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Research Article

Consumer Buying Behavior Towards Footwear: Insights From the Unorganised Retail Outlets in Chennai City

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Abstract: The footwear industry is growing significantly with the changing lifestyle of consumers, increased awareness of fashion, and the rise of income levels. It is imperative for retailers to understand consumer preferences in order to compete effectively in an ever-changing market environment. The present study aims to analyze consumer preferences regarding footwear in Chennai with special reference to Shoba Shoes. Primary data was collected from 113 respondents using a structured questionnaire. A descriptive research design was adopted, and statistical tools such as percentage analysis, chi-square test, and ANOVA were used for data analysis. The findings of the study reveal that comfort, price, quality, and design are the major factors affecting purchase decisions. The majority of respondents prefer soft sole footwear and purchase footwear once in six months within a price range of ₹500–₹1000.

Keywords: Consumer Preference, Footwear Industry, Buying Behaviour, Customer Satisfaction, Retail Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer preference is an important factor in the success of any retail business, particularly for retail businesses operating in competitive industries such as footwear. With the rise of urbanization and changing lifestyles, consumers have become more conscious about their purchases, particularly with regards to footwear. Chennai is a metropolitan city with a highly diverse market.

Footwear is not only a necessity but also a fashion statement that defines an individual's personality. The presence of both branded and unbranded stores has led to an increase in competition for footwear retailers. Thus, it is important for any retail business to understand consumer expectations.This study is based on analyzing consumer preference for footwear at Shoba Shoes in Chennai. The study aims to identify the factors that influence consumer preference for footwear at Shoba Shoes and customer satisfaction.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The theoretical background of the study includes consumer behavior theory. This theory helps in explaining consumer behavior based on how individuals make buying decisions according to their needs and preferences. Consumer buying behavior is based on factors such as price, quality, brand, and consumer preferences. The utility theory implies that consumers try to maximize satisfaction from buying products. In the shoe industry, consumers try to analyze different factors before making a buying decision.Retail marketing theory also plays a crucial role in explaining consumer buying behavior. This theory implies that consumer experience, variety of products, and pricing influence consumer buying behavior.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies have been conducted to examine different aspects of consumer behavior in the footwear industry. Recent studies on customer preference and satisfaction towards footwear in India reveal a multidimensional pattern of consumer behaviour across both organized and unorganized markets. Research by Nema and Sharma (2025) highlights that product quality, durability, and brand perception significantly influence purchase decisions and satisfaction levels, while psychological and social factors increasingly shape consumer choices. Chabata (2024) emphasizes the growing importance of omni-channel retailing, sustainability, and personalized experiences in determining customer satisfaction. Similarly, Venkatesh et al. (2024), focusing on Tamil Nadu's local markets, found that affordability, availability, and functional utility remain dominant factors influencing preference, especially in semi-urban areas. Thakur (2024) further supports this by identifying a dual-market structure in India, where unorganized sectors compete on price while organized sectors leverage brand trust and quality assurance. Studies by Sheoran and Chhikara (2023) and Selvi (2023) reveal that price, comfort, design, and social influences such as peer groups and lifestyle trends significantly affect purchase intention, with younger consumers showing a stronger inclination toward branded and sports footwear. Chakkambath et al. (2022) underline that footwear consumption is no longer purely utilitarian but also reflects identity and lifestyle, combining functional and aesthetic factors. Supporting this, broader behavioural studies indicate that psychographic variables such as attitudes, lifestyle, and social class play a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction and loyalty. Market-level insights also suggest a shift toward casual and multi-purpose footwear driven by urbanization and changing consumer lifestyles (Minhas, 2025). Earlier foundational work by Abbas et al. (2020) confirms that price and quality continue to be the core determinants of consumer preference, especially in price-sensitive markets like India. Overall, the literature indicates that while traditional factors such as price and quality remain significant, emerging elements like brand image, sustainability, and customer experience are redefining consumer expectations, particularly across different market segments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study has adopted a descriptive research design for analyzing the consumer preferences for the footwear products in Chennai. The descriptive research design will enable the researcher to understand the opinions, behavior, and satisfaction level of the customers. The primary research was done using a structured questionnaire for gathering the required information from the respondents. A total of 113 respondents were chosen for the study. Secondary research was done by using the journals, books, and online resources. The sampling technique adopted for the study is the convenience sampling technique. The research was done for a period of three months. Statistical methods like percentage analysis, chi-square test, Correlation , etc. have been used for the purpose of analyzing the collected data. Tabular representation has been used for the purpose of proper understanding.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	Category	No. Of Respondents	Percentage %
Gender	Male	48	42.5
	Female	65	57.5
	Total	113	100
Age	Below 20	11	9.7
	21-30	64	56.6
	31-40	30	26.5
	41-50	8	7.1
	Total	113	100
Occupation	Student	50	44.2
	Business	21	18.6
	Employee	28	24.8
	Homemaker	10	8.8
	Other	4	3.5
	Total	113	100
Monthly Income	Below ₹15,000	53	46.9
	₹15,000-₹30,000	23	20.4
	₹30,000-₹45,000	16	14.2
	₹45,000-₹60,000	9	8
	Above ₹60,000	12	10.6
	Total	113	100

