

Jackets

Light weight, trendy jackets warm up cool winter

The jackets market has seen good growth over the years despite competition from other winter wear segments. Stylish, lightweight jackets are in demand and manufacturers are banking on festive season and cold weather to perk up business this year, write **Ajanta Ganguly and Ajay Goswami**

The advent of winter ushers in good tidings for the jacket segment with many preferring this elegant but warm item of clothing over others in a rapidly evolving fashion conscious India. And even though several leading international brands are setting trends in the Indian jacket segment, they have not managed to rattle domestic brands who are still playing smart in their own space, design and price segment. While big global brands make more basic products that sell well on global catwalks, domestic brands focus on innovative fashion styles and fabrics thus giving each other space to grow.

With shrinking winters, clever investment in marketing and advertising along with a strong focus on lightweight jackets, seems to be the way forward for domestic brands to survive against the onslaught of international brands. And within just a couple of winter months, the jacket segment has to prove itself among thermals, sweatshirts, sweaters and coats to ring in a happy new financial year for their brand.

As Paramjit Singh, Partner of Ludhiana-based Azzo Jackets puts it, "Nowadays thermal and sweatshirts are more popular among customers, so it does affect demand for jackets. Demand depends on the changes in the climate. So, when the temperature is too cold during that time there will be more demand for jackets than sweatshirts. We make both light as well as heavy weight jackets and our starting range for jackets and coats are Rs 1,795 and goes up to Rs 3,600. Indeed, the middle class is brand-conscious but the big global brands do not affect our market much."

Agrees Vinay Aggarwal, Director of Lure, a domestic jackets brand that makes for both men and women as he says, "The market for jackets is growing with global players helping to raise the standard. Competition has increased but opportunities have also



Lightweight jackets are more in demand

Sporty bright and warm winter colours are trending

Thermal and sweatshirts do not affect jacket segment

Less stock ensures profit over short winters

Global brands focus on basic jackets

Domestic brands focus on innovation in fabric, colour and style

risen with organised retail industry providing a boost to the sector. Quality products are in demand and we are working diligently to maintain high quality parameters. The jacket market has no competition with any category in winter wear segment although sweatshirts and sweaters do eat into each other's

market." Like all other apparel categories, increasing raw material prices, impact of recession and low consumer sentiments have had an impacted on this segment. However, with new styles, fabrics, colours and designs, this segment is still witnessing steady growth even during lean seasons.



Manjula Gandhi,
GM (Planning & Supply Chain) Numero Uno Clothing

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CEO, Latin Quarters

“Around 35 per cent of winter wear market is comprise of jackets in northern India. The growth depends a lot on the season and climatic conditions. Trending this season are wind and ski jackets and we are introducing leather jackets in exotic bright colors which few brands do.”

Despite strong demand throughout the year, jackets remain a seasonal and regional market. So brands need to prioritise the strategies that might work for them. With unpredictable short winters, lightweight jackets are popular with most manufacturers as a high value category with MRPs anywhere from Rs 1,500 to Rs 5,000. Rahul Bhalla, CEO of Latin Quarters, known for its portfolio of women’s jackets points out that “Around 35 per cent of winter wear market comprise of jackets in northern India. The growth depends a lot on the season and climatic conditions. Trending this season are wind and ski jackets and we are introducing leather jackets in exotic bright colors which few brands do.”

Lightweight jackets more in demand

Demand for lightweight jackets is picking up slowly as people are open to experimenting with layering and slipping on a light weight jackets on top of full sleeve tees or sweatshirts for extra warmth, especially during pre-winter months. Layering helps them to experiment with their look by combining different fabrics and colors. It is product exclusivity that matters most as basic designs don’t usually work as all consumers try to stand outwearing something different. Seasons determine a great deal as what one prefers to wear as if the cold is light, sweatshirt are popular and if severe like in North India, then jackets and long coats will sell better.



Sudershan Jain
MD, Oner

“If the season is atypical, only that category will grow which supports that particular season. Sweatshirts’ demand has shot up in the last few years because winters are extended and cold is not that severe. No product is going down as every category has its own space. We are giving complete solutions to consumers so we are not facing any issues.”





Sunil Kumar
Director, Blueman

“In some cities we face problems related to retailing because of big global brands, so to resolve this we need to do more advertising there. In non-traditional markets demand for jackets are increasing. Earlier, we had 2-3 counters in these places but now we there are around 15-20 counters.”

“A particular category will grow in accordance with the kind of climate it is. Sweatshirts’ demand has shot up in the last few years because winters are extended and cold is not that severe. No product market or share is going down as every category has its own space. We are giving complete solutions to consumers so we are not facing any issues,” explains Rishav Jain, MD, of brand Oner.

Clever marketing strategies and lower pricing are helping to ward-off international competition. As Sunil Kumar, Director, Blueman puts it, “In some cities we face problems related to retailing because of big global brands, so to resolve this we need to do more advertising there. In non-traditional markets demand for jackets are increasing. Earlier, we had 2-3 counters in these places but now we are there in around 15-20 counters.”

