

THE CHANGING FACE OF KHADI: a heritage fabric

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Abstract

Khadi is a hand spun and hand woven cloth from India and has historical significance for bringing about extensive rural empowerment. Khadi fabric originally used hand spun yarn made on a spinning wheel (*Charkha*) and then woven on a handloom. Over the years, many innovations have been done in its manufacturing processes for increasing the production and improving the quality. From being a fabric of the freedom fighters to those in politics and social sector, Khadi is slowly gaining popularity as a fashion symbol. Government of India is also promoting Khadi by recommending it for uniforms in its various departments.

In view of the above an attempt was made to gather experiences of people using khadi. Data was collected from 130 consumers and 65 salesmen using purposive sampling method. Detailed information was collected through questionnaires on preferences for variety of products, patterns, colours, performance of khadi fabrics and products.

It was interesting to know from the results that people find it as an authentic cloth linked with the cultural heritage of India. It is considered to be a pure, soft, durable and comfortable fabric. Khadi products are associated with high quality and no side effects. It is a green fabric and provides employment to vast number of people. Today, khadi has become favourite segment of consumer's choice in this growing demand for natural products across the world.

1. Introduction

Khadi is a hand spun and hand woven cloth from India and has historical significance for bringing about extensive rural empowerment. Khadi fabric originally used hand spun yarn made on a spinning wheel (*chrakha*) and then woven on a handloom. Since its establishment, khadi manufacturing has gone through several stages of technological developments. Improvements in different stages like spinning, weaving, finishing etc. have been done in order to enhance quality as well as overall efficiency and wages of khadi workers of all categories.

Many efforts have been made to improve the design and performance of spinning instrument. Earlier, a simple tool called '*takli*' was used to spin the raw cotton. The *takli* used to be 10" to 14" long and thick like a large needle made of iron rod with the bottom of a brass circle (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Takli* used for spinning cotton khadi. Source: National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi.

Later, *charkha* was introduced as a better tool to spin the yarn and was mainly made of wood. A yarn count of less than 60 was considered a thick yarn and it was spun on the *charkha*. The yarn count more than 60 and up to 400 was spun on *takli* (<http://shop.gaatha.com>). There were mainly two types of *charkha* used for spinning during freedom struggle:

a) Bardoli Charkha has a regular form having spinning wheel (Figure 2). It is one of the oldest known forms of the spinning wheel. The *charkha* works with a drive wheel being turned by hand, while the yarn is spun off the tip of the spindle.

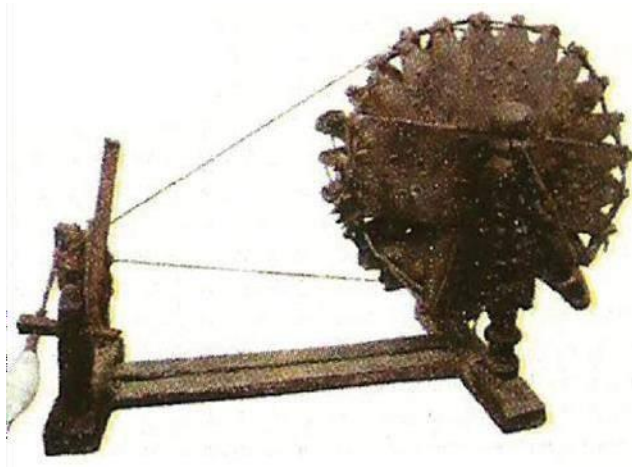


Figure 2. Bardoli *Charkha*, Source: [Heritage Charkha](#) Museum, New Delhi.

Various designs of traditional *charkhas* were used by artisans to spin the yarn. Some of the designs used in different periods of time are shown in Figures 3 to 5.

