

BEYOND UTILITY

From
FUNCTIONALITY TO FASHION



Nikhil Jaiswal | January, 2025

In the last letter on footwear, dated July **2024**, we saw the Indian footwear industry evolve through distinct phases—from its functional roots in the 1930s to the fashion-forward designs of **2024**. **Have you ever considered that shoes might be the first thing people subconsciously notice about you?** Once just a necessity for protection, footwear has become an essential part of modern identity, reflecting personality, lifestyle, and taste.



Have you ever encountered questions like, "How much is your outfit worth?"

Sometimes, one item steals the spotlight—often, it's footwear. More than just an accessory, shoes make a statement, offer comfort, and can even be an investment. A high-value pair of kicks speaks volumes about style and priorities. My journey with sneakers started for function but soon became a lifestyle. I still remember my first **Puma running shoes**—not just gear, but a source of confidence and self-expression. Today, footwear goes beyond function, reflecting trends, affluence, and evolving consumer values—an extension of identity and lifestyle. But how did sneakers, once functional sportswear, become a luxury item with booming resale markets in India? Let's understand this evolution through our own special '**Cycle of 3As**' model, which we first talked about at our **5th Annual conclave, 'BHARAT BEYOND METRO'**

Awareness

The first **A** is about **Awareness** where the sneaker culture, originally rooted in the West, was brought to India through social media, global influencers, and celebrity collaborations with major sneaker brands. Platforms like **Instagram, YouTube, & sneaker-focused** events introduced Indian audiences to the hype surrounding limited-edition sneakers. As global streetwear culture permeated Indian youth through these channels, they became aware of the exclusivity and desirability of owning unique kicks.

“Whatever happens in the west, happens five to six years later in India!”

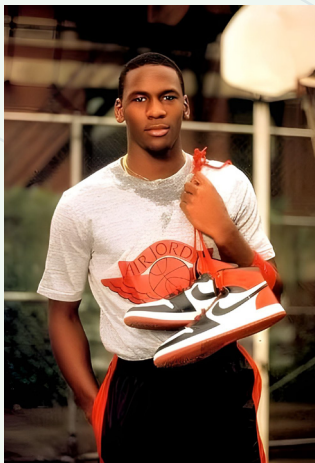
-Prabal Bagla,
Founder of Sneaker Marketplace Solesearch in India

Aspiration

The next **A** stands for **Aspiration, Sneakers** evolved from mere footwear to a symbol of individuality and status. For consumers in India, particularly **Gen Z & millennials**, sneakers became a way to connect with a global streetwear culture they admired from afar. They weren't just shoes; they represented a piece of something bigger—a movement, a lifestyle. Owning rare sneakers became a way to express style and align with global trends, turning them into aspirational lifestyle products.

Access

The last **A** of the cycle is **Access**, E-commerce platforms, resellers, and the rise of Indian sneaker boutiques bridged the gap between demand and supply. Websites like **StockX**, and homegrown platforms like **VegNonVeg** and **Superkicks**, made it easier for enthusiasts to purchase or resell rare pairs. The introduction of global brands like **Nike, Adidas, & Yeezy** into Indian markets further fueled this trend. This seamless interplay of awareness, aspiration, and access has transformed sneakers into not just a fashion statement, but a cultural movement and a lucrative market in India.



How did footwear brands successfully transition from being purely functional to coveted fashion statements?

From a brand's perspective, positioning shoes as a fashion statement rather than just a utility was a strategic move to tap into evolving consumer behaviour. Consumers, especially younger ones, now view shoes as a symbol of identity and status. By introducing exclusivity, **limited-edition drops**, and **celebrity collaborations** like **Michael Jordan** brands created hype and a profitable resale market. This allowed them to expand their reach beyond athletic wear, appeal to style-conscious consumers, and drive higher engagement with Gen Z and millennials. Ultimately, it transformed footwear into a valuable, sought-after part of the modern wardrobe.