Small but innovative inventory augurs well

Both domestic and global brands are showcasing strong winter themes and expecting a 15 to 20 per cent hike in profits and sales this year. Jacket makers try to pass on the costs to consumers as much as possible with the prices of raw material going up and shorter winters. Last year, the winter season was delayed and festivals came early, this affected the market and this led to early discounts sale. Many brands started sales early and local brands followed



R Kapoor
Director, Replay Square

“My stocks are almost cleared, and if there is any return of stock, where ever there is demand, we sell it over there. We don’t take risks and make as much products as can be sold easily.”

the trend. Meanwhile overproduction caused inventory issue. However, this year, most jacket makers are optimistic about business. They feel festivals and weddings are happening at the right time. And if the weather settles in well, most jacket manufacturers expect to do brisk business. Industry experts feel that few brands in the jacket segment cross the Rs 10-15 crores profit margin in retail although, they may do it in wholesale. So the key is to make just enough to sell well over the season.

As R Kapoor, Director, Replay Square rightly says that it is not is difficult to overcome the problem of unpredictable winters as smaller brands only need to strategise the steps to overcome this problem. “My stocks are almost cleared, and if there is any return of stock, where ever there is demand, we sell it over there. We don’t take risks and make as much products as can be sold easily.”

Most domestic players are now concentrating on lightweight jackets and summer jackets to be worn all through the year. They also feel that the government should focus on domestic industries rather than encouraging big international brands to open outlets everywhere, including small cities. Economic slowdown has affected consumer sentiment and their buying behaviour as buying a branded jacket is not an impulse moment anymore but a well-planned decision. But then again, winter is a season for higher spending, and most feel that they will be laughing to the bank at the end of this financial year.



Vinay Aggarwal
Director, Lure

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“Nowadays thermal and sweatshirts are more popular among customers, so it does affect demand for jackets. Demand depends on the changes in the climate. So, when the temperature is too there will be more demand for jackets than sweatshirts. Indeed, the middle class is brand-conscious but the big global brands do not affect our market much.”

Leather, warm winter colours is the rage

Jacket manufacturers target men across age groups across different style and income brackets, as men prefer to wear jackets to both formal and informal social outings. However, women jacket manufacturers target the 18-40 age group in the middle to upper-middle income segment who are either working or college going. They also have a portfolio for social occasions such as weddings, New Year and Christmas parties, as women rarely wear jackets for just about anything.

Basic core colors like black, navy blue, greys and khakis are popular among urban woman while sporty bright like salsa red, oranges, rust, wine, midnight and teal blues and ochre yellow are brightening up winter days this year. Jackets are no more just an outerwear but a style statement for both men and women in an eclectic mix of style, functionality and comfort whether it is for biking, hiking or for a nightout or just an everyday work.

“Looking at the latest craze for faux leather jackets, we have extended our line and added synthetic/faux leather jackets to our collection in various styles and colors . In



A/W '15, we have gone a step ahead and even added few styles of premium genuine leather jackets are made from super soft sheep leather. Nehru band collar waistcoats in bright colors and premium fabrics, light weight quilted gilet with feather touch effect, cotton washed jackets with contrast trims, faux leather and genuine leather biker jackets and washed denim trucker jackets are trending this year,” says Ketan Jansari, Head-Design and supply chain, category at Numero Uno.

Elaborating on what’s new this year, Majula Gandhi, Spokesperson for Numero Uno says, “Ultra-light weight quilted polyester jackets in full sleeve and sleeve-less options. These can be rolled into a small pouch available with jacket making it extremely easy travel gear. A wide collection of PU/synthetic leather jackets in various colors and styles and a limited edition of premium genuine leather jackets have been introduced along with reversible jackets with an interesting mix of fabrics and style. In terms of fabrics, there are a lot of textures and structures , melange and two-tone colours.”

Inspired from global brands, domestic brands are now doing smart slim fits along

with regular fits which sell well. Both full sleeve and sleeveless jackets are the rage. Previously, Fall/Winter range of many big brands like Celio, Pepe Jeans London, Latin Quarters and Adidas were heavy and meant for extreme climate but since India has lighter winters, except in few regions, they identified products from their international collection that run even in full winter. In women’s wear, demand for coats has increased as women follow international catwalk styles and coats are versatile and can be worn with formal as well as casual wear.

“For this winter wear, our ladies coats are in both long as well as short length. We have used imported fabrics from China. We have used tweed in colors like black, maroon, and others. We have given a European look for both short as well as long length coats by adding fur on them. The price range starts from 3,500 and goes up to Rs 4,500,” informs K S Dua, Director, Queens Apparel, a leading domestic brand.

To sum up jackets have held strong against competition from other winter wear segments. And brands/manufacturers are looking to bank on its popularity to do good business this year.