

Customer Perception of Two Leading Footwear Companies in Bangladesh: BATA and APEX

¹Taposh Ranjan Sarker*, ¹Rajib Saha, ²S. M. Tufazzal Haider, ³Monica Sarker, ⁴Masrur Alvee, ⁴Md. Adib Ibne Yousuf

¹Department of Textile Engineering, Southeast University, Tejgaon, Dhaka, Bangladesh

²Department of Textile Engineering, Northern University Bangladesh

³Department of Zoology, University of Chittagong

⁴Department of Business Administration, Bangladesh University of Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to assess customer perceptions of two leading Bangladeshi footwear brands, BATA and APEX. A structured questionnaire was designed to evaluate factors such as price, size, durability, design, and additional benefits influencing consumer beliefs. The study examines how sudden price changes, trust in information sources, aesthetic appeal, and willingness to pay affect customer perceptions. It also segments respondents by age, gender, occupation, monthly income, and preferred brand to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior. Additionally, the research analyzes media and promotional content of BATA and APEX, identifying implicit and explicit messages, characteristic language associated with positive or negative beliefs, and the impact of celebrity endorsements. Comparisons between the two brands are drawn across all examined dimensions, providing a comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions and preferences in the Bangladeshi footwear market.

Keywords: Customer perception, satisfaction, price, quality, design, endorsement.

INTRODUCTION

The footwear sector is one of the oldest industries in Bangladesh and makes a substantial contribution to the national economy, enjoying a strong reputation in the global market. As an agro-based by-product industry, it utilizes locally available indigenous raw materials and holds significant potential for export expansion and long-term sustainable growth. Bangladeshi footwear is internationally recognized for its superior quality, fine grain, uniform structure, smooth texture, and natural feel. Notable advancement in product development, particularly in crust and finished leather, commenced during the 1990s [1].

Bata Bangladesh is a public limited company in which the Government of Bangladesh holds a 49–51% ownership stake. Bata companies emphasize understanding customer needs in their respective local markets and aim to deliver footwear that exceeds customer expectations in terms of quality, style, and value [2]. Bata first entered the region during the Pakistan period and, following independence, continued its commitment to offering high-quality footwear at affordable prices. Over time, Bata Bangladesh has undergone significant transformation, expanding beyond durability to incorporate contemporary designs aligned with consumer preferences. The company has also broadened its operations nationwide, establishing an extensive network of stores, agencies, dealers, and wholesalers, and is widely recognized as the largest shoe manufacturing and marketing organization in Bangladesh [3].

Apex Footwear Limited began its journey over two decades ago, initially inspired by the leather trade before gradually transitioning into footwear manufacturing. As the largest shoe manufacturer in the subcontinent, the company accounts for approximately 15% of Bangladesh's leather footwear exports, contributing to leather exports valued at around USD 1.1 billion [4]. Shoemaking being a highly labor-intensive process, the company employs around 5,500 workers, the majority of whom are women, to manufacture stylish leather footwear. Their designs are inspired by the latest international footwear trends. As a leading footwear company, APEX takes on the responsibility of serving as a role model in workforce development and environmental stewardship. The company's core values are grounded in the belief of valuing people through continuous growth and creating pathways for greater achievements. The name "APEX" signifies the peak or zenith, and since 1975, the company has endeavored to uphold this ideal [5].

The primary objective of this report is to examine customer perceptions of the two leading competitors, Bata and Apex, within the footwear industry.

- Conducting a comparative study on independent variables such as quality, durability, variety, brand image, price, design, reliability, assurance, and perceived value.
- Assessing the price-to-product-quality ratio between the two competitors.
- Analyzing the competitive market structure of the footwear industry with a focus on Bata and Apex.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Perception is the process through which individuals interpret and organize their sensory experiences to make sense of their environment. However, a person's perception may differ significantly from objective reality. Customer perception, as a marketing concept, reflects what customers think about a brand, company, or its products. It encompasses the positive or negative feelings, beliefs, predispositions, expectations, or experiences that a customer associates with a brand [6].

