

'Innovation, comfort & style drive the market'

Comfort, easy-care, affordability and simple designs have made T-shirts popular across age groups. And manufacturers are responding to demand with innovative sweat free, mix and match fabrics. Line illustrations, graphics and slogan tees are drawing young India, write **Ajanta Ganguly and Ajay Goswami**



As a predominantly young country with a median age of 27 years and where summers are long and winters short, the knitwear market in India, is indeed a lucrative one. With an inherent USP of comfort blended with style, the T shirt segment in the domestic knitwear markets is ruling roost. With wardrobes in India and across the world undergoing a distinct shift from formal to a more casual trendy attire, this segment is certainly growing compared to other textile categories.

T SHIRT SEGMENT BALANCES AGAINST ALL ODDS

The market for T-shirts is not really registering major growth as market is slow and on a recovery mode post de-monetisation. New policies are affecting the overall apparel market but slowly and steadily it is again settling down. Experts say India's Rs 12,200 crores-worth T-shirt market is expected to grow at an impressive CAGR of 12 per cent to reach Rs 21,250 crores by 2018.

The T-shirt market is dominated by men's and boys' segments, which contribute 85 per cent market share. The women's and girls' segments is also growing rapidly as there is an increased acceptance of western casual wear in in the semi urban cities across India.

The women's segment is expected to register a higher CAGR of 14 per cent over the next few years, with a portfolio that also includes knit shirts, Polos and tops alongside T shirts. Women are now wearing T-shirts not only with bottom wear like jeans and trousers but also with leggings that are

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- **Comfort, easy-care, affordability and simple design make knitwear popular**
- **Fashion T-shirts with fancy fabrics and embellishments selling well**
- **Mercerized cotton and sweat free fabrics in demand**
- **Technology driven fabrics are also growing driven by innovation**
- **Line illustrations have become popular for some time**
- **Graphic and slogan tees popular among youth**

usually paired with kurtis, giving yet another twist to fusion wear.

INNOVATION SELLS BEST

Comfort characteristics, easy-care properties, affordability and simple design options using stripes, checks and prints are the major driving forces propelling market. Fashion T-shirts using fancy fabrics and embellishments are also selling well.

Materials that have more elasticity and stretch using Spandex and Modal as well as mix and match fabrics are popular in the fashion T shirt segment. The basic stripers and solid T-shirt with three necklines: round, V and polos sell well over the summer months.

"As a brand, we play a lot with fabrics and give different effects to the garment. We aim at creating effects which are unique in the market. Fancy yarns have been used for majority of products. This experimentation is happening on almost every category, especially sweat pants and T-shirts.

Graphics have come into play across age groups," says Anuj Jain, Brand Head, Neva, a leading domestic apparel manufacturer. "As far as fabrics are concerned, we do mercerized cotton as well as sweat free fabrics. We do 65 per cent basic and rest 35 is fashion.

Designing element and fabrics bring the differentiation when it comes to fashion and



Usha Periasamy,
Head of Operations & Brand
Classic Polo

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basic t shirts. The product should be youth based in today times. Our research is always aimed at youth and based on that we come out with products. There is so much scope for innovation in knit segment. In knits we have functional fabrics as well as different yarns and combinations. Technology driven fabrics are also growing driven by innovation,” he adds.

Many types of innovative fabrics are blended with knits to give it a good fit and cut. Tencel and Lycra are popular since they give a slim fit and suitable for the hot and humid Indian climate. Spandex is also used but is not so popular in the summer months. A few brands are experimenting with organic tees which is the current global trend although concern for the environment and society doesn’t come easily to Indians unlike the German or Scandinavian market. However, this category is slowly receiving positive feedback as the phase of educating consumers about organic products is nearly over and now it’s about expanding the market.

