

Sweater Market

Knitting in new styles and trends to lure young India

With erratic winters sweater players find the going tough in a highly competitive market. However, it's the smaller brands who are edging ahead with their focus on innovations, new designs and higher fashion elements, write **Ajanta Ganguly** and **Ajay Goswami**

The sweater segment has huge potential in India's winter wear markets inspite of competition from other segments. While each winter product offering has constant demand as per season's requirement, the sweater segment has a special pocket amidst lower intensity and unpredictability of season. Indeed sweaters compete with jackets and sweatshirts for market share, with each eating away a little bit of other's share due to overlapping in winter segment. In a season encompassing just a couple of months with its highs and lows, the sweater segment has to fight its way to the head of the pack through innovation in colour, designs and lightweight fabrics.

Stability Amid Competition

Both light and heavy sweaters sell well, although a lot depends on the climate in that particular geographical region. Heavy woollens are more in demand where winters are severe as in North and Northeast India and lightweight fashionable sweaters are preferred in the rest of India where winters are moderate. Experts feel that in earlier years, customers used to start buying products for winter from the month of August, this year customers started buying products only from September due to the late start of season. Since the starting of this season was slow, most manufacturers made lesser products than their usual although the running has been as expected so far.

"Receding winters is a major concern as the time period for EOSS is not receding accordingly. End customers enjoy the most. Experimentation and higher disposable incomes have accelerated purchasing of winter wear due to awareness, change in lifestyles, and the need for seasonal clothing. Menswear contributes a majority to the total apparel winter market in India with a share of 42 per cent. Women's wear and kids wear contribute 38 percent and 20 percent market respectively to the total apparel market," says Bipan Jain, CMD, Madame, a leading women's brand that also



Sweaters are still the mainstay of winters

Heavy sweaters more in demand in colder climate

Lightweight sweaters are making inroads due to their fashion element

Smaller brands more into innovation

Big brands stick to basic products

New blends, designs attract youth

Women's category driven more by fashion

offers sweaters, jackets and sweatshirts for women. An innovative portfolio by most sweater brands and the willingness to spend has accelerated purchases of winter wear over the last few years. Instead of taking out

the same winter wear from their wardrobes every year and adding just a few new items, today's fashion conscious consumers are changing their entire winter wardrobe far more frequently than ever before. Besides



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CMD, Madame

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colours, cuts and designs, the sweater collection of most brands have undergone a sea change as regards the yarn selection, quality and tensile strength of the materials used.

“Innovation and experimentation are important factors to remain upto date in every category, especially in sweater segment as demand from youth is changing every season. Fine knits and lightweight sweaters are more in demand because of a change in weather since three to four years. Following international trends and weather forecasts, we foresee demand for this category will increase in coming years. The winter wear market has changed from heavy clothing to more oriented products but it will continue to grow and develop at a considerable pace. Sweaters encompass all age groups since they have changed their shape and become more trendy and casual, so they are as more acceptable to youngsters and those in



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Japneet Singh
Director, Juelle

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Focus on Blends and Styles to Stay Afloat
With different sets of customers for each segment, the demand for sweaters has remained stable inspite of competition from other segments such as shawls, sweat shirts and jackets. With 80 per cent fashion and 20 per cent basic being the norm, different brands are now innovating with colour,





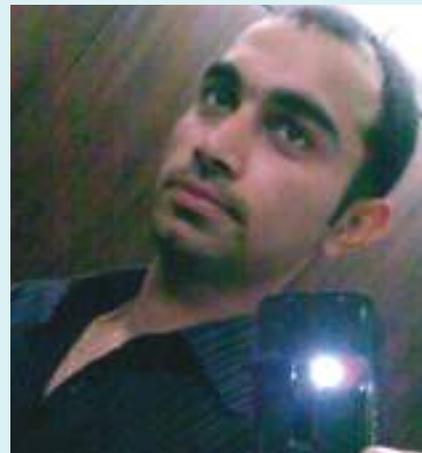
Pankaj Bharti
Director, Sunayna

“In the women’s segment, mostly all garments are smart fit. Nowadays more accessories are used and all that matters is that the product should be fashionable. In woollen products, we use Indian wool. Sweatshirts are more in demand and we have given a woollen touch to them by adding sleeves that are woollen and that segment is running well.”



Rajan Dhiman
Director, Gold Queen

“We are using multiple fabrics and blends like modal wool, nets, velvets with lashings of shimmers as well as different blends in wool like acrylic, nylon and angora yarn. Our collection explores nature in its various shades and colours. Hot pink, red, maroon, marsala are the colours to add to your wardrobe.”