Apex Adelchi Footwear Limited ranks as one of Bangladesh's leading footwear companies, currently occupying the second position in the market, just following BATA [7]. The company has been operating with a strong reputation for over two decades, exploring both the domestic and international footwear markets. Apex began its journey in late 1975 as an export-oriented enterprise and has been recognized from the outset as a manufacturer of high-quality footwear for the global market. The company has since expanded its offerings to include children's products as well as specialized shoes and apparel for men and women. By establishing strong brand equity among customers, the company can achieve its strategic goals and reach its desired market position.

Founder Tomas Bata was a visionary committed to meeting the needs of the people. In 1904, he introduced mechanization and mass production to shoemaking and developed the "Batovka," a working-class shoe noted for its simplicity, style, lightweight design, and affordability. The Bata brand soon became synonymous with quality and value, and within just over twenty years, the company was selling 2 million pairs of shoes annually, with exports increasing dramatically [8].

Both Apex and Bata footwear have customers in North America, Central Europe, and the Middle East. By establishing strong brand equity through effective pricing strategies and promotional activities, the companies can not only strengthen their market leadership domestically but also enhance their prospects of gaining global recognition as top-quality footwear exporters [9]. Today, the footwear industry is a key contributor to Bangladesh's economic growth. Following the ready-made garment sector, it has emerged as a primary focus for investors. This study on customer perception primarily aims to identify the factors influencing consumers' willingness to purchase footwear.

Numerous studies have examined customer perception across various products. This research, however, focuses specifically on customer perception in the footwear industry. In this context, only a few Bangladeshi researchers have conducted comparative analyses of two different footwear companies. Most prior studies concentrated on single products, gathering customer feedback and analyzing the data [10]. This literature review highlights

selected previous studies and establishes connections between the current research and existing literature.

Aynadis (2014) conducted a study on customer behavior in retail shops, focusing on Dhaka city. The research examined customers, managers, and marketers, integrating key concepts across various shopping dimensions to effectively target customers and optimize the operational productivity and performance of retail outlets [11]. Rizwan et al. (2013) collected data on customer satisfaction levels at retail footwear shops in Dhaka and Chittagong. The study highlighted the success of both national and international brands and emphasized that strong branding serves as a sustaining force to remain competitive in the market [12].

Vavra conducted research in the western United States, examining consumer satisfaction experiences in shopping malls compared to local stores [13]. Cochran (2003) developed and tested a model of store choice dynamics to assess how consumer demographics influence grocery store selection and switching behavior. A dynamic hazard model was employed to analyze the factors affecting purchase timing, store choice, and competitive interactions within the retail sector. This hazard model was integrated with an internal market structure analysis using a generalized factor analytic framework [14].

In today's evolving environment, both in terms of customer preferences and organizational offerings, it has become essential to closely monitor customer perception, particularly for products like footwear that vary in size, design, durability, and promotional activities. Customer perception is now a critical concern for most organizations, especially in the service sector. Accordingly, customer satisfaction needs to be analyzed, evaluated, and translated into measurable parameters. Previous research indicates that customer perception can be understood in two ways: as an outcome and as a process of service delivery. Key factors influencing perception include service, price, quality, promotional tools, brand switching, celebrity endorsements, and similar elements [15]. The parameters analyzed in this study are inherently subjective; consequently, the scope of customer perception factors can be broadened based on the practices of the two footwear companies and the experiences and sentiments of customers during or following the service.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine and compare customer perceptions and brand loyalty toward two leading footwear brands in Bangladesh: BATA and APEX. A survey-based approach was selected as it is appropriate for capturing consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions at a single point in time and allows for statistical comparison between brands.

Data Sources

The study utilizes primary data, collected directly from consumers, and secondary data, obtained from published reports, academic literature, company websites, and industry-related documents.

- Primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions regarding brand image, price fairness, product quality, promotion, customer service, and overall reputation of BATA and APEX.
- Secondary data were used to support the conceptual understanding of customer perception and to provide contextual background for the footwear industry.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study is based on a sample of 123 respondents, selected using a convenience sampling method due to time and accessibility constraints. All findings and interpretations are derived from the perceptions and responses provided by these participants.