Beyond The Basic Shoes

Our shoes themselves are becoming canvases for self-expression, thanks to all these cool charms and collectibles. It's like turning your footwear into works of art! Remember those **Jibbitz** for Crocs? That was just the beginning. Now you've got **charms for sneakers & even loafers**, each one a little badge of your personality. **Jibbitz** sales grew **17%** in **2023** to **\$250 million** in sales. Also, sneakers. They used to be just for athletes or hardcore collectors, but now everyone's into them. **It's not just about fashion these days; it's about craving something unique, something with a story behind it.** Whether it's a customized charm that reflects your hobby or a pair of vintage sneakers that remind you of a special time, these accessories are more than just decorations – they're a way to express yourself and connect with people who share your passions.!



Ever thought what compliments with a shoes? **YES you're right 'socks'** & You know, it's crazy how something as simple as a pair of socks can say so much these days. Remember when they were just, well, **socks**? Plain, boring, hiding away inside your shoes. Now, you see people rocking **Craziest patterns**, the most



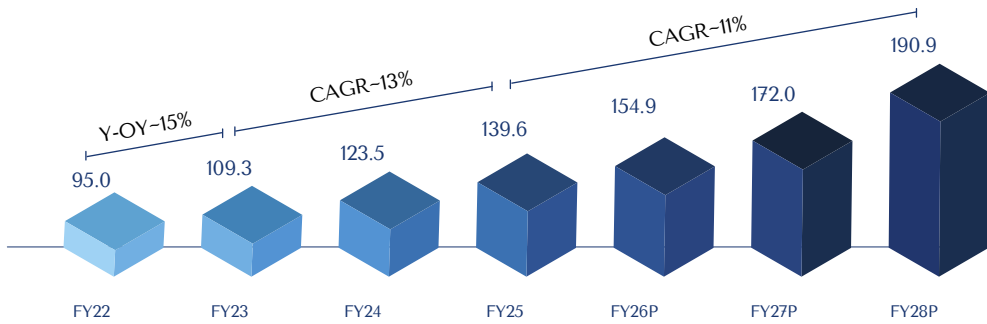
vibrant colours & even characters and stuff – all peeking out from their Shoes. A way to show the world you're not afraid to be different. And honestly, **it makes sense, right?** We're all about expressing ourselves these days, so why not have some fun with even the smallest details? A cool pair of socks might seem like a little thing, but it can say a lot about who you are.

An Attractive Industry

India is a key player in the global footwear industry, ranking as the **2nd** largest producer and consumer of footwear. The country contributes approximately **13%** of global footwear & leather production, India's footwear production is nearly **3 billion units** as of **2024**.

Footwear Market In India

₹'000 Cr, FY22-FY28P

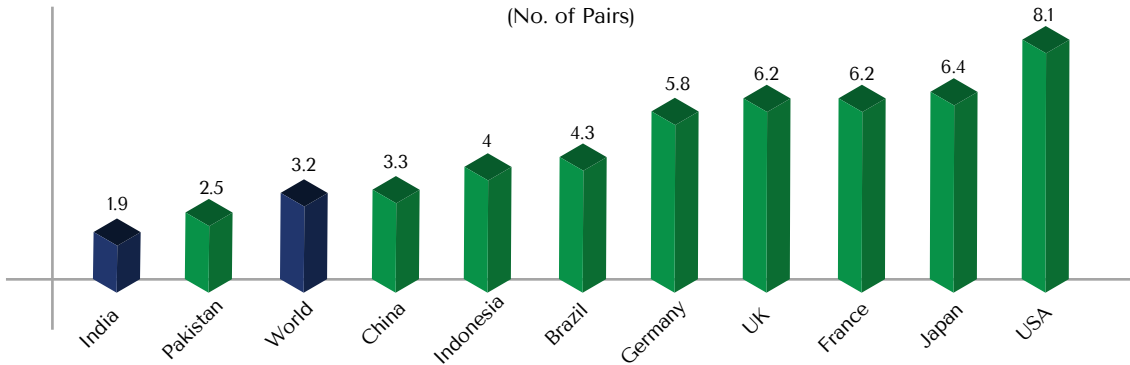


Source: 1 Lattice Report

According to **Metro Brands** annual report The Indian footwear market was valued at **~₹ 1.23 trillion** in **FY 2023-24**. The industry is expected to witness significant growth, with a CAGR of 11%, reaching **₹ 1.91 trillion** by **FY 2027-28**. Non-leather footwear is expanding, contributing **90%** to the Indian footwear market. The Indian Footwear industry is dominated by **MSMEs**, with key production hubs in **TamilNadu, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal**.

