

AN INVESTIGATION ON BRAND PREFERENCE AMONG SPORT SHOE CONSUMERS: A CROSS SECTIONAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The study of consumer behavior in sport helps understand customers. A better understanding of customers can help develop products and services that meet their needs and design marketing strategies to attract new customers and retain existing customers. Consumer has been elated with the kind of reception they are getting from various companies these days. The reason behind a drastic change in consumer behavior is because the consumer is no more treated as a hire purchaser but, he is treated as the decider of the company's fortune. The purpose of the study was to investigate the brand preference of sport shoe consumers in Malnad region of Karnataka State. The subjects for the study were 200 inter university level sports persons from different sports disciplines representing Kuvempu University during the academic year 2011-12. In order to test the hypotheses formulated for the study a self structured questionnaire was constructed with thirty two close ended questions. Percent analysis was carried out wherever necessary and results were depicted with the help of tables and charts. Reebok and Nike brands were highly preferred at the cost of Indian made shoes like ASE, Action and others. Particular brands were preferred because of its perceived quality and durability by the consumers. Least importance was assigned to price, variety or safety provided by the sports shoes to the consumers in this study.

KEYWORDS

Consumer behaviour, sportswear, sports shoes, sports brand, marketing.

INTRODUCTION

 portswear has become a common and popular category among young people as it identifies them with a more relaxed lifestyle, greater versatility and comfort. This has prompted manufacturers like Nike and Adidas to start expanding their business particularly in Asia as it has the potential to give them higher volume of sales for their products (Yee and Sidek, 2008). Sports shoes have essentially become an inevitable part of any sports person at any level.

Many companies in the sportswear industry try to enhance brand loyalty among their customers. Brand loyalty is a consumer's conscious or unconscious decision that is expressed through the intention or behaviour to repurchase a particular brand continually. Brand loyalty has been proclaimed to be the ultimate goal of marketing (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). In marketing, brand loyalty consists of a consumer's commitment to repurchase the brand through repeated buying of a product or a service or other positive behaviours such as word of mouth. This indicates that the repurchase decision very much depends on trust and quality performance of the product or service (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Famous brand names can disseminate product benefits and lead to higher recall of advertised benefits than non-famous brand names (Keller, 2003). There are many unfamiliar brand names and alternatives available in the market place. Consumers may prefer to trust major famous brand names. These prestigious brand names and their images attract consumers to purchase the brand and bring about repeat purchasing behaviour and reduce price related switching behaviours (Cadogan & Foster, 2000).

In the past decade, the field of marketing, including consumer behavior has received great attention. Researchers found that when consumers seek information about certain products, they relied on some key sources, which transmitted consumer-related values, attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. Consumer has been elated with the kind of reception they are getting from various companies these days. The reason behind a drastic change in consumer behavior is because the consumer is no more treated as a hire purchaser but, he is treated as the decider of the company's fortune (Bheri, 2004). The study of consumer behavior in sport helps understand customers. A better understanding of customers can help develop products and services that meet their needs and design marketing strategies to attract new customers and retain existing customers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Yee and Sidek (2008) investigated how the respondents are influenced by factors of brand loyalty towards sportswear brands. Previous research adopted seven factors to test in the Malaysian environment. The seven factors of brand loyalty are brand name, product quality, price, style, promotion, service quality and store environment. Brand name has shown strong correlation with brand loyalty. In order to increase customer satisfaction and drive them to be brand loyalists, marketers are encouraged to develop aggressive marketing programs. Questionnaires were distributed and self-administered to 100 respondents. Descriptive analysis, one-way ANOVA and Pearson Correlation were used in this study. The research results showed that there is positive and significant relationship between factors of brand loyalty (brand name, product quality, price, style, promotion, service quality and store environment) with sportswear brand loyalty. Study of more focused factors that are appropriate to the Malaysian environment is recommended in order to obtain accurate information.

Youn, Song and MacLachlan (2008) examined how consumers' brand preferences and price sensitivities evolve as their levels of experience increase in outdoor sports gear categories. Using a Hidden Markov modeling framework, we investigate how consumers evolve along discrete latent states that represent their experience and knowledge levels, and how this corresponds to changes in preference parameters. In our empirical estimation and evaluation of the model we utilize customer membership data from a large outdoor and sporting goods retailer. Existing single-category Hidden Markov approaches require a rich purchase history and do not work well for the types of durable product categories in an area such as sport climbing, as typical customers make relatively few purchases in any single category, even over long periods of time. For this reason we use a multi-category framework in which unobservable experience levels are inferred by leveraging information from multiple categories. Using Hierarchical Bayes estimation, we account for initial consumer heterogeneity as customers first take up the sport at different skill levels. This also allows us to account for consumer heterogeneity in transition probabilities as customers accumulate experience and knowledge at different rates. We model the latent states to follow a Markov chain with a transition probability matrix that is specific to individual customers, and is a function of their cumulative purchases in each category. Thus, we are able to identify the typical brand(s) purchased by customers at different stages of their experience. We find empirical evidence that customer who are beginners or are new to sport climbing will prefer certain brands while customers who have more experience or knowledge of the sport will prefer other brands. The multi-category approach allows us to determine which product category is most indicative of a stage of a consumer's evolution.

