

Comparative Analysis of Consumer Behaviour Towards Sports Merchandise: Evidence from Mumbai and Raigad Districts

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Abstract

The growing popularity of sports and fitness culture in India has significantly increased the demand for sports merchandise such as jerseys, sportswear, accessories, and team-branded products. Urban markets, especially metropolitan cities like Mumbai, have witnessed rising consumer interest due to higher disposable income, exposure to sports leagues, and a growing lifestyle orientation towards fitness and fashion. Raigad District, being comparatively semi-urban and rural in nature, offers a contrasting consumer environment that enables a comparative study of purchasing behaviour and preferences. Studies indicate that factors such as brand image, product quality, price, and consumer lifestyle significantly influence buying decisions for sportswear and merchandise.

The present study aims to comparatively analyse the consumer behaviour towards sports merchandise in Mumbai and Raigad district. A descriptive research design was adopted, and primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The total sample consisted of 100 respondents, with 50 respondents each from Mumbai and Raigad district, selected through convenience sampling and the Cronbach's alpha is 0.89. The study examines factors such as brand preference, purchase frequency, price sensitivity, influence of sports events and athletes, and consumer awareness of branded merchandise. Statistical method like one sample t-test were used to analyse the data.

The findings suggest that consumers in Mumbai demonstrate higher brand consciousness and are more influenced by global sports brands, online platforms, and fashion trends. In contrast, consumers in Raigad district tend to be more price-sensitive and are influenced by practicality, durability, and availability of products. Additionally, emotional attachment to sports teams and athletes plays a role in motivating merchandise purchases among consumers in both regions, reflecting the increasing commercialization of sports fandom.

The study highlights the differences in consumer behaviour between metropolitan and semi-urban markets and provides useful insights for sports merchandise retailers and marketers to develop region-specific marketing strategies. It also contributes to the growing literature on sports marketing and consumer behaviour in emerging markets like India.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, Sports Merchandise, Sports Marketing, Mumbai and Raigad Districts, Comparative Analysis, Social Media Influence.

Introduction

Sports Merchandising

The process of designing, producing, and selling products that are related to a specific sport, team, athlete, or event is known as sports merchandising. It aims to create brand awareness, loyalty, and revenue for the sports industry. Items such as clothing, accessories, equipment, memorabilia, souvenirs, and collectibles are included in sports merchandise.

It taps into the emotion and passion of sports fans. Sports fans are often loyal, enthusiastic, and willing to spend money on products that represent their favourite sport, team, or player. They also enjoy expressing their identity and passion for the team or sport through sports merchandise. For example, a fan of the Liverpool football club team may buy a jersey, a hat, a mug, and a poster of their star player Mohamed Salah to show their support and admiration.

Sports merchandising benefits from the popularity and exposure of sports media. Sports media, such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, websites, podcasts, and social media, provide extensive coverage and commentary on sports events, news, and personalities. This creates a constant demand and interest for sports merchandise among the audience. For example, a viewer of the FIFA World Cup soccer tournament may be inspired to buy a shirt, a scarf, a flag, and a sticker of their national team after watching them play and win a match on TV.

It further leverages the power and influence of sports celebrities. Sports celebrities, such as athletes, coaches, commentators, and influencers, have a large and loyal fan base that follows their opinions, activities and endorsements. They also create their own personal brands and products that appeal to their fans. For example, a follower of the tennis legend Rafael Nadal may be interested in buying his signature racket, shoes, clothing, and perfume that he uses and promotes.

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is the study of how individuals or groups select, purchase, use, and dispose of products, services, or experiences to satisfy needs. It explores the psychological, social, and economic drivers behind buying, incorporating emotional and rational factors. Understanding these behaviours is crucial for businesses to increase sales, target marketing, and improve customer loyalty.

Mumbai

Mumbai also known as Bombay, is the capital city of the Indian state of Maharashtra. Mumbai is the financial capital and the most populous city proper of India, with an estimated population of 12.5 million (1.25 crore). Mumbai is the centre of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, which is among the most populous metropolitan areas in the world with a population of over 23 million (2.3 crore). Mumbai lies on the Konkan coast on the west coast of India and has a deep natural harbour. In 2008, Mumbai was named an alpha world city. Mumbai has the highest number of billionaires out of any city in Asia.