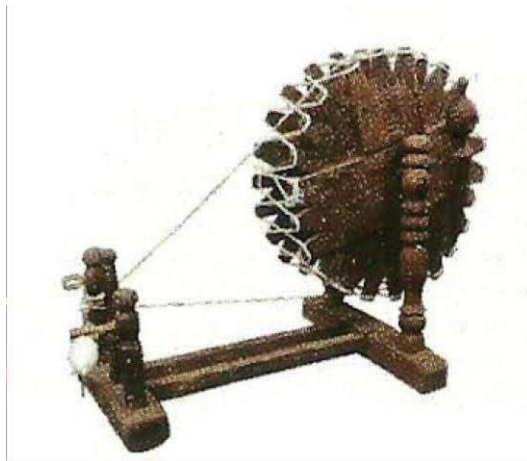


Figure 3. *Takua Pankhudi Charkha* 1912. Source: [Heritage Charkha](#) Museum, New Delhi.

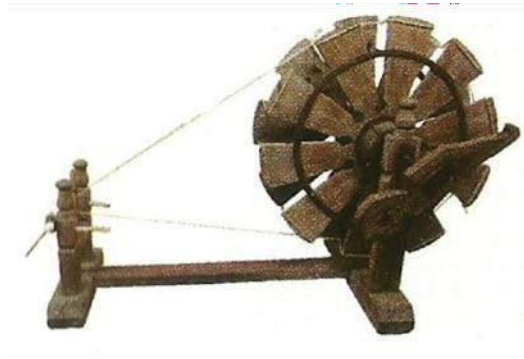


Figure 4. *Banjoo Charkha*, 1943. Source: [Heritage Charkha](#) Museum, New Delhi.

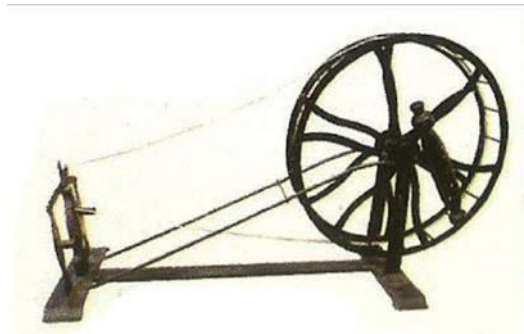


Figure 5. Traditional Iron *Charkha*, 1977. Source: [Heritage Charkha](#) museum, New Delhi.

(b) Yerwada *Charkha* had a box-form and is efficient, portable and foldable (Figure 6). Since the traditional *charkha* was bulky and difficult to move, Mahatma Gandhi needed an instrument that could easily be transported. During his imprisonment in Yerwada jail, he had used the portable spinning wheel that folds and has a handle for carrying. It is compact and folds into a wooden box (<http://shop.gaatha.com>).



Figure 6. A box-form Yerwada *Charkha*. Source: National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 7. *Peti Charkha*, 1943. Source: [Heritage Charkha](#) Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 8. *Peti Charkha*, 1947. Source: [Heritage Charkha](#) Museum, New Delhi.

The New Model Charkhas were introduced by KVIC incorporating the ring spinning technology having multiple spindles ranging from 2 to 12 spindles to give high speed and to provide better wages to the spinners (Figure 9). Although most of the spinning is now done on the New Model *Charkha* (NMC), in some remote villages the traditional hand spinning wheel is still being used. The spun yarns are wound into reels of 1000 meters each. Khadi is identified by the direction of twist in yarn. In khadi yarn twist direction is “S”. Usually it is called left twist or anti-clockwise twist.



Figure 9. New Model Charkha (NMC 8 -Spindle *charkha*). Source: <http://www.kvic.org.in>

Khadi is popular in both domestic and export markets and is available in many varieties i.e, cotton, silk, wool and polyvastra. As seen in the Table 1, khadi is sourced from different parts of India, depending upon its raw materials. Silk variety is sourced from West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and North Eastern states, the cotton variety comes from Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh,

Bihar and West Bengal. Khadi poly is spun in Gujarat and Rajasthan while Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Jammu & Kashmir are known for the woollen variety.

Khadi fabrics and their products come in a wide variety. Khadi is also considered a fabric that embodies purity and simplicity in India. The versatility of the fabric lends itself for use in apparels as well as furnishings. Many types of apparel are made from it like tops, shirts, trousers, *dhoti*, jackets, skirts, handkerchief, ties, *salwar kameez*, *kurta pajama*, sarees, dupattas, vest and jackets, coats, *lois*, shawls, gloves, caps etc. Khadi is also used in upholstery, bedspreads, curtains, table linen, kitchen linen, cushions, blankets, throw and bags.

