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Footwear Consumer Behavior: The Role of Trust and Brand Perception

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates how Indian consumers of footwear perceive and trust various marketplaces (Amazon, Flipkart and Myntra) in comparison to the brands' own websites, with Bata India as the focal brand. The study has relied on a sample of 178 respondents for gathering data via a structured questionnaire aiming to cover the aspects of trust perception, platform identity, trust drivers and promotion sensitivity. It was found that brand websites receive significantly higher trust (M = 3.54) in comparison to marketplaces (M = 3.42, p = .011), although the difference does not seem too large. However, in spite of the high level of trust, which would lead to buying from the brand sites in line with theories about trust, marketplaces are still winning the purchase war. Thus, while 73.6% of respondents are usually buying shoes from Myntra or Flipkart, the contradiction is evident and consumers are trusting brands more than marketplaces, with 56.7% of respondents believing that the brand's website is the best representation of the brand's identity. Moreover, the research has shown that secure payment, overall customer support and speed of the website seem to be the strongest preconditions of brand trust, while product images and descriptions attract much lesser attention in terms of their importance. The survey indicates that consumers prefer brand trust to discounts, as respondents indicated with a mean score of 4.18, while also keeping in mind that consumers respond well to sales. The other point worth mentioning is that the study found that over half (about 58%) of respondents cited reviews and ratings — a feature native to the marketplace — as the main determinant of trust as compared to product quality or brand name. The study therefore provides Bata India with recommendations regarding the strengthening of its brand trust with the help of authenticity assurance, customer support, and review visibility on its website to stimulate purchases.

Keywords:N/A.

INTRODUCTION

The phase of online retail is now dominating the world of footwear sales thus its is estimated to continue growing by around 10% every year for the next ten years. This has happened thanks to two processes running at the same time, namely a more substantial number of smartphones being sold in developing countries and a desire from the side of established companies to reach their customers directly rather than through intermediaries. In the Indian context, it has led to the existence of a dual retail system comprising of aggregator marketplaces like Amazon and Flipkart operating alongside web-stores of particular brands.

As a result of this shift, long-established brands like Bata India face difficulties in earning trust on the internet. Traditionally, trust has been built through years of successful business marked with physical locations and thus in-store customer interaction. However, on the internet, trust should be developed within nanoseconds before the customer sees the item. Buying shoes is particularly tricky: since comfort and fit are vital in deciding on a purchase, one cannot actually check those remotely. The purchaser sees only the size chart and photos, and he or she should trust one of them, instead of feet and hands that know how shoes fit perfectly. Various studies within this category conclude that the perceived quality of a product is the biggest predictor of trust, and the fairness and ease of return of the goods follow right behind.

This problem is caused by the fact that we often do not make a difference between these two types of trust, which

influences how the brand should react to this problem. People can trust the process of payment and delivery of While consumers trust brands and their products completely, they have doubts about them. However, brand websites are typically better than any other sites in terms of emotional connection and authenticity, as consumers from several Asian countries have more faith in product authenticity. Research shows that customers who place orders through a brand's site tend to spend at least 20 percent more than those who buy the same items from a marketplace.

When it comes to Bata India, which owns a good physical retail presence, but competes for online space on third-party marketplaces, it is not just a hypothetical question — it is now seen as a challenge for its current digital strategy. However, the issue of how Indian shoemakers themselves make choices between the procedural credibility of brands and the effectiveness of marketplaces has been little studied. The aim of this work is to address the gap by studying the issue of trust in Bata India, both in third-party marketplaces and on its own D2C website, in order to retrieve the information on which aspects and dimensions of trust should be prioritized in the company's omnichannel strategy.

Myntra's core customer group (which makes up 55.1% of our sample, and features the lowest D2C trust score of 3.10) represents the single largest customer category for D2C conversion. This makes targeted communication—rather than general brand advertising—the more effective way of utilizing the marketing budget.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital retail has rapidly taken over as the most significant area of development for the global footwear market. It is expected that the e-commerce segment will grow at a rate of almost 10 percent annually. According to Market Intelo (2026), there are two factors driving this change—greater penetration of smartphones in emerging markets and the increasing inclination of established companies to sell directly to their consumers without relying on intermediaries. Thus, two different digital environments are emerging in India and several countries in Southeast Asia—on one hand, marketplaces such as Amazon, Myntra, and Flipkart, and on the other hand, retailer companies' own websites. For a well-established, traditional company such as Bata India, this implies a new meaning of trust, changing from a slow-during-years process based on repeated visits to stores with familiar salespersons to an instant without ever having contacted the product beforehand.

