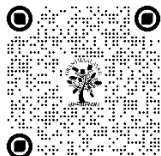


EMBRACING KHADI: URBAN INDIAN WORKING WOMEN'S AFFINITY FOR WESTERN OFFICE ATTIRE

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ABSTRACT

In urban India number of women's joining the corporate firms has grown significantly and hence the market for women's office wear is expanding exponentially. The work wear outfit choices of these women's matters a lot to them as it reflects their personality and somewhere their position in workplace. With changing lifestyles, women's preference for western office wear outfits has increased. Also, on the other hand Consumer lifestyle preferences in Urban India shows some awareness and inclination towards sustainable fashion choices. This paper aims to analyse Urban Indian working women acceptance for western office wear outfits made using Khadi fabric which is one of the sustainable textile materials. This paper is an extension to a previous study on understanding consumer behaviour towards sustainable fashion and office wear outfit need and preferences of working women in India. For the research western office wear outfits styles were developed using Khadi Fabric material and were subjected to analysis on seven parameters – Fabric look and feel, Garment Quality, Garment Comfort, Garment Style and fashion, Garment Size and Fit, Garment care and maintenance and Garment Price and value. The primary data for the study has been collected from user's study conducted over the period of three months with an average of once in a week usage of the garment. The goal of primary research is to capture users authentic experiences as a potential consumer - while wearing the garment and after care. The findings suggest that the acceptance by users and potential target consumer was significantly related to the seven analysis parameters. This research recommends Sustainable Fashion brands, Women's western office wear brands, Khadi weavers and designers to adapt and diversify Khadi in such a way which can deliver higher level of customer value and satisfaction. Also the research can be useful for customers to adopt Khadi and for other stakeholders to popularize it.

Keywords: Khadi Fabric, Western Office Wear Outfits, Sustainability



1. INTRODUCTION

The term "khadi" originates from the Sanskrit word "Khadira," which means "raw, unprocessed." Khadi, a traditional handwoven fabric of India, holds a significant place in the country's history and culture. It is not merely a textile but a symbol of self-reliance, sustainability, and a connection to India's freedom struggle. Khadi gained prominence during India's fight for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He saw khadi as a means to empower rural artisans, promote self-sufficiency, and boycott foreign goods, particularly British-made textiles. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) was established in

1956 to promote and develop khadi production, thereby improving the socio-economic conditions of rural artisans. Khadi is known for its natural and eco-friendly attributes. It is typically made from cotton, but variations can be produced using silk and wool as well. The process involves spinning raw fibers into yarn and weaving them by hand, making each piece unique. The hand-spun and handwoven nature of khadi fabric gives it a distinct texture and appearance, reflecting the human touch that goes into its creation. In recent times, while khadi remains deeply rooted in tradition, efforts have been made to modernize its production and appeal to a broader audience. Modernization aims to maintain the essence of khadi while making it more relevant in contemporary fashion and lifestyle trends. Some aspects of the modernization of khadi are in areas of - Design and innovation, Technology Integration, Dyeing and Finishing Techniques, Marketing and Branding, Economic Empowerment, and Incorporation in Daily Life. The modernization of khadi fabric has struck a balance between preserving its cultural significance and adapting to the demands of a changing world. It continues to uphold the values of sustainability, self-reliance, and heritage while embracing innovation and evolution.

In today's time many renowned Fashion designers and retailers are adopting Khadi as main choice of Fabric for their collections that is not just available in Indian garment and silhouette types but is also available in western types. The incorporation of khadi fabric into Western-style clothing is a fascinating fusion of traditional Indian craftsmanship with modern fashion sensibilities. Western wear made from khadi fabric not only highlights the versatility of this textile but also showcases its relevance in contemporary fashion. When creating Western wear from khadi fabric, designers often pay attention to blending the natural texture of the fabric with contemporary cuts, patterns, and designs. This fusion results in clothing that not only looks stylish but also carries a sense of heritage and craftsmanship. The use of khadi fabric in Western wear embodies the concept of "old meets new," bridging the gap between traditional Indian techniques and global fashion trends. According to [Vandana & Avadhut \(2020\)](#) findings indicate that "Khadi is an emerging choice of fabric among brands in Indian market but yet to tap many product categories and design opportunities. At Present Khadi apparel market in India offers men's wear with limited design in casual and formal wear category. Khadi apparels for women's is mostly available in Indian ethnic wear, Indo western wear category and very limited in western wear" (Pg. 69).

