Brand Loyalty and Shoe Attributes Preference of Indian National Basketball Players

Mitesh Punjabi¹ and Amritashish Bagchi²*

¹Student, MBA, ²Assistant Professor, Symbiosis School of Sports Sciences, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, Maharashtra, India

*Corresponding author: amritashish.bagchi@ssss.edu.in (Bagchi)

Abstract

Background: Indian National basketball players are arguably the best players in the country who represent their state in one of the most prestigious basketball championships in India, Senior National Basketball Championship. This paper indicates a brand preference, reason to choose a particular brand, and other important attributes such as price range, ankle-length, comfort, durability, and usage time of basketball shoes that elite players choose. Choice of shoe brand and different attributes may depend on brand loyalty or attributes such as comfort, price, looks, or some new technology. Methods: In this paper data from 150 basketball players with a mean age of 27.46 years, who have participated in the senior national basketball championship was compiled and analyzed. Data was collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed with the help of SPSS using Chi-Square and non-parametric tests. Conclusion: It was found that there is no significant difference in gender when it comes to choosing a pair of shoes for basketball. It was seen that "Nike" was most preferred by elite players. Preferred ankle length was “Mid Ankle” cut by both the genders and price range of “4000-5999” Indian Rupees was most common amongst the players. The most preferred attribute by the players was Comfort and Flexibility in both the gender category, followed by looks of the shoe.

Keywords: Basketball, Preferences, Brand Loyalty, Shoe Attributes

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1. Introduction:

Basketball shoes go as back in time as in 1891 when the first basketball shoe was made named “Chuck Taylor”. Then in 1920 Converse Came out with its classic canvas tennis with rubber soles shoes¹⁰ and around for 40 years they were the best-selling shoes in the United States. In 1960 other companies like “Nike” and “Puma” began to make a presence on the basketball court with leather sneakers, whereas converse remains in the headlines as it was the all-star brand still worn by legendary players such as Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. In Mid 1980s Nike changed its game as they started using advanced technology in their shoe “Air Force One” and its legendary “Air-Sole”, also they signed one of the greatest basketball players Michael Jordan in his rookie season which helped Nike to be one of the greatest producers of basketball shoes.

Shoes are an important part of any basketball player’s performance. People prefer different kinds of attributes in their shoes such as looks, comfort, ankle-length, cost, or usage time. People feel comfortable with these different attributes which help them to play to their full potential. Basketball shoes are supposed to support the ankle. Low-cut ankle and high tops ankle shoes should give comfort with good ankle support. Factors such as subjective feels and comfort play a large role in user preference². Shoes specific for basketball are generally associated with how a player performs and are frequently innovated to enhance a player’s performance. Benefits attributed to this product include: reducing injury rates, minimizing energy expenditure, and enhancing athletic performance³. Getting the correct fit is important when it comes to choosing...
the best basketball shoe for oneself. As with any sport, it can be said that comfortable footwear can help to perform better with fewer injuries in the process.

Brand plays an important role in performance, a brand that the consumer believes to be of high quality will be a more successful brand that is not\(^4\). A brand should be used as a communication perspective. Any product can be superior to its competition yet may not be preferred as it may not be able to convey the core benefits of the product to the target audience\(^5\). With the brand comes the brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is something whose perception depends from person to person\(^6\). Brand loyalty is when a customer purchases a product from the same brand repeatedly instead of switching to a substitute brand. Brand helps the players to be comfortable psychologically as it helps the player to feel comfortable and perform to its full efficiency and also helps to reduce injury as a player is comfortable in the shoes\(^7\). Basketball shoes are also associated with players, players tend to buy shoes because a player is associated with the brand it is a part where brand loyalty comes in as it shows that players are or want to be associated with their favorite player or the player that they admire.

Indian basketball history goes back in time to pre-independence when in 1930 the first basketball match was played in India. In 1934 first Indian National Championship for men was conducted. It was after independence when a federation for basketball BFI (Basketball Federation of India) was formed in 1950 which was Affiliated with FIBA (federation Internationale de Basketball Amateur) and followed its rules for organizing basketball championships.

