

# Offline to online: Changes knitwear retail going thru

Ease and accessibility of online retail has prepped up knitwear retail and helped its growth. Brands and retailers are now adopting omni channel strategies to boost sales and increase market share, write **Shubhangi Bidwe and Ajay Kumar**

**A**s per a Technopak study corporatized retail is expected to grow in India, from 8 per cent in 2013 to 24 per cent by 2023. The growth drivers are expected to be continued large share of private consumption in India's economy, the growth of alternative retail, and the continued growth of brands and retailers. What's more a significant share of apparel retailing is contributed by knitwear. Growth is backed by growing acceptance of casual wear and accessibility of brands across various retail channels. As Lubeina

- **China, Bangladesh, India some of the largest knitwear exporters in the world**
- **The category, with an increase in number of organised players, has now become fashion apparel**
- **Omnichannel retail has given a huge boost to knitwear segment**
- **Online knitwear retail is growing at a rapid pace**
- **India is expected to become the world's fastest growing e-commerce market.**



Shahpurwala, Co-founder, Mustang Socks & Accessories explains “Knitwear fabric can be adapted to a wide range of apparels like socks, shirts, Tshirts, sweaters, jackets, dresses, etc. Hence, demand has increased. Technological innovation is another major reason for the production of a wide range of knitwear products.”

**Retail evolves from offline to online**

Knitwear retail is evolving from brick and mortar stores in the neighbourhood to online shopping, exclusive stores located in swish malls even pop up stores, thus increasing competition amongst retailers. “A majority of retail companies are changing their approach towards how they sell the product. Brands are being vocal about their brand values and associating themselves with social causes that they truly believe in. They are also using eco-friendly materials, recycling manufacturing waste, using energy efficient means of production, etc,” says Shahpurwala.

And as Kuntal Raj Jain, Director, Duke says, “Indian retail is emerging as one of the most dynamic and fast-paced industries due to the entry of several new players. India is expected to become the world’s fastest growing e-commerce market, driven by robust investment in the sector and rapid increase in the number of internet users. Various agencies have high expectations about growth of Indian e-commerce markets.”

**Omni-channels approach the way forward**

Online retail in knitwear is growing at a rapid pace. “Driven by robust investment and rapid increase in the number of internet users, online retail in India is expected to be at par with physical stores in the upcoming few years,” observes Jain. However, despite the rise in e-commerce, physical stores still draw a significant shopping crowd. Retailers

are implementing an omni-channel approach by which online and physical platforms are no longer at loggerheads, but complement each other in driving customer satisfaction,” he further states. E-commerce has made retailing convenient and hassle free because majority of consumers has shifted to online shopping. “This has also driven the decline of price points across categories, making it a cluttered but highly competitive space,” adds Shapurwala.

