

## **Sneaker Evolution In Chennai**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i10.050 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i10.050>

Received: 30 September 2024 / Accepted: 20 October 2024 / Published: 29 October 2024

### **ABSTRACT**

*Sneakers, once primarily utilitarian footwear, have evolved into cultural icons and fashion statements. This paper examines the multifaceted factors that contribute to the popularity of sneakers, encompassing elements of fashion, sports, celebrity influence, marketing strategies, and technological advancements. By analysing consumer behaviour, market trends, and case studies of successful sneaker releases, this research aims to provide insights into the dynamic landscape of sneaker culture and its influence on contemporary fashion and consumer preferences. Additionally, it investigates the role of social media, brand collaborations, limited editions, and resale markets in shaping the popularity of sneakers among diverse demographics. Through a comprehensive exploration of these factors, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics driving the enduring appeal of sneakers in today's global market.*

### **Introduction**

Sneakers have undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from functional athletic gear to powerful cultural symbols and coveted fashion items. Initially designed for sports and physical activities, they were valued primarily for their performance-enhancing features. Over time, however, sneakers have transcended their utilitarian roots, becoming integral to various aspects of contemporary culture.

This evolution began in the mid-20th century when sneakers started to gain popularity beyond sports. The 1980s and 1990s were pivotal decades, with the rise of hip-hop culture and the endorsement of athletes like Michael Jordan, whose collaboration with Nike on the Air Jordan line revolutionised the sneaker industry. These developments turned sneakers into symbols of identity and status, resonating with youth culture and urban communities. The sneakers people chose to wear became an extension of their personalities, a way to make a statement or show allegiance to a particular subculture.

Today, sneakers are not just about comfort or functionality; they are also about aesthetics and cultural resonance. Limited-edition releases, collaborations between brands and celebrities, and the proliferation of sneakerhead culture have turned sneakers into high-demand commodities. Some sneakers are now treated as investments, with rare models fetching thousands of dollars on the resale market. This shift reflects broader trends in consumer behaviour, where exclusivity, brand loyalty, and cultural relevance play crucial roles in purchasing decisions.

Moreover, the sneaker industry has become a significant player in the fashion world. High-end designers and luxury brands have entered the market, blurring the lines between streetwear and haute couture. Sneakers are now featured on runways and red carpets, symbolising the merging of casual and high fashion.

### **Evolution of sneakers**

The inception of sneakers can be traced back to the late 19th century with the creation of rubber-soled shoes called plimsolls. The term "sneakers" was coined around 1917 due to the rubber soles that made the wearers' footsteps virtually silent.

In the early to mid-20th century sneakers started gaining popularity through their association with sports. Brands began to innovate and started focusing on enhancing athletic performance.

The 1970s marked a turning point with the fitness boom and the emergence of running as a popular sport. This era saw significant technological advancements in sneaker design.

By the 1990s, sneakers had become firmly established as fashion statements and status symbols. The sneakerhead subculture emerged, characterised by enthusiasts and collectors who valued limited editions and unique designs.

The advent of the internet and social media revolutionised the sneaker industry. Sneakers became more accessible globally, and online platforms transformed the way they were bought, sold, and marketed.

Keds was the first U.S company which started to mass-produce sneakers, making sneakers available to the general public.

Recent years have seen a growing emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices within the sneaker industry by initiating eco-friendly methods like reducing carbon footprints.

### **Different types of sneakers which influenced the culture**

#### **Nike Air Jordan**

The Nike Air Jordan series epitomises the intersection of sports, fashion, and cultural impact. Launched in 1985, the Air Jordan 1 broke the NBA's uniform policy, garnering massive attention. Michael Jordan's on-court success and charismatic personality, combined with Nike's innovative marketing, turned the Air Jordan into a cultural icon. As of 2021, the Air Jordan brand is valued at over \$3 billion annually, demonstrating its enduring legacy and influence.

### **Adidas Yeezy**

The Adidas Yeezy line, a collaboration with rapper Kanye West, revolutionised the sneaker industry with its unique designs and limited releases. Launched in 2015, Yeezys quickly became a status symbol. The partnership with Kanye West brought a new demographic into the sneaker world, blending music, fashion, and lifestyle. According to Adidas' 2019 financial report, Yeezy sales contributed significantly to the company's growth, highlighting the commercial success of such collaborations.

### **Vans and Skate Culture**

Vans, established in 1966, became synonymous with skate culture in the 1970s. The brand's association with the skateboarding community, coupled with its iconic designs like the Old Skool and Slip-On, cemented its place in sneaker culture. Vans' grassroots marketing strategy, focusing on authenticity and community, allowed it to build a loyal following. As per Jeffrey Haden, a contributing editor for *Inc. magazine*, known for writing extensively about business, leadership, and personal development (2018), Vans' ability to stay relevant through collaborations with artists and designers showcases the brand's adaptability and deep cultural roots.

### **Nike's "Just Do It" Campaign**

Nike's "Just Do It" campaign, launched in 1988, is one of the most successful marketing campaigns in history. The campaign transcended traditional advertising, promoting a lifestyle and mindset that resonated with a global audience. The integration of iconic athletes like Serena Williams and LeBron James further solidified Nike's position in sneaker culture. The campaign's success lies in its ability to inspire and connect with consumers on an emotional level, driving brand loyalty and sales.