Himanshu Kapoor
Owner, Regency Fashion

“Demand for light weight pullovers is always higher in areas with moderate winters, while heavy pullovers are the requirement of colder areas. Fashion is also one of the factors why demand is good for lighter products. So we make items in all gauges. However, 12 gauge products are more favoured by consumers, both ladies and gents.”

fabrics and designs like never before. In India, region wise variation plays an important role in demand for sweaters because in heavy winter areas like J&K, Himachal or NortheEast, there is more demand for heavy woollens as compared to the plains or metros where demand for innovative fashion wear in light woollens is more. Styling and designing is increasingly becoming more important and full sleeves, round neck short length sweaters are more in demand this year.

“Fits are very important in women’s wear. Loose sweaters are out and short length garments are more acceptable this year. Since we are an urban wear fashion brand, the demand for pure wool is less. We concentrate on blends that make our garment look more casual and funky. Prints are in, in a big way in sweaters and other garments. The entry of big brands does create competition especially in metros. But in the unorganised sectors there is not much competition. If your designs are innovative, you can give competition to the top brands because of your economy and efficiency and price,” explains Japneet Singh, Director, Juelle.

While elaborating on the style and trends in sweaters this winter, Rajan, Director of Gold Queen, a leading manufacturer of ladies



kurtis, cardigans and coats opines, “We are using multiple fabrics and blends like modal wool, nets, velvets with lashings of shimmers as well as different blends in wool like acrylic, nylon and angora yarn. Our collection explores nature in its various shades and colours. Hot pink, red, maroon, marsala are the colours to add to your wardrobe. Experimentation and higher disposable incomes have accelerated purchasing of winter wear due to awareness, change in lifestyles, and the need for seasonal clothing. We have now added party wear premium range to our winter collection and this adds a new twist to this segment.” The Indian market for woollens has not dipped, with each segment having its own space and utility throughout the different phases of winter. During peak winters, jackets and heavy sweaters sell well, while in the beginning and end of the season, lightweight sweaters and sweatshirts takeover. The unpredictable length and intensity of the season has affected profitability in many ways. However, constant connectivity, contextual relevance and multi-screen world are changing both online and offline shopping experiences.

