

EVOLUTIONARY NEED FOR BETTER MARKETING PRACTICES BY TEXTILE WHOLESALERS

Abstract

The textile industry is vast and intricate, with its varied products and consumers. With rampant globalization that spiked during the Corona virus pandemic, there is a marked relevance for the use of online and other promotional methods of marketing. Marketing in general has also been an increased activity in every industry. This is because, in recent years the world economy has taken a beating, and it's only the survival of the fittest and those that are quick adapters to change are able to prosper.

The textile wholesaler is one link in the textile supply chain. They now function as distributors, or essentially middlemen. Internet Globalization is making middlemen redundant. Companies can reach direct consumers easily for purpose of sales by using various technologies over the internet. Consumers also have stepped up in trusting online purchase and payment processes.

It's important to have a textile wholesaler ready for the all kinds of future competition and aware of present loss of sales that has come from untapped opportunity.

The area of research and application of strategies in marketing for a textile wholesaler is still fairly untapped. The main focus of marketing strategy has always been the retail sector, as they sell in smaller quantities to single consumers. So logically a great deal of effort is needed to break-even. Wholesalers have been operating the traditional way and don't see the need to change their approach to selling. This lack of foresight is a threat to their survival and growth. With the changing economic and technological environment, manufacturers have less dependence on wholesalers to help them distribute their goods in the market.

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This study is an attempt to delve in the marketing practices of textile wholesalers in general, and offers a starting point for future research and development of the wholesale industry in the field of marketing.

Keywords: wholesale; textile; marketing; growth.

I. INTRODUCTION

The textile Industry is one of the major industries in India. It is vast and varied. There are many small businesses that are gear in the wheel of this complex machine.

Most wholesale knitted fabric businesses are a family run business that are registered as sole proprietorship. The product range will vary from businesses to business, however a common trait is that it will hardly go over 40 types, and will specialize in certain fiber types. Some businesses prefer dealing in a mixed fabrics, where as others pride themselves in selling good 100 percent cotton.

The knitwear and sportswear market is a growing market. Presently any wholesaler in knitwear textiles supplies fabric to around 1200 garment factories in total that span Pune, Mangalore and Goa. The walk-in customers and telephonic orders amount to around 60 to 70 bills daily.

1. Customers & Marketing: The type of Customers is Individuals, Designer boutiques, Fabric Retailers, and Corporate Clients.

The businesses reach out to clients via whatsapp marketing. They do not advertise or use any other new or modern methods of promotion. They are listed on various websites with minimum or incorrect information. These as a result have not shown results. Most firms believe in maintaining the status quo, and trusts in the current forms of marketing as they feel they are making satisfactory profits. They believe that the sportswear market is growing in a way that they will continue to make profits and thus so far have not planned any modern marketing strategy.

2. SWOT Analysis: With changing times, the traditional ways of doing business is not going to be sufficient to grow the business or guarantee continuous orders. The whole salers depend on only few vendors to supply fabric as it is a family concern. If there were an unforeseen emergency, and the unit is not able to supply a customized order, they do not have enough alternative vendor relationships to supply fabric at the best price and lead time. This would increase cost considerably and reduce profit margins.

Besides this in regards to variety of fabrics sold, they are limited to what they can offer. This becomes a drawback in these economic times as the consumer demand for variety is always overflowing. The nature of the wholesale function is to stock in large quantities and supply in smaller portions. But this is not a sustainable system in this era because of various reasons that will be articulated further in this chapter.

Another weakness is the absence of an active online presence. All businesses these days need to have an active online presence to survive and be current. Although textile wholesalers have regular customers, its customer reach to acquire a significant share in the market is not possible because of the absence of an active online presence.

The next weakness we need to address is the absence of a good market information system. Most Small& Medium Enterprises like textile wholesalers rely on the software called Tally, for the purpose of accounting, billing, inventory management and seeing past sales figures. Beyond these functions, the software cannot give anymore

service to business. A good market information system is essential to help make better strategic decisions and future plans.