Measurement of Customer Perception

Customer perception was measured using multiple dimensions commonly cited in branding and consumer behavior literature, including product quality, pricing, promotional communication, service experience, and brand reputation. Respondents evaluated these attributes based on their personal experiences with the selected brands.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. These included frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and graphical representations to summarize and compare customer perceptions of BATA and APEX. No inferential statistical analyses, such as correlation, regression, or hypothesis testing, were conducted, as the primary aim of the study was exploratory and comparative, rather than explanatory or predictive. The descriptive approach enables a clear presentation of consumer opinions and highlights perceptual differences between the two brands.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to analyzing customer perceptions of BATA and APEX within the footwear industry in Bangladesh. The research focuses on selected perceptual dimensions derived from consumer experiences and publicly available brand-related information. The findings are intended to provide comparative insights that may be useful for managerial decision-making and future academic research in brand perception.

Limitations of the Study

Despite careful design, the study is subject to several limitations:

- Some previous and recent data relevant to the footwear industry were not available.
- Certain information could not be obtained due to organizational confidentiality policies.
- The availability of secondary data was limited, as relatively few academic studies have been conducted in this specific research area.
- Access to internal operational data of the selected companies was restricted.
- Collecting competitor-related information was challenging, as some officials were unwilling to share data or provide consent.
- Consumer misconceptions, variations in purchasing power, and the overall economic condition of the country may have influenced respondents' perceptions, thereby affecting the generalizability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Respondent anonymity and confidentiality were ensured during data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study. All collected data were securely stored and used exclusively for research and academic analysis.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Customer Perception

Customer perception reflects how consumers actually view a brand, its products, and services. Often, customers

develop impressions, beliefs, and opinions about a brand that can differ significantly from the brand's own self-perception. The following examples illustrate this concept.

Brand: A company may position its brand as a luxury offering, yet customers might perceive it as more of a budget option.

Prices: Generally, customers perceive prices as high, low, or fair, while some may remain indifferent to the price of certain products.

Engineering: Software engineers may claim that a feature is functioning properly, yet customers might still perceive it as faulty.

Usability: Customers frequently hold well-defined opinions about the usability of products such as mobile devices, software, and appliances.

Senses: The sensory attributes of products and environments, including taste, smell, touch and sound.

Promotion: Customers may perceive advertising and promotional messages differently from the intentions of the creative teams.

Quality: Customers assess the quality of products and services based on criteria that can vary widely among individuals. For example, one customer may consider a beverage in an easy-to-open plastic bottle as high quality, while another may perceive beverages in glass bottles as inherently superior.

Reputation: A brand that claims to be sustainable and trustworthy may not be seen that way by customers if the company's actions do not match its claims.

Customer Service: Some customers value friendly service, including personal interactions, while others prefer a more professional, distant approach. Experienced customer service professionals are able to recognize and adapt to these preferences.

Features: Certain features may be perceived as flaws or annoyances. For instance, repetitive, trivial, or poorly designed notifications with unpleasant sounds can be unpopular with users.

Lack of Features: Features that competitors offer or that customers instinctively expect, but which are lacking in the product.

Factors deciding customer perception: In general, customer perception can be influenced by numerous factors. Some of the key factors include:

- Consistency of performance – Evaluates how the brand has performed historically and how it performs currently.
- Emotional connection – Leading brands recognize that building an emotional bond with customers is essential for brand development.
- Marketing communications – Refers to how the brand engages with customers through various media channels.
- Holistic marketing – A brand cannot excel with strong sales alone but weak support; it must perform well across all touchpoints to satisfy customers comprehensively.

Based on the definitions and key determinants of customer perception, the footwear industry was selected as the research field, focusing on two leading companies, BATA and APEX. Customer perceptions of these companies were then collected and systematically analyzed.

Demographic Information:

Table 4.1: Gender

Gender	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Male	76	61.8%
Female	47	38.2%

What's your Gender?

123 responses

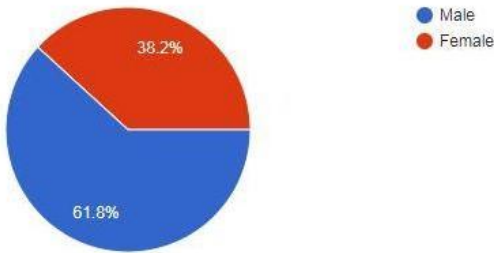


Fig 4.1: Gender distribution

Analysis:

Of the 123 respondents, 76 were male (61.8%) and 47 were female (38.2%). The graph shows that Males are more active in footwear purchases.