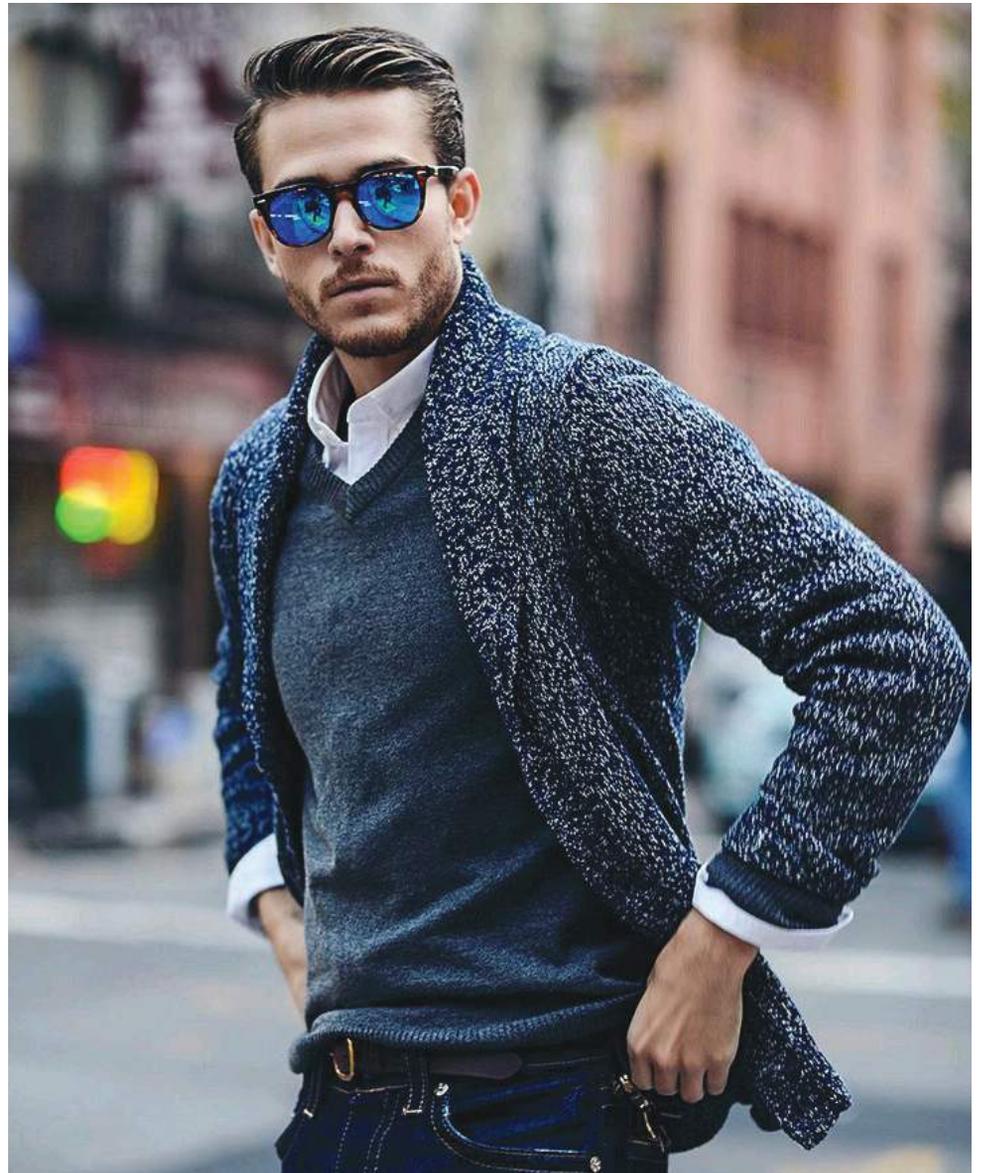
Women, Kids’ Showcase Good Growth

Women shoppers across metros and small cities are increasingly opting for sweaters

teamed with western wear rather than traditional ethnic wear worn with coats and shawls. Traditionally, an under-served market, women's western wear is getting traction and wider acceptance owing to an increase in disposable incomes. Along with that women's sweater segment especially the pullover variety that teams well with pants and skirts is selling well. The women's segment is growing at a faster pace than both men's and kids, mainly because of rapid change from traditional women's wear to western wear. However, the kids' apparel market in India is growing well, due to rising media exposure, high disposable income of the parents, peer pressure and brand consciousness among children.

"The women's winter wear has been on a growth trajectory. The size of women's winter wear stands at worth Rs. 3,290 crores in India and is expected to grow at 7.5 per cent to reach Rs 8,080 crores by 2024. The major products in this segment are cardigans, sweaters, jackets, sweater tops, sweater-cum-kurtis, pullovers, sweatshirts, tracksuits, stoles and shawls, caps, mufflers. There is also potential in the kids' segment, which has a share of 20 per cent as of now at \$9.6 billion. It is expected to grow at CAGR of 10.5 per cent which will take this segment to \$15.8 billion with its share increasing to 22 per cent," adds Jain.

Talking about current trends in the sweater segment, Pankaj Bharti, Director, Sunayna a women's brand for coats and cardigans says, "In the women's segment, mostly all garments are smart fit. Nowadays more accessories are used and all that matters is that the product should be fashionable. In woollen products, we use Indian wools. Sweatshirts are more in demand and we have given a woollen touch to them by adding sleeves that are woollen and that segment is running well. We have equal number of customers for all segments although demand for sweatshirts is more because it is easy to wear and matches anything. Currently, there is more demand for designed products like jackets, coats,



and long jackets whereas there is less demand for woollen products."

The winter wear market for sweaters is at par with international market in terms of innovations and trends. In fact, at times it's even more trendy than many European brands which are almost basic since they don't take risk and are not experimental to ensure profitability. Domestic brands however, have less inventory and usually make just enough for the current season thus allowing for innovation. As Ramesh Bedi, Director, Palmer puts it, "Bigger brands don't have much impact as smaller domestic ones have our base of customers. And we sustain by creating better products in terms of quality and creativity, bigger brands stick to basic ideas."

Online Retail Catching on

Most winter wear brands sell well through distribution channels of large formats, MBO'S and EBO'S and also have a strong online presence. Many are available online through fashion platforms along with their own websites. Online shopping websites such as Jabong, Flipcart, Amazon and Snapdeal are popular. Consumers no longer see a distinction between online and

offline shopping. It is indeed a smarter way to extend storefront by online presence. Traditional retail formats are popular for most brands with most of the business coming in from North India from places like Punjab, Haryana and Delhi where the winters are much colder than the other regions.

"Demand for light weight pullovers is always higher in areas with moderate winters, while heavy pullovers are the requirement of highly cold areas. Fashion is one of the factors why the demand is always good for lighter products and so we make items in all gauges. However, 12 gauge products are more favoured by consumers, both women and men," sums up Himanshu Kapoor, Owner, Regency Fashion.

Experimentation and higher disposable incomes have accelerated winter purchases. Price sensitivity still remains an issue in the sweater market as the winter season remains unpredictable. The sweater segment has been and will always remain the mainstay of winter apparel market. The only thing constant is change and this segment needs to thrive on innovations to create a niche for itself which other winter segments cannot creep into.