Krishna (2012) focused on attitudes and behavior on the concept of the youth's buying behavior towards branded sports shoes, different consumers have got different decision making process. The buyer's ultimate goal is to buy the product of qualitative, quantitative with low/best affordable price. In order to identify different kinds of consumer's behavior towards buying of different branded shoes and Nike sports shoe. Investigator have carried out buying behavior of youth and different kind of consumer behavior models, literature and theory of consumer behavior; and finally, analyzed and concluded.

Yoh, Mohr and Gordon (2012) investigated factors that influence Korean teens' athletic footwear purchase. Four hundred and fifty-six teens participated in the study. Throughout the review of related literature and the conduction of a pilot study, seven characteristics were considered; price, color, style, brand name,

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OBJECTIVES

HYPOTHESES

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

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CONCLUSIONS

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comfort, quality, and celebrity endorsement. ANOVA procedures indicated that gender played a significant role in the purchasing behavior of Korean teens. Male teens stated that comfort and quality are the most important factors while female teens revealed that style and color are more important factors than any other factor. Marketers and advertising managers of athletic shoes companies should utilize the findings of this study to communicate with teen consumers more effectively.

Sportswear, including sports shoes, becomes a common and popular category because it gives young people a more relax lifestyle and greater versatility and comfort. It is believed that consumers prefer products of developed countries to products of developing or underdeveloped countries. Ko, Kim and Hoon (2008) tried to compare consumer behaviors for sports shoes in China and Korea. Our research model analyzed relationships among country-of-origin, perceived quality, perceived price, brand image and purchase intention for sports shoes in Korea and China. The country-of-origin was not found to play a significant role in Korea. But it was found to positively influence perceived quality in China. Brand image was found to play an important role in influencing perceived quality and perceived price in Korea and China. Perceived quality was found to influence positively purchase intention in both countries. Perceived price was found to negatively influence purchase intention in China. Implications drawn from this study were discussed.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study was considered significant for the following reasons:

- 1) Understanding of dynamics in marketing of sport shoe was facilitated.
- 2) Sports shoe manufacturers could understand the demands of consumers.
- 3) Feedback derived from consumers to shoe manufacturers was made possible.
- 4) Helpful for budding shoe companies to understand the preference patterns of consumers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The objective of the study was to investigate the brand preference of sport shoe consumers in Malnad region of Karnataka State.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the review of literature and understanding of the research problem it was hypothesized that the consumer perceptions are influenced by explicit factors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SELECTION SUBJECTS

The subjects for the study were 200 inter university level sports persons from different sports disciplines during the academic year 2011-12. Simple random sampling technique was observed to give equal opportunity to every sports person irrespective of gender and sports discipline. All the subjects belonged to Kuvempu university jurisdiction and their age regarding between twenty to twenty eight years.

SELECTION OF TEST ITEMS

In order to test the hypotheses formulated for the study a self structured questionnaire (Appendix I) was constructed as per the insight of the researcher and literature review. Apart From personal details the questionnaire included 32 closed ended questions framed both in English as well as regional language Kannada. A pilot study was conducted in order to remove ambiguities in the questionnaire.

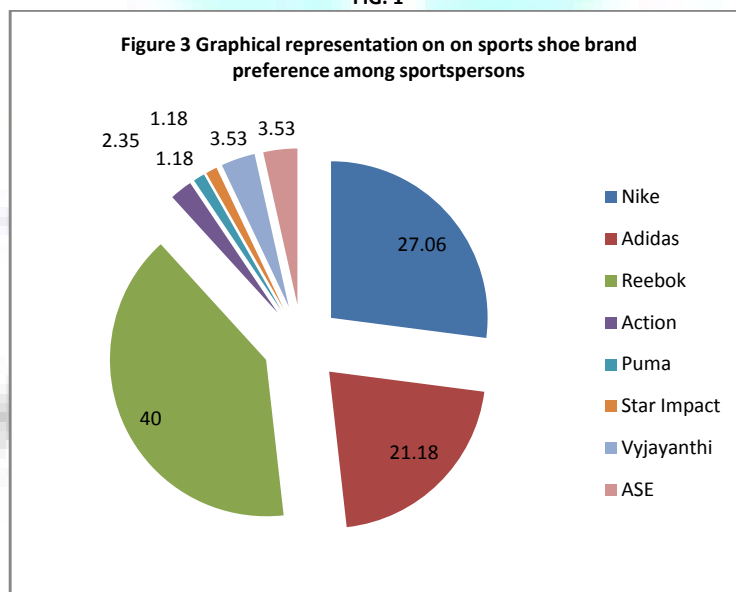
STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES

In order to derive inferences suitable statistical techniques were employed. Percent analysis was carried out wherever necessary and results were depicted with the help of tables and charts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All the Inter University level sportspersons selected for the present cross sectional study preferred wearing sports shoes due to inevitableness and the nature of sports. Replacement of sports shoes from time to time is imperative for hassle free high sports performance. It was apparent that the respondents replaced their sports shoes either once in six months (44.71%) or once in a year (51.76%). Information relating to consumer preferred sports shoes brand is provided in figure 1.

FIG. 1



Information relating to factors influencing the selection of particular brand is provided in table 1.

TABLE 1: DETAILS ON FACTORS INFLUENCING SELECTION OF SPORTS SHOE BRAND

Factors	Responses (in Percentage)
Quality	70.59
Durability	23.53
Price	2.35
Variety	2.35
Safety	1.18
Total	100

From the above table it is clear that the majority of respondents prefer a particular brand of sports shoes because of its quality (70.59%). A considerable amount of respondents preferred a particular brand of sports shoes because of its durability (23.53%). A very meager proportion of respondents preferred because of its price, variety or safety.

Table 2 to table 9 provides information on various aspects related to brand loyalty among sportspersons of Malnad region. Table 2 contains details on responses of sportspersons towards brand name of sports shoes.

TABLE 2: INFORMATION PERTAINING TO RESPONSES OF SPORTSPERSONS TOWARDS BRAND NAME OF PREFERRED SPORT SHOES

Aspect	Response	Percentage
Agreement on selection of brand name regardless of price	Yes	76.47
	No	23.53
	Total	100
Agreement on reputation of the brand	Yes	91.76
	No	8.24
	Total	100
Agreement on brand name and image attracting purchasers	Yes	82.35
	No	17.65
	Total	100
Agreement on reflection of personality through brand name	Yes	83.53
	No	16.47
	Total	100

From table 2 it is apparent that the subjects (76.47%) select their preferred brand irrespective of price; 91.76% of the subjects agree that their preferred brand is reputable; 82.35% of respondents believed that the brand name and image attracts them in making purchase; 83.53% of respondents agree that the brand name reflects their personality. Table 3 provides details on product quality of preferred brand as perceived by sportspersons of Malnad region.

TABLE 3: INFORMATION PERTAINING TO RESPONSES OF SPORTSPERSONS TOWARDS QUALITY OF PREFERRED BRAND OF SPORT SHOES

Aspect	Response	Percentage
Agreement on fitting of size of sport shoes	Yes	98.82
	No	1.18
	Total	100
Agreement on comfort of materials used by preferred brand	Yes	88.24
	No	11.76
	Total	100
Agreement on preferred brand providing sufficient colour options	Yes	68.24
	No	31.76
	Total	100
Agreement on satisfaction with the quality of preferred brand	Yes	100
	No	00
	Total	100

From table 3 it is clear that the majority of the subjects (98.82%) agree on the fitting of the size of preferred brand sport shoes; 88.24% of respondents are comfortable with the materials used by preferred brand; about two third (68.24%) of the subjects agree that their preferred brand provides sufficient colour options for selection; and there is complete agreement on the satisfaction with the quality of preferred brand. Table 4 provides details on aspects relating to style of preferred brand of sport shoes.

TABLE 4: INFORMATION PERTAINING TO RESPONSES OF SPORTSPERSONS TOWARDS STYLE OF PREFERRED BRAND OF SPORT SHOES

Aspect	Response	Percentage
Agreement on provision of wide variety of styles	Yes	77.65
	No	22.35
	Total	100
Agreement on suitability of styles of brand	Yes	92.94
	No	7.06
	Total	100
Agreement on style of the brand having distinctive features	Yes	71.76
	No	28.24
	Total	100
Agreement on styles of the brand being trendy and fashionable	Yes	77.65
	No	22.35
	Total	100

From table 4 it is obvious that the three fourth of the subjects (77.65%) feel that their preferred brand provides wide variety of styles; 92.94% of the respondents perceive that the style of the preferred brand is suitable to them; 71.76% of the respondents believe that the style of their preferred brand has distinctive features; and 77.65% of the respondents believe that the style of their preferred brand is trendy and fashionable. Table 5 provides details on aspects relating to store environment and service quality of preferred brand of sport shoes.