Table 4.2: Respondents age group

Age	No of Respondents	Respondents %
18-21	10	8.1%
22-29	103	83.7%
30-45	9	7.3%
46 and above	1	0.9%

What age group do you belong to?

123 responses

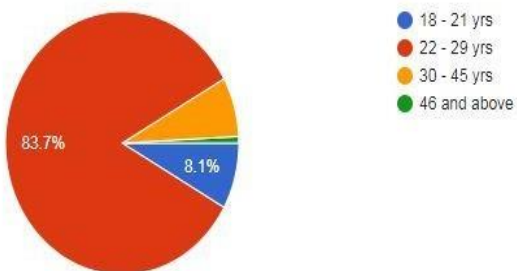


Fig 4.2: Age Group

Analysis:

Out of 123 respondents, 10 (8.1%) belong to the 18-21 years, 103 (83.7%) belong to the 22-29 years, 9 (7.3%) belong to the 30-45 years and 1 (0.9%) belong to the 46 & above age group. This indicates that the majority of respondents belong to the younger generation. From the graph, it stands that younger customers (18–21) dominate footwear purchases, indicating higher digital literacy and adoption among millennials and Gen Z. one respondent from the 46 and above age confirms the "digital divide" where older generations prefer less footwear purchasing practice.

Table 4.3: Educational level

Educational Level	No of Respondents	Respondents %
High School	63	51.2%
Bachelors	54	43.9%
Post-Graduation	6	4.9%
MPhil/ PhD	0	0%

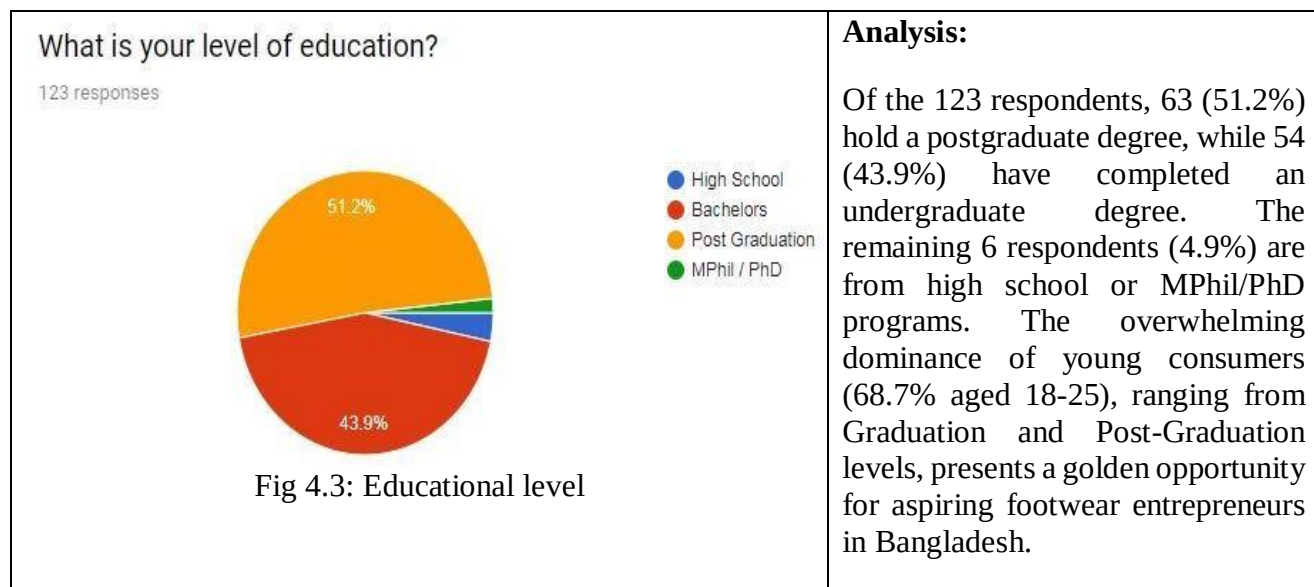


Table 4.4: Occupational level

Occupational Category	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Student	65	52.83%
Business	4	3.25%
Self-Employed	2	1.64%
Unemployed	4	3.25%
Govt. Job	3	2.44%
Private Job	42	34.15%
House wife	3	2.44%

In what category does your occupation fall in?