Data Interpretation and Findings

The study reveals that the majority of respondents are female (57.5%), indicating higher participation from women compared to men (42.5%). Most respondents belong to the 21–30 age group (56.6%), showing that young adults dominate

the sample. A large portion of the respondents are students (44.2%), followed by employees (24.8%), which reflects a youth-oriented demographic. Additionally, nearly 46.9% of respondents earn below ₹15,000, suggesting that most of them fall under the lower-income category. Overall, the findings indicate that female respondents form the major share of the study, young adults (21–30 years) are the primary consumers, and students represent the key target group. The sample mainly represents a young, low-income, student-dominated population.

TABLE 2: LEVEL OF PREFERENCE FOR COMFORT FEATURES IN FOORTWEAR
(Highly Preferable-HP, Preferable-P, Neutral-N, Not Preferable-NP, Highly Not Preferable-HNP)

Feature	HNP	%	P	%	N	%	NP	%	HNP	%	Total	%
Soft Cushioning	59	52.2%	42	37.2	12	10.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	113	100
Proper Fit	60	53.1	44	38.9	8	7.1	1	0.9	0	0.0	113	100
Arch Support	40	35.4	43	38.1	28	24.8	2	1.8	0	0.0	113	100
Lightweight	38	33.6	35	31.0	36	31.9	3	2.7	1	0.9	113	100
Breathable	40	35.4	47	41.6	20	17.7	2	1.8	4	3.5	113	100