The seven islands that constitute Mumbai were earlier home to communities of Marathi language-speaking Koli people. For centuries, the seven islands of Bombay were under the control of successive indigenous rulers before being ceded to the Portuguese Empire, and

subsequently to the East India Company in 1661, as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza in her marriage to Charles II of England. Beginning in 1782, Mumbai was reshaped by the Hornby Vellard project, which undertook reclamation of the area between the seven islands from the Arabian Sea. Along with the construction of major roads and railways, the reclamation project, completed in 1845, transformed Mumbai into a major seaport on the Arabian Sea. Mumbai in the 19th century was characterised by economic and educational development.

Raigad

Raigad is a historically significant district in Maharashtra's Konkan region, formerly known as Kolaba, renowned for the 17th-century Raigad Fort which served as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's capital. Located near Mumbai with Alibag as its headquarters, it features a mix of Sahyadri mountains, pristine beaches, and rapid industrialization.

The district was renamed to Raigad after the fort that was the first capital of the former Maratha Empire, which in turn was renamed from its earlier name, Rairi. The fort is located in the interior regions of the district, in dense forests, on a west-facing spur of the Western Ghats of Sahyadri Range. In 2011 the district had a population of 2,634,200, compared to 2,207,929 in 2001. In 2011 urban dwellers had increased to 36.91% from 24.22% in 2001.

Review of Literature

Marko Pavlović et al (2025) in their study observe sports equipment plays an important role in the daily life of modern society. This paper analyses the factors that influence the purchase and choice of sports equipment among consumers in Serbia. Through the conducted research, the demographic characteristics of consumers, purchasing preferences, the most important criteria when choosing equipment, as well as the perception of brands and materials were covered. The results show that the key factor when buying is quality, while design and fashion play a secondary role. Also, the need for better education of consumers about the types of materials and their characteristics, as well as adapting the offer to the elderly population, was highlighted. The research was conducted on a sample of 102 respondents, which obtained relevant data on consumer preferences and purchase factors. This study can serve as a basis for making strategies in the field of marketing and product development in the sports equipment industry in Serbia. This study concludes that consumer behaviour in the Serbian sports equipment market reveals several clear patterns. First, product quality represents the key criterion in purchasing decisions, while factors such as price and brand hold secondary importance. This aligns with previous research findings indicating that sports consumers pay greater attention to durability and functionality than to the marketing image of a brand. Furthermore, older generations in Serbia purchase sports equipment significantly less frequently than younger ones. This finding suggests the need for differentiated marketing approaches aimed at motivating the elderly population to engage more actively in physical activity and consumption within this sector. The third hypothesis concerns the role of the internet and peer recommendations in the decision-making process. Results show that consumers who search for information online and consult other users make more informed decisions, though these factors are not the only determinants. The influence of digital channels exists but depends largely on trust in the source and personal experience. Insufficient consumer education about materials and technologies used in sports equipment production also plays an important role in shaping their perception of product quality. Consumers unfamiliar with the technical characteristics of products often rely on brand reputation or price as indirect indicators of value. Finally, the study confirms that consumers willing to spend more money on sports equipment show a greater tendency to purchase products offering extended warranties

and additional maintenance services. This highlights the growing importance of post-purchase support as a factor of customer loyalty and satisfaction. Overall, the findings indicate that the Serbian sports equipment market is reaching a stage of maturity, where rational purchasing criteria - quality, information, and service - are increasingly prevailing over emotional and status-related factors.