Senior National Basketball Championship is arguably the most prestigious basketball tournament in the country\(^8\). In the last Senior National Basketball Championship 2019-2020 season, 53 teams (29 Men and 24 Women) teams participated and it was conducted at Guru Nanak Stadium in Ludhiana, Punjab. This championship is the top level of basketball in India where best players from India represent their states. Players playing in this Championship are arguably the best of their respective states so having their opinion of the type of shoe attributes and shoe brand that they prefer would be of importance to the producers so that they can target the Indian market accordingly.

Basketball is a game where you need to focus on strength, agility, and power development also have to work on the cardiovascular base\(^9\). There are so many attributes in basketball such as hand-eye coordination, change in direction while running, jumping, and sprinting. So, to be a basketball player you need to be able to perform all this efficiently, and Indians are becoming knowledgeable about fitness and this is evident by the number of fitness and health care centres that have increased in recent times. Various health issues have prompted to this awareness. The Indian shoe market has undoubtedly emerged as a clear winner from this mounting realization about maintaining a healthy lifestyle\(^10\). As becoming fit has stated more of a choice than an option people are not just targeting gyms for being fit but also sports. People targeting basketball as an activity to be fit will buy basketball shoes as basketball is a sport which requires sport-specific shoe and it cannot be played using regular running shoes\(^11\). The primary objective of this study is to study the preference of National basketball players in India in choosing basketball shoes for them. This study would help to highlight important factors related to product attributes such as brand, ankle-length, price range, and usage rate. This study will help the brand to understand brand loyalty and brand recognition in the Indian basketball system, also will help to estimate different shoe attributes that national players need in their shoes and allow the brands to target the Indian market accordingly.

1. Material & methods:

2.1. Selection of Sample – This study was targeted to elite Indian basketball players who have participated in the senior national basketball championship at least once. The total number of respondents for this study was 150 with a mean age of 27.46 years and the female to male ratio was 3 females per 10 males.

2.2. Selection of variable – Independent variable for this study was gender whereas the dependent variable was the most preferred brand, ankle-length preference, the amount spent on a shoe, usage of basketball shoes in months, and selection of sport-specific attributes requires in a pair of shoes.
2.3. Data collection – Data was collected through an online questionnaire and it was targeted to National basketball players as they are arguably the most elite player in the country and their view on a particular topic would help to understand the shoe requirement for basketball.

2.4. Statistical technique – For performing data analysis SPSS version 24 was used. Chi-Square statistical technique was used to differentiate between gender preferences and see if there is any significant difference in preference based on gender. It was also used for analysing the individual factors associated with brand preference and the larger data set of brand preference within the Elite Indian national basketball circuit. Using percentages, the collected data was segmented into smaller themes that further the overall understanding of independent variables within the raw data.

3. Results and Discussion:

Basketball has been argued as a popular and developing sport in India and with the spread of the NBA, it is looking at higher levels of professionalization in the future. The research focused on the elite professionals at the highest level for basketball within the country and their perspective of how they derive value and utility from footwear brands with a specific correlation to the basketball specialization.

From the data collected, gender is the only variable that is independent and will be discussed along with dependent variables for a more holistic outlook of brand preference while understanding the limitation in the number of male and female respondents respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Sig. Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Preference</td>
<td>0.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of Brand</td>
<td>0.169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ankle Cut Type</td>
<td>0.507</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usage Rate</td>
<td>0.089</td>
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<tr>
<td>Price Factor</td>
<td>0.387</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preferred Shoe Attribute</td>
<td>0.756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brand Preference

In terms of preference of shoe brand, the overall collective data reveals Nike as the most preferred brand among the respondents with 49% men and 38% female as the gender-based distribution. Nike has been synonymous with basketball since the arrival of Michael Jordan in basketball who is arguably the greatest player to ever play the sport of basketball.

Air Jordan under Nike itself is a sub-specialization in the basketball shoe category, undergoing increasing commercialization and spectacle-ization of the world of which Michael Jordan and Nike are a significant and highly revealing part[12]. With the globalization of the NBA, Nike was always equally complimentary in its business strategy and its consistent interpretation can be seen consistent with the Indian elite basketball circuit. The significance value is more than 0.05% in the Chi-square test, there was no significant difference in gender for brand preference.