TYPES	VARIETIES	PRODUCTS
Cotton Khadi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Muslin Single Thread (West Bengal) 2. Muslin Single Thread (Tuni-A.P.) 3. Muslin (4 ply) 4. Muslin (6 ply) 5. Muslin Coating 6. Muslin Check 7. White SF 8. White SE 9. White Triple Thread 10. White Double Thread 	<i>Kurta</i> , <i>Kurta Payjama</i> set, Jawahar Jacket, <i>Baniyan</i> , Gandhi Cap, Shirt, <i>Nada</i> , Night Suit, Ladies Suit, House Coat, Maxi, <i>Salwar</i> , Ladies Top, Cotton Gown, Shoulder Bag, Underwear, Apron, Petticoat, Saree
Silk Khadi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Matka Silk 2. Tassar Katia 3. Matka Katia 4. Matka Jute 5. Balkol 6. Dupion Silk 7. Andi Silk 8. Tassar Silk 9. Munga Silk 	<i>Kurta</i> , Jacket, coat, Tie, Shirt, <i>Payjama</i> , <i>Kurta Payjama</i> set, Blazer, Scarf, Ladies top, Saree, <i>Achkan</i> , Stole
Woollen Khadi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Woollen Marino Shirting 2. Terewool 	Gown, Coat, <i>Kurta</i> , Shirt, Shawl, Stole, <i>Chadder</i> , Gloves, Cap, Gandhi cap, Blanket, Mufflar
Polyvastra Khadi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. White Polyvastra (Padyur) 2. Polyvastra Shirting 3. Coloured Polyvastra 	<i>Kurta</i> , Shirt, Top, Pillow covers, Duster

Table No. 1 Varieties of Khadi fabric

Source: Anonymous, KVIC Product Directory

Over the years, many innovations have been done in its manufacturing processes for increasing the production and improving the quality from being a fabric of the freedom fighters to those in politics and social sector. Khadi is slowly gaining popularity as a fashion symbol. In view of the above an attempt was made to gather experiences of people using khadi and to study the possibility of acceptance of khadi amongst people of diverse professions.

2. Significance of the Study

Government of India is promoting khadi through 'Make in India' campaign and boost the rural economy and generating employment for people. Government is making efforts to promote the use of khadi products in various other departments including police forces, government hospitals, railways and airlines. According to MSME there is a big market for school uniforms in the country and promotion of khadi uniforms will lead to the growth of the rural economy (<http://indiatoday.intoday.in>). In view of the above an attempt was made in this paper to gather experiences of people using khadi and look into the possibility of acceptance of khadi amongst people of diverse professions.

3. Methodology

In order to study experiences of people, 13 khadi retail outlets were selected in manufacturing states, New Delhi and NCR region of North India. These comprised one each in Dausa, Jind, Kurukshetra, Moradabad, two retail outlets in central Delhi (Connaught Place), one in each zone in Delhi (east, west, north and south) and one each in Faridabad, Noida and Gurgaon. Purposive sampling was used to identify stores in each region; the inclusion criteria for selection of stores were (1) khadi retail outlets stocking fabrics and (2) khadi retail outlets located in the main market of the region.

A sample of 65 salespersons and 130 consumers (5 salespersons and 10 consumers from each retail outlet) was taken using purposive sampling method. The inclusion criteria for selection of salespersons were (1) salespersons that have experience of selling khadi fabric and (2) their willingness to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria for selection of consumers were (1) consumers who have used khadi fabrics and (2) their willingness to participate in the study.

Information from salespersons and consumers was gathered through questionnaires. Since the information was to be collected from large number of respondents, it was convenient to administer a questionnaire. Detailed information was collected such as variety of products available, preferences for pattern and colour, problems associated with performance of khadi fabrics and products. The feedback received from salespersons and consumers regarding use of khadi were noted. The responses received were entered in MS Excel, data was tabulated and worksheets were prepared. Data was analyzed using frequency, mean, percentage and rank order method.