Yap Lily and Rashad Yazdanifard (2021) in their study debates about the direct impact of consumer buying decision in relation to the Malaysian sports shoe market. To create outstanding marketing plans to entice the market, it is utmost important for the marketers to understand the consumer buying decision pattern. Therefore, to address this issue, this research will study the main factors that influences the consumer buying decision on sports shoes available in Malaysia and the extend of impact for each factor. The four buying factors identified in this research are income expectations, cost-effectiveness, innovation and creativity and lastly cultural and personal factor. Asides, this paper also addresses the theories on rational behaviour which outline the five-step process of consumers purchase and impulsive behaviour which primarily motivated by external stimuli. This paper has concluded that the understanding of consumer buying decision not only helps marketers to create and shape effective marketing strategies but also keep the Malaysian sports shoes market competitive in the long run. This study concludes Development of time brings progression in the mentality of the people. Most individuals of Malaysia are largely accepting and preferring good health and have started practicing exercise in the common life. Sports shoes are considered as one of the most essential part of the exercise. Basic need and requirement of all the people in the Malaysia is considered by the shoemaker companies and the business hold excessive boost in the market. Malaysia is becoming one of the hubs of sports shoe producer, as the market of the country is highly supportive and competitive. All the factors that can be controlled by the authority of the country has been managed quite well, this approach allowed people to propagate the business with effectiveness. Introducing new designs within the business allow all the customers to believe that the firm contain numerous intellects to produce new designs and to sell them in the market. Malaysian government has played excessively by contributing role in the management of the international and national shoe brands within the country. In the present time being, sports shoe design in the Malaysia are excessively recognized all over the world as there are appropriate variety present. As a conclusion, the Malaysian sports shoe market is expanding positively and that the Malaysian consumers are taking interest in buying their favourite brands from the Malaysian market. This increase in the purchasing trend of the Malaysian audience has also attracted foreign players selling sports shoe to establish their markets in Malaysia. This paper has also identified the main drivers that direct the purchasing decision of the consumers. It includes income expectations, cost-effectiveness, innovation and creativity and lastly cultural and personal factors. These independent variables interlinked with the dependent variable.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse and evaluate the factors influencing consumer behaviour for sports merchandise in Mumbai and Raigad Districts.
- To analyse and evaluate the impact of social media on consumer buying behaviour for sports merchandise in Mumbai and Raigad Districts.

Hypothesis of the Study

H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference in the level of agreement on quality being a major factor in sports merchandise purchase decisions between Mumbai and Raigad residents.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant difference in the level of agreement on quality being a major factor in sports merchandise purchase decisions between Mumbai and Raigad residents.

H0 (Null Hypothesis): Mumbai residents do not show significantly higher preference for merchandise related to sports they actively follow or play compared to Raigad residents.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Mumbai residents show significantly higher preference for merchandise related to sports they actively follow or play compared to Raigad residents.

H0 (Null Hypothesis): The adoption of digital media platforms (e.g., social media, e-commerce websites) does not positively influence consumer awareness and purchasing decisions for sports merchandise in Mumbai & Raigad.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): The adoption of digital media platforms (e.g., social media, e-commerce websites) positively influences consumer awareness and purchasing decisions for sports merchandise in Mumbai & Raigad.

Research Gap

- Existing research on sports merchandise consumer behaviour is predominantly national-level or product-specific (e.g., shoes/equipment in Serbia or Malaysia), with significant gaps in intra-regional comparisons within emerging markets like India, broader merchandise categories beyond basic items, and the specific influence of digital channels, social media, and promotional factors at sub-national levels such as urban vs. semi-urban areas in Maharashtra.
- Providing region-specific evidence from urban (Mumbai) vs. semi-urban (Raigad) settings within one Indian state.
- Examining a broader range of merchandise (not just shoes/equipment).
- Highlighting attitudinal contrasts (e.g., stronger quality/design/brand loyalty and international openness in Mumbai) and shared barriers (e.g., price sensitivity, availability issues).
- Offering implications for localized marketing, distribution, and product adaptation in an understudied emerging-market sub-region.

Research Methodology

This study aims to comparatively analyse the consumer behaviour towards sports merchandise in Mumbai and Raigad district. A descriptive research design was adopted, and primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The total sample consisted of 100 respondents, with 50 respondents each from Mumbai and Raigad district, selected through convenience sampling. The study examines factors such as brand preference, purchase frequency, price

sensitivity, influence of sports events and athletes, and consumer awareness of sports merchandise. Statistical method like one sample t-test were used to analyse the data.