123 responses

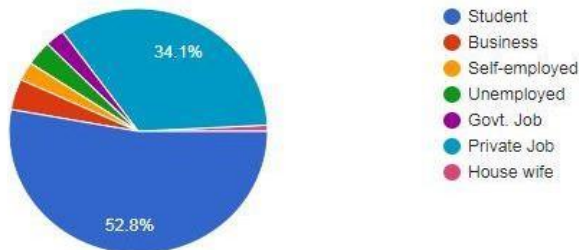


Fig 4.4: Occupation

Analysis:

The majority of respondents are students, totaling 65 (52.83%). The remaining 42 respondents (34.15%) comprise private sector employees, business owners, self-employed individuals, government employees, and unemployed participants. From the graph it stands that students are more prone to the usage of footwears.

Table 4.5: Marital status

Marital Status	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Single	101	82.1%
Married	20	16.5%
Separated	2	1.4%
Divorced	0	0%

What is your marital status?

123 responses

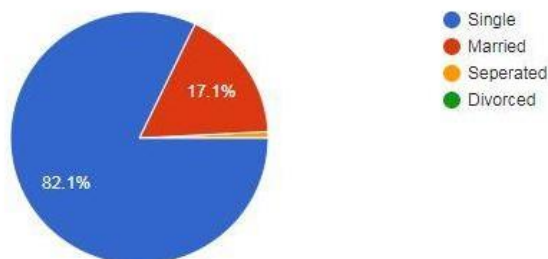


Fig 4.5: Marital Status

Analysis:

A total of 101 respondents (82.1%) were single, while the remaining participants were married. The graph indicates that the single category demonstrates a higher level of concern regarding footwear usage compared to other categories.

Table 4.6: Income level

Income Level Range	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Below Tk. 10000	55	44.8%
Tk. 10000-40000	51	41.5%
Tk. 40000-80000	10	8.0%
Tk. 80000 and above	7	5.7 %

What is your monthly income?

123 responses



Fig 4.6: Monthly Income

Analysis:

Monthly income influences the purchasing pattern of footwear. Among the participants, 55 respondents (44.7%) earn below BDT 10,000. A total of 51 respondents (41.5%) earn between BDT 10,000 and BDT 40,000. The remaining 17 respondents (13.1%) earn BDT 40,000 or more.

Customer Perceptions with respect to Different Factors:

Table 4.7: Preferred brand

Brand Name	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Bata	62	50.4%
Apex	61	49.6%

Which brand do you prefer?

123 responses

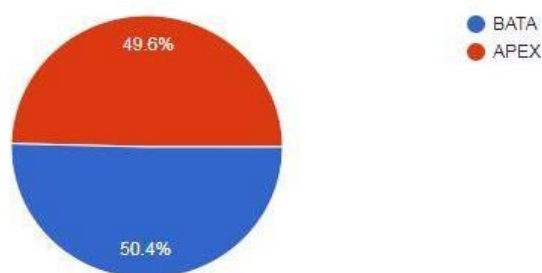


Fig 4.7: Preferred Brand

Analysis:

Data were collected through both online surveys and direct interviews to examine customer perceptions. The graph shows that, brand preference was nearly evenly distributed between BATA and APEX, with 62 respondents (50.4%) preferring BATA and 61 respondents (49.6%) preferring APEX.

Table 4.8: Satisfaction level with respect to quality

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	106	86.18%
No	17	13.82%

Are you satisfied with the quality of preferred brand?

