INTRODUCTION

A sports industry is developing one of the biggest in the world. More & more people are participating in sport & recreational activities throughout a wide spectrum of activities. Indian sports goods retail industry has grown significantly over the years. Technology, coupled with few government initiatives, leading to cost-effective production techniques, would be the prerequisites for this highly evolving industry. The Indian sports goods retailing sector is becoming intensely competitive, as more and more players are vying for the same set of customers and is witnessing a radical transformation. The increase in the number of retailers across the country indicates that sports industry will boom in a big way in the near future. The new entrant in retailing in India signifies the beginning of retail revolution. Retailing of Sports Goods Market in India is growing due to the rise in per capita income, changing lifestyle, and consumer preferences. India has been a manufacturing hub for various sports products and brands sourcing which has tremendously increased.

Sports is becoming increasingly important as a passive entertainment, both live and in the media. The most popular "equipped' sport in India is cricket; next comes volleyball and racket sports. Beyond these, sports equipments market is extremely fragmented. Home fitness equipments is nearly second only to cricket in terms of consumer expenditure. As maximum consumers of fitness equipments is by clubs and gyms. Consumers also spend more on sportswear but their spending is exaggerated by the fashion for wearing sports clothing and sports shoes as all-purpose leisurewear. As ever, a sport in the 21st century is a market full of extremes. With markets throughout the world becoming increasingly more competitive, market research is now on the main agenda of marketing the sports goods; it means identifying customers and providing services of uncompromising quality in return for an optimal profit on investments.

Generally, a growing market is more desirable, not only there is great sales potential but also usually easier to enter and build sales in a growing market place. For very small firms, however, a large market can be a double edge sword. On the positive side of course there is a potential for huge sales, negatively though larger firms with well established access to marketing channels and better financing might be tempered to enter such an attractive market place.
Sports Goods

Sports Goods are defined as tangible, physical products that offer benefits to consumers. Conversely, services are intangible, non-physical products. Most sports products possess the characteristics of both goods and services. Sports goods industry is comprised of all establishments primarily engaged in retailing new sporting goods, health and fitness equipments, apparels or hosiery, sports shoes various sports equipments and accessories which are sold by sports good retailers and whole sellers. It is axiomatic that consumers participate in the activities for which they buy various sports products; where as in some cases it may be in obverse condition people may not buy products for participation; e.g. Tread - mill or Jogger may not be used at Health clubs, Cricket Matting or Helmets may be shared by one or more teams. Table Tennis Table may be borrowed or rented etc. None less in many sports events participating trends are clearly correlated with consumer's products. One believes that sports product is a good, service or any combination such (a) Product availability in the region, b) Geographic location of the region, c) Economic condition of the sports participants, etc. are the few points to be mentioned.

Indian Retail Sector of sports goods

India is a country having one of the most unorganized sports goods retail markets. Traditionally it is a family’s livelihood, with more than 90% retailers function in less than 500 square feet of shopping space Purchasing power of Indian urban consumer is growing and branded merchandise in sports are slowly becoming lifestyle products that are widely accepted. Indian sports goods retailers need to take advantage of this growth and aim to grow, diversify and introduce new formats and to face fierce competitive pressure they must come to recognize the value of building their own stores as brands to reinforce their marketing positioning, to communicate quality as well as value for money. No doubt Indian sports goods retail scene is booming and has witnessed too many players in short time, crowding several categories without looking at their core competencies, or having a well thought out branding strategy. Some retailers have still been able to maintain their ground in the market in spite of the arrival of new entrants. Consumer insights built over their years of experience in business is helping them to
hold the fort against the onslaught of the new players on the horizon. Researcher quotes that “Consumers also now play games with retailers – sitting tight and waiting for the discounts to come. Because purchases are not necessities as they have more choice about when they buy.”

**Sports goods Retail market in Vidarbha**

In Vidarbha region sports goods retail has developed a lot and sports goods market is growing rapidly at an average annual rate of around 5-10 per cent in the past few years, as young and educated population, higher disposable income, urbanization, awareness and exposure to international markets, presence of foreign brands, corporate entry into sports, technological developments and good performance of the country in some international events. Also hosting a series of international / national sporting events, increased training and infrastructure facility had boosted sports goods business in the region. Although, Vidarbha is not a major sporting region in country and neither does the players won a significant number of medals in major sporting events but participants had actively participates in all types of sporting events.