Trust in this research paper is defined based on three venerable theories. The first theory could be the integrative model of trust in organizations as developed by Mayer et al., 1995. It pinpoints ability, benevolence, and integrity as the quality features of the trusted whom the truster is willing to put his or her trust in. This model has been applied in the field of e-commerce where the trusted organization may be represented by a marketplace or a website of the brand. The second theory is the model proposed by McKnight et al. (2002), which is an extension of the previous model and deals with an important distinction between institution-based trust (i.e., trust in protections and assurances provided by the site) and trust relating to the vendor's competence and benevolence. This distinction influences what is being researched in the paper. The third theory considered in this study is Technology Acceptance Model proposed by Davis (1989), which emphasizes that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are the key factors affecting the willingness of consumers to use particular channel. Site speed, checkout security, and navigability out of the total seven factors of trust are involved in the research as well.

These three streams lead to a common conclusion about footwear e-commerce: consumer trust is composed of several layers, namely structural assurance (functionality of the platform), brand-specific belief (brand's honesty), and usability (convenience of the process). Marketplaces tend to have advantages on the first and third layers — Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra devote a lot of effort and resources to ensuring smooth checkout and comfortable usage of their platforms, whereas sites owned by brands have to build up credibility related to the second layer without the help of the platform's reputation, according to McKnight et al. (2002). Theoretical distinction is the reason why that huge difference between platforms and brands could be found in the literature and the reason

why this research was conducted.

Trust research can be encapsulated into two basic areas: namely, the reliability of a brand, and the perception of a brand's concern for its customers' interests even without scrutiny (Aaker, 1996; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The area of shoes is a unique exception, because order of size and comfort cannot be checked online. Thus the consumer has to rely on 'trusting' the size guide and photographs of the shoes (Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026). According to empirical research, perceived quality of a product is the most significant predictor of trust, followed very closely by simplicity and fairness of after-sale service as well as return procedures (Azzam et al., 2024). However, it is vital to differentiate between trust in the platform and trust in the brand. Consumers can trust in smooth checkout and delivery process of Flipkart (institutional trust), but at the same time they may not be sure about the genuineness or size of the shoes they are about to buy (knowledge-based trust that only comes with direct brand experience) (Azzam et al., 2024).

"Trust proxies" are marketplaces that acquire their credibility from other sources. They do not earn every product's trust like they do with the consumers who use the marketplace. For example, trust in Amazon's return policy is much greater compared to the trust associated with some sellers like patanjalis and dhatu in a marketplace. This principle has been acted out in the marketplace principle of scale. A few players are dominating the market (Market Intelo, 2026). The appeal of the marketplaces for Indian consumers lies in the practical benefits of the platforms — better management of the shipment process (Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026).

While convenient for consumers, this creates problems for marketers; customers in this type of market learn to delay their purchases until the next sale, thereby diminishing the

pricing power of the brand in the long run (Lukito, 2025). As he puts it, this is a "default discount mindset" that brands can find difficult to change after it was created.

Branded websites outperform marketplaces when it comes to what marketplaces fail with in regard to achieving emotional connection and authenticity. Consumers in South East Asia specifically claim to trust that products purchased from an official site of a brand are genuine compared to the same products purchased through a marketplace (Google, Ipsos, and Sixth Factor, 2021). This trust appears to translate into willingness to spend more — one frequently quoted research finding shows that consumers spent around 20% more on average when they purchased something from a brand not from a marketplace, as they got the additional assurance of an official warranty and after sales service (Think with Google, 2021). So, for a traditional brand, the owned site is less of a sales channel and more so of a visionary space for storytelling, exclusive launches, and solidifying the message of the brand, something that a marketplace listing with many other sellers cannot do (Think with Google, 2021; Kulkarni and Wankhede, 2026).

Kulkarni and Wankhede (2026) synthesize much of this into four practical pillars that a brand can act on directly, rather than leaving trust to chance:

To begin with, it is essential to ensure that the product being advertised matches the product that is delivered, via realistic images of the product as well as size charts that truly indicate fit. This is key since customers are most concerned about fit when it comes to buying footwear (Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026).

Secondly, it is important to deliver a straightforward digital experience of fast load time, secure checkout, and smooth navigation. A complicated interface sends the impression of an incompetent company even before the customer sees the product advertised (Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026; Azzam et al., 2024).

Finally, it is crucial to establish relationship integrity through customer service and return management, in which customers' time and resources are treated as valuable as the company's reputation (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026).

