Hence, advances in design innovation, extending retail access and broadening product assortments could have a crucial role in increasing customer acceptance.

Intention for Future Purchase

The survey results show that Khadi market has a good future potential. A majority of respondents had a favorable intent to purchase Khadi products in the future and were of the opinion that Khadi can be a mainstream sustainable fashion material. The respondents also said they would be far more likely to buy Khadi if it had more current and appealing designs, partnerships with well-known fashion companies and more product availability.

The comments suggest that the appeal of Khadi to consumers is not limited to sustainability but includes changing fashion sensibilities. Millennials seem to be open to adopting Khadi when it successfully blends environmental responsibility with style, usefulness, affordability and accessibility.

Interviewed

Overall, survey results imply that Khadi has a huge potential to grow beyond its usual market standing. It was shown that consumers had a high level of understanding about sustainability, environmental value of Khadi and positive attitude towards future adoption. However, purchasing behavior is affected by the more pragmatic issues of product design, price, availability and branding. The findings thus support the premise that the reinvention of Khadi as a contemporary sustainable fashion textile has to have a consumer-centric approach that combines traditional craftsmanship with modern product development, innovative branding and improved retail experiences. Such strategic

actions would allow Khadi to increase its relevance to younger consumers while also helping to the larger objectives of sustainable fashion consumption.

8. Recommendation

The whole results of the survey indicate the great scope for the growth of Khadi outside the typical market placement. It was shown that consumers had a high level of understanding about sustainability, environmental value of Khadi and positive attitude towards future adoption. However, purchasing behavior is affected by the more pragmatic issues of product design, price, availability and branding. Thus the findings support the proposition that to reposition Khadi as a contemporary sustainable fashion textile, a consumer-centric approach is needed, which merges traditional craftsmanship with modern product development, new branding and enhanced retail experiences. Strategic interventions would help Khadi to become more relevant to the younger consumers, whilst contributing to the larger goals of sustainable fashion consumption.

REFERENCES

1. Deloitte. (2024). *2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey*. Deloitte Insights.
2. Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). (2024). *Annual Report 2023–24*. Government of India.
3. McNeill, L. & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: Fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 39(3), 212–222.
4. Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T. & Gwilt, A. (2020). The environmental price of fast fashion. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 1(4), 189–200.
5. PwC. (2024). *Voice of the Consumer Survey 2024*. PricewaterhouseCoopers.
6. Wiederhold, M. & Martinez, L. F. (2018). Ethical consumer behaviour in the fashion industry: The role of sustainability. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 198, 1382–1390.