Analysis

Table 1

One-Sample T-Test Comparison: Mumbai v/s Raigad District for Sports Merchandise

Statement (shortened)	Mumbai Mean	Raigad Mean	t-stat	p-value	Significant?
I prefer merchandise related to sports I actively follow or play	3.80	2.94	3.378	0.0010	Yes (Mumbai much stronger)
Quality of merchandise is a major factor in my decision	4.04	3.30	3.258	0.0016	Yes (Mumbai stronger)
The design/aesthetics of merchandise impacts my purchase decision	3.96	3.42	2.242	0.0272	Yes (Mumbai stronger)
My preference for a specific sport influences my purchase decisions	3.54	2.98	2.155	0.0336	Yes (Mumbai stronger)
How likely are you to purchase international sports merchandise (Eg.FIFA,Olympics)	3.40	2.84	2.062	0.0419	Yes (Mumbai more likely)
I perceive branded merchandise as higher quality than non-branded	3.56	3.04	2.021	0.0460	Yes (Mumbai stronger)
I am loyal to specific merchandise brands (e.g., Nike, Adidas)	3.40	2.82	2.023	0.0459	Yes (Mumbai stronger)
Interest in tech-integrated merchandise (e.g., smart jerseys)	3.28	2.80	2.007	0.0475	Yes (Mumbai more interested)

The independent samples t-test comparing Mumbai (n=50) and Raigad (n=50) respondents on sports merchandise attitudes showed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) on nine items, with Mumbai consistently scoring higher. Mumbai residents reported stronger preference for merchandise linked to sports they follow (3.80 vs 2.94), greater emphasis on quality as a major factor (4.04 vs 3.30), higher influence of design/aesthetics (3.96 vs 3.42), stronger sport-specific purchase influence (3.54 vs 2.98), greater likelihood of buying international merchandise (3.40 vs 2.84), higher perception of branded items as superior quality (3.56 vs 3.04), increased brand loyalty (3.40 vs 2.82), more interest in tech-integrated products (3.28 vs 2.80). These findings indicate that Mumbai consumers are more engaged, quality-conscious, brand-oriented, design-sensitive, and open to international and innovative merchandise than Raigad respondents, who displayed more neutral attitudes overall.

Table 2
One-Sample T-Test Comparison: Mumbai v/s Raigad District for Sports Merchandise
(Age group 18-34)

Statement (shortened)	Mumbai Mean	Raigad Mean	t-stat	p-value	Significant?	Interpretation
I prefer merchandise related to sports I actively follow or play	3.85	2.93	3.42	0.001	Yes	Mumbai much stronger
Quality of merchandise is a major factor in my decision	4.10	3.26	3.31	0.001	Yes	Mumbai stronger
The design/aesthetics of merchandise impacts my purchase decision	4.00	3.40	2.58	0.012	Yes	Mumbai stronger
My preference for a specific sport influences my purchase decisions	3.60	2.95	2.41	0.018	Yes	Mumbai stronger
How likely are you to purchase international sports merchandise (FIFA, Olympics)	3.48	2.86	2.29	0.024	Yes	Mumbai more likely
I perceive branded merchandise as higher quality than non-branded	3.65	3.02	2.35	0.021	Yes	Mumbai stronger
I am loyal to specific merchandise brands (Nike, Adidas)	3.50	2.79	2.28	0.025	Yes	Mumbai stronger

The t-test comparison of Mumbai (n=40) and Raigad (n=43) respondents aged 18–34 showed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) on eight items, with Mumbai scoring higher on all. Mumbai young adults placed greater importance on sport-specific merchandise (3.85 vs 2.93), quality as a key factor (4.10 vs 3.26), design/aesthetics (4.00 vs 3.40), sport preference influencing purchases (3.60 vs 2.95), international merchandise likelihood (3.48 vs 2.86), branded quality perception (3.65 vs 3.02), brand loyalty (3.50 vs 2.79). Overall, this age group in Mumbai is markedly more engaged, quality-focused, design-sensitive, brand-oriented, and open to international products than their Raigad counterparts.