Another aspect to take into account is that most wholesalers do not feel the need to employ educated manpower besides the manager. The manpower employed at the business does the function of heavy labor and follows directions from the manager. They are not given the authority or responsibility to make important decisions, or billing and are not privy to pricing decisions of the business. The reason for this is, so that the manager who is also a family member of the owner has maximum control, and business information is kept private. This is also necessary, because the employees hired are not of the educational level to execute such responsibility. This strategy however pulls at the reins of growth and expansion. It lays a heavy burden on one person to execute all financial tasks of the business.

In conjunction with weaknesses, if we look at threats to business, we see a few related factors. The first being the fickle nature of consumption. Consumers these days have short attention spans and low loyalties. With a more dynamic presence and brand identities established by competitive wholesale businesses, it is possible that loyalty is unreliable as a firm foundation for growth.

Changing customer requirements and many sources for new varieties of fabric makes is a threat to the sales of a business if these cannot be provided by the same source. The advancement in logistic systems have also made remote sources more accessible.

Looking at the current state of the business although it may not be making losses, there are still many opportunities to grow the profits using various marketing strategies, online as well as offline. This can be done by a better market information system, saving and investing in warehousing and a better planned online and offline marketing strategy.

II. THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

In research there has been very little study on Marketing management of wholesale textiles. There exists a lack of marketing strategy in this area. Although there is some input of modern marketing methods. It is greatly under-utilized and used without strategy. I wanted to understand to what extent are marketing methods being used, and propose a way it can be improved for a wholesale textile business.

III.OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Creating a better Marketing model for wholesalers of knitted textiles : As compared to other industries, there has been very little research of the Wholesale component in the specific knit textile sector in the Supply Chain System. The first objective of the study is to consider Chehika Incorporation as a fair representation of the traditional knit textile wholesaler. Researching this enterprise will help in creating a better Marketing model for wholesalers of knitted textiles.

This will be done by:

- Researching current marketing practices.
- Developing the Market Information System.
- Finding Innovative methods of marketing.
- Utilization of proven methods to improve marketing practices.
- Utilization of methods (Strategic Marketing: Planning and Control) and applying them to the case study.

1. **To bring into Academics a Case Study Relevant to Marketing in a Wholesale Business Model:** Study of Marketing Management in the Fashion domain has mainly focused on retailing. There is not much information of the Wholesale business aspect. The second objective of this project is to bring into academics a case study relevant to marketing in a wholesale business model.
2. **Scope of the Study:** The scope of this study covers the marketing practices of a particular wholesale textile business. It looks at marketing practices of wholesale businesses in the Pune area, as well as observing marketing practices of bigger wholesale fabric suppliers online. It looks at all angles and possibilities of marketing with a focus on promotional practices.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology implemented for this study consists of exploratory research, One-on-One long interviews and telephonic survey questionnaires. The research is a qualitative approach with semi-structured strategies applied to understand the marketing practices of a wholesale textile business. Its purpose is to provide suggestions to improve on current practices.

The research methodology used is through primary data and secondary data sources. The primary data sources of data are telephonic interviews with similar textile wholesalers in the Pune area. The secondary data collection is from research papers, website articles and academic books that speak of different strategies that can be applied.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. **An Overview of the Textile Industry in India:** In the article Indian textile industry - An overview by Dr. M. Dhanabhakya and A. Shanthi in Fibre2Fashion website, it was noted that, The Textile Sector in India ranks next to Agriculture. Textile is one of India's oldest industries and has a distinguishable presence in the national economy in as much as it contributes to about 14 per cent of manufacturing value-addition, accounts for around one-third of our gross export earnings and provides gainful employment to millions of people. The textile industry occupies a unique place in our country. One of the earliest to come into existence in India, it accounts for 14% of the total Industrial production, contributes to nearly 30% of the total exports and is the second largest employment generator after agriculture. It provides direct employment to around 20 million people. Textile and clothing exports account for one-third of the total value of exports from the country. Unlike other major textile-producing countries, India's textile industry is comprised mostly of small-scale, nonintegrated spinning, weaving, finishing, and apparel-making enterprises. This unique industry structure is primarily a legacy of government

policies that have promoted labor-intensive, small-scale operations and discriminated against larger scale firms. Knitted garments manufacturing has remained as an extremely fragmented industry. Global players would prefer to source their entire requirement from two or three vendors and the Indian garment units find it difficult to meet the capacity requirements. Industry still plagued with some historical regulations such as knitted garments still remaining as a SSI domain.