4. Results and Discussion

It was observed from the data that most of the **salesperson** were employees of KVIC and had been working as regular employees in retail outlets while some of them were hired on contractual basis. They possess minimum educational qualification from high school to maximum post-graduation. Findings revealed that 18% salesperson were educated upto high school, 39% until senior secondary, 36% were graduates and 7% were post- graduates (Table 2). Out of 65 salespersons, only 11 were females and 54 were males.

Gender	Age	Education	Years of experience with khadi
Female(F) -11	18-33yrs: 8	High school: 1	1-10yrs: 9 11-20yrs:1 21-30yrs:1
	34-49yrs: 2	Senior secondary: 4	Above 30yrs: 0
	50-65yrs: 1	Graduate: 4 Post-graduate: 2	
Male(M)- 54	18-33yrs: 25	High school: 12	1-10yrs: 34
	34-49yrs: 12	Senior secondary: 22	11-20yrs: 8
	50-65yrs: 17	Graduate: 18 Post-graduate: 2	21-30yrs: 7 Above 30yrs: 5
Total	65 salespersons		

Table 2. DETAILS OF SALESPERSON

Table 3 below depicts the demographic data of the **consumers**. Analysis reveals that out of a total of 130 respondents, 23% were females and 77% were male in the age group of 20-80 years of diverse professions.

Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
Female- 30 (F)	20-35yrs:11 36-49yrs: 9 50-65yrs: 9 Above 65 yrs-1	High school-5 Senior secondary-5 Graduate-7 Post-graduate-13	Students, Housewife, private jobs, Journalists, Software engineer, Business, Doctors, Teachers, self-employed
Male- 100 (M)	20-35yrs:45 36-49yrs: 26 50-65yrs: 27 Above 65 yrs-2	High school-25 Senior secondary-15 Graduate-47 Post-graduate-13	Students, private jobs, Software engineer, Bank employee, Army, Police, UPSC aspirant, CA, Mechanic, Accountants, Shopkeepers, Government employee, Insurance agent, Freelancer, Farmer, Business, Writer and editor, Teachers, self-employed
Total	130 consumers		

Table 3. Details of consumers

The results are based upon consumer's response and salesperson daily interaction with the consumers to know about their preferences for variety of khadi products, patterns, colours, frequency of purchase and opinion regarding perception of khadi. The findings of the data collected have been explained below and represented through pictorial depiction.

4.1 Highest season and frequency for sale and purchase of khadi

It was observed that consumers buy khadi products both in summer and winter season and the most popular pattern amongst people of all ages was plain white followed solid dyed, checks, stripes, prints and dots (Figure 10).

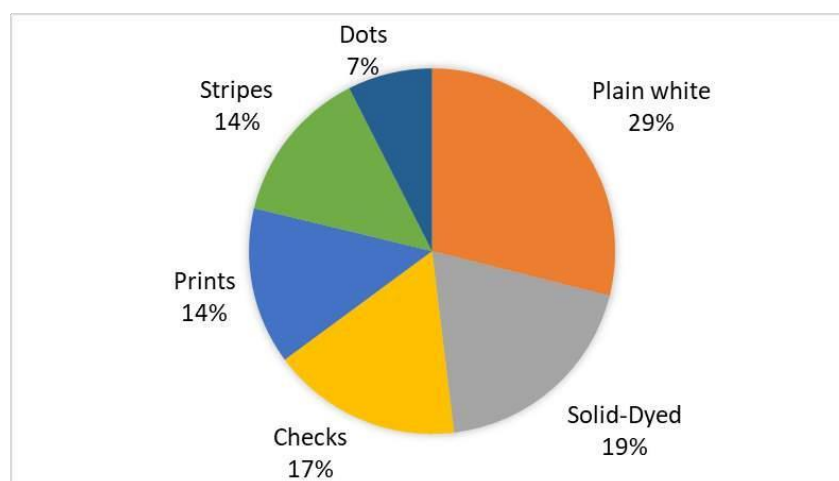


Figure 10. Favourite pattern of khadi products

It was found from the respondents that 37% people prefer to purchase khadi fabrics, 31% apparels, 18% made-ups and 14% home furnishings (Figure 11).