123 responses

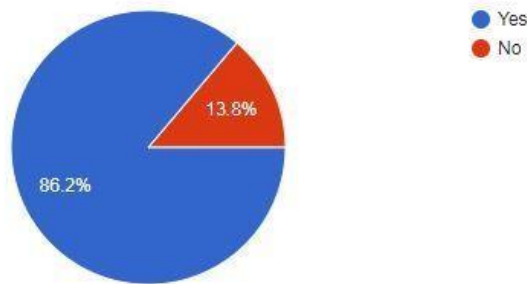


Fig 4.8: Satisfaction level with respect to quality

Analysis:

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the quality of their preferred brand. While customers generally prioritize quality, not all are fully satisfied, even with their preferred brand. Among the participants, 7 BATA-preferring respondents reported dissatisfaction, and 10 APEX-preferring customers were not satisfied with the product quality.

Table 4.9: Impact of design

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	111	90.2%
No	12	9.8%

Do you think design is a factor for choosing brand?

123 responses

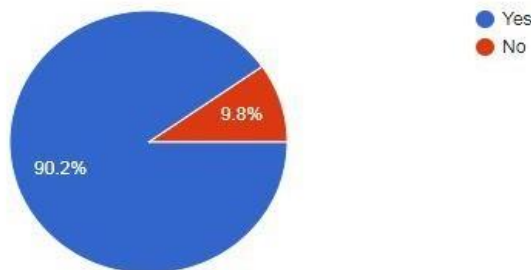


Fig 4.9: Impact of design

Analysis:

Here, most of the customers think about the design specifically 90.2% before purchasing footwear. Only 9.8% respondents are not bothered by the footwear design. Therefore, design is an important factor influencing the respondents' footwear purchasing decisions.

Table 4.10: Satisfaction level with price range

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	80	65%
No	43	35%

Are you satisfied with the price range of preferred brand?

123 responses

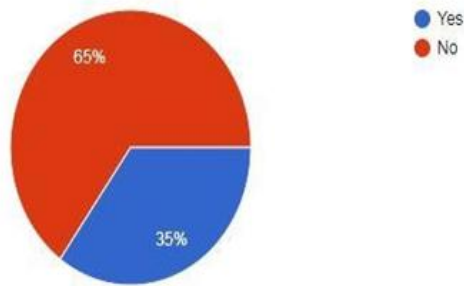


Fig 4.10: Satisfaction level with price range

Analysis:

Respondents were asked questions regarding the satisfaction level of the preferred brand's price range. Most of the customers, precisely 65%, are not satisfied with the price of their preferred brand. However, 35% were satisfied with this aspect, which is not remarkable. Price is an important factor for respondents with low- and middle-income levels.

Table 4.11: Impact of price increase

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Same Brand	46	37.4%
Cheaper Brand	25	20.3%
Any Other Brand	52	42.3%

If the price of your preferred brand increases will you purchase again?

123 responses

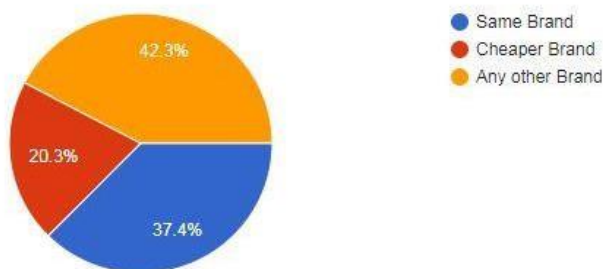


Fig 4.11: Impact of price increase

Analysis:

Respondents were asked about their opinions on price increases for their preferred brand. Survey responses show that the majority (42.3%) will switch to any other brand. 20.3% will look for a cheaper footwear brand. And the percentage of loyal customers are 37.4% who prefer to purchase the same brand although the price of their favorite brand is increased.

Table 4.12: Lower price over quality for preferred brand

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	80	80.5%
No	43	19.5%

Are you willing to buy the preferred brand at lower price with negligible quality?

123 responses

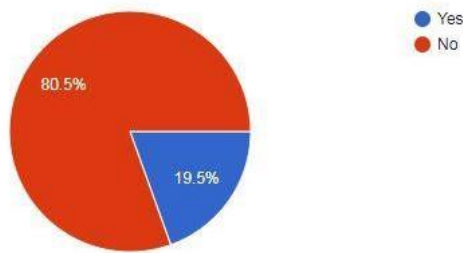


Fig 4.12: Lower price over quality for preferred brand

Analysis:

The majority of respondents (80.5%) prefer to purchase their preferred brand at a lower price, even if it means a slight compromise in quality. A few people of 19.5% still do not prefer to compromise with the quality.

