

KHADI BUSINESS IN MUMBAI: FADING LEGACY OR RISING OPPORTUNITY?

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Abstract

Khadi textile is considered not just a textile, but is associated with the Indian Independence Movement with its connection to deep roots of rural India. The pre-independence era saw khadi as a tool to stand against the oppression by the British, to seek a future that was built on self-reliance and pride for Indian culture. On the environmental front, khadi fabric represents sustainable fashion and stands out for being eco-friendly, dermatologically safe and fashionable at the same time. Today, khadi business in India is prospering with governmental support, effective marketing strategies and introduction of new designs to appeal to the younger generation. Mumbai city has witnessed a long journey of khadi business through its establishment, modern challenges and certain setbacks. Evolution of other affordable fabrics, shifting consumer base, rise of online shopping and alienation from the youth are certain challenges this industry is facing. This paper aims to trace the historical evolution of the khadi industry in Mumbai and its cultural significance with respect to the Independence movement. The paper also seeks to highlight the marketing strategies, governmental support and innovations that have contributed to the revival of khadi business among the youth. The paper underlines case studies of major khadi stores in Mumbai to understand their operational model, customer engagement practices and overall performance. The consumer perception preference and purchasing behaviour towards khadi fabric in the Mumbai market will also be assessed through this study.

Keywords: Khadi Fabric, Khadi Heritage, Sustainable Fashion, Khadi Business In Mumbai City, Business Challenges, Consumer Approach.

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Introduction:

Ancient roots of Indian Textile Industry:

The Indian textile industry is as old as the civilization itself. Various fabrics and textiles have their mention in ancient scriptures. Evidence found at the excavation of ancient sites point towards the fact that ancient Indians were in a practice of making fibers and weaving fabric. Different parts of India were known for different textiles emerging as prominent textile centres. The identity and the bond created between the textile and the local heritage as well as the culture still remains untouched [1].

In the ocean of textile variety one fabric has remained unique because of its quality texture and its connection with the Indian independence struggle, and that is Khadi. A well known textile in the Indian subcontinent Khadi has gained recognition in the western world for its adaptability, and comfort. It's a hand-spun fabric, it has a two-stage manufacturing process: first involves making a

yarn from a spinning wheel (Charkha) and the second is weaving the fabric from the yarn using looms, usually hand-loom [2].

Uniqueness of Khadi Textile:

- **Origin and production:** Khadi textile is a handmade fabric mainly originated from the Indian subcontinent made from cotton silk and wool. [3].
- **Different from cotton:** Unlike machine-woven cotton fabric, Khadi is handspun and handwoven giving a raw texture.[4].
- **Rural connection:** Khadi has a deep connection with rural industries, providing employment to many [4].
- **Versatile fabric:** The weaving pattern of Khadi fabric allows better air circulation and temperature control, keeping the wearer cool in summer and warm in winter [4].
- **Sustainability:** Khadi uses natural colours, has less dependency on electric units, leaving a much lesser carbon footprint than other textile manufacturing [5].

Khadi Fabric and Indian Independence Movement:

The Khadi industry in India declined during British occupation due to the industrial revolution in England and machine-made textiles replacing Khadi. Cheap British fabric caused unemployment among hand-loom workers. Visionary leaders like Gandhiji promoted the Swadeshi movement, encouraging boycott of British textile and adoption of Khadi, making it a symbol of the Indian Independence movement [6,7].

Initiatives towards Khadi revival:

- **KVIC:** The Khadi and Village Industries Commission was established by the Government of India in 1957 to provide employment to rural hand-loom workers and promote village industries. KVIC has taken initiatives to enhance Khadi sale by setting up Khadi villages, making user-friendly Charkha and producing more varieties of Khadi fabric[8]. KVIC is also collaborating with big fabric manufacturers such as Raymond and Aditya Birla to promote Khadi [9].
- **Prime Ministers Employment Generation Program (PMEGP):** This scheme encourages collaboration between the beneficiaries and banking institutions for financial support [8].
- **The Interest Subsidy Eligibility Certificate (ISEC) Scheme:** Introduced in May 1977, this scheme is the major source of funding for the Khadi programme by mobilizing funds from banking institutions [8].
- **Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP):** It is helping to revive the Khadi industry by introducing a ‘Khadi mark’ to bring authenticity and more consumer-friendly marketing strategies [8].
- **Fashion Designers:** The government has collaborated with top fashion designers to bring Khadi into the mainstream. Renowned fashion designers such as Rohit Bal, Malini Ramani, Anamika Khanna and Rajesh Pratap Singh have used Khadi to make fashionable Khadi designs which were showcased on ramps [8].