While there are other prominent brands, the clear dominant choice also begs the question of the reasons for the choice of the brand which are directly linked to brand consumption and further brand investigation would provide further insight into elite athletes and their consumption of footwear brand concerning basketball in India.

There is a significant difference in brand preference with medium effect size. It was found that Nike is most preferred, followed by Adidas and Under-Armour. Nike is the preferred over brands like Adidas and Under-Armour, this might be because of the vast social media presence and also its association with major players in the world of basketball. It will be seen in other attributes that people select a brand based on its trust knowledge visibility and availability respectively in this order. Nike arguably is one of the most trusted brands and as mentioned above it has a vast social media presence. That is why Nike is very well-preferred over other brands.
Following the brand preference, brand loyalty towards Nike for repeat purchase solidifies the brand's deep influence in the basketball shoe category with 74% players opting to stick with products from Nike again in terms of consumption highlighting the importance of brand commitment resulting from perceived quality. Data also indicates the choice of brand dependent more on brand trust with 52% men and 45% of women citing it as an important factor as compared to other factors such as brand knowledge and brand advertising. It shows a gap in product communication which makes the choice of shoe selection less informed.

Brand loyalty for Nike dictates the strong relationship it has in the consumer's mind. The use of loyalty programs as a powerful tool for relationship marketing is becoming popular to encourage customer loyalty. New brands entering the elite basketball market in India do not enjoy strong loyalty indicated by low dependence on brand knowledge, brand advertising, and even the aspect of ease of access to the brand offering which was indicated at 8% of the data collected covering choice of brand.

Loyalty is the result of developing past positive experiences with the customers and having them return to the company various times due to these experiences, customers will return again and again to do business with the company; regardless of whether it may not have the best product, price or service delivery. The holistic approach of measuring loyalty provides an avenue for brands to communicate better with consumers while being less price sensitive. The gender aspect of the choice of brand for women could be limited by the product offering accommodated by most brands involved in the elite Indian basketball circuit.

Trust in a brand is the main thing that allows people to buy a certain product of a particular brand. Trust comes when you have already consumed a product from the same brand and when you have trust in a particular brand you would not hesitate in trying a different product from the same brand itself. It can be seen that there is a significant difference (< 0.05) in the reason for buying a particular brand, Trust being the most repetitive answer followed by knowledge. The effect size was calculated and the magnitude was found to be large.
Basketball is a high impact sport that puts a heavy strain on the ankle due to the hard landings, explosive movements, and the contract-based nature of the sport. High impacts in running and landings, explosive movements must be considered in the context of overuse injury occurrence. Also, various investigations have emphasized the importance of functional traction properties in shoes for high agility sports\textsuperscript{(16)}.

Looking at the properties of Elite Indian basketball, the surface also plays an important factor as most training facilities are hard concrete courts which increases the impact of the foot. Outdoor courts also affect the traction of the shoes and make the sole of the shoe flat and slippery. Most brands in India can be argued to have product offerings that are almost completely for indoor shoes which also affects the longevity of the shoe and the brand along with it.

The athletic demands of basketball players and its significance on shoe ergonomics can be based on specific playing positions namely guards requiring speed and agility, centers with strength and power, and forwards with general versatility\textsuperscript{(17)}. According to the respondents, mid-ankle cut type offering stability and higher mobility is the most popular segment followed by high ankle which offers extra ankle support but restricts movement. The low ankle cut category has received low utility are which could be due to low functional association with the characteristics of basketball.

While mid-cut is the most popular category, biomechanically it can be argued that the category is not as functional as the high-cut due to lack of protection which can increase the risk of injury. It seems that, among players, high-cut shoes are still thought to reduce the risk of ankle supination trauma, even though several investigations found no evidence for this relationship\textsuperscript{(18, 19, 20)}.

It was found that there is a significant difference in ankle-length preference with large effect size. It was found that Mid ankle length is most preferred followed by a high top and low ankle support.
Usage Rate

Worobets and Wannop\textsuperscript{(21)} has highlighted the significance of pressure and its direct impact on the traction of the shoe. From an Indian context, this measure is amplified further due to the hard courts thereby affect the usage rate of the shoe and the associated brand. Almost 34% of the respondents have a shoe change every 6 to 9 months with the range of me being higher at 38% and women at 31% indicating the use of at least 2 functional shoes in a year.