Fourthly, another pillar of social proof is the use of authentic reviews from third-party sources and user-generated content; however, it should be noted that this pillar also has its drawbacks. Kulkarni and Wankhede (2026) show that most (61%) consumers do not believe the reviews on the company's website but trust the reviews made at third-party sites. Therefore, companies may need to seek external validation instead of relying solely on reviews made by themselves on their sites.

Nike's experience serves as an example that illustrates the viability of this approach. The company cut its wholesale and multi-brand retailing presence to drive its direct sales further. This had a short-term positive effect on the margins for the company, but the brand lost the retail space where consumers go to examine different shoes (Meritshot, 2026). The competitors like On Running and Hoka took advantage of the gap left by Nike and severely reduced the company's market share (Meritshot, 2026). This suggests that it is not about the negative consequences of the investment into D2C but that using the marketplace for product discovery and online shopping are still interdependent processes and therefore should not replace one another.

This dilemma concerning investment within the channel and the reinforcement among the channels has received a lot of attention in the literature regarding the omnichannel retailing field of study. Verhoef, Kannan and Inman (2015) state that the change from the multichannel to the omnichannel

retailing comes from the fact that it is based on the making fluidity of the channels from the customer's point of view. A shopper does not differentiate between the listing of the product by Bata at the marketplace and the official website of the company as two separate connections but rather considers this experience as one single connection with the brand that is presented at two resources in an inconsistent manner. Considering this, one should note that Nike's strategy failed not only with respect to the discovery channel but it also failed in terms of managing customer throughout a journey that should have been seen as seamless and continuous from one channel to another.

In essence, the literature suggests that a "tiered" approach is more appropriate than an either/or strategy: marketplaces serve as the entry point into mass discovery and inventory efficiency, and owned digital channels offer the venue through which to manage brand relationships more deeply once customers are interested (Schillinger, 2026). The implementation of this idea in practice requires the integration of data from both channels because without the common customer view, companies cannot know if they have made a sale on the marketplace to a new customer or to a customer whom they were unable to retain on their site (Schillinger, 2026).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Examine how third-party marketplaces (Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra) and Bata India's own D2C website differ in the level of consumer trust they generate for footwear purchases.
- Identify which specific factors — product authenticity assurance, product images and descriptions, secure payment, website performance, return and warranty policies, and customer support — most strongly influence trust in each channel.
- Assess the extent to which marketplace-driven promotional culture (discount events, festival sales) affects consumers' willingness to purchase at full price, and whether this differs from behavior toward the brand-owned website.
- Determine whether consumers are willing to pay a price premium on Bata India's official website in exchange for assurance of authenticity and better customer service.

- Understand, through open-ended responses, what consumers themselves identify as the markers of a trustworthy footwear brand online.

1.2 Important Definitions

- Marketplace: A third-party e-commerce platform (Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra) that hosts multiple sellers and brands, including Bata and its sub-brands, alongside competing products.
- Brand-Owned Website (D2C): An e-commerce channel operated directly by the brand (e.g., Bata India's own website), without competing listings from other sellers or brands.
- Price Premium: The additional amount a consumer is willing to pay to purchase from a brand-owned website rather than a marketplace, in exchange for assurance of authenticity or service quality.
- Promotional/Discount Culture: The pattern of consumer behavior shaped by recurring marketplace sale events (e.g., Big Billion Days, Great Indian Festival, End of Season Sale) that encourages deferring purchases until a discount is available.

1.3 Research Design

This study uses a descriptive research design to examine and compare consumer trust and brand perception across third-party marketplaces and Bata India's brand-owned website in the footwear

category.

- Type of Study: Descriptive research using a cross-sectional survey.
- Approach: Quantitative research to identify measurable trends in trust, purchase behaviour, and price sensitivity.
- Scope: How platform type (marketplace vs. brand-owned website) shapes consumer trust, brand perception, and willingness to pay a premium, with Bata India as the focal brand.

1.4 Data Collection

Primary Data

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire designed in Google Forms, covering four sections:

- Section A – Shopping Experience: demographic profiling (age, gender) and the platform most frequently used for footwear purchases.
- Section B – Platform Influence on Brand Identity: a Likert-scale battery measuring agreement with statements on trust in official websites versus marketplaces, perceived product genuineness, reliability of product information, influence of marketplace reviews, and the effect of exclusive brand-website launches on brand image.
- Section C – Ranking and Trust Drivers: a single-choice question on which platform best represents a footwear brand's identity, followed by Likert-scale items on the influence of product images, product descriptions, secure payment options, website loading speed, return policy, customer support, and warranty/exchange policy on trust.
- Section D (Promotional Culture and Price Premium): Likert-scale items on waiting for sales, the influence of marketplace discounts and festival sale events (e.g., Big Billion Days, Great Indian Festival) on purchase timing, willingness to pay more on a brand's official website for assured authenticity, willingness to pay extra for better customer service, and the relative importance of trust versus discounts.
- An open-ended question asking respondents, in their own words, what makes a footwear brand appear more trustworthy online.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and prior studies on brand trust, D2C branding, and marketplace dynamics in the footwear and broader e-commerce sector, as covered in the literature review chapter.