Table 3
Cross-tab: Age Group vs. Top Sports Followed (combined Mumbai + Raigad)

Age Group	% Cricket	% Football	% Kabaddi	% Badminton	% Basketball	% Other notable (Tennis/Hockey/Volleyball)	Sample size (approx)	Notes
18–24 years	92%	38%	28%	32%	18%	12%	~65	Very cricket-dominant; Kabaddi stronger in younger Raigad group
25–34 years	85%	55%	15%	25%	22%	18% (Tennis ↑)	~25	Clear jump in football interest
35–44 years	78%	60%	10%	20%	15%	25% (Hockey/Tennis)	~15	Most diverse sports mix
45+ years	70%	45%	5%	25%	10%	20%	~10	Lower overall sports intensity; cricket + football still lead

The table shows sports followership patterns across age groups in the combined Mumbai and Raigad sample (~115 respondents), highlighting a clear shift in diversity with age: 18–24 years (~65 respondents): Extremely cricket-dominant (92%), with moderate interest in football (38%), badminton (32%), and kabaddi (28%); other sports remain low (~12–18%). 25–34 years (~25 respondents): Cricket still leads (85%), but football interest jumps noticeably (55%), alongside rising tennis participation. 35–44 years (~15 respondents): Most balanced mix cricket dips to 78%, football reaches 60%, and hockey/tennis gain traction (25% combined in “other”). 45+ years (~10 respondents): Lowest overall engagement; cricket (70%) and football (45%) remain primary, but kabaddi and basketball fall sharply. Younger groups (especially 18–24) are heavily cricket-focused with emerging kabaddi interest (stronger in Raigad), while middle-aged respondents show greater diversity and higher football following, indicating evolving preferences as people age.

Table 4
Cross-tab: Income vs. Selected Attitudes (Likert 4-5 = Agree/High)

Income Bracket	% Willing to pay premium for quality (4-5)	% Likely to buy international merch (4-5)	% High interest in tech-integrated (4-5)	Notes
Below ₹1,00,000	38%	22%	18%	Price-sensitive, low international/tech interest
₹1L – ₹5L	55%	35%	28%	Moderate openness
₹5L – ₹10L	70%	50%	40%	Clear premium shift
Above ₹10L	85%	65%	55%	Highest interest in premium, international & tech

The table shows a clear positive correlation between household income and willingness to invest in premium, international, and tech-integrated sports merchandise. Below ₹1,00,000 only 38% willing to pay premium, 22% likely to buy international merchandise, and 18% highly interested in tech-integrated items; this group is the most price-sensitive with low openness to premium or innovative products. ₹1,00,000 – ₹5,00,000 there is a moderate shift with 55% willing to pay premium, 35% open to international, and 28% interested in tech; emerging willingness as income rises. ₹5,00,000 – ₹10,00,000 there is a noticeable premium orientation: 70% willing to pay more for quality, 50% likely for international, and 40% high interest in tech-integrated merchandise. Above ₹10,00,000 the highest engagement: 85% willing to pay premium, 65% likely to buy international items, and 55% very interested in tech features. Higher income brackets exhibit significantly greater readiness to pay for quality/premium products and show stronger interest in international and tech-integrated sports merchandise, indicating a clear income-driven segmentation opportunity for brands and retailers.

Table 5
Sports Interest & Engagement

Aspect	Raigad	Mumbai	Key Difference
Top sports followed	Cricket (almost universal), Kabaddi, Football, Badminton	Cricket (still dominant), Football (very strong), Basketball, Badminton, Tennis, Hockey	Mumbai shows noticeably stronger interest in Football, Basketball, Tennis
Support specific team/player	~85% Yes	~80-85% Yes	Similar
Live event attendance	Mostly Never / Rarely	More Occasional / Frequent	Mumbai attends live events more often
Content consumption	TV + streaming + social media	Similar, but slightly higher social media + news apps	Mumbai marginally more digital/multi-channel

Cricket dominates both regions (near-universal in Raigad), but Mumbai shows noticeably stronger interest in football, basketball, tennis, and hockey, while kabaddi remains more prominent in Raigad. Support for specific team/player: Very similar across both (~80–85% say yes), indicating comparable fandom levels. Live event attendance: Raigad respondents mostly never or rarely attend, whereas Mumbai residents are more likely to attend occasionally or frequently. Content consumption: Both use TV, streaming, and social media, but Mumbai shows marginally higher reliance on social media and news apps/websites, suggesting slightly more multi-channel/digital engagement.

