



## Khadi's Digital Revolution

The digital revolution since 2015 has transformed Khadi from a symbol of tradition into a modern, tech-enabled global brand. E-commerce platforms, mobile apps, and social media expanded its reach to millions, driving exceptional growth in both sales and visibility. Innovations such as AI-driven tools, virtual try-ons, and transparent supply chains have further strengthened efficiency and consumer engagement. During the pandemic, digital agility enabled KVIC to meet rising demand, showcasing Khadi's adaptability and relevance. Overall, Khadi's journey demonstrates how heritage and technology can work together to empower artisans, sustain livelihoods, and build a sustainable future.

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hen the Digital India flagship initiative was launched in 2015, Khadi India's traditional fabric—began redefining itself and stepping into the digital era with a renewed identity. A digital revolution took shape that transformed the story of Khadi after 2014. A narrative that was earlier rooted mainly in tradition, patriotism,

swadeshi values, cotton fabric, and historical symbolism has now expanded to include new experiments, innovations, and achievements aligned with a modern and digital age.

Khadi, which once had limited engagement with technology, emerged with a powerful technological expansion. Not only did its business grow at an unprecedented pace, but its image also transformed.

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Khadi became both traditional and contemporary.

More than it was about reimagining an entire traditional handloom industry in a new way, where it could establish a strong presence among millions through e-commerce, social media, artificial intelligence, and aggressive digital marketing.

In 2014–15, Khadi's sales were around Rs. 1,000 crore. By 2025, they had soared to Rs. 1.70 lakh crore. It reflects the modernisation efforts of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), the adoption of new-age marketing strategies, the introduction of online sales platforms, and innovative ways of connecting with people.

This digital transformation is not just the story of Khadi's surprising growth in markets and usage. It stands as an excellent example for traditional industries across the world that are Khadi's journey demonstrates how blending heritage with new technology can create fresh opportunities while preserving cultural identity and strengthening rural livelihoods.

#### **How Khadi Secured Its Place in the Digital World**

The first major transformation in the journey of India's Khadi industry came in 2016, when the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) launched its official e-commerce portal, "Khadi India Online." For the

first time, a customer in Bengaluru could directly purchase authentic Khadi woven by an artisan in a remote village of Bihar—without the interference of middlemen. This direct-to-customer (D2C) model revolutionised both pricing and accessibility.

The digital platform broke the geographical barriers that had long restricted Khadi to a few government-run stores in select cities. Recognising the rapid rise in smartphone usage across India, the Commission launched a mobile app in 2018, understanding that this small handheld device was now shaping consumer behaviour and market dynamics.

However, KVIC's digital ambitions did not stop at building its own platform. In 2016, it partnered with major e-commerce giants like Amazon India and Flipkart, giving Khadi exposure to millions of online shoppers—many of whom had never visited a Khadi store. Collaboration with Myntra, a platform popular among fashion-conscious youth, opened the doors for Khadi to enter the competitive world of fashion.

Additionally, onboarding the government's e-procurement portal, the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), simplified official purchasing processes. These developments were not just symbolic tie-ups or superficial platform presence. They marked a significant shift in Khadi's market position and its perception as a product—elevating it from a government-promoted traditional fabric to a mainstream consumer choice.

The impact on sales was clearly visible. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21, when physical stores remained closed, Khadi's online sales grew by 300%. Its geographic footprint expanded from major cities to over 500 districts, bringing Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities—where Khadi once had minimal presence—into its growing market.

The pandemic also witnessed an interesting innovation. As the demand for masks skyrocketed, KVIC quickly started producing Khadi masks, promoted aggressively through digital channels. The initiative



succeeded beyond expectations— more than one crore masks were sold solely through online platforms.

This ability to make timely decisions, implement them swiftly, and leverage emerging market opportunities showcased a new and dynamic side of both the product and the Commission.

### **How Social Media Took Khadi Into Every Home**

In Khadi's technological transformation, the role of social media and digital marketing cannot be overlooked. They offered a powerful platform to reshape and retell the story of the Khadi brand. Instagram emerged as Khadi's visual storytelling space, where modern designs, collaborations with influencers, and stories of weavers and artisans replaced old-style government advertisements. Fashion bloggers and lifestyle influencers began showcasing Khadi in everyday life. Many young professionals were seen wearing Khadi kurtas to their offices or styling Indo-Western fusion outfits to promote Khadi and other KVIC products.

On Facebook, several communities emerged where Khadi enthusiasts shared their experiences and styling tips. Twitter became a channel for real-time updates, announcements, and customer service interactions. Meanwhile, YouTube featured product demos and glimpses into the lives of artisans— videos that added a human and emotional touch to the long process behind Khadi production.

The digital campaign "Khadi for Nation" went viral, watched and appreciated by millions. As a result, Khadi began to be seen not just as a fabric, but as a cultural identity.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, known for wearing and promoting Khadi himself, played a significant role in its rising popularity. Through repeated mentions in his radio programme *Mann Ki Baat*, he encouraged people to embrace Khadi wholeheartedly, further boosting the positive sentiment around it.

### **Other Dimensions of Technology**

Although the general public mainly notices Khadi's promotion, popularity, and rising sales figures, there is much more happening behind the scenes— where technology plays a crucial role. One major development has been the introduction of new experiments based on Artificial Intelligence (AI). With the help of AI, KVIC can now better understand market trends and make informed decisions accordingly.

Not only this, AI has also enabled features like virtual try-on, allowing customers to see how different Khadi outfits would look on them while sitting at home. Earlier, such advanced features were available only with international brands.

Technology has also improved the transparency of Khadi's supply chain. Potential disruptions in supply can now be identified in time and resolved quickly. Similarly, quality control has become more efficient through automated inspection systems, which earlier depended mainly on manual supervision.

Digital payment systems have become widely used for Khadi purchases. Along with UPI, KVIC has partnered with several digital payment gateways and wallets such as Paytm, PhonePe, and Google Pay, making transactions easier and more seamless. Digital methods are also being used for international payments, contributing significantly to the growth of Khadi exports.

Khadi's digital transformation not only expanded its presence within India but also opened global markets that were earlier beyond the reach of our artisans and small entrepreneurs. Partnerships with major international platforms like Amazon Global gave Khadi worldwide visibility and strengthened its global identity. Khadi also aligned itself with the worldwide green movement, gaining recognition as a sustainable and eco-friendly fabric. As a result, Khadi's exports grew from Rs. 15 crore in 2015 to over Rs. 120 crore by 2023, and international orders through digital channels increased by 450%.

Emerging technologies indicate that Khadi's story of transformation will continue. Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), AI-based chatbots, and multilingual web services will further expand Khadi's reach in the coming years.

A key element of Khadi's journey is its ability to embrace both heritage and technology simultaneously. Each has its own importance. While technology has given Khadi a larger market and a global identity, tradition and heritage have kept it authentic and original. On one hand, it has connected Khadi with new generations, new markets, and new societies; on the other, it has strengthened rural livelihoods, preserved traditional skills, and contributed to environmental sustainability. □