- 2. Supply Chain Practices in the Textile Industry:** In the article Supply Chain of Textile Industry – An Overview- by Mazharul Islam Kiron in textilelearner.net, it was noted that Supply chain of textile industry is long and complicated; hence the implementation of sustainable practices along the entire chain is challenging. A short review on supply chain of textile industry is presented here, starting with fiber production and its variety depending on raw material, followed by textile processing and technologies in yarn and fabric production, further finishing processing and technology, then manufacturing and merchandising, and finally consumption, use and disposal. Unlike value-added chains for food or building materials, textiles and apparel include a great number of process stages, carried out by different successive industry units. Along with the material flow, the value-added chain is modeled in the steps of fiber production, spinning, weaving/knitting, finishing, cutting and sewing, merchandising, wholesale/retail, consumption, and disposal/recycling.

VI. IDEAL WHOLESALE BUSINESS PROCESSES

From these we can conclude that, wholesalers are positioned either in the fabric or garment stages of the supply chain. The ideal business processes that could be practiced by knitted fabric wholesaler knit are as follows:

- 1. Sourcing and Procurement:** Identifying and sourcing knitted fabrics from manufacturers or textile mills. Evaluating suppliers based on factors like quality, price, reliability, and compliance with regulations. Negotiating contracts, terms, and pricing with suppliers. Placing purchase orders and managing the procurement process.
- 2. Inventory Management:** Receiving and inspecting incoming fabric shipments to ensure quality and accuracy. Maintaining an inventory management system to track fabric stock levels, locations, and specifications. Conducting regular inventory audits to monitor stock accuracy and identify any discrepancies. Analyzing demand patterns and forecasting to optimize inventory levels.
- 3. Sales and Marketing:** Developing a customer base, including garment manufacturers, designers, and retailers. Promoting and marketing the knitted fabric products through various channels, such as trade shows, digital marketing, or direct sales. Responding to customer inquiries, providing product information, and offering customized solutions. Developing and maintaining strong relationships with customers to foster repeat business.
- 4. Order Management:** Receiving customer orders for knitted fabrics, including specific fabric types, quantities, and delivery requirements. Processing and validating orders, ensuring accuracy and timely delivery. Coordinating with internal teams and suppliers to fulfill orders and manage any special requests or customization requirements. Generating and managing sales orders, invoices, and shipping documents.

5. **Logistics and Shipping:** Coordinating with logistics partners to arrange transportation of fabric shipments. Managing shipping schedules, ensuring on-time delivery, and tracking shipments. Optimizing shipping methods to minimize costs while meeting customer delivery requirements. Managing customs clearance, export documentation, and compliance with international trade regulations.
6. **Financial Management:** Managing pricing strategies and profit margins. Monitoring and analyzing sales performance, revenue, and profitability. Handling financial transactions, including invoicing, payment processing, and accounts receivable management. Budgeting and financial planning to ensure sustainable business growth.
7. **Quality Control and Assurance:** Implementing quality control processes to ensure that the knitted fabrics meet industry standards and customer expectations. Conducting inspections and testing to check for fabric quality, color consistency, and other specifications. Addressing any quality issues or customer complaints promptly and effectively.
8. **Supplier Relationship Management:** Building and maintaining relationships with fabric suppliers, negotiating contracts, and managing supplier performance. Conducting supplier assessments to ensure compliance with quality, ethical, and sustainability standards. Collaborating with suppliers on product development, innovation, and sourcing strategies.
9. **Continuous Improvement and Innovation:** Monitoring market trends, technological advancements, and customer preferences to identify opportunities for new products or improvements. Investing in research and development to explore new fabric materials, finishes, or designs. Continuously optimizing business processes, enhancing operational efficiency, and implementing best practices.