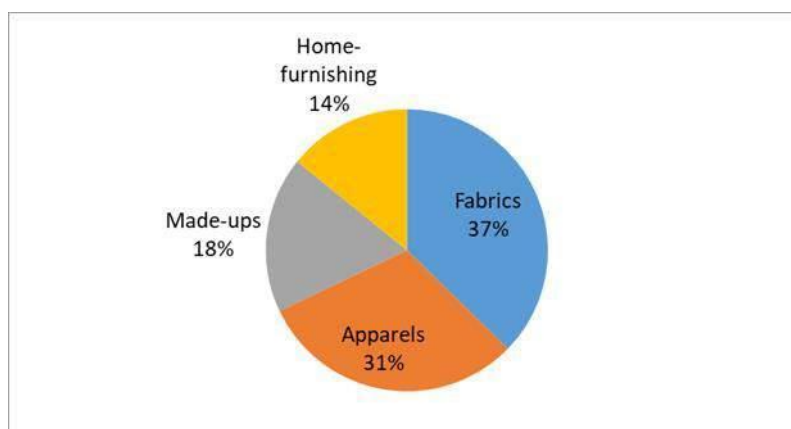


Figure 11 Details of preferences of khadi products

Additionally, under each category consumers preferences were noted about khadi products.

4.1.1 Fabrics: It was analysed from **salesmen and consumers** data that cotton khadi was preferred the most amongst people with 38% followed by 22% khadi silk, 21% Polyvastra and 19% khadi wool (Figure 12). Cotton khadi was in high demand in all the retail outlets.

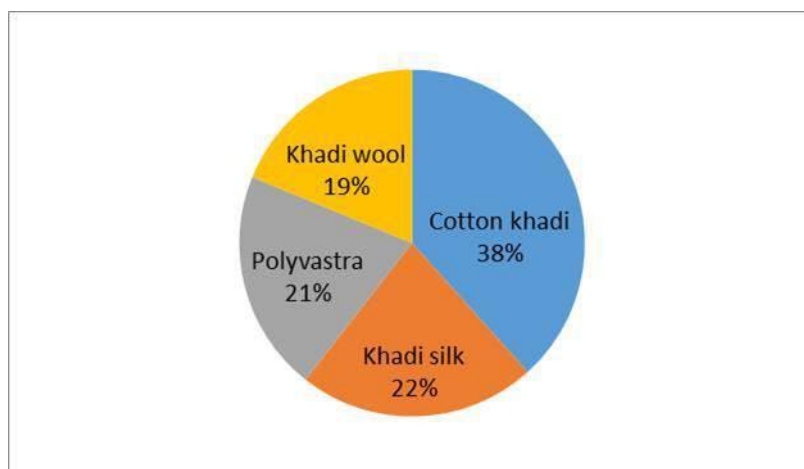


Figure 12 Details of highest selling khadi fabric category

4.1.2 Ladies Products: According to results, kurta was found to be the most popular product in ladies category in all retail outlets amongst people of all ages (Appendix I).

4.1.3 Gents Products: According to results, kurta and pajama was found to be the most popular product in gents category in all retail outlets amongst people of all ages (Appendix II).

4.1.4 Kids products: According to results, kurta was found to be the most popular product in kids category in retail outlets (Appendix III).

4.1.5 Made-ups: It was found from the results that the most popular product under made-ups category was hankerchief (Appendix IV)

4.1.6 Home-furnishing: It was noted from the results that the most popular product under home-furnishing category was bedsheets (Appendix V).

Note: National flag was a common product being sold in each store at special occasions.

4.1 Viewpoint of salesmen and consumers about khadi

According to the primary data obtained, it was interesting to note that the salesmen and consumers in the retail outlets had diverse perceptions about khadi. It was important to know about their understanding regarding khadi, therefore, various responses were collected from them (Figure 18 and 19).

Analysis of data revealed that 46% **salesmen** think khadi or *khaddar* is a term for handmade cloth (hand spun and hand woven) from India. In addition, for a large number of salesmen about 29%, khadi stands for a national (*swadeshi*) fabric. They associate and attribute positive features to it and describe it as a pure, natural, comfortable and good quality soft cloth which is best for our body. Khadi is skin friendly fabric that does not cause any allergies or irritation and is a relief cloth for skin, it remains cool in summers and warm in winters. Moreover, 15% salesmen associate khadi with abstract attributes and expressed that khadi is just not a cloth it is an idea, thought and an opinion. It is an inspiration promoted by Mahatma Gandhi which has become a symbol. 10% salesmen said khadi is not only a fabric, it is basis of giving work to people. Khadi is a service to nation as it provides employment for rural people and has become a point of the interest of nation's youth.