### **Sneaker Conventions and Community Events**

Events like Sneaker Con highlight the communal aspect of sneaker culture. Sneaker Con, founded in 2009, is a travelling convention where enthusiasts buy, sell, and trade sneakers, and share their passion. These conventions have grown in popularity, reflecting the strong sense of community among sneakerheads. According to Sneaker Con's 2020 report, attendance has

consistently increased, with events in multiple countries, underscoring the global reach and community-driven nature of sneaker culture.

### **Where are the Indian Sneaker communities headed?**

Globally, sneaker communities, particularly in the United States and Europe, are characterised by their maturity, diverse membership, and robust market infrastructure. These communities benefit from well-established conventions like Sneaker Con, robust online marketplaces such as StockX and GOAT, and extensive media coverage by specialised outlets and influencers who shape trends and opinions. These global communities are deeply intertwined with broader cultural movements such as hip-hop, sports, and streetwear, driving hype and demand through celebrity and artist collaborations.

In contrast, Indian sneaker communities are in a stage of rapid growth, driven by a dynamic base of young consumers. Local events and meetups, although smaller in scale compared to global conventions, are becoming more common and provide platforms for enthusiasts to connect and share their passion. Culturally, the Indian sneaker community is influenced by Bollywood, cricket, and local fashion trends, in contrast to the global influence of hip-hop and basketball. Collaborations with Bollywood celebrities and cricket stars are becoming more frequent, driving local interest and adoption. While global sneaker communities have diverse and extensive memberships with strong international connections, Indian communities are dynamic and youthful, with growing international ties and developing platforms for engagement and commerce. Indian sneakerheads are increasingly active on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, with influencers playing a crucial role in shaping trends and fostering community.

As the market infrastructure develops and cultural integration deepens, Indian sneaker communities are poised to become a significant force in the global sneaker landscape, reflecting a blend of global influence and local identity.

### **Sneaker communities in India**

- **Mainstreet Marketplace** is a key player in the Indian sneaker scene, operating both as a resale platform and a community hub. Mainstreet organises pop-up events and sneaker fairs, creating a marketplace atmosphere where enthusiasts can buy, sell, and trade sneakers. These events often attract large crowds and feature rare and exclusive sneaker releases. They conduct educational workshops and panel discussions, inviting industry experts to talk about topics such as sneaker authentication, the history of iconic sneaker models, and the economics of sneaker reselling. These initiatives aim to educate both new and seasoned sneaker enthusiasts about the nuances of sneaker culture.

- **Crepdog Crew** is a collective that has quickly made a name for itself within India's sneaker community. Known for its innovative approach and dynamic community engagement, Crepdog Crew is helping shape the future of sneaker culture in India. Crepdog Crew hosts large-scale sneaker expos that bring together a diverse crowd of sneakerheads. These expos showcase rare and limited-edition sneakers, offer buying and selling opportunities, and include activities like live music performances and sneaker art displays. They organise smaller, more intimate meetups where community members can exchange ideas, showcase their collections, and participate in discussions about the latest trends and releases.
- **Superkicks** is another leading sneaker retailer in India, known for its exclusive collections and vibrant community activities. Superkicks organises "Sneaker Fests," large-scale events that bring together sneaker enthusiasts from across the country. These fests feature various activities, including sneaker exhibitions, panel discussions, live art performances, and competitions. They leverage social media to run campaigns that highlight sneaker culture, such as featuring user-generated content, conducting giveaways, and collaborating with influencers to reach a broader audience.

### **Survey results**

By taking a survey from 26 people around 61.5% are females who collect sneakers. 65.4% prefer physical shopping, 7.7% prefer online shopping and 26.9% prefer both. When asked why they collect sneakers most said comfort. Comfort is a dominant factor for most respondents, followed by style and price. Design and brand reputation are also influential, especially for younger females interested in fashion. Around 64% say that they are more inclined to purchase limited edition sneakers. 57.7% collect sneakers for fashion. Since there are no big sneaker communities in Chennai none of them participate in sneaker events.