Challenges Faced by Khadi Textile Industries in India:

- Decline in Khadi production and shortage of skilled labour [10].
- Excessive bureaucracy and stringent rules set by KVIC [10].
- Post-Independence, Khadi started being linked only to politicians, leaving the general public disassociated with it [9, 11].

- Comparatively higher prices of Khadi fabric [12, 13].
- Lack of e-commerce awareness among the Khadi sellers. The majority of them have no website, or even the provision to accept payment online [12].
- Lack of awareness in the general public about Khadi fabric [14].
- Rise of fast fashion and more availability of more affordable clothing options, whereas Khadi lags behind in terms of catchy designs, trendy prints and varieties [15].

Opportunities for Khadi Industry:

- With a large consumer base, India is becoming a central point of the fashion world, bringing attention back to Khadi [16].
- Global sustainability trends in fashion have renewed recognition for Khadi, valued for its ethical production, eco-friendliness, and durability [10].
- Growing technology can shift consumer behavior toward Khadi, using social media to create awareness and boost its online shopping [10].
- The sale of Khadi fabric increased between 2019-20 to 2024-25 from 4211.26 cr to 7470.40 cr. The statistics may point towards a bright future for Khadi fabric [17].

Research Objectives:

- To understand the significance of the Khadi textile sector with regards to its ancient roots and uniqueness in terms of fabric quality.
- To examine the initiatives taken by the Government of India and others towards revival of Khadi industry to bring it into mainstream.
- To assess the challenges and opportunities for the Khadi industry to revive itself.
- To investigate the current status of Khadi sale and consumer behaviour towards Khadi purchase.
- To suggest sustainable measures for increasing Khadi purchase.

Research Methodology:

The study required collecting both primary and secondary data.

- **Primary Data:** Greater Mumbai was chosen as the study area. Primary data was collected from both the sellers/retailers of Khadi textile and consumers. Two separate structured questionnaires were formed for both of them respectively and were circulated via online channels. In addition to online platforms, specifically for sellers, telephonic interviews and personal interviews were also collected. Data was collected from 16 Khadi sellers/retailers and 282 consumers from Mumbai to know about sales and purchase behaviours. The collected data was presented in the form of tables and pie charts.
- **Secondary Data:** Secondary data was collected from online resources such as case-studies, newspaper articles, journals, governmental websites, previously published and peer reviewed research papers, etc.

Findings:

Table 1. Summary of responses by the sellers:

Sr. No.	Questions	Responses	Observations
1.	Scale of business/unit	-25% units are small -75% units are large	All large units are run by Mumbai Khadi & Village Industries Association and they all are

			named as Khadi Bhandar. They are placed at various locations in Greater Mumbai.
2.	Market they cater to	-25% units have local consumer base -75% units have local and international consumer base	Units with an international consumer base is a result of in-person shopping by foreign tourists in Mumbai, and not because of online platforms.
3.	Governmental support	-None of these units are supported by any governmental schemes	All the units have never felt the need to opt for governmental support. One such unit dates back to pre-independence times and thus claims to handle their business well even without governmental support.
4.	Ease of acquiring governmental support	-All the units opined that acquiring governmental support is a lengthy and tedious process	There are numerous hindrances to acquire governmental support: there is a lot of paperwork, many other permissions to be acquired, thus keeping the Khadi shops away from it.
5.	Marketing strategies used for young consumers	All the units completely rely on word-of-mouth ways of marketing. An occasional use of newspaper advertising is made.	All Khadi units are old shops, and have a steady consumer base. The small units prefer not to waste money on marketing as they are satisfied with their sale.
6.	Use of online platforms for sale and barriers to adopt new technology	Only 6% (i.e only 1 unit out of 16) of the sellers use online platforms such as websites.	Most of the Khadi sellers believe that Khadi fabric should not be sold online, as it deprives the consumers of the feel of the fabric texture, which unlike cotton, is very unique and represents its quality.
7.	Participation in exhibitions/fairs	None of the Khadi units participate in the exhibitions or fairs	Due to the tedious process of enrolling in an exhibition, the sellers prefer staying away from it.
8.	Age group that prefers Khadi the most	Majority of the sellers believe that Khadi is majorly famous among the age group of 40 and above.	A general perception that Khadi is worn only by older people is clearly viable here.
9.	Most common challenges faced by the unit	-Higher prices of Khadi fabric -Lesser turnout of young crowd -Limitations on trendy designing -Governmental regulations	KVIC has been taking legal action against private Khadi sellers for selling products other than Khadi, for blending Khadi fabric with other synthetic fabrics, or even using the title 'Khadi' and 'Charkha' as a symbol for their unit. The monopoly over Khadi brand by KVIC is proving to be troublesome by the private sellers.
10.	Sustainable/	All the sellers feel that	Increasing awareness about sustainability is