**Younger consumers prefer online shopping**

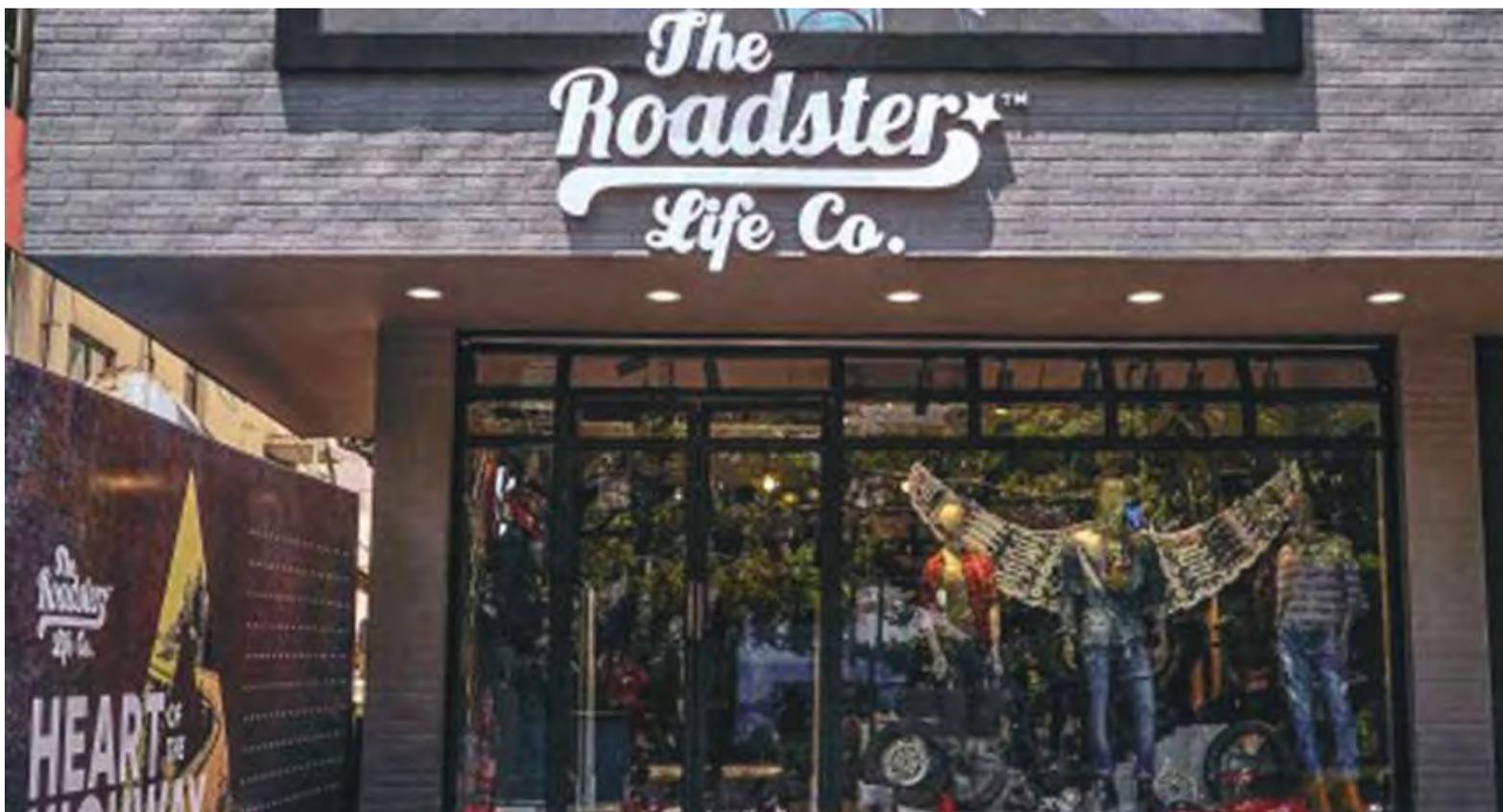
Online channels are also seeing a growth trajectory with younger audiences who have fast paced lifestyles and wish to procure knitwear without going to the shop. “We are responding to changing consumer preferences by expanding the range of our value-based products,” notes Vinod Kumar Gupta, Managing Director, Dollar Industries. At present, the brand has over one lakh MBO’s to sell its products across states. “We always keep our eyes open for new opportunities and try to expand to new markets. Developing new sale channels, formulating new branding strategies are the parts and plans of our expansion,” he adds. Online knitwear start-ups are introducing new innovations through their offerings to create an edge for themselves. They are also expanding the accessible market by making audience more attuned to their products. “This is indirectly fueling market growth through product variations by multiple players. However, due to the highly cluttered nature of the market, these start-ups are barging in with special offers and discounts to attract more customers making the market more competitive,” adds Shahpurwala.

For Shahpurwala, price and novelty go hand-in-hand when it comes to consumer-focused sections. “While it is imperative to



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continuously innovate design and style, it is also important to keep aligned to how much you can demand for your product. Value for us, involves providing quality with affordability.

It's this mix that attracts customers," she says. Jain however disagrees, "No doubt season discounts play important role but everyone wants to follow latest fashion. Fashion consciousness is increasing which makes customers excited about new collections each season," he adds.

Major brands and designers are incorporating knitwear in their collections. "The category holds great potential and if rightly tapped, it can become a trigger in the textile industry by making the right use of innovation and technology. This will prove to be a big boon to future prospects of the knitwear industry in India," adds Shapurwala.



**Lubeina Shahpurwala,**  
Co-founder, Mustang Socks &  
Accessories

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### **Demonetisation, e-commerce curb exports**

Alongwith China and Bangladesh, India is one of the largest knitwear exporters in the world. The biggest importers of India's knitwear are the US, UAE, Germany, UK and France. In 2017, India overtook China to become the biggest garment exporter in USA in a few categories of knitwear. India. "Cotton T-shirts exported from India are durable, classic, and versatile with mass appeal as a staple closet item. They are typically made of 100 per cent cotton but can be found in polyester or a polyester-cotton blend," notes Jain.

While knitwear exports have been rising steadily, last year the industry witnessed a decline. "Nationally, the consequences of demonetisation stunted growth while internationally, the rise of e-commerce gave small shops and offline retailers tough competition. This caused a slump in exports. Another reason for this decline was growing competition from countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh and their low priced goods," adds Shapurwala.

The knitwear industry is growing at a rapid speed. As consumers demand more comfortable, stylish and affordable clothes, knitwear satisfies all these demands. The category, with growing number of organised players, has now become fashion apparel.



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