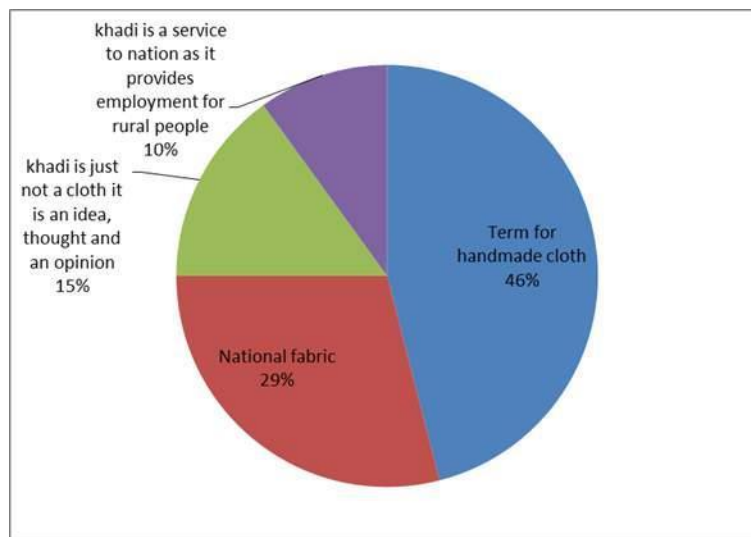


Figure 18: Salesmen viewpoint about khadi

As stated by **consumers**, the first group around 25% was found nationalistic. According to them, khadi is Indian traditional cloth which is very authentic and linked with our culture. Khadi being made by the people and for the people was preferred over other brands by consumers. Second group of consumers about 21% was influenced by positive fabric properties of khadi. According to them, khadi is pure, soft, durable and comfortable cloth. It represents simplicity, quality and nationalism. Near about 20% of consumers of third group responded that khadi represents trust and authenticity. Khadi products are genuine which are better than cloth available in other shops. Fourth group of 20% consumers favours khadi due to its quality. They found khadi products have high quality with no side effects. *Swadeshi* fabric khadi is

made by spinning yarn on *charkha* and it is long lasting. Fifth group of consumers around 7% liked khadi as it is indigenous and eco-friendly fabric. According to them, everyone should accept khadi fabric in their lives as it doesn't harm our body and is skin friendly, it doesn't stick with our body, after wearing khadi one feels fresh. Next group of consumers near about 5% feels inclined towards khadi as it is home- made finest fabric which is best wearing cloth in every season as it is warm in winter and cool in summer. They feel that since khadi is made of natural fabric it works very well in our tropical climate. Last group of consumers around 2% showed their affinity towards khadi. They wish that efforts to promote our local products should be done in national interest, everyone should be proud to have it. It is a gift to us from our father of nation Mahatama Gandhi.