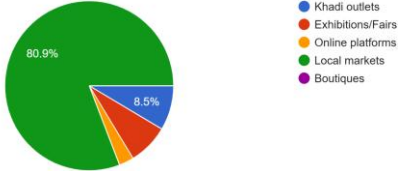
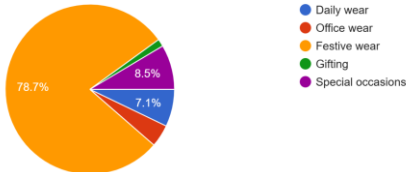
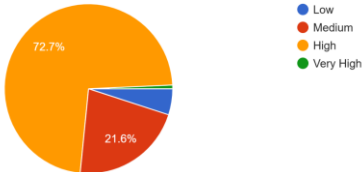
	eco-friendly image of Khadi	the sustainable nature of Khadi is helping in creating a brand image.	reflecting positively on the Khadi sale.
11.	Future of Khadi	Barring 1 seller out of 16, rest all feel that Khadi has a bright future and no other fabric, however trendy, can replace Khadi.	The unique texture, feel and look of Khadi is irreplaceable by any other fabric.

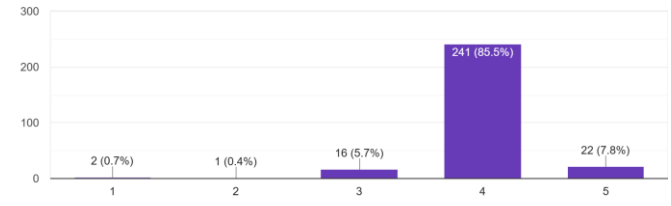
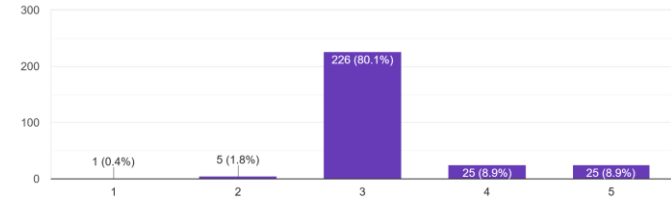
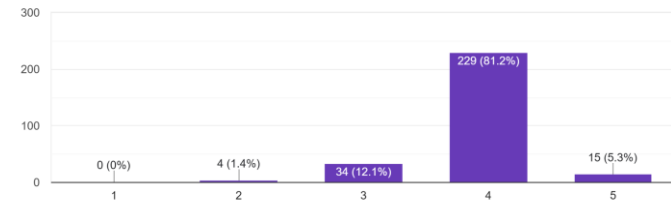
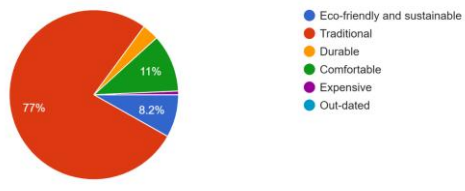
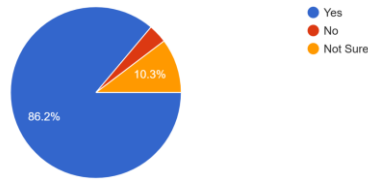
From the View-Point of Consumers:

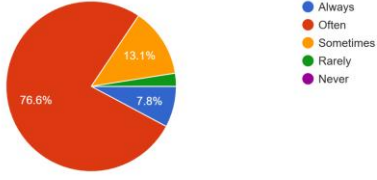
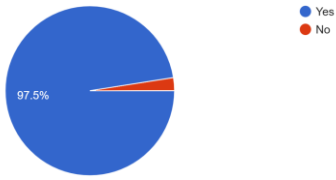
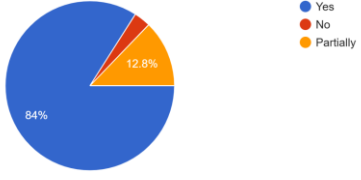
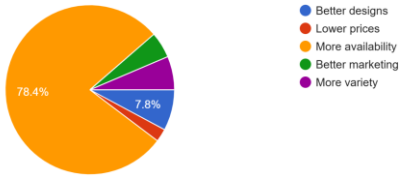
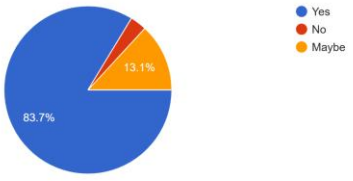
The study required collection of primary data from the consumers to understand their purchase behaviour towards Khadi textile. Their past Khadi purchases (if any), frequency of buying, reasons for choosing or not choosing Khadi, possible future purchases were some of the key questions to understand what possibilities lie ahead for the Khadi industry in Mumbai.