Compared to the highest professional set up in the world in the NBA, the usage rate of performance basketball shoes in Indian is exceptionally low. NBA players change their shoes every 10 to 15 days, with the Denver Nuggets kit manager even stating that “on average each player will use approximately 50 pairs of shoes for an 82-game season.”\textsuperscript{(22)} There was no significant difference when it comes to how much time a male elite athlete and a female elite athlete uses a pair of shoes.

Price factor

The elite Indian basketball sector does not have any athletes with shoe deals and therefore require purchasing their shoe based on need, desire, ability to pay, and accessibility of the
product/brand. The average price for a shoe that most elite basketball players spend is about Rs.4750 and considering a minimum of 2 functional pairs every year is closer to Rs.10000. Most performance brand shoes from all brands are about $150 and upwards and if the price is considered as a measure of quality, then at least 34% of the respondents and using mid-tier priced products and not the top of the line as compared to dominant basketball paradigms like the NBA. Only 9% male and 14% of female athletes consume high-performance shoes as brand narratives.

![Figure 5: Gender wise price range in percentage](image)

**Preferred shoe attributes**

Different shoe attributes are preferred by different people and it depends on what is perceived by the player that makes them feel comfortable in a pair of shoes and what attributes help them to perform better and be at their best. (23) examined plantar and dorsal in-shoe pressures during walking in three pairs of footwear. The authors concluded that the measurement of pressure on the foot should be considered a useful indication of discomfort associated with the footwear.

In the male category, it was seen that 25% wanted their shoe to be comfortable more than anything which also is an indication of what brand might look to offer. For example, Nike is the most popular brand among the respondents and can be associated with comfort as it emerged dominant among other themes. It was also seen in (17) that Guard and centers showed specific demand for attributes comfort being the most important for both positions and ankle support for centers and shoe weight and flexibility for guards.

Flexibility and stability also play a significant role in the utility consideration of basketball shoes and the elite Indian basketball circuit was consistent with this analogy, with 16% players expressing the need for their shoes to be flexible and stable each, 17% players wanted that their pair of shoes are good looking and 14% wanted the shoe according to the weight of the shoe they prefer. Stability and comfort are important factors for shoe preference. Also, there was no significant difference in gender in choosing an attribute for their pair of shoes.
In this study, basic factors were taken into consideration which would help the brand to identify what an Indian basketball player needs in their shoe as the game of basketball is different in India being played mostly on cemented courts. In this study shoe attributes may differ as players in India are used to play on different surfaces such as wooden, cemented, and synthetic basketball courts, and each court may have different requirements of shoes depending on the surface of the court.

4. Conclusion:

This study was conducted to study the preference of national basketball players of India in choosing a basketball shoe for them which will be best for them. Different factors which were taken in consideration which were brand they prefer, a reason to choose a brand, ankle-length preference, price willing to pay for a pair of shoes, how long they use a pair of shoe and specific attributes such as comfort, stability, flexibility, shoe weight and looks of a shoe. It was found that Indian players prefer “Nike” the most which can be because of its vast social media presence as it was also seen that Indian players are inclined to buy a product because of trust in a brand and they frequently are aware of the brand. It can also be seen in this paper that Mid-Cut ankle length is most preferred as it provides adequate support and does not reduce stability as these two were most preferred attributes after comfort followed by the looks of the shoe, by Indian national basketball players. These players tend to use a shoe for 3-6 months. As basketball in India is not just limited to be an indoor sport which is only played on a wooden surface there are a lot of factors which can be used for further investigation also. For example, in India, most of the court are cement and synthetic courts which may affect the usage of a shoe as shoe sole would not be as last as long as it would while playing on a wooden court. This also affects the amount which a player would want to spend on a shoe as they would also need the shoe to be economical for them with all the attributes they desire, on average they are willing to 4000-5000 on a pair of shoes. This study will be significant for marketing perspective as it would help to know the niche market of basketball footwear in India and to have a wide view of attributes required by Indian basketball players, hence brands can target these points and make a mark on basketball footwear market in India.

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Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest among the authors

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