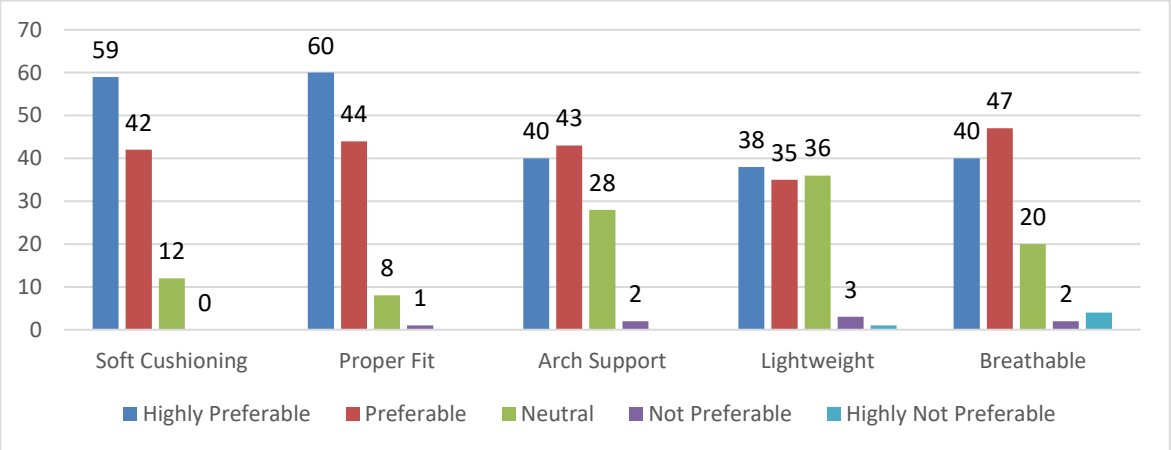


CHART 2: LEVEL OF PREFERENCE FOR COMFORT FEATURES IN FOORTWER

Data Interpretation and Findings

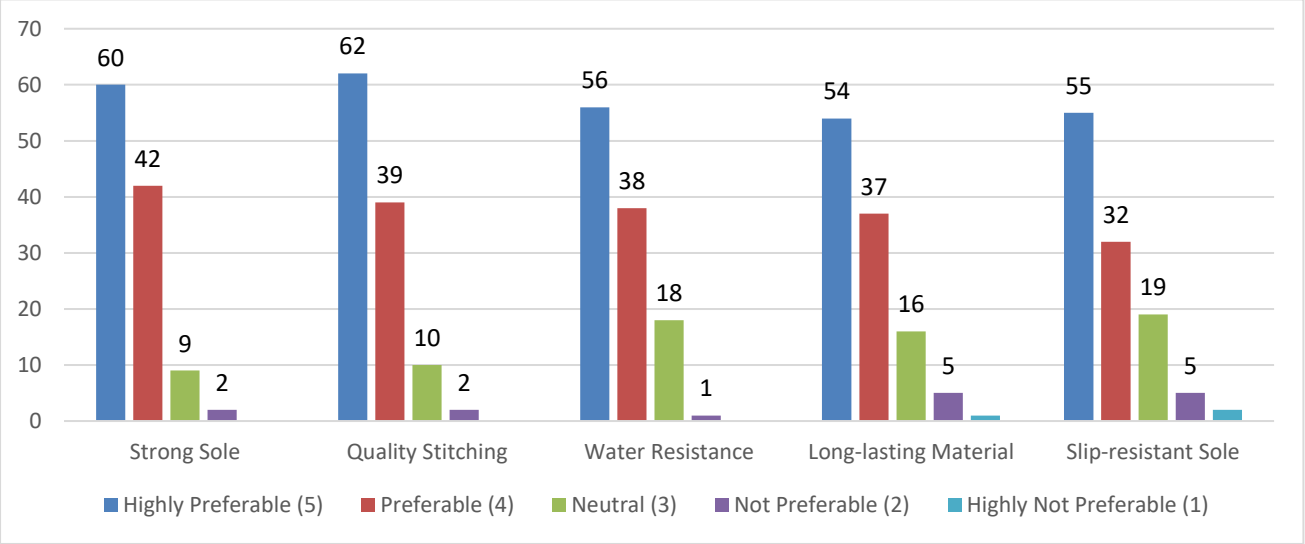
The table indicates that comfort features play a significant role in footwear preference among respondents. Proper Fit (53.1%) and Soft Cushioning (52.2%) have the highest proportion of "Highly Preferable" responses, showing that these are the most important comfort factors. Breathability (41.6%) and Arch Support (38.1%) are mostly rated as "Preferable," indicating moderate importance. Lightweight footwear shows a relatively higher neutral response (31.9%), suggesting mixed opinions among respondents. Very few respondents have rated any feature as "Not Preferable" or "Highly Not Preferable," reflecting an overall positive perception toward all comfort features. The findings reveal that Proper Fit and Soft Cushioning are the most preferred features, followed by Breathability and Arch Support, while Lightweight has comparatively varied opinions. Overall, comfort is a key factor influencing footwear choice, with strong preference for fit and cushioning.

TABLE 3: LEVEL OF PREFERENCE FOR DURABILITY FEATURES IN FOOTWEAR
(Highly Preferable-HP, Preferable-P, Neutral-N, Not Preferable-NP, Highly Not Preferable-HNP)

Feature	HNP	%	P	%	N	%	NP	%	HNP	%	Total	%
Strong Sole	60	53.1	42	37.2	9	8.0	2	1.8	0	0.0	113	10

												0
Quality Stitching	62	54.9	39	34.5	10	8.8	2	1.8	0	0.0	113	1000
Water Resistance	56	49.6	38	33.6	18	15.9	1	0.9	0	0.0	113	1000
Long-lasting Material	54	47.8	37	32.7	16	14.2	5	4.4	1	0.9	113	1000
Slip-resistant Sole	55	48.7	32	28.3	19	16.8	5	4.4	2	1.8	113	1000

CHART 3: REPONSDENT'S PREFERENCE FOR THE FEATURES IN A FOOTWEAR



Interpretation

The findings indicate that respondents place strong emphasis on functional and durability-related features in footwear. A majority show high preference for strong sole (53.1%) and quality stitching (54.9%), highlighting the importance of structural strength and build quality. Similarly, water resistance (49.6%), slip-resistant sole (48.7%), and long-lasting material (47.8%) are also highly preferred, reflecting the need for safety, comfort, and durability. The proportion of neutral responses is relatively higher in water resistance (15.9%) and slip resistance (16.8%), indicating that these features may depend on usage conditions. Negative preferences remain minimal across all features (generally below 5%), showing that these attributes are widely accepted as essential. Overall, the results clearly demonstrate that customers prioritize durability, safety, and performance-oriented features when selecting footwear.

Hypothesis 1

- **H0:** There is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards cushioning in the footwear.
- **H1:** There is significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards cushioning in the footwear

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.763a	2	.414
Likelihood Ratio	1.857	2	.395
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.284	1	.257
N of Valid Cases	113		

Interpretation:

Since P (0.414) value is greater than 0.05 we reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. Hence there is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards soft cushioning. The Chi-square test shows that the p-value (0.414) is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant relationship between gender and preference for soft cushioning. This means gender does not influence expectations towards cushioning. Both male and female respondents have similar opinions regarding this feature. The test results are reliable as all expected counts are above 5. Hence, soft cushioning is equally important for all respondents irrespective of gender.