A large number of women in urban India are employed in corporates and leading them. In urban India, women participation in the workforce is in impressive numbers [Singh & Hoge \(2010\)](#). The Indian workforce has seen a substantial increase in the participation of urban women across various industries. From technology and finance to healthcare and media, women are carving out spaces for themselves and contributing to the nation's economic growth. This transition has necessitated a shift in the way they present themselves professionally; with office wear becoming a key component of their identity. As per Pooja Khanna –Founder Venn "There has been an overall lifestyle change which has led to a change in preferences in the type of clothes women are choosing. This coupled with high disposable income, easy access and awareness to e-commerce and social media has led to the rise of the formal wear segment in India," [Sharma \(2019\)](#). Also Remarkably, India stands as the third-largest country globally for the representation of women in senior management roles, as reported in the 2021 Women in Business study by the international accounting and consulting firm Grant Thornton [Grant Thornton \(2021\)](#). As these women navigate their careers in diverse sectors, their office wear has also evolved, reflecting their individuality, confidence, and the fusion of global trends with Indian sensibilities. Urban Indian women have embraced a range of

office wear choices that balance tradition and modernity and incorporating Indian elements into Western attire. Such choices not only reflect their cultural pride but also convey a sense of authority and self-assuredness.

2. METHOD

This research serves as a continuation of a preceding study examining the intricacies of consumer conduct in relation to sustainable fashion. The previous study concentrated on the specific clothing requirements and favoured choices of Indian women in the workforce, with a specific emphasis on office attire. The study provided an in-depth understanding of the evolving preferences and needs of female professionals, shedding light on their inclinations towards sustainable clothing options in the context of the Indian market. Further the current research seeks to investigate the acceptance of Khadi-based Western office wear among urban Indian working women on seven parameters – Fabric look and feel, Garment Quality, Garment Comfort, Garment Style and fashion, Garment Size and Fit, Garment care and maintenance and Garment Price and value. For the research five styles (Coded 1-5) of western office wear prototype were developed using Khadi Fabric material that were subjected to user study for acceptance. The user study aims to comprehensively evaluate these seven parameters by gaining insights directly from the users. For the study setup five users (Coded a-e) were chosen based on their easy accessibility and willingness to participate and each user was allocated a particular garment style (Figure 1). The users were similar in characteristics and the selection was based on criteria as – millennial working professional women at mid-level in corporates and MNC's from Urban Pune region. The user's study was conducted over the period of three months with an average of once in a week wear of the garment. After every garment wear the users had to self-report by maintain a written or digital diary or voice notes and document their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and interactions longitudinally over the period of three months. For the documentation the users were provided with guidelines that were based on seven parameters of evaluation. A follow