VII. MARKETING PRACTICES IN THE TEXTILE FABRIC WHOLESALE MARKET.

In the current era, the role of the wholesaler in the supply chain is slowly getting redundant. This is because of the infinite reach of the internet to every individual consumer. This has made it possible for big companies to bypass wholesalers and reach direct consumers through online market places and shopping websites.

If wholesalers need to stay relevant, and competitive, they need to adapt to the changing technological environment. Besides this they should be able to provide, extra services that are related to the product to increase sales. There are many small businesses that follow traditional modes of sales and do not invest in an online presence. However there are many businesses that now sell through online market places like Amazon.in , flipkart.in, ebay.in, meesho.com, and etsy.com. The most popular online platform for wholesalers is Indiamart.com. Other websites usually subscribed to are justdial.com, tradeindia.com, sulekha.com, and dnb.com.

The main focus of the wholesale marketing practices are, offering the best price, good product quality, speedy delivery. Promotion is given the least or no importance.

Wholesale textile suppliers do not restrict themselves to Minimum Order quantities. They also retail in the same establishment, so as to not miss out any possible consumer. Some provide additional services like connecting buyers with made up or garment manufacturing units. The wholesalers however avoid as far as possible any credit sales, and delivery costs from store to consumer.

Papers & Book References

The textile industry in India is one of the oldest and contributes to almost 14% of production and 4 % of GDP. This sector is extremely varied right from raw materials to fabric and apparel production. Along with this extensive variety there has naturally evolved an extensive Supply Chain System. It is important to study this component as the wholesaler is a very important link in the chain of distribution especially for textile products.

While understanding the existing marketing practices of a wholesale textile business, it is important to keep in mind the purpose of the project. The primary objective of the project was to improve on and enhance the business by improving on the marketing activities. To do so, it would be relevant and sensible to first understand what relevant and efficient options of activities are possible to use or choose from. The framework to make these choices are referred from the books Strategic marketing. Market oriented Corporate and Business unit planning, by Torsten Tomczak, Sven Reinecke and Alfred Kuss. The second book which was found most useful is Strategic Marketing: Planning and Control by Graeme Drummond, John Ensor and Ruth Ashford.

After understanding this, it would make sense to find proof of scientific conclusions that have already been achieved. These would serve as guidance for further study.

The first study by Jay Y Trivedi brings to light that Small and Medium Enterprises do not conduct sufficient marketing activities. Besides suggesting simple practices like better management and employee relationships and innovative marketing implementation based on clear goal setting, it makes inferences that a SME has great potential to make quick decisions and implement action. This is because there is an absence of the many layers in the decision-making process. Mohammad Amiri stresses on the importance of using a Market Information system to make better informed decisions. Thus, giving more direction to this project. Sheetal, Sangeeta, and Rajiv Kumar with an empirical survey, further talks about each aspect of the marketing mix and its effect on marketing strategy. Charun Mahajan and Pragya Mahajan speak of the impact of the Covid Pandemic on SME's . This is an important perspective as the large-scale economic impact of the pandemic has resulted in loss of business, and entrepreneurs making difficult decisions for the purpose of survival. It also thus further guides us to study more about this factor as the present level of prosperity of SMEs are a direct fallout of the Pandemic. And finally, DenadaFaraswacyen L. Gaol, Erna Maulina, Muhamad Rizal, and Margo Purnomon through their research try to understand the importance of applying innovation in the management and marketing process for the sake of survival of SME's when faced with corporate competition.

VIII. PRIMARY RESEARCH

Primary data analysis was attempted via survey method. 2 types of questionnaires were created to analyze different marketing aspects of wholesalers and to understand its

relevance to customers. The second questionnaire were prepared for consumers, however, there was a big challenge to get any responses.

The questionnaires were used for telephonic interviews.

The first questionnaire was sent to the wholesalers. The wholesalers were mostly apprehensive and barely open to interviews. The set of questions that were asked were framed in a way to get maximum participation.

Questions of section 1 were to capture the contact information about the business to establish genuineness of the respondent.

Questions of section 2 was to capture details of the first 3 'P's' of marketing, to understand what is the bearing of Product, place and price to the profitability of the business. It establishes the proportionate weight age of these inputs to the success and break-even achievement of sales.