1.5 Sampling Plan

- Target Population: Consumers who purchase footwear online, across marketplaces (Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra) and brand-owned websites, with Bata India as the reference brand.
- Sample Size: 150–200 responses.
- Sampling Method: Convenience sampling, with the questionnaire circulated through mixed online channels (including social media and messaging platforms) to reach respondents with recent footwear purchase experience.

1.6 Research Execution

- The questionnaire was distributed online through a mix of channels to maximise reach across different age groups and platform preferences.
- The survey was designed to take approximately 3–5 minutes to complete.
- Responses were collected until the target of 150–200 completed responses was reached, to ensure a sufficiently robust base for comparative analysis.

1.7 Data Analysis

Data collected was analysed using quantitative methods:

- Percentage and frequency analysis to interpret the distribution of responses across demographic and platform-usage questions.
- Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation) for Likert-scale items measuring trust, promotional influence, and price premium willingness.
- Cross-tabulation to compare trust levels and platform preference across demographic segments (age, gender, platform used most often).
- Pie charts and bar charts for visual representation of key findings, particularly the marketplace-vs-brand-website trust comparison.
- Thematic grouping of open-ended responses on what drives perceived trustworthiness online. These

analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel / Google Sheets.

The focus of the analysis was to determine: The comparative trust levels consumers place in marketplaces versus Bata India's brand-owned website.

- Which specific trust drivers (authenticity assurance, service quality, website experience) carry the most weight for each channel.
- Whether marketplace promotional culture affects willingness to buy at full price, and the extent of willingness to pay a premium for assured authenticity on the brand-owned website.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

- The sample size (150–200) is modest relative to the broader population of online footwear shoppers in India and may not be fully representative.
- Responses are self-reported and may be subject to recall or social-desirability bias, particularly on willingness-to-pay questions.
- Convenience sampling through online channels may skew the sample toward digitally active, urban respondents, limiting generalisability to offline-first or rural consumers.
- The study uses Bata India as the focal brand; findings on trust dynamics may not generalise uniformly to other footwear brands with different market positioning.
- As a cross-sectional survey, the study captures trust perceptions at a single point in time and cannot account for how these perceptions shift with individual purchase experiences over time.

DATAANALYSIS

Consumer Trust in Marketplaces versus Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) Channels in Indian Footwear Retail, with reference to Bata India

In this chapter, a thorough examination of the primary data is presented. Data was collected by means of structured questionnaires and filled out by 178 respondents. The questions of the questionnaire were prepared to investigate the trust of consumers in brand-owned websites and third-party marketplaces (like Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra). Bata India has been taken as a reference brand to perform the empirical part of the study. The chapter further covers descriptive statistics based on responses in Likert scale format, composite scores of trust index and application of inferential tests.

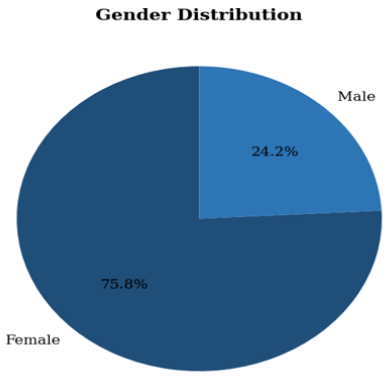


Figure 1 (Pie chart of Gender Distribution)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	135	75.8%
Male	43	24.2%
Total	178	100%

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

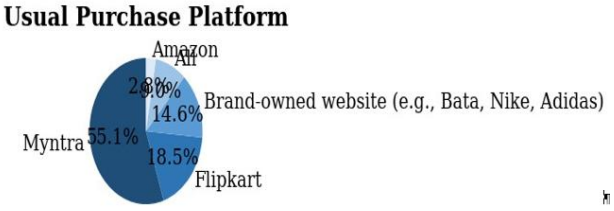


Figure 2 (Pie chart of Usual Purchase Platform)

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Myntra	98	55.1%
Flipkart	33	18.5%
Brand website	26	14.6%
All / multiple	16	9.0%
Amazon	5	2.8%

Table 2: Usual Purchase Platform

Myntra and Flipkart together hold 73.6% of typical purchasing behavior, indicating that the marketplaces — whether brand-owned or independent — play a leading role in actual footwear purchasing practices among the participants surveyed, despite brand-owned sites enjoying a strong advantage in terms of trust and brand identity.