Figure 1

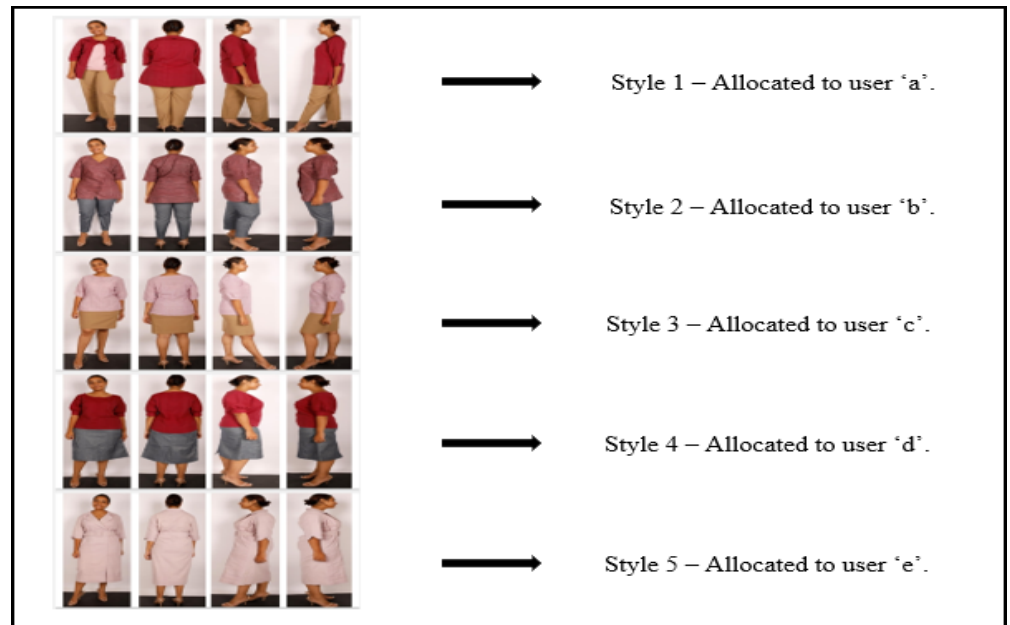


Figure 1

up with users was done in every 15 days to maintain engagement, clarify any uncertainties, and ensure the quality and completeness of their diary entries. The users were encouraged to reach out whenever they have questions or need clarification about the study requirements. This methodology will help the researcher understand the potential user's perceptions and preferences and thereby understanding the acceptance of the designed garments. This study contributes to the larger discourse on sustainable fashion, empowering women to make conscious choices that align with their values while navigating the professional world.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The diary study aimed to delve into the acceptance of Khadi western office wear garments among urban Indian working women. By observing and analysing the experiences of participants a, b, c, d & e over a three-month period on 12 occasions, the study sought to uncover insights related to fabric look and feel, garment quality, comfort, style and fashion, size and fit, care and maintenance, and price and value. The interpretation endeavours to dissect the multifaceted dimensions of participants' experiences, reflecting on the broader implications for the fashion industry.

- 1) **Fabric Look and Feel:** The diary entries unveiled the participants' intricate perceptions of the fabric's aesthetics. While some participants were captivated by Khadi's rustic appeal and natural texture, others expressed reservations about its unconventional appearance in the context of office wear. This polarity underscores the subjectivity of fabric aesthetics, influenced by personal tastes and cultural backgrounds. It is intriguing to note that the distinctiveness of Khadi often triggered conversations, drawing attention to its historical relevance and igniting participants' curiosity.
- 2) **Garment Quality:** The journey of acceptance was notably intertwined with participants' assessment of garment quality. The unanimous appreciation for Khadi's authentic craftsmanship and handwoven nature is evident in the entries. However, instances of irregular weaving or finishing were also highlighted, suggesting room for consistent quality control. Paradoxically, these imperfections were not deterrents; rather, they contributed to the allure of Khadi as a crafted art form. This resonates with the growing sentiment favouring unique and imperfect elements in contemporary fashion.
- 3) **Garment Comfort:** The theme of comfort resonated deeply among participants, reflecting its pivotal role in their acceptance of Khadi office wear garments. Initially, the stiffness of Khadi fabric was a common observation, with subsequent wear and washing softening the texture. Interestingly, participants' comfort evolved over time, indicating that the tactile experience of Khadi requires a period of adaptation. This dynamic suggests that Khadi's comfort attribute is an acquired taste, with varying trajectories for each individual.
- 4) **Garment Style and Fashion:** The entries unveiled an intriguing tussle between traditional aesthetics and modern fashion sensibilities. Some participants embraced Khadi western office wear as a refreshing departure from conventional attire, applauding its fusion of heritage and

contemporary design. Conversely, concerns were voiced about seamlessly integrating Khadi with the contemporary office environment. This dual response underscores the participants' endeavour to reconcile tradition and modernity in their style choices, presenting Khadi as a distinctive avenue for personal expression.

- 5) **Garment Size and Fit:** Size and fit emerged as critical considerations impacting the acceptance of Khadi western office wear garments. Participants reported diverse experiences, with some attributing Khadi's natural texture as accommodating various body types. However, sizing challenges arose due to the unique properties of the fabric. The recurrent theme was the need for well-defined sizing charts and tailored cuts to ensure optimal fit. The variable experiences illustrate the intricacies of achieving desired fit in Khadi garments.
- 6) **Garment Care and Maintenance:** Diary entries elucidated participants' conscientiousness in adhering to Khadi's prescribed care instructions. Participants acknowledged the fabric's durability and wrinkle-resistant nature as favourable attributes. However, the learning curve associated with washing and maintenance was acknowledged, emphasizing the significance of proper care to preserve Khadi's integrity. The emphasis on maintenance aligns with the ethos of sustainable fashion, where longevity is a crucial element.
- 7) **Garment Price and Value:** The diary study uncovered participants' perspectives on the perceived value of Khadi western office wear. The consensus was that Khadi transcends mere monetary cost, embodying cultural heritage and sustainability. Participants demonstrated a willingness to invest a premium in Khadi garments, albeit with expectations of transparency regarding pricing. This underscores the dynamic relationship between perceived value and conscious consumption, hinting at the potential for Khadi to spearhead sustainable fashion narratives.