TREND ALERT: LINE ILLUSTRATIONS AND SLOGAN TEES

Although the T-shirt market has been affected by demonetization, it is expected to pick up in the summer. It should register a comparatively higher growth than woven apparel market, not only due to seasonal reasons but also because of its ability to deliver high quality t-shirts at reasonable prices. Many kinds of design and styles in the fashion segment as well as the classic Tees in traditional solid colors are doing the rounds this summer. There is expected to be a higher demand for T-shirts with line illustrations as more and domestic smaller companies join the knitwear bandwagon.

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Line illustrations are often associated with modern elements and technology as they are employed by technological brands when it comes to design; and the meteoric rise of tech start-ups and new-age companies has provided timely relevance to this particular design language,” points out Usha Periasamy, Head of Operations & Brand of Classic Polo, a leading domestic knitwear manufacturer. And goes on to add T-shirts with slogans or statements are making appearances everywhere these days, from A-list stars to the runways of New York and Paris.

“Much like tattoos, statement T-shirts can help people send a message without having to utter a word, which is why they are extremely popular around the world these



days, especially among politicians and celebrities,” she says.

Slogan T shirts are not just popular with the young college crowd but also at mega charity and promotional events as it’s the best way to pass on a message. With the help of social media like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, slogan T-shirts worn at events do better advertising than even a print ad campaign, leading to bulk orders for the smaller brands who get the contract for them.

Dinesh Harbhajanka, CEO, Unik Bazar

“In Unik Bazar, a short-sleeved casual top that is made of cotton jersey knit fabric has the shape of the capital letter ‘T’ when spread out flat. This is a common description but does not tell the complete story. A T-shirt can be of various shapes, fabrics, and sizes. They can be loose fitting and boxy or tight so that they are snug to the body. T-shirts are made from 100 per cent mercerized cotton which is soft to touch and is long lasting.”





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FABRIC AND COLOUR PLAY THIS SUMMER

With brands focusing on each T-shirt portfolio as an unique collection, innovation in fabrics and design is on an all-time high. This season, manufacturers are using more interlock, cross knit fleece, jacquard, 100 per cent cotton, double mercerized, suede finished fabrics and melanges as fabric innovations in their collections.

Apart from regular cotton and blends, many brands are using special value addition fibers such as 15 per cent Lycra and 15 per cent of Modal to give a slim fit, which is most popular. For regular fits, knits blended with cotton is used as it is comfortable and helps to absorb sweat

The color palette for 2017 summer season is focused on being bright and cheerful. Peach is the seasonal color which will be omniscient in the new T-shirt collections of most global and domestic manufacturers.

The color theme this season is black and white together, white, brown, blue, aqua green, yellow and indigo among others. Earthy shades are totally in right now. Vivid as nature in full-bloom and wonderful on every skin tone, there's nothing that spells summer quite like green. Blue's a classic colour all year round and so is white but all the more so when it's hot outside, Fuchsia, strawberry or coral are the shades in pink doing the rounds and the most popular in

knitwear for little girls and women across all age groups.

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T-shirts are made from 100 per cent mercerized cotton which is soft to touch and is long lasting,” points out Dinesh Harbhajanka, CEO, Unik Bazar. He too reiterates graphic tees are trending now and while some style them simply with jeans and sneakers others aim to impress by pairing them with velvet suits, midi skirts, and even dresses.

“Whichever way you choose to style yours, we are here to assure you that this is one trend guaranteed to stick around into the New Year, and that's a trend worth investing in. We primarily operate in Tier II, III cities with the chain of Unik Bazar Retail departmental stores. 'Zyada Choice..Kam Price' is our main motto. We believe in providing latest trends at the best price,” he adds.

In summer, knit fabrics usually sinker while Pekay fabrics is used at higher end. Then there are different kind of gauges in sinker fabrics which may vary according to GSM from region to region. Combo T-shirts are still in trend and cut and sew is also popular. In the T-shirt category is 40 per cent basic



and 60 per cent fashion while washing concept is also growing. Stripers are the core selling item for both men and women.