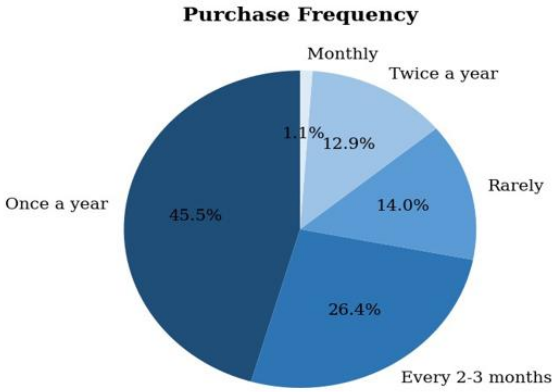


Figure 3 (Pie chart of Purchase Frequency)

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Once a year	81	45.5%
Every 2–3 months*	47	26.4%
Rarely	25	14.0%
Twice a year	23	12.9%
Monthly	2	1.1%

Table 3: Footwear Purchase Frequency

Regarding footwear, buyers tend to purchase infrequently; half the participants state that they buy footwear at least once per year. The infrequency of purchase cases as compared to the results of this study suggests that due to the low purchase frequency of such goods, the effect of a single strong or weak experience can be very pronounced in shaping channel trust.

Trust in Brand-Owned Websites versus Marketplaces

Eight Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) captured trust in the two channel types. Two composite indices were computed: a D2C Trust Index (mean of five brand-website items) and a Marketplace Trust Index (mean of three marketplace items).

Index	Mean	SD	n
D2C Trust Index	3.54	1.09	178
Marketplace Trust Index	3.42	1.09	178

Table 4: Composite Trust Indices

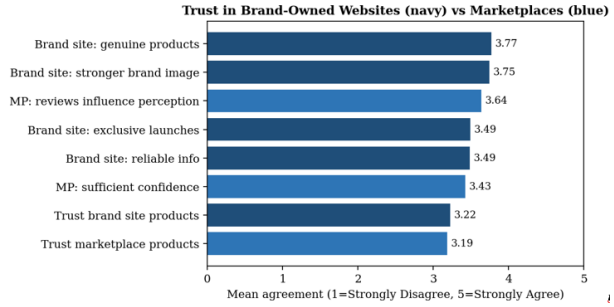


Figure 4: Trust Item Means, Brand-Owned Websites (navy) vs Marketplaces (blue)

D2C's superiority in terms of trust compared to marketplace is supported by a paired-samples t-test: t (177) = 2.56, p = 0.011, and the mean difference is 0.13. The effect is statistically meaningful but small, meaning that people slightly prefer trusted directly from brand websites, and therefore the margin is small, which is in line with the earlier indications of the overall inclination to follow marketplace recommendations while making purchases. It is interesting to note that the statement "Brand owned websites give me assurance of a product being genuine" has the highest mean score (3.77) out of all statements, while the specific statement regarding trust in the marketplace products has the lowest mean score (3.19), therefore marking the concern about authenticity as the major reason for higher scores in D2C trust.

Trust by Usual Shopping Platform

A one-way ANOVA tested whether D2C and marketplace trust vary by which platform a respondent usually buys from.

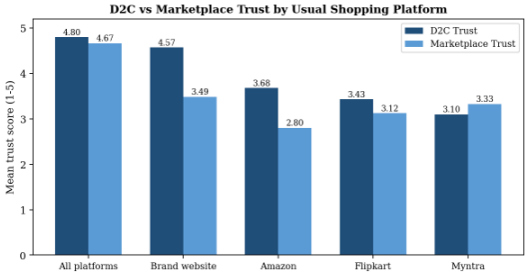


Figure 5: D2C vs Marketplace Trust by Usual Shopping Platform

The two variations show a lot of statistical significance: D2C trust among the 'usual' platform, F(4,173) = 22.48, p < .001; marketplace trust among the 'usual' platform, F(4,173)