Table 4.13: Preference to alternative brands offering same quality at reduced cost

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	100	81.3%
No	23	18.7%

Will you purchase another brand of same quality with less price?

123 responses

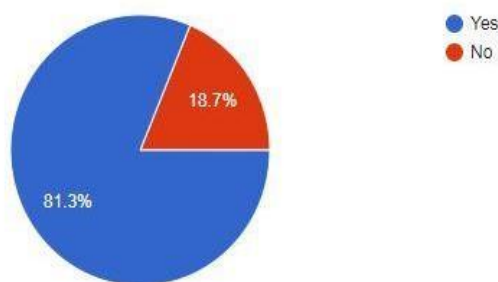


Fig 4.13: Preference to alternative brands offering same quality at reduced cost

Analysis:

Respondents were asked whether they would continue purchasing from their preferred brand or switch to an alternative brand offering similar quality at a lower price. Among the 123 respondents, only 23 (18.7%) indicated that price does not influence their purchasing decision. In contrast, the remaining 100 (81.3%) stated that they would switch to another brand if a comparable alternative were available at a lower price.

Various factors act as catalysts in a customer's purchase decision, as individuals consider multiple aspects before making a purchase.

What factors influence you to go for a particular brand? (Tick multiple if necessary)

123 responses

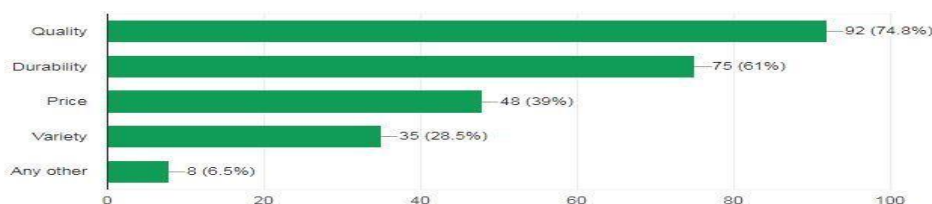


Fig 4.14: Factors to go for a particular brand

Analysis:

The questionnaire identified various factors that influence respondents' preference for BATA or APEX. The responses related to these factors are presented below:

Table 4.14: Different factors

Factors	BATA	APEX	Total
Variety	16	14	30
Price	29	19	48
Durability	43	35	78
Quality	46	44	90
Other	4	5	9

Most customers prioritize quality when purchasing footwear. However, it was observed that BATA's customers tend to remain loyal due to the durability of its products. Price is also an important consideration for respondents in the low- and middle-income groups.