TABLE 5: INFORMATION PERTAINING TO RESPONSES OF SPORTSPERSONS TOWARDS STORE ENVIRONMENT AND SERVICE QUALITY OF PREFERRED BRAND OF SPORT SHOES

	Aspect	Response	Percentage
Store environment	Agreement on sufficient sales outlet	Yes	89.41
		No	10.59
		Total	100
	Agreement on attractive interior displays of store	Yes	71.76
		No	28.24
		Total	100
Service quality	Agreement on training acquired by sales person of the store	Yes	61.18
		No	38.82
		Total	100
	Agreement on willingness of the salespersons of the stores to help	Yes	68.24
		No	31.76
		Total	100
	Agreement on friendly and courteous behaviour of salesperson of the store	Yes	77.65
		No	22.35
		Total	100

From table 5 it is clear that the respondents of this study feel that their preferred brand have sufficient outlets (89.41%); 71.76% agree that the interior displays at the store of preferred brand sport shoes are attractive; 61.18% of respondents agree on the fact that the sales person of the store is trained; 68.24% of respondents feel that the salespersons of the stores is willing to help; and 77.65% of respondents agree that the behaviour of salesperson of the store is friendly and courteous. Table 6 provides details on aspects relating to sales promotion and price of preferred brand of sport shoes.

TABLE 6: INFORMATION PERTAINING TO RESPONSES OF SPORTSPERSONS TOWARDS SALES PROMOTION AND PRICE OF PREFERRED BRAND OF SPORT SHOES

	Aspect	Response	Percentage
Sales Promotion	Agreement on attractiveness of ads	Yes	80
		No	20
		Total	100
	Agreement on attractiveness of window displays	Yes	78.82
		No	21.18
		Total	100
	Agreement on impact of celebrities on purchase of sport shoes	Yes	44.71
		No	55.29
		Total	100
Price	Increase of price hinders purchase	Yes	61.18
		No	38.82
		Total	100
	Agreement on goods value for money	Yes	81.18
		No	18.82
		Total	100
	Agreement on satisfaction with the price range	Yes	67.06
		No	32.94
		Total	100
	Agreement on purchase of another brand of same quality with lesser price	Yes	36.47
		No	63.53
		Total	100

From table 6 it becomes obvious that the majority of respondents of this study agree on the attractiveness of ads (80%); 78.82% agree on the attractiveness of window displays; there was disagreement by a large number (55.29%) on the impact of celebrities on purchase of sport shoes; 61.18% believe that the increase of price hinders purchase; 81.18% Agree that the preferred brand provides goods value for money; 67.06% agree on satisfaction with the price range; and 63.53% disagree on purchase of another brand of same quality with lesser price. Table 7 provides details on importance of sports shoes as perceived by respondents in the present study.

TABLE 7: DETAILS ON PERCEPTION OF SPORTSPERSONS REGARDING IMPORTANCE OF SPORT SHOES

Factors	Percentage
Comfort	30.59
Price	0
Durability	15.29
Utility	54.12
Total	100

Table 7 makes it very clear that the sportspersons perceive sports shoes of their preferred brand important for the following reasons: 54.12% of respondents believe on the utility and 30.59% of respondents believe on its comfort. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents provide importance on the price of sports shoes of their preferred brand. Table 8 provides information on switching over of the brand under normal circumstances.

TABLE 8: DETAILS ON SWITCHING OVER OF THEIR PREFERRED BRAND SPORT SHOES IN SPORTSPERSONS OF MALNAD REGION

Response	Percentage
Yes	22.35
No	77.65
Total	100

From table 8 it is evident that more than three fourth of the respondents (77.65%) have expressed their loyalty and are determined not to switch over their preferred brand sport shoes under normal circumstances. Table 9 provides information on preference for promotional tool by their preferred brand sport shoes among sports persons of Malnad region.