Also consumers are health conscious as is evident from the growing number of health clubs, gyms and fitness centers. Sports goods retailing in Vidarbha is not a new concept but the retail formats have changed in the post liberalization period. In the past, sports retailing was through family-owned single shop outlets which mostly sold sports equipment and toys. Sports apparel was sold by apparel retailers and shoes by footwear retailers. There were hardly any outlets providing sports apparel, shoes, equipment and accessories under one roof. After last few decades sports goods retail business in Vidarbha under gone a massive changes from family-owned, one-shop businesses to corporate retailing, presence all type of foreign brands through exclusive outlets, department stores, other convenience stores, etc. There are a number of studies on the various retail sectors in Vidarbha. However, they do not specifically look at sports goods retailing.

Researcher pointed out that sports goods retailers in the region are more likely to sell high-value technology-oriented products, fast-moving products along with foreign brands that operate across all segments including sports equipment, apparel, shoes and sports accessories which help them to increase their retail footprints. However, penetration of sports retailers in
smaller cities of Vidarbha region is somewhat restricted by availability and access to sports infrastructure.

**Services offered by sports goods retailers**

The general services which a sports goods retailer should provide are as below:

1. Sports goods retailers anticipate the wants of the consumers and then supplies them right kind of goods at reasonable price. Retailers make consumers buying easy & convenient as possible.

2. Retailers perform the service of bulk-breaking i.e. dividing large quantities into small units, appropriate for consumer use.

3. Retailers create time and place utility by storing the products in off season and by transporting these goods to the places where they can be readily available as and when needed by the consumer.

4. Retailers also help the manufacturers in distributing their goods by using advertisement display and personal selling.

5. Retailers sometimes also offer free delivery of goods, credit, free alteration, liberal exchange facilities, instructions in the use of goods, revolving credit plans, etc.

**Marketing**

Marketing is one of the most misunderstood and confused terms used in business. Many of us are often confused between marketing and selling. However, these two concepts have exactly opposite connation. Marketing is existed in the world of business and commerce. The marketing concept is very logical. In general, marketing activities are all those associated with identifying the particular wants and needs. The two can be differentiated as (1) Manufacturers create a product, which is given to sales representatives to find a customer and sell that product; whereas in the marketing approach the information is given to the designer who develops a product and finally the manufacturer who produce the desired product. Thus, the sales approach begins and ends with the customers. (2) The second major difference between sales and marketing approaches is the focus of management. The sales approach almost always focuses on
volume; while the marketing approach focus on profit. Marketing is a dynamic discipline, one must adapt quickly to new technologies, new products & new consumer tastes, as rapid technological innovations continue to change human needs & provide goods & services to consumers at an affordable price. A need occurs when an individual feels that they lack a necessity. A want, on the other hand, is something learned; it is shaped by various factors such as culture, experience, social-influence etc. Thus, a market is composed of potential consumers with the desire and ability to purchase a specific product.

**Four P’s of Marketing**

There is evidence that some universal rules are applicable to successful marketing in retail sports goods industries. Studies have found that some of the characteristics affecting consumer behavior that marketers must take into account, due to the influence on consumer purchases are product, pricing, positioning, and placement. What is known in marketing circles as 4 P’s? As selling sports goods need to create a **successful mix** of:

1) The right **product**, 2) Sold at the right **price**, 3) In the right **place** & 4) Using the most suitable **promotion**

**Other Dimensions of competition in sports goods retailing**

**Geographical location**

Geographical location can be important in retailing. Sports goods consumers are not quite sure what they want and want to be able to make comparisons among a number of different shops, retailers can attract customers by clustering together. The importance of geographical location means that local market power can be high and the inability to find an appropriate location can act as a barrier to entry.

**Product selection (Quality and Range of Products Retailed)**

Location in product space tends to be very important in retailing. Retailers carry out a selective gatekeeper function: consumers do not have the time or ability to look at all products available from manufacturers, and they prefer retailers to carry out some selection on their behalf.
Consumers then choose between retailers on the grounds of the sort of product selection they expect the retailer to have already done.

Level and quality of retailer service

Simply deciding which products to retail, however, is only part of a retailer’s quality choice. In addition to the physical characteristics of the products chosen, the retailer has to decide how much, and what form, of retailer service to provide.

There are various possible types of service that retailers can provide:

1. Shop ambience
2. Point-of-sale service
3. After-sales service
4. Product promotion
5. Retailer image/reputation

There are a variety of opportunities to market within the sports industries, as it views marketing not as hunting but as gardening. Minds are like parachutes, they only function when they are open. Many sports goods manufacturers have formed their own wholesale and retail networks. Also a new marketing strategy the in-house retail system is being applied by various manufacturers to achieve consumers loyalty and strengthen their competitiveness, ultimately leading to greater market share, because instead of product centered "make and sell" philosophy, the sports product marketing concept is a customer centered "sense and respond" philosophy.