Table 4.15: Switching brand

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	66	53.7%
No	57	46.3%

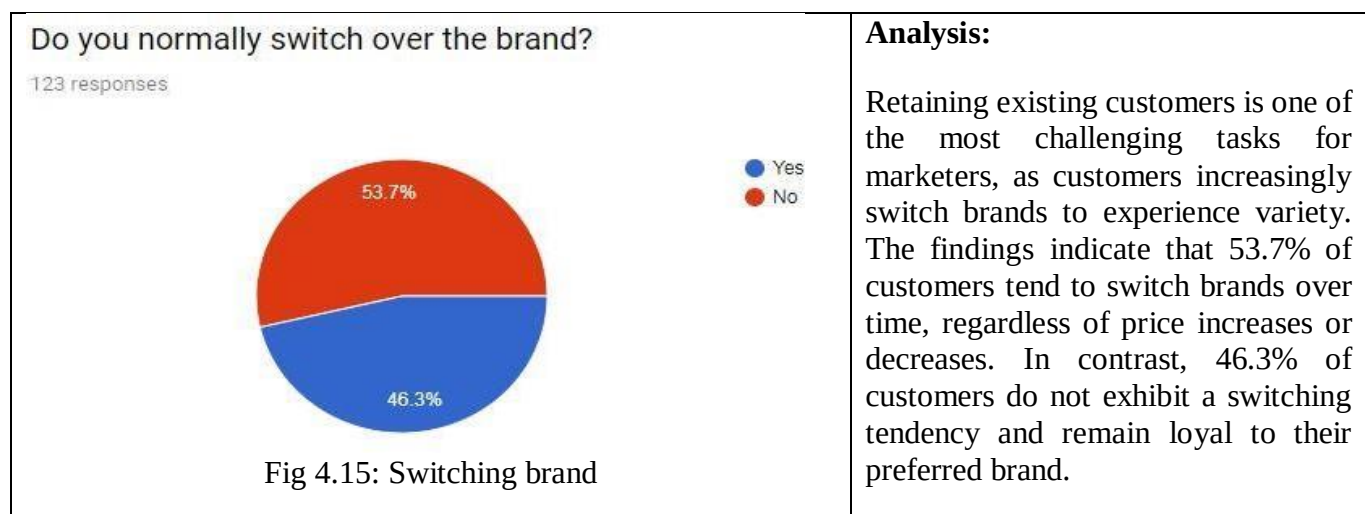


Table 4.16: Celebrities' influence

Opinion	No of Respondents	Respondents %
Yes	104	84.6%
No	19	15.4%

Is there any impact of celebrities on your purchase of preferred brand?

123 responses

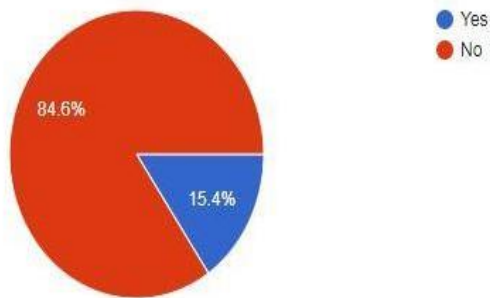


Fig 4.16: Impact of celebrities

Analysis:

In the survey, respondents were asked about the influence of celebrities on their purchasing decisions. They reported that these two popular brands do not extensively use well-known celebrities in their advertising or promotional campaigns; therefore, celebrity endorsements have limited influence. Customers tend to prioritize product quality over celebrity impact. Nevertheless, 84.5% of respondents believe that celebrities can create a positive influence on the purchasing decisions for their favorite brands.

Customers' Authentic Feedback

The questionnaire included an option for customers to provide honest feedback about their preferred brand. Valuable insights regarding their perceptions of BATA and APEX were obtained. A few illustrative examples are followings:

"Overpriced brands don't work for me. As a student, I prefer products that are durable and reasonably priced. Design and color are important to me, as I like to stay stylish."

"I purchase Apex because I trust its quality. I once bought Bata, but now I consider it a waste of money. I do not visit other shoe stores and exclusively choose Apex. However, if I notice a decline in Apex's quality, I would consider switching to another brand."

"Brand loyalty is influenced by factors such as price, quality, and service standards. Additionally, brand image is a key psychological factor closely linked to brand loyalty. Bata has been serving the country for over two decades with high-quality footwear, and for many customers, it has become an indispensable part of their daily life."

CONCLUSION:

This study examined customer perceptions of two leading footwear brands in Bangladesh—BATA and APEX—by looking at demographics, brand preference, satisfaction, price sensitivity, switching behavior, and key factors influencing purchases. The results show that customers mainly consider quality, durability, price, and design when buying footwear, especially younger, single, student, and low- to middle-income consumers.

The comparison between BATA and APEX shows almost equal brand preference, indicating strong competition. BATA enjoys slightly higher customer loyalty due to its durability and long-standing reputation. APEX customers are more sensitive to price and quality, showing that they make more value-driven decisions. Both brands need to pay attention to quality and durability, as these are the most important factors for buyers.

Price sensitivity is significant, as many respondents are not satisfied with current prices and would switch to another brand offering similar quality at a lower cost. This shows that brand loyalty is fragile in a market where purchasing power is limited and alternatives are available.

From a managerial perspective, BATA should continue emphasizing durability and brand trust while considering

pricing strategies to keep price-conscious customers. Offering different product lines at varied prices could help retain younger consumers. APEX should focus on maintaining quality, improving affordability and enhancing post-purchase satisfaction to turn switchers into loyal buyers. Since celebrity endorsements have little effect, both brands should focus more on product quality, comfort and value-for-money in their marketing. Following these strategies can help BATA and APEX strengthen their position and maintain long-term growth in the Bangladeshi footwear market.

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