TABLE 9: DETAILS ON PREFERENCE FOR PROMOTIONAL TOOL BY THEIR PREFERRED BRAND

Promotional tool	Percentage
Lucky Coupon	10.59
Free Gift	8.24
Discount	67.06
Buy one get one free	14.12
Total	100

From table 9 it become obvious than the majority of respondents (67.06%) expect some sort of discount to be offered by their preferred brand sport shoes.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the results of this study it was concluded that the sports persons of Malnad region prefer wearing sports shoes on regular basis. Sportspersons replace their shoes either once in six months or once in a year. Reebok and Nike brands were highly preferred at the cost of Indian made shoes like ASE, Action and others. Particular brands were preferred because of its perceived quality and durability by the consumers. Least importance was assigned to price, variety or safety provided by the sports shoes to the consumers in this study. The brand name and image attracted consumers and they felt that the preferred brand reflected their personality. The consumers were contented with the materials used and colour options provided by their preferred brands. There was complete agreement on the satisfaction with the quality of preferred brand sports shoes. They perceived that the style of the preferred brand was suitable to them and also believed that the style of their preferred brand has distinctive features. There was agreement among respondents on sufficient sales outlets by their preferred brand and agree that the interior displays at the store was attractive. The sales person of the store was believed to be trained and willing to help. They agreed that the behaviour of salesperson of the store was friendly and courteous. There was disagreement by a large number on the impact of celebrities on purchase of sport shoes. It was also believed that the increase of price hindered their ability to purchase. Sportspersons agree that the preferred brand provided goods value for buyers money. They also agreed on satisfaction with the price range and disagreed on purchase of another brand of same quality with lesser price. This exhibited their strong association with the brand and their loyalty. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents provide importance on the price of sports shoes of their preferred brand. Respondents were determined not to switch over their preferred brand sport shoes under normal circumstances and they expect some sort of discount to be offered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following recommendations are recommended on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The results of the present study may be helpful to upcoming sports marketing professionals in order to enhance their sales.
- The results of the present study shall guide the sports manufacturers and franchise in making their product better.
- A similar study can be conducted on National and International level sportspersons.
- The study in future days may include vast area not just limited a particular region.
- The tool used in the study may be made systematic by using Likert Scale for assessing the perception of the consumers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE ON PREFERENCE FOR SPORTS SHOE BRAND

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name : _____
2. Age : _____
3. Gender : _____
4. Address : _____
5. Phone No. : _____
6. E-mail : _____
7. Occupation : _____
8. Date : _____

Instructions: Kindly read each question carefully and mark [v] appropriate response.

1. Do you prefer wearing sport shoes?
Yes ☐ No ☐
2. Do you use it regularly?
Yes ☐ No ☐
3. How often do you replace your sport shoes with a new one?
Once every six months ☐
Once every year ☐
Once in two years ☐
More than two years ☐
4. Which brand you prefer?
Nike ☐

- Adidas
Reebok
Action
Any other Kindly specify _____
5. What factors influence you to go for a particular brand?
Quality
Durability
Price
Variety
Any other Kindly specify _____
6. Do you select brand name regardless of price?
Yes No
7. Is the brand reputable?
Yes No
8. Does brand Name and Image attract you to purchase?
Yes No
9. Does the size of sportswear fit you very much?
Yes No
10. Does your preferred brand provide wide variety of styles?
Yes No
11. Does your preferred brand have sufficient sales outlet?
Yes No
12. Is the sales person of the store is well-trained?
Yes No
13. Are ads of your preferred brand attractive?
Yes No
14. Does an increase of price hinder you to purchase?
Yes No
15. Are the materials used by your preferred brand comfortable?
Yes No
16. Are styles of the brand suitable for you?
Yes No
17. Are the salespersons of the stores willing to help?
Yes No
18. Are window displays of your preferred brand attractive?
Yes No
19. Does your preferred brand provide goods value for money.
Yes No
20. Does your preferred brand have sufficient colour options?
Yes No
21. Does the style of your preferred brand have distinctive features?
Yes No
22. Are the interior displays of store of your preferred brand attractive?
Yes No
23. Is the salesperson of the store friendly and courteous?
Yes No
24. Are you satisfied with the quality of your preferred brand?
Yes No
25. Are the styles of your preferred brand trendy and fashionable?
Yes No
26. Does the brand reflect your own personality?
Yes No
27. Are you satisfied with the price range of preferred brand?
Yes No
28. How do you consider the importance of sport shoes?
Comfort
Price
Durability
Use in sport
Any other Kindly specify _____
29. Do you normally switch over the brand?
Yes No
30. What kind of promotional tool you prefer?
Lucky coupon
Free gift
Discount
Buy one get one free.
31. Is there any impact of celebrities on your purchase of sport shoes?
Yes No
32. Will you purchase another brand of same quality with lesser price?
Yes No

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