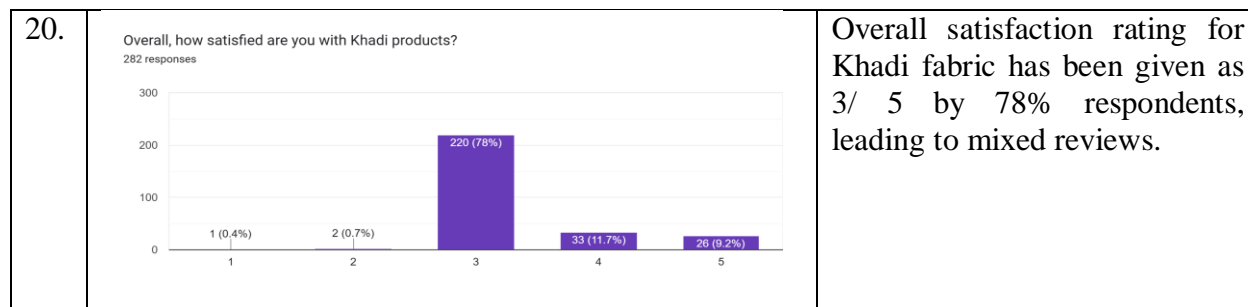
Table 1. Summary of responses by the consumers:

Sr. No.	Responses	Observation and interpretation
1.	<p>Age group: 282 responses</p> <p>Legend: ● 18-25 ● 26-35 ● 36-45 ● 46-55 ● 55 and above</p>	Majority of the respondents belonged to the 26-35 age group, followed by 36-45 and 18-25.
2.	<p>Have you ever purchased Khadi fabric or Khadi products? 282 responses</p> <p>Legend: ● Yes ● No</p>	Almost 95% of the respondents have purchased Khadi in the past, thus proving to be the right sample group.
3.	<p>How often do you purchase Khadi products? 282 responses</p> <p>Legend: ● Frequently ● Occasionally ● Rarely ● Never</p>	With 83% respondents purchasing Khadi rarely, and 11% occasionally.

<p>4.</p>	<p>What type of Khadi products do you usually purchase? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Product Type</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Fabric</td> <td>84.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apparel</td> <td>8.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accessories</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Home furnishings</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Soaps</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>shampoo</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nothing purchase yet</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All type of khadi products</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Product Type	Percentage	Fabric	84.8%	Apparel	8.5%	Accessories	7.1%	Home furnishings	7.1%	Soaps	7.1%	shampoo	7.1%	-	7.1%	Nothing purchase yet	7.1%	All type of khadi products	7.1%	<p>Almost 85% of respondents prefer Khadi fabric, followed by 8.5% choosing apparels.</p>
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<p>5.</p>	<p>Where do you usually purchase Khadi products from? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Purchase Location</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Local markets</td> <td>80.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Khadi outlets</td> <td>8.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Exhibitions/Fairs</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Online platforms</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Boutiques</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Purchase Location	Percentage	Local markets	80.9%	Khadi outlets	8.5%	Exhibitions/Fairs	7.1%	Online platforms	7.1%	Boutiques	7.1%	<p>It is seen that over 80% of respondents choose to purchase Khadi from local markets, over exclusive Khadi outlets. This could be a result of the limited number of exclusive Khadi outlets.</p>								
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<p>6.</p>	<p>What is your primary purpose for buying Khadi fabric? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Purpose</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Festive wear</td> <td>78.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Special occasions</td> <td>8.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Daily wear</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Office wear</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gifting</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Purpose	Percentage	Festive wear	78.7%	Special occasions	8.5%	Daily wear	7.1%	Office wear	7.1%	Gifting	7.1%	<p>Over 78% respondents choose to wear Khadi for festive purposes, while special occasions (8.5%) and daily wear (7.1%) are the next best reasons to wear Khadi.</p>								
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<p>8.</p>	<p>What factors most influence your purchase decision? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Factor</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Quality</td> <td>270</td> <td>95.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Design</td> <td>230</td> <td>81.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Brand</td> <td>212</td> <td>75.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Price</td> <td>218</td> <td>77.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sustainability</td> <td>20</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Factor	Count	Percentage	Quality	270	95.7%	Design	230	81.6%	Brand	212	75.2%	Price	218	77.3%	Sustainability	20	7.1%	<p>With 95.7%, quality of the textile is the prime reason for the respondents to choose any fabric they wear. Next chosen criteria is design (81.6%) followed by price and brand. Surprisingly, the least voted criterion is sustainability (7.1%).</p>		
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No	10.3%																			
Not Sure	3.5%																			