Annual Per Capita Footwear Consumption - FY20

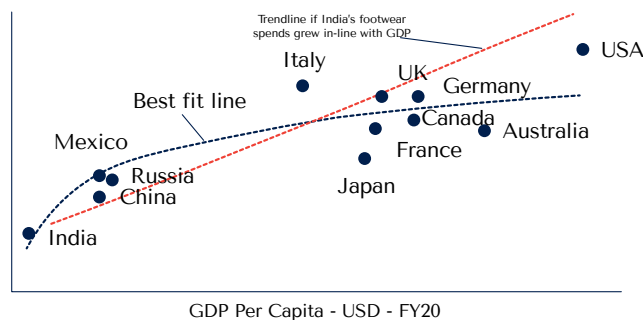
(No. of Pairs)



Source: IIFL Research

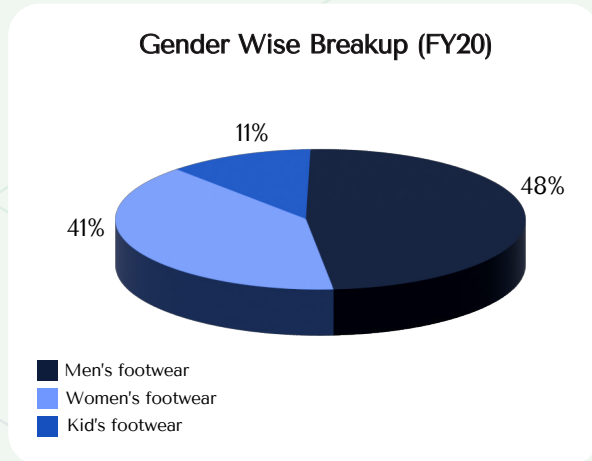
Analysis of historical and cross-country trends indicates that footwear in India is an attractive industry with low per capita consumption **1.9 pairs** vs. **global average at 3.2 pairs**, on the other side countries like **USA, UK, and Japan** ranks as the **top 3 countries** with per capita consumption at **8.1, 6.4, and 6.2** respectively and a relatively higher income elasticity.

Annual Footwear Spends Per Capita - USD - FY20



Source: Campus IPO Prospectus, IMF

India's footwear spends are likely to grow higher than **nominal GDP** growth in the medium term. It is a category that is skewed more towards the discretionary side and in times of a favourable macro, it is well poised to grow faster than **nominal GDP growth**. Unorganized channels still constitute **65%** of the industry and a steady shift towards organized channels would add further growth levers.



Source: Campus IPO Prospectus

The Men's segment dominates the footwear market with **48%** market share in **FY20** but the women's segment is on the rise with **41%** market share in **FY20** and is expected to dominate the Indian footwear market through the forecast period. The Indian women's footwear market is highly varied, offering various styles and designs to meet the involved needs of women. Flats, heels, sandals, boots, and sneakers are among the most popular classifications. Fashion trends and aesthetics are critical in driving consumer favourites.

In the end, footwear has become a powerful medium of self-expression. It's not just about protecting our feet; it's about projecting our personality and aspirations in the world. **Have you ever paused to consider how your choice of footwear represents your personality?**

Be it sneakers that reflect athleticism, loafers symbolizing sophistication, or eco-friendly innovations aligning with sustainability values, footwear now speaks volumes about who we are.

"Until next time, let your style guide your steps!"

Some Interesting Reads

- [How Personalization and Sustainability are Redefining Retail in India's Footwear Industry](#)
- [India's athleisure boom: How young consumers are shaping the trends](#)

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