Table 6
Sports Merchandise Purchase Behaviour

Aspect	Raigad	Mumbai	Key Difference
Ever purchased	~80% Yes	~85–90% Yes	Slightly higher in Mumbai
Purchase frequency	Mostly Rarely / Every 3–6 months	More Every 3–6 months / Once a year, some Monthly	Mumbai buys a bit more regularly
Most frequent category	Clothing >> Accessories	Clothing dominant, but more Equipment & Shoes mentions	Mumbai slightly more equipment-oriented
Purchase channels	E-commerce ≈ Physical stores	Physical stores (especially) + E-commerce + Official sites + Stadiums	Mumbai uses more physical & official channels
Avg spend per purchase	~60% Below ₹1,000; most < ₹3,000	More spread: many ₹1,001–3,000 & ₹3,001–5,000; several >₹5,000	Mumbai spends noticeably more per purchase
Preference	Mixed branded vs team-specific	Slightly leans Branded / Both	Mumbai marginally prefers branded

The comparison between Raigad and Mumbai reveals broadly similar engagement with sports merchandise, with slightly higher participation in Mumbai. However, Mumbai consumers demonstrate more frequent purchasing behaviour, higher spending capacity, and a stronger inclination toward branded products. While clothing remains the most popular category in both regions, Mumbai shows relatively greater interest in equipment and shoes. In terms of purchase channels, Raigad relies equally on e-commerce and physical stores, whereas Mumbai consumers use a wider mix, including physical outlets, official brand sites, and stadium purchases. Overall, Mumbai represents a more mature and higher-value market, while Raigad remains more price-sensitive and less frequent in purchasing, indicating different strategic approaches for each region.

Findings of the Study

1. Older & higher-income → higher per-purchase spending, more willingness to pay for quality/premium
2. More engaged (live events, diverse sports especially football)
3. Prefer physical/official channels over pure e-commerce
4. Slightly more influenced by ads/endorsements & open to international/tech merch

5. Demand better in-city availability, variety beyond cricket, sizing inclusivity, and experiential retail.
6. Social media emerged as a powerful driver for advertising sports merchandise.
7. Social media integration can substantially enhance consumer engagement in sports merchandise across diverse demographic settings.

Region-Specific Nuances

Raigad: Strong focus on accessibility in smaller cities, weather-suited designs, and affordable options for students/families. Raigad feels more constrained by local access and basic affordability.

Mumbai: Emphasis on reducing overpricing of official merch, more variety beyond cricket, sizing improvements, digital/AR features, and experiential/physical retail. Mumbai frustrations centre around premium pricing, variety gaps (non-cricket), and desire for modern retail experiences.

Conclusion & Discussion

The survey (≈ 100 respondents from Mumbai & Raigad) shows strong interest in sports merchandise, especially cricket-related clothing, driven by team loyalty, quality, and authenticity. However, high prices, limited availability, and lack of variety are major barriers limiting frequent purchases. Mumbai respondents (older, higher-income) spend more, prefer physical channels, and show greater interest in football and international items, while Raigad respondents (younger, lower-income) are more price-sensitive and cricket/kabaddi-focused. Addressing affordability, accessibility, and product diversity offers significant growth potential in Maharashtra's sports merchandise market. Cricket dominates, but rising interest in football and other sports (especially in Mumbai) indicates opportunities for niche merchandising. Regional differences highlight the need for tiered strategies: better e-commerce and local access for Raigad, experiential stores and premium options for Mumbai. Younger low-income groups need affordable "fan-edition" products, while mid-to-high income segments are willing to pay for quality and branding. Stakeholders should focus on authentic products at multiple price points, inclusive sizing, customization, and promotion of local/regional sports. Hence this study proves that all the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis are rejected. The three alternative hypotheses are accepted as follows (using Welch's t-test on the Likert data, $p < 0.05$ threshold): H_1 (Quality as major factor): Accepted. Mumbai mean = 4.04, Raigad mean = 3.30, $t = 3.258$, $p = 0.0016 \rightarrow$ clear significant difference; Mumbai residents show much stronger agreement that quality drives purchase decisions. H_1 (Higher preference for sport-specific merchandise in Mumbai): Accepted. Mumbai mean = 3.80, Raigad mean = 2.94, $t = 3.378$, $p = 0.0010 \rightarrow$ Mumbai residents exhibit significantly higher preference for merchandise tied to sports they actively follow/play. H_1 (Digital media positively influences awareness & purchase decisions): Accepted (inferred from supporting evidence). Although not directly tested via regression, related Likert items (e.g., "Social media ads influence purchasing" and engagement frequency) show means above neutral ($\approx 3.1-3.4$ overall), with high daily/weekly social media usage reported by 68% of respondents. This supports positive influence of digital platforms on awareness and buying in both regions. This study offers valuable insights for entrepreneurs and start-ups by enabling them to design region-specific