<p>15.</p>	<p>Does sustainability influence your decision to buy Khadi fabric? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Frequency</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Always</td> <td>7.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Often</td> <td>76.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometimes</td> <td>13.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rarely</td> <td>~1.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td>~1.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Frequency	Percentage	Always	7.8%	Often	76.6%	Sometimes	13.1%	Rarely	~1.5%	Never	~1.0%	<p>With 76.6% respondents often choosing Khadi for its sustainable properties, the link between the two is strongly underlined.</p>
Frequency	Percentage													
Always	7.8%													
Often	76.6%													
Sometimes	13.1%													
Rarely	~1.5%													
Never	~1.0%													
<p>16.</p>	<p>Are you aware that Khadi supports rural artisans and employment? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>97.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>2.5%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Yes	97.5%	No	2.5%	<p>It is visible that 97.5% respondents are aware that the Khadi industry supports rural employment and this awareness has influenced the purchase behaviour of 84.8% respondents.</p>						
Response	Percentage													
Yes	97.5%													
No	2.5%													
<p>17.</p>	<p>Do you think Khadi has adapted well to modern fashion trends? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>84%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Partially</td> <td>12.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>~3.2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Yes	84%	Partially	12.8%	No	~3.2%	<p>84% respondents believe that Khadi has evolved to adapt to recent market changes. This shows a positive reflection of market adaptability by Khadi fabric.</p>				
Response	Percentage													
Yes	84%													
Partially	12.8%													
No	~3.2%													
<p>18.</p>	<p>What improvements would encourage you to buy more Khadi products? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Improvement</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Better designs</td> <td>7.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lower prices</td> <td>~2.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>More availability</td> <td>78.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Better marketing</td> <td>~1.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>More variety</td> <td>6.4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Improvement	Percentage	Better designs	7.8%	Lower prices	~2.5%	More availability	78.4%	Better marketing	~1.0%	More variety	6.4%	<p>Almost 78.4% respondents consider the easy availability of Khadi will make them buy more, followed by better designs (7.8%) and more variety (6.4%). With only 2.5% respondents choosing lower prices as an encouraging factor, shows that price is not a hindering factor to purchase Khadi.</p>
Improvement	Percentage													
Better designs	7.8%													
Lower prices	~2.5%													
More availability	78.4%													
Better marketing	~1.0%													
More variety	6.4%													
<p>19.</p>	<p>Would online availability increase your Khadi purchases? 282 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>83.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>~3.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Maybe</td> <td>13.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Yes	83.7%	No	~3.2%	Maybe	13.1%	<p>83.7% respondents feel that availability of Khadi fabric on online platforms will make them buy more, showing the influence of current technology and ease of buying.</p>				
Response	Percentage													
Yes	83.7%													
No	~3.2%													
Maybe	13.1%													



Conclusion:

The observations can be summarized to conclude:

- Khadi sellers are optimistic about its future, however, their lack of being on online platforms is keeping them away from potential consumers.
- A few interventions from the government are limiting the marketing and promotion of private Khadi sellers.
- Khadi is admired for its quality, comfort and fashionability, yet it is not purchased as regularly as other garments.
- Consumers are ready to spend more for Khadi textile, however, lack of accessibility, limited designs and less variety reduces their chances to buy Khadi on a more regular basis.

Recommendations:

- A more cordial relationship between governmental regulations and private Khadi sellers will improve overall sale of Khadi.
- The Khadi industry should try to bring trendy designs to the market, keeping in mind the global fashion market to appeal more to the young crowd.
- Khadi sellers need to become more technologically advanced to be able to make their products available online.
- Promoting Khadi industry as a means to support employment of rural artisans will encourage more consumers to buy.
- A business model where Khadi sellers integrate with shopping malls and big fashion brands with governmental support, will bring Khadi to the forefront.

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