= 7.43, p < .001. There are two noteworthy trends. Respondents who buy from brand-generated sites show the most significant D2C trust (4.57) yet, the least trust for the marketplace (3.49). Myntra's target audience has the lowest D2C trust score out of any group (3.10). This group, too, is the least likely to switch to a brand's site yet, makes up the biggest portion of respondents (55.1%). There are no gender differences reported in either trust index (D2C: t = 0.63; p = .53; Marketplace: t = 0.49; p = .63), meaning that in terms of trust, people do not vary by gender. Which Platform Better Represents Brand Identity

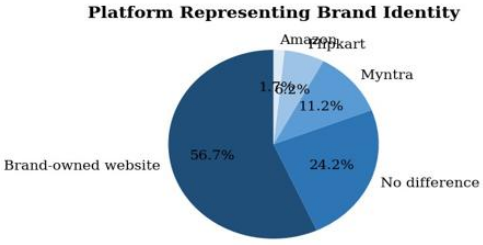


Figure 6 (Pie chart of Identity Platform)

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Brand website	101	56.7%
No difference	43	24.2%
Myntra	20	11.2%
Flipkart	11	6.2%
Amazon	3	1.7%

Table 5: Platform Best Representing Brand Identity

Over half (56.7%) of the participants believe that brand identity is best captured through a particular brand's website, despite the fact that not many respondents shop there regularly. This illustrates that there is a clear trust–behavior gap between brand sites that do well in terms of brand identity and authenticity, and marketplaces that are popular among customers because of their convenience and shopping practice.

Drivers of Online Trust

An evaluation was conducted on the seven elements that were evaluated to determine how different characteristics of sites/services impacted trust. The results were then compared with the D2C Trust Index in order to discover which characteristics and attributes are essential in forming trust in company-owned channels.

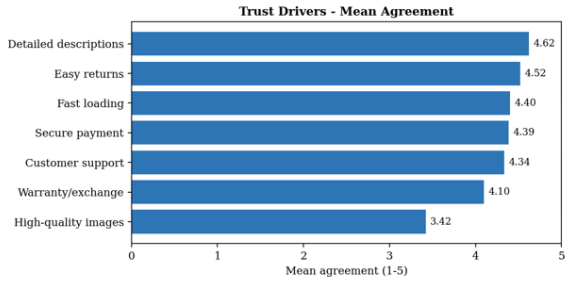


Figure 7: Trust Drivers — Mean Agreement (1–5)

Driver	Mean	r with D2C trust	p
Detailed product descriptions	4.62	.27	< .001
Easy return policies	4.52	.54	< .001
Fast website loading	4.40	.57	< .001
Secure payment options	4.39	.58	< .001
Good customer support	4.34	.65	< .001
Warranty and exchange policies	4.10	.55	< .001
High-quality product images	3.42	.22	.003

Table 6: Trust Drivers — Correlation with D2C Trust Index

All the seven drivers can be termed to have high significance (between 3.4 and 4.6) and positively correlated with D2C trust. Among them, the customer support (correlation=0.65), secure payment system (correlation=0.58) and speed of the website (correlation=0.57) indicate the strongest relation to D2C trust overall, which suggests that improvements in these areas will make huge impacts towards trust levels. Product photography and description receive relatively high importance ratings compared to the other drivers, but relatively low ratings regarding their ability to build trust.

Discounts, Promotions, and Price Prem

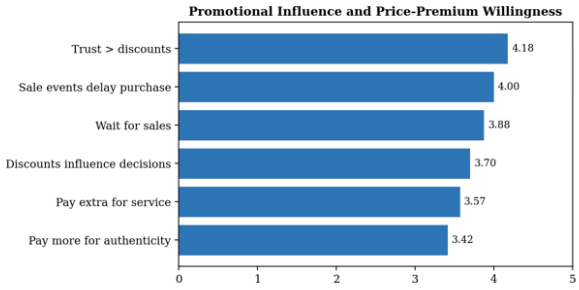


Figure 8: Promotional Influence and Price-Premium Willingness (mean, 1–5)

On average, people think that trust (4.18) is more crucial than discounts, which is the highest rating given on the scale. However, people also feel very influenced by sales and discounts (3.7–4.0). Their probability to pay more if authenticity and/or services offered on a branded website (3.4–3.6) is very low. Trust and willingness to pay more in case of authenticity are linked positively ($r = .42$, $p < .001$), which means that there is a group of customers who are concerned with trust, but other consumers that are very price sensitive live among them, meaning that both trust-based and price-based loyalty can exist within customers.Open-Ended Responses: What Makes a Brand Appear Trustworthy Online