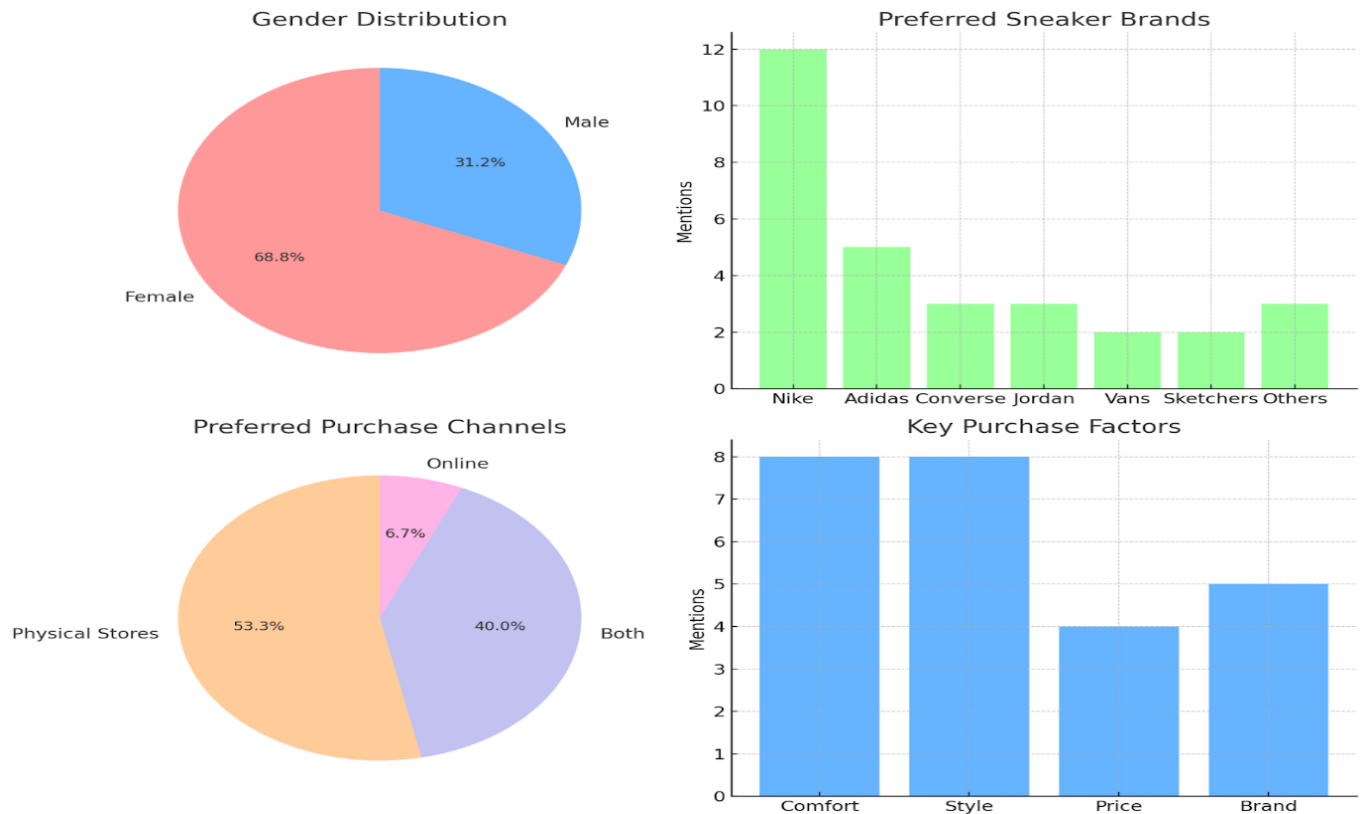
From this I have concluded that more females collect sneakers than men and sneakers are mostly used for fashion purposes rather than for sports or daily wear. The brands all prefer the most are Nike and adidas. I also got to know that most of them don't attend sneaker events or participate in sneaker communities.

Aim: to find how many people in my neighbourhood are interested in collecting sneakers and are into the sneaker conventions.

**Data collection method:**

All the questions asked in the data I collected were regarding the sneaker popularity in my area and neighbourhood. The sample sizes were asked without any biases with different age groups. A total of 15 questions were asked and they were

1. What is your gender
2. what is your age
3. Do you like collecting sneakers??
4. On average, how many pairs of sneakers do you own?
5. Do you prefer online shopping or visiting physical stores when buying sneakers?
6. What motivates you to collect or own multiple pairs of sneakers?
7. What factors matter most to you when considering a sneaker purchase?
8. Would you say the resale market for sneakers has impacted your approach to buying sneakers?
9. Are you more inclined to purchase limited edition or exclusive sneakers?
10. Which sneaker brands do you prefer?
11. Do you wear sneakers primarily for fashion or for specific activities
12. How important is the role of sneakers in your overall fashion and style?
13. Do you participate in sneaker communities or events?
14. What innovations or features would you like to see in future sneaker designs?
15. Are there any particular sneaker collaborations or releases that you're looking forward to?  
if yes name them



Here are the graphs summarising the sneaker preferences based on the survey data:

1. **Gender Distribution:** Shows the proportion of female and male respondents.
2. **Preferred Sneaker Brands:** Highlights the most mentioned brands, with Nike being the top choice.
3. **Purchase Channels:** Displays the preferred ways people shop, with a balance between physical stores and both channels.
4. **Key Purchase Factors:** Illustrates the most important factors, with comfort and style being the top priorities.

### Conclusion

While Indian sneaker culture is influenced by global trends, it is also uniquely shaped by local cultural elements such as Bollywood and cricket. The integration of these local influences with global sneaker dynamics is creating a distinct and rich sneaker culture in India. Influential groups such as Sneakerheads India, Mainstreet Marketplace, VegNonVeg, Superkicks, and Crepdog Crew are at the forefront of this movement, actively working to foster a vibrant sneaker

ecosystem. This blend of global influence and local identity not only enriches the sneaker culture within India but also contributes to the diverse and dynamic global sneaker community.

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