Questions of Section 3 look at the state of the current marketing practices of the business. It identifies the weaknesses in terms of inadequacies and gives an idea of opportunities of creating business growth. The following are the list of questions that were asked:

SI No.	Section	Question
1	Section 1: Information about the company	Name of your Wholesale Business
2		How is the business legally registered?
3		Please share your business phone number
4		Please share your office Email Address
5		Please share your Office Location/address.
6		Please share your business' web address
7	Section 2: Product, Price and Place related questions.	What products do you sell?
option 1		Fabric
option 2		Garment
option 3		threads
option 4		Zips
8		How do you identify the going market rate for the fabrics you offer?
9		From which areas/places do your consumers come from?
10		What is your best selling product and what is the price
11		Do you sell a specific fabric content? For example, only cotton, or blends. What is that content?
12		On average how many varieties of fabric do you sell in a year?
option 1		upto 40
option 2		40 to 50

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option 3		50 to 60
option 4		other
13		What is the average number of colors sold per type?
14		What is the price range of the fabrics that you sell
15		What is the name of your lowest priced fabric?
16		What is the name of your highest priced fabric?
17		What type of customers do you have?
option 1		Individuals
option 2		designer boutiques
option 3		fabric retailers
option 4		corporate clients
option 5		other
18		Who is your biggest Client ?
19		What product they best prefer from you?
20		Who would you consider to be your competitors in the immediate market?
21		What are the similar products to yours do they offer?
22		What are the different products that the competitors offer, that you don't sell?
23		Which fabric do you see as a potential best seller, but you NOT yet to selling?
24		What is stopping you from stocking these products?
25		Do you employ a professional marketing expert?
option 1		yes
option 2		no
26		Which online platforms do you actively use for promotion?
27		Which online platform has given you the best response from consumers?
28		Do you collaborate with other businesses for promoting your business?
option 1		yes
option 2		no
29	Section 3: Promotional Practices related questions.	How do you reach new customers?
30		What services do you give your customer to influence them to buy.
option 1		delivery
option 2		discount
option 3		garment making
option 4		printing
option 5		dyeing
option 6		credit period
option 7		other
31		When you open a new outlet, how do you make customers aware of this new outlet?
32		Which traditional methods of advertising do you use?

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option 1	newspapers
option 2	magazines
option 3	radio/tv
option 4	posters
option 5	hoarding
option 6	catalog/brochure
option 7	none of the above
33	What data do you use to understand future demand trends?
34	Do you collaborate with any other business for the purpose of promotion.
option 1	yes
option 2	no
35	Which months of the year do you have the most orders?
option 1-12	All months jan-dec
36	Which months of the year do you have the lowest orders?
option 1-12	All months jan-dec
37	Any personal Thoughts on the Wholesale Textile business.

After the interviews were conducted with 20 textile wholesalers these were the results of the responses received from other wholesalers in comparison with Chehika Incorporation.

There were overwhelming similar responses in the entire set. When looking at Section 2 that made inquiries about three aspects of marketing, namely, product place and price. The following responses were noted.

IN regards to products and pricing, the overlaps in product variety sold was around 75%, with 25% being a special fabric that was not common in the market. The wholesalers also did not venture to stock a fabric type that was specially supplied by a competitor.

The average range of fabrics stocked was 40 types or less. The prices offered for similar fabrics were the same amongst all the wholesaler. The colors available were around 18 or usually 10 or less. The wholesaler provided a paid service of dyeing the fabric. If corporate clients approached the wholesaler for fabric, the wholesaler provided the service of manufacturing the garments, by outsourcing the work to a known manufacturing unit.

98% of the wholesalers dealt with very few fabric manufacturing units, and thus offered limited variety because of cost of inventory and warehousing is expensive. Depending on the fabric types in the inventory the wholesaler keeps the proportion of client types changed, however the types of clients were all the same.