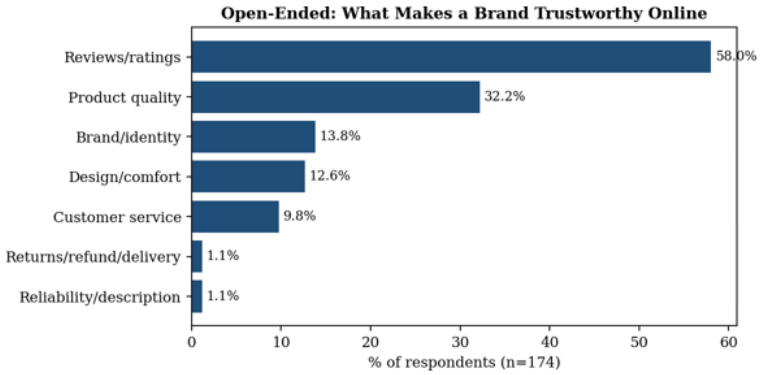


Figure 9: Themes in Open-Ended Trust Responses (n = 174)

When asked to explain trust, consumers say that reviews and ratings are most common with a score of 58.0% — this is more than product quality, which scored 32.2%, and significantly higher than just a brand name scoring only 13.8%. Despite the fact that consumers say that a brand's website is genuine and builds their identity, when asked what makes them trust a brand in their own words, they say that social proof — something inherent to any marketplace is main reason they trust the brand. Summary of Key Findings

- D2C (brand-website) trust is significantly higher than marketplace trust overall (3.54 vs 3.42, $p = .011$), but the gap is small, and marketplaces still capture 73.6% of usual purchase behavior

— a clear trust–behavior gap.

- Brand-owned websites are seen as the strongest representation of brand identity (56.7%), well ahead of any single marketplace.
- Trust is highly platform-dependent: shoppers already loyal to brand sites or using multiple platforms report the highest D2C trust; Myntra's core base — 55% of the sample — reports the lowest.
- Customer support, payment security, and site speed are the strongest drivers of D2C trust ($r =$ .57–.65); product imagery and descriptions, while rated important, are weaker differentiators.
- Consumers say trust matters more than discounts (4.18/5), but sale events and marketplace discounting still strongly influence purchase timing and channel choice.
- Unprompted, reviews/ratings are the single largest driver of perceived trustworthiness (58% of open responses) — more than product quality or brand name — a marketplace-native strength that D2C sites currently under-leverage.

CONCLUSION

In analyzing this set of investigations, one can see that retail platforms and branded websites do not serve the same purposes. Retail platforms are designed to provide an extensive reach, hassle-free transactions and convenience; whereas branded websites, in contrast, are established in order to make brands more accountable and accessible to consumers, as brand image is of increasing importance nowadays (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Think with Google, 2021; Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026). For Bata India as for other brands, it is necessary to operate on both platforms and the only thing brands need to solve is the issue of coordinating channel use efficiently. The emergence of such technologies as AI-

based sizing and virtual fitting may help to solve the "product truth" problem to a great extent (Kulkarni & Wankhede, 2026).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN FOOTWEAR BRANDS

For footwear companies operating in the Indian market, the results imply more of a sequencing measure than a channel-selection measure. Marketplace spending should remain significantly unchanged as more than two-thirds of the sample (73.6%) is already buying through this medium, with the trust gap for brand websites being very low (0.13 point difference on a five-point scale). The opportunity that has higher leverage according to this study lies on the direct-to-consumer side: closing the gap in visibility of reviews (with 58% of buzz being trust-related mentions), communicating guarantees on service explicitly at the point of sale, and employing brand site's long-term identity advantage (56.7% of research participants indicated this).

The primary segment that can be targeted by the D2C conversion is the major user group of certain large marketplaces (55.1% of the entire sample and the group with the weakest D2C confidence level of 3.10), hence targeted advertising is more likely to work more effectively than general brand advertising. The way the retargeting campaigns will work is that they will most likely address this customer segment with an authentic message and guarantee of services during the periods coinciding with the customers' purchasing cycle instead of trying to compete during the discounts periods that are organized by the marketplaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reviews and ratings are the single largest unprompted driver of perceived trustworthiness (58% of open-ended responses), yet this is a marketplace-native strength. Bata should surface verified customer reviews, ratings, and user photos prominently on its own website's product pages to close this structural trust gap.

- Customer support, secure payment, and site speed show the strongest correlation with D2C trust (r = .57–.65 out of the seven drivers tested). Bata should prioritise investment here — responsive support channels, visible payment-security signalling, and page-load optimisation

— over further investment in product imagery/descriptions, which despite high importance ratings show the weakest trust correlation (r = .22–.27) and are likely already at parity with competitors.