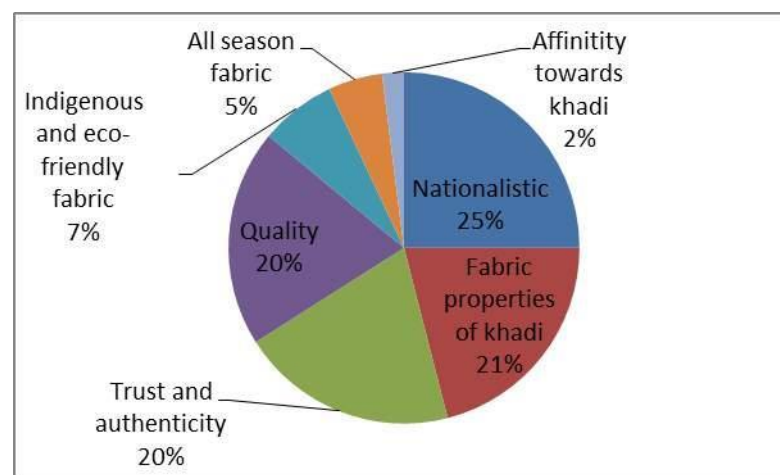


Figure 19: Consumer's viewpoint about khadi

Conclusion

People differentiated khadi from other fabrics by bringing up various properties; they had positive perceptions about khadi fabric. According to them Indian fabric khadi is a primitive handmade textile that can be 100% pure cotton or can be manufactured using different fabrics wool, silk and polyester. Khadi is made by hand spinning in rural India by spinners & weavers that is why it is softer and much more porous than mill made cloth which gives khadi a ventilated feel. It is more comfortable, durable and of better quality than other cloths. It is ecofriendly and skin friendly fabric as compared to other fabrics. Over the years, many innovations have been done in its manufacturing processes of khadi for increasing the production and improving the quality. From being a fabric of the freedom fighters to those in politics and social sector, khadi is slowly gaining popularity as a fashion symbol. It was interesting to note that the salesmen and consumers in the retail outlets had diverse perceptions about khadi and they think that after using khadi fabric they feel like having their own identity. Hence, it can be concluded that khadi carries different values, morals and ethics for people and has become way of the life for them. People of diverse professions are ready to use and accept

khadi fabric wholeheartedly. It is being re- re-imagined for new future for fashion focusing on social responsibility as it has emerged as the fabric of the people, keeping its artisanal roots and sustainability.

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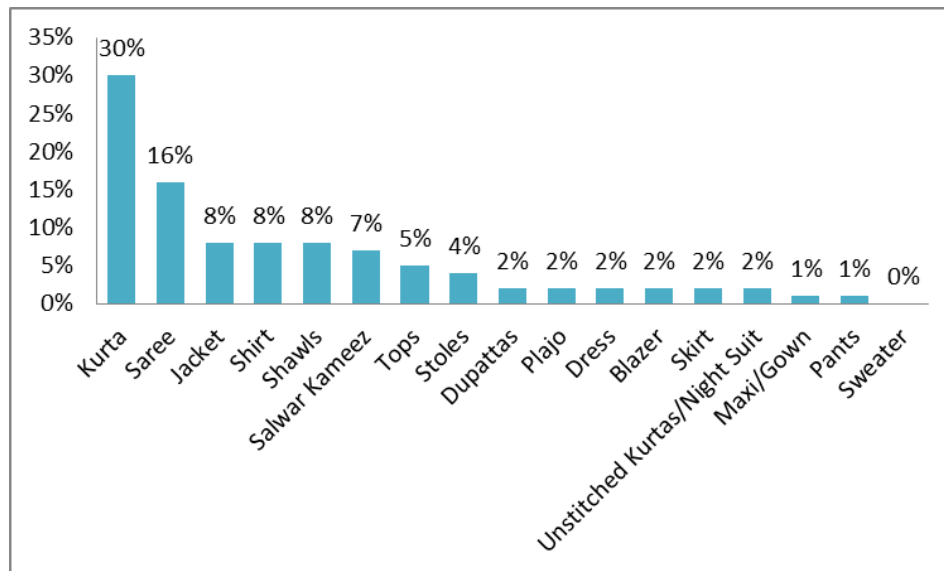
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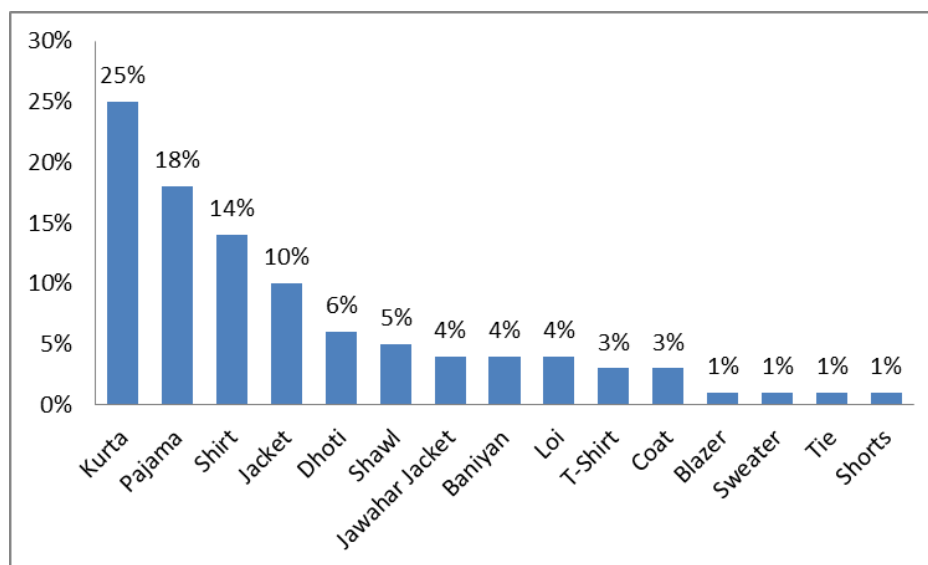
Appendices