In regards to marketing aspect of Place, it was found that 100% of the wholesalers were open to supply goods to states of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala. 98% did not get much orders from Andhra Pradesh. All did not supply to the North, West, or eastern regions of India from Pune. 75% did not want to open new branches within Pune. All the

wholesalers complained of insufficient affordable warehouse space. 25% were considering investing in added warehousing along the outskirts of Pune.

In section 3 of the questionnaire, the marketing aspect about promotional activities was talked about. 80% of the wholesalers did not invest in promotional activities to do their business. They mostly focused on the retention aspect and not acquisition of customers. Their preferred means of communication is whatsapp text messaging, or phone calls. They did not find it necessary to actively advertise or seek new customers.

IX. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

It is clear from the data collection that, small businesses of textile wholesalers operate in a homogenous manner.

They are heavily dependent on product quality, availability, and price as a means of marketing. This also is seen in heavy dependence on limited vendors or fabric units. This has led to an increase of inventory and lowers the bargaining power of the vendors.

The small capacity of these wholesalers are limiting their ability to service a larger geographical demographic.

The most common belief that the wholesalers seem to agree on is that they do not need to be part of the internet community and don't need to invest in promotional activities. Their dependence on whatsapp texting as means of promotion limits their reach to potential customers. There are untapped markets that could be reached by the wholesalers, because their focus is only on retention marketing and word-of-mouth publicity. Even traditional advertising is not undertaken.

The wholesale businesses operate their concerns like warehouses selling goods. The establishment is not aesthetically inviting. There is no attention given to improving the office space, or displaying of samples and options. There is no attention given to the identity of the business as being a recognizable brand or having a distinct inviting brand identity.

With reference to secondary data collection, it is concluded that growth is a means to survival. It is essential to every business. With the rapid growth of the internet community, and its increasing reach to every part of the world, it cannot be ignored as a threat to the future success of a small wholesaler.

It is evident from secondary data, there are certain aspects that need to be invested in to hope for the future growth of the business.

The conclusions arrived at from looking at Secondary data is as follows:

- The wholesale business in India is a Small medium enterprise SME.
- Market Information System needs to be used as a market strategy for Wholesalers. If used efficiently, can help wholesalers make better business decisions.

- The impact of Covid pandemic on the wholesale businesses is the result of 47% losses suffered. Wholesalers however did not adapt as quickly as other businesses, and are still in the recovery mode.
- Innovation is necessary to run a business successfully. This maybe introduced in small portions as and where relevant, but always necessary. Internet promotional strategies are a step towards innovation and bringing the business to a current business world.
- There are tried and tested marketing strategies that can be implemented as a first step to improve the prospects of a wholesale business.

X. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude Chehika Incorporation just as other textile wholesalers has been living a traditional existence devoid of innovation and an active online presence. Like most similar business it may have elements of still recovering from the economic downturn of the global corona virus pandemic.

- 1. Focus on Higher Inventory Turnover:** Chehika Incorporation is conducting a profitable business. It has its limitations being attached to a single fabric vendor. It needs to find a way to increase its inventory turnover rate, so that higher profits and increased savings can divert funds towards expansion strategies.
- 2. New Machinery and Increase in Range of Fabric:** Considering the firm is a family business, it may not be in the best interest of all sister concerns for Chehika Incorporation to find alternative sources of fabric, it needs to be considered on growing the existing business and invest in new machinery and equipment to expand the range of fabrics that can be sold by the wholesaler.
- 3. Consider Investing in Added Warehousing:** It is advisable to increase warehousing by stocking goods in real estate that lies on the outskirts of Pune city, to keep the costs in check.
- 4. Market Information System:** A proper MIS with better software and a few higher qualified employees will help in proper gathering and analysis of market information to undertake better business decisions, besides aid management of the growing enterprise.
- 5. Internet Marketing Strategies:** It's important to create a long-term plan, to use Internet marketing strategies to increase the scope of the business, to make the market more aware of its presence and to reach and acquire new categories of customers.
- 6. Utilizing Experts:** Employing experts in the fields of marketing to conduct a thorough research and planning along with implementing active marketing strategies is important for the growth of the business. If the business creates a goal to expand exponentially, it will need to be re-vamped with well-thought out and executed strategies and brand identity.

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