

Being A Good Sport

Bindu Gopal Rao looks at a recent report which shows the real scale of the sportswear market in India.

If you had followed the recently concluded Rio Olympics closely, you would have observed that the athletes were all well-dressed. In fact most sportspersons today pay attention to what they wear and this is naturally a niche apparel segment that is growing at a good rate. A report titled 'Sportswear Market in India, 2015' by IMAGES F&R Research estimates India's active sportswear market (including sports footwear, apparel and accessories) at ₹6,000 crore, growing at 13 per cent, a year.

NEW LAUNCHES

The latest in the sports apparel collection available in the Indian market concentrates on delivering a look which is sporty yet fashionable. Scott Sports, India has just launched its bike-wear collection which comprises of bicycle-specific jerseys and padded shorts. "The jerseys feature top-of-the-line breathable, technical fabric with antibacterial properties to keep the riders comfortable



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during their bicycle rides. They also have back pockets to help carry small essentials for the rider. The padded shorts feature an anatomic gel padding to prevent saddle sores occurring post medium or long rides. They also feature a silicone gripper to keep the shorts from creeping up and ensure an optimum fit," says Jaymin Shah, Country Manager, Scott Sports, India.

Several brands have tried to leverage on this growing demand by tying up with established designers to create ranges that are sporty and yet spell fashion loud and clear. A well-designed smart set of casuals like track suits easily passes through as travel wear, cruise wear or simply smart casuals or semi-formal dressing. Saloni Handa, Director, Emperro, says, "The standard guidelines and colour of the uniforms to be manufactured for any particular sport do not change, but with demand preference in trend the design and print on them changes. Another sub-category of sportswear that deserves to be mentioned is the fitness wear which is the corporate apparel for going to the gym or jogging or casual activities. These cannot be considered as hardcore sportswear and they are for the general folk who do not play any particular sport but are equally inclined towards their fitness and health. A few things that can come under this category are yoga dresses, leggings, joggers, t-shirts, shorts, etc. for both men and women."

TREND CHECK

Brands are playing with colours, prints and styles. People are in fact wearing sportswear as stylish comfort casual wear owing to the variety in cuts and designs that are available. A consumer sees value in technical wear. Many home-grown as well as established brands are introducing swimsuits and beach wear. Srishti Nadhani and Ankita Mantri Lahoty, Founders, Store Untold opine, "The fusion of casual cuts and details are being seen in sportswear. Brands are using details like laces, leather, beads, colours, prints, etc. to make the apparel more fun. In turn people are wearing sportswear as casual dressing, sometimes even to fashion weeks. Another important factor is that these are all made keeping in mind a high degree of comfort. In fact gender neutral fashion is also very strong in sportswear and vibrant colours and details are being seen in men's sportswear too."

A growing trend seen among the sportswear vertical is of recycled products. Many renowned sports apparel companies are now switching to recycled apparels. "Neons and vibrant colours have especially brightened up the sportswear segment in the country, and given the association of varied designers with sportswear brands, the trend only seems to be on the

upswing," says Sachin Sharma, Director, GEM Enviro Management Pvt Ltd. "There is a growing visibility of youth sporting their favourite football or basketball jerseys at pubs, bars and parties. There is an increased usage of PET recycled polyester in the high end sportswear segment. Nike produces jerseys for the Indian Cricket Team which are manufactured by PET recycled polyester."

The latest trend in apparel market is 'Athleisure'. Another reason behind the spur in the demand of athletic and fitness apparels is the fitness revolution, directly instrumental in the steep rise in the number of gyms and fitness centres. "The consumer today is much evolved than any of his antecedents and thus precisely knows what he wants. The latest trend today is fabrics and designs which are fashionable as well as athletic, thus satisfying the customer's desire to make a fashion statement while working out. Then, the rise in activities like trekking, trail running, mountaineering and cycling, etc. has raised the demand for performance apparel as well," says Sonal Jain, Vice President—Brand, Lotto Sport India.



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OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

It is expected that sportswear sales will touch ₹540 billion by 2020. People are becoming more and more health conscious due to stressful living habits. Another big trigger to wanting to have a better lifestyle and good health is the growth and importance of social media. "The technical sportswear market is relatively nascent when compared to the bicycles market and we see that the market on the whole is in a rapid growth phase as it is so early in its lifecycle. The supply of apparel from reputed brands is very low with a lot of first copies of big brands being seen in the market. We hope to change this with the launch of the "Head-to-toe" concept and are sure to register steady and stable growth as we have a great spread of Scott's official dealers spanning across the country," says Shah. The country's sportswear segment is largely unorganized with organized players constituting only around 30 per cent of the market. Franchised exclusive brand outlets (EBOs) and multi-brand outlets form the core retail channels for sportswear in India. Today, the organized sportswear market in India is dominated by the "big four" (Adidas, Reebok, Nike and Puma) global players, which have over 80% market share of the organized market, with several others such

as Fila and Lotto ramping up their presence.

These brands face competition from multi-brand sportswear retailers such as Planet Sports and Royal Sporting House (RSH). "Counterfeiting is one of the biggest challenges sportswear brands are facing in India today. Unorganized players imitate product styles, brand logos and names, which adversely impacts the brand equity and sales brands. Although there is high viewership of sports (particularly cricket) in India, participation continues to be low, with only an estimated 1% of the population engaging in sporting activities. Therefore, in line with this market reality, several sports brands have positioned themselves as lifestyle instead of fitness brands. Players face major competition from unorganized players that constitute around ~70% of the overall sportswear market, since the latter have a significant advantage over their organized counterparts in pricing," says Sharma. Nowadays the consumer preferences are changing at a rapid pace with new designs and technology options hitting market almost every quarter.

"Another hindrance a brand faces in our nation is related to production setbacks; the technology required to produce the modern day fitness apparel is mostly unavailable in the country," says



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LOOKING AHEAD

Sportswear companies are focusing on product innovation, positioning as fashion style statement and using sustainability as new concepts in their product line. The sportswear industry has been witnessing significant innovation in the premium as well as the mass segment. Sustainability and innovation are two of the key criteria of selection, for successful companies in the future will be those where sustainability is well-integrated in terms of core values, operations, as well as consumer acceptance.

The sportswear market has undergone a massive shift from being a niche segment to a dynamic consumer and lifestyle sector. "Sports apparel market is expanding by constantly working towards creating new styles. The new trend of creating a fusion of sportswear with casual wear has attracted a lot of customers. Individuals are opting for such trendy styles as they are convenient and fashionable," says Pranal Modani, Business Head, C9. According to a report, the global sportswear market is expected to grow at a rate of 5.3% from 2016 to 2020, keeping in mind the increasing health awareness among citizens and their active participation. So this is one space to watch out for. ■

Sonal. "Secondly, the advanced apparels require specialized fabrics, which too are required to be imported, hence the high price. There has been a steep rise in demand of apparel with modern technologies which is predicted to grow at a stable pace because of the fitness revolution."



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