Hypothesis 2

- **H0:** There is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards the fit of the footwear.
- **H1:** There is significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards the fit of the footwear.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.497a	3	.058
Likelihood Ratio	7.898	3	.048
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.166	1	.075
N of Valid Cases	113		

Interpretation:

Since P (0.058) value is greater than 0.05 we reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. Hence there is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards proper fit.The Chi-square test shows that the p-value (0.058) is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant relationship between gender and preference for proper fit. This means gender does not influence expectations towards proper fit in footwear. Both male and female respondents have similar opinions regarding this feature. However, some cells have expected counts less than 5, which slightly affects the reliability of the test. Hence, proper fit is considered equally important by all respondents irrespective of gender.

Hypothesis 3

- **H0:** There is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards arch support in a footwear.
- **H1:** There is significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards arch support in a footwear.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.718a	3	.437
Likelihood Ratio	3.451	3	.327
Linear-by-Linear Association	.019	1	.889
N of Valid Cases	113		

Interpretation:

Since P (0.437) value is greater than 0.05 we reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis.Hence there is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards arch support of the footwear.The Chi-square test shows that the p-value (0.437) is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant relationship between gender and preference for arch support. This means gender does not influence expectations towards arch support in footwear. Both male and female respondents have similar opinions regarding this feature. A few cells have expected counts less than 5, but the results remain acceptable. Hence, arch support is equally important for all respondents irrespective of gender

Hypothesis 4

Chi-Square Tests

- **H0:** There is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards lightweight feature of the footwear.
- **H1:** There is significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards lightweight feature of the footwear.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.799a	4	.773
Likelihood Ratio	2.160	4	.706
Linear-by-Linear Association	.041	1	.840
N of Valid Cases	113		
a. 4 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .42.			

Interpretation:

Since P (0.773) value is greater than 0.05 we reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. Hence there is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards lightweight feature of the footwear.The Chi-square test shows that the p-value (0.773) is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant relationship between gender and preference for lightweight footwear. This means gender does not influence expectations towards this feature. Both male and female respondents have similar opinions regarding lightweight footwear. Some cells have expected counts less than 5, which slightly affects reliability. Hence, lightweight is equally important for all respondents irrespective of gender.

Hypothesis 5

- **H0:** There is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards breathable feature of the footwear.
- **H1:** There is significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards breathable feature of the footwear.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.286a	4	.683
Likelihood Ratio	2.363	4	.669
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.097	1	.295
N of Valid Cases	113		

Interpretation:

Since P (0.683) value is greater than 0.05 we reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis.Hence there is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their expectations towards breathable feature of the footwear.The Chi-square test shows that the p-value (0.683) is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant relationship between gender and preference for breathable footwear. This means gender does not influence expectations towards breathability. Both male and female respondents have similar opinions regarding this feature. Some cells have expected counts less than 5, which slightly affects reliability. Hence, breathability is equally important for all respondents irrespective of gender.

Hypothesis 6:

- **H_0:** There is no significant relationship between synthetic, leather, canvas, and rubber materials.
- **H_1:** There is a significant relationship between synthetic, leather, canvas, and rubber materials.

Correlation

		Synthetic	Leather	Canvas	Rubber
Synthetic	Pearson Correlation	1	-.004	.267**	.418**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.970	.004	.000
	N	113	113	113	113
Leather	Pearson Correlation	-.004	1	.374**	.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.970		.000	.062
	N	113	113	113	113
Canvas	Pearson Correlation	.267**	.374**	1	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000		.000
	N	113	113	113	113
Rubber	Pearson Correlation	.418**	.176	.498**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.062	.000	
	N	113	113	113	113

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation:

The correlation table shows that most material types have a positive and significant relationship with each other. The strongest correlation is between canvas and rubber (r = 0.498), followed by synthetic and rubber (r = 0.418) and leather and canvas (r = 0.374).However, the relationship between synthetic and leather (p = 0.970) and leather and rubber (p = 0.062) is not statistically significant. Since most p-values are less than 0.05, we partially reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Hence, there is a significant relationship among most material types, except for a few combinations.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that consumer preference in the Chennai footwear market is mainly influenced by factors such as comfort, durability, price, and design. Consumers tend to prefer footwear that offers both quality and value for money, along with features like proper fit and cushioning. The findings of the study indicates that footwear companies have a strong potential to enhance their market by focusing on product quality, expanding product variety, and maintaining competitive pricing. Improving customer experience and adopting digital marketing strategies can further help in attracting and retaining customers. Overall, understanding consumer preferences is essential for business success in a competitive market, as it helps firms to align their products and strategies with changing customer needs.

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