4. CONCLUSION

The exploration into the acceptance of Khadi western office wear garments among urban Indian working women through a comprehensive diary study has illuminated a rich tapestry of insights. The convergence of heritage, sustainability, and contemporary style within the ambit of fashion has bestowed renewed significance upon Khadi fabric. The synthesis of participants' experiences, woven intricately with fabric aesthetics, quality, comfort, style, fit, care, and value, has illuminated a multifaceted narrative that resonates beyond individual preferences, touching upon broader implications for the fashion industry and cultural consciousness.

Khadi, with its distinctive appeal, has triggered varied perceptions of fabric aesthetics among the participants. The texture, handwoven essence, and cultural connotations intertwined to create a unique visual and tactile experience. These perceptions mirrored participants' personal tastes and cultural backgrounds, emphasizing the subjectivity of fabric aesthetics. Moreover, the fabric's distinctive appearance has acted as a conversation starter in professional settings, fostering dialogue around its historical significance and cultural resonance. This dimension underscores the potential for Khadi to serve as not only a fabric but also a catalyst for meaningful interactions and narratives.

Quality emerged as an essential criterion that shaped participants' acceptance. The participants universally acknowledged the allure of Khadi's authenticity, celebrating its artisanal craftsmanship and handwoven essence. The presence of imperfections, far from detracting, seemed to enhance the allure by adding an element of uniqueness. This resonates with contemporary fashion's evolving ethos, wherein discerning consumers value craftsmanship, individuality, and the stories embedded in each garment. The imperfect perfection of Khadi aligns seamlessly with the current shift towards embracing authenticity and the artisanal.

The diary entries resonated with the central theme of comfort, highlighting its pivotal role in acceptance. The initial stiffness of Khadi fabric was palpable in the participants' initial experiences. However, a recurring pattern emerged – over time, with repeated wear and washing, the fabric softened, resulting in a more comfortable tactile experience. This trajectory reflects the notion that Khadi's comfort, akin to its aesthetics, requires a period of acclimatization. The transformation from initial stiffness to subsequent comfort underscores the depth of Khadi's tactile journey and its unique ability to adapt to individual preferences.

The interplay between tradition and modernity was palpable within the theme of style and fashion. Participants' responses encapsulated the dichotomy of embracing traditional aesthetics within contemporary contexts. While some participants found Khadi to be a refreshing departure from conventional office wear, others grappled with seamlessly integrating it into modern workplace environments. This dual response mirrored participants' struggle to harmonize heritage and modernity within their personal style. Khadi, therefore, emerges not merely as an outfit but as a canvas for individual expression, symbolizing the ongoing negotiation between cultural heritage and evolving fashion trends.

Size and fit emerged as a complex aspect impacting participants' acceptance. The fabric's natural texture and adaptability were often deemed accommodating for various body types. However, sizing inconsistencies underscored the need for standardized sizing charts and tailored cuts that cater to diverse proportions. This dimension signifies the intricacies in achieving optimal fit, highlighting the importance of garment design that marries individuality and inclusivity.

Participants' conscientiousness toward garment care and maintenance echoed the ethos of sustainable fashion. Khadi's durability and resistance to wrinkles were well-received, though participants acknowledged a learning curve associated with proper washing and maintenance. This resonates with sustainable fashion principles that prioritize longevity and reduce the environmental impact of frequent garment replacements. Khadi's potential to extend the lifecycle of clothing while encouraging mindful consumption aligns with the growing movement toward sustainable wardrobes.

The study unveiled participants' perceptions of Khadi's value as extending beyond its monetary cost. The cultural heritage and sustainability underpinning Khadi resonated with participants, prompting a willingness to invest a premium in these garments. However, transparent communication regarding pricing was deemed imperative. This juxtaposition of value and price underscores the complex dynamics of conscious consumerism, where intrinsic worth and ethical considerations converge to influence purchase decisions.

In summation, the diary study offers a multidimensional exploration into the acceptance of Khadi western office wear garments among urban Indian working women. The findings underscore the symbiotic relationship between fabric aesthetics, quality, comfort, style, fit, care, and value. Khadi transcends being a mere fabric; it embodies cultural narratives, reflects individuality, and encapsulates the

evolving zeitgeist of sustainable and conscious fashion. The study's implications resonate within the fashion industry, advocating for designs that harmonize tradition and modernity while catering to the discerning preferences of urban working women. Khadi emerges not just as a fabric but as a symbol of cultural heritage, sustainability, and a canvas for personal narratives within contemporary fashion landscapes.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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