Details of preference of ladies products according to consumers



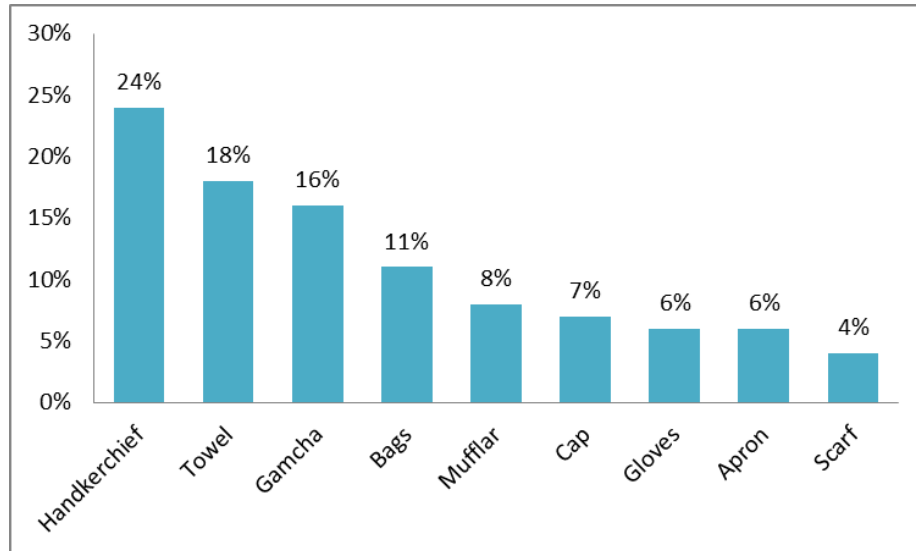
Appendix II

Details of preference of gents products according to consumers



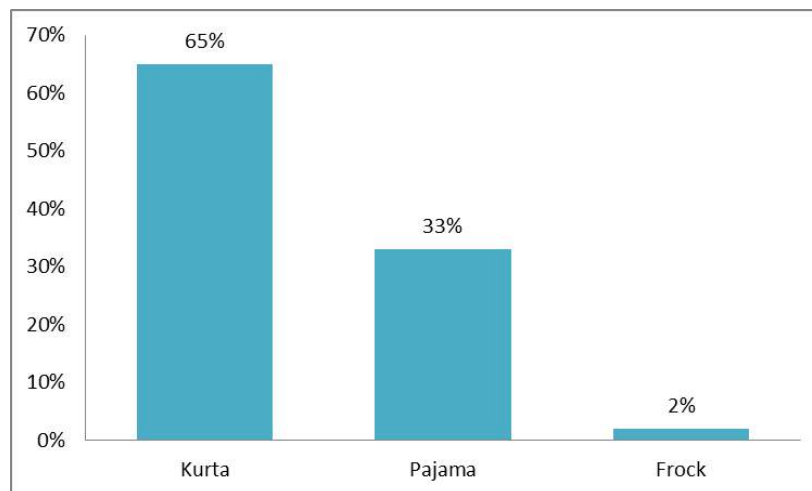
Appendix III

Details of preference of kids products according to consumers



Appendix IV

Details of preference of made-ups according to consumers



Appendix V

Details of preference home-furnishing according to consumers