- Myntra's core user base (55.1% of the sample) reports the lowest D2C trust of any platform group (3.10 vs 4.57 among brand-site shoppers). This is the single largest addressable segment for D2C conversion campaigns and should be prioritised in targeting and messaging.

- 56.7% of respondents already see the brand website as the truest expression of brand identity. Bata should lean further into exclusive launches and identity-driven merchandising on its own site (already rated 3.49/5) to convert this perception advantage into purchase behaviour, rather than assuming identity alone will shift the 73.6% of habitual marketplace buyers.

- Because consumers rate trust above discounts (4.18/5) yet remain highly sale-responsive (sale-event postponement mean 4.00), Bata's own-site promotions should pair price cuts with explicit authenticity/service guarantees (e.g., "official warranty included," "100% genuine" messaging) rather than competing on discount depth alone against marketplaces.

- Return, warranty, and exchange policies show strong correlation with D2C trust (r = .54–.55) and are levers Bata controls directly, unlike marketplace-mediated logistics. These policies should be made clearly visible at the point of purchase on the D2C site, not buried in terms pages.

- Given the low annual purchase frequency in this category (45.5% buy footwear only once a year), a single negative experience carries outsized weight on channel trust. Post-purchase touchpoints (delivery confirmation, easy-return follow-up, genuine-product certification) should be treated as trust-building moments, not just fulfilment steps.

The primary objective of this study was to explore the trust level of Indian consumers toward the third-party market places (Amazon, Myntra and Flipkart) as opposed to the brand-specific websites using Bata India as the center-of-attention brand and finding out the particular site/service characteristics that lead to that trust. As a result, the findings lead to relevant conclusions about both of these issues that are clearly more sophisticated than simply concluding that either D2C model is better or it is the marketplace model.

Brand-specific web pages do provide significant trust benefits as compared to the marketplace sites (3.54 vs 3.42, p = .011), which can be explained by relatively higher level of trust in authenticity of the products. However, this advantage is small and does not affect the purchasing behavior, since the marketplace sites account for 73.6% of footwear purchases made by participants of the study. The gap between trust and behavior is what the researchers identified as the main finding of the study and that leads to the shifting of the question which is relevant for Bata India. The problem is that trust alone is not enough to persuade consumers to make purchases on the brand website.

There is abundant evidence that points to the reasons behind the phenomenon. When given the opportunity to express their views as to what gives a footwear brand an impression of reliability online, most respondents specifically mentioned reviews and ratings (58%) — a feature widely known in the world of e-commerce to be lacking in Bata's own website. At the same time, the characteristics correlated with D2C trust had hardly anything in common with those that a brand might think it necessary to focus on first: customer service, security of payments, and speed of site (r = .57–.65) matter much more than product images and descriptions (r = .22–.27) that are regarded by customers as mere formality. Taken together, the results indicate that closing the gap between trust and behavior would require more than refining the

way products are presented, as it is about introducing social proof features and service infrastructure widely acknowledged by market visitors.

The results also imply a segmentation element. Trust depends heavily on the platform used, with respondents who are loyal to the brand website having the highest trust (4.57) and those who are Myntra's core shoppers having the lowest (3.10). This group provides both the highest conversion potential and the biggest hurdle to overcome, so marketers must treat their efforts differently rather than assume uniform trust levels across different marketplaces.

The findings need to be understood within the context of limitations regarding the study. The data (178 valid responses) comes from a convenience sample dominated by urban, digital consumers, and the cross-sectional design allows to examine people's trust perceptions only at one moment in time.

Only Bata India was a focus brand, meaning that the importance of each of identified drivers, in particular of customer support and payment security in comparison to product estimation, may differ when applied to other footwear brands that hold a different market position or are fully digital companies.

In the future, researchers could build on this research by: (1) developing a longitudinal study to see how trust changes after a real purchasing experience on a given channel; (2) comparing results across footwear brands, which vary in terms of their physical-retail background, in order to determine whether the reasons for trusting Bata are unique to this company or are true for all brands; and (3) closely investigating new solutions, such as AI-assisted online sizing or virtual fitting solutions, as these are regarded in the literature as the most substantial means in terms of closing the gap between online and offline shopping.

In summary, it appears that Bata India does not have to make a choice between online marketplaces and its own site; it has to sequence the processes carefully, first using marketplaces' popularity and credibility in attracting attentive customers, and then putting effort into building credibility and reliability in its own online site.

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