product strategies. In Mumbai, businesses can focus on high-quality, sport-specific (particularly cricket- and football-linked), and branded merchandise to cater to the strong demand for premium products. In contrast, in Raigad, offering affordable, accessible, and primarily cricket-focused merchandise would better align with local consumer preferences.

The study also helps identify untapped opportunities, particularly the potential for introducing technology-integrated and international merchandise in Mumbai, where demand is significantly higher. At the same time, maintaining price-sensitive product options in Raigad can reduce the risk of unsold inventory. Targeted marketing strategies that leverage social media platforms and festive-season campaigns, supported by influencers, can drive awareness and conversions more efficiently and cost-effectively.

For e-commerce platforms, the findings highlight the importance of prioritising quality and authenticity filters, showcasing official and branded products, incorporating user reviews, and offering sport-specific recommendations to address key purchase drivers. Regional targeting can further enhance conversions by promoting premium and international collections to Mumbai consumers while highlighting value-for-money and locally relevant options to users in Raigad. Additionally, integrating social proof through targeted Instagram and YouTube campaigns, including reviews and event-based promotions, can significantly influence buying decisions.

Physical sports retail stores can benefit by adopting a quality-first assortment strategy focusing on durable, authentic, and design-oriented products in Mumbai, while maintaining affordable and diverse inventory in Raigad to overcome availability constraints. Experiential retail elements, such as in-store trials, knowledgeable staff, and customisation options (especially in Mumbai), can further enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. An omnichannel approach, where physical stores act as pickup points for online orders and are supported by localised social media promotions, can also help increase footfall and sales. For sports merchandise brands and manufacturers, the study recommends developing tiered product strategies premium, branded, international, and technology-integrated lines for Mumbai, alongside affordable, mass-market products for Raigad—to maximise market reach across Maharashtra. Product development should prioritise improved sizing, greater variety beyond cricket, and enhanced authenticity and quality, as these are key consumer demands across both regions. Strengthening marketing and distribution through increased investment in social media and event-based campaigns, along with expanding physical retail presence in semi-urban areas, can help bridge the availability gap.

Overall, this research transforms broad assumptions into precise, actionable insights, enabling businesses to reduce risk, optimise inventory, increase repeat purchases, and achieve sustainable growth in both urban and semi-urban markets of Maharashtra.

Suggestions for Mumbai and Raigad Districts

- Affordable / reasonable pricing and better value for money (dominant in both).
- Improved availability more physical stores, better reach in Tier-2/3 areas, faster delivery (stronger emphasis in Raigad).
- Higher quality & authenticity of products to reduce counterfeit products.
- Greater variety especially for non-cricket sports (football, kabaddi, volleyball, badminton, etc.) and niche/local Maharashtra teams.

- Better sizing and fit (weather-appropriate cuts, larger sizes, inclusive for average body types).
- More customization / personalization options.
- Enhanced retail experience experiential stores, knowledgeable staff, pop-ups (more voiced in Mumbai).

Limitations of the Study

This study includes convenience sampling only in Mumbai and Raigad districts. Future research across more regions would strengthen these insights. Overall, targeted improvements in pricing and availability can convert high fandom into sustained market growth. This study focuses only on general sports merchandise; excludes deep analysis of specific brands or niche products.

Scope of the Study

This study explores consumer behaviour and preferences towards sports merchandise in Maharashtra, with a specific focus on two regions: Mumbai (urban metropolitan) and Raigad (Tier-2/suburban). It covers key aspects including demographics (age, gender, occupation, income), sports interest and engagement, merchandise purchase behaviour (frequency, types, channels, average spending), attitudes towards quality, price, authenticity, social media influence, barriers to buying, and improvement suggestions.

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