



**Research Article**

**CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN PASSENGER CAR MARKET WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED DISTRICTS IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Present world we have so many leader in car manufacturing like Ford, General Motors, Honda, Toyota, Suzuki, Hyundai, Renault, Mitsubishi, Benz, BMW, Volkswagen and Nissan. A consumer gives more importance to easy, convenient, stylish and more comfortable vehicles rather than highly sophisticated vehicles. Consumer behaviour is a complex one. It differs from person to person as well as product to product. With the multiplicity of choices available to the Indian passenger car buyers, it drastically changed the way the car purchase scenario in India and particularly in the State of Andhra Pradesh. This transformed the automobile scene from a sellers' market to buyers' market.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The automotive Industry directly and indirectly employs 13 million individuals in India. The industry is valued at about US\$ 35 billion contributing about 3.1 percent of India's GDP (nominal). India's cost-competitive auto components industry is the 2nd largest in the world. In addition, India's motorcycle market is also the 2nd largest in the world with annual sales of around five million units. India has become one of the international players in the automobile market. The Indian Automobile industry is at present engaged in mergers and acquisitions on the international scale.

In India, till early eighties, consumers had very limited options for passenger cars. The Automobile Industry has been in the booming phase for the past 10 years, on the strength of the Indian Government's liberalized economy policy and freedom from the License Raj. The Government of India allowed Foreign Joint Venture in the industry since early 1990, which saw many automobile giants entering the Indian market with their models, readily available, without much waiting time for the delivery. Sudden interest of major global players has made Indian auto industry very competitive, as India provides twin benefit of ready market and low cost manufacturing base for them. With the explosion of the automobile industry, due to its globalization and liberalization, car manufacturers introduced much innovative and technological advancement in their models. Customers have started thinking to change over.

Indian Automobile industry is the tenth largest in the world with an annual production of approximately 2 million units. In passenger vehicle segment, still Maruti Suzuki is the leader with around 50%, market share followed by Hyundai Motors with 19% and Tata Motors with 16%. Other players in this segment are Honda Sael Cars and Ford India Pvt. Ltd, Toyota, General Motors etc. Accordingly to Society of Indian Manufacturers (SIAM), sales of passenger vehicles segment grew by 31.34 percent in 2016. In 2018, analysts predict that the sales momentum to continue and may achieve a growth rate of 20-25 percent in the passenger vehicle segment alone.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Reeti Agarwal, (2007) "A study of spousal influence in family purchase decision" she had attempt to analyses the buying division – making patterns access different products and services categories within Indian families so as to get a clear understanding of the influence of the husband and the wife in family decision making. She concluded that, in the Indian households, the husband is still dominating influence in the purchase decision of products irrespective of whether the division is instrumental or expressive. Thus, marketers of different products need to pay attention to the nature of their product and the resultant dominant influence on its purchase; and not focus only on the instrumental or expressive aspects of the decisions.

Kaushik. V.K. and Neeraj Koushik (2008) stated that in determining the pre – purchase behaviour of the customers they were asked about the sources of their information while purchasing new product and who influenced their decision.

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Majority of the respondents found to be relying upon friends and advertisement.

Maheskumar S. (2009) attempted to analyse the automotive sector and its contribution to the country's GDP. The rising income of the Indian middle income class along with the growth of the economy over the past few years has attracted global auto majors to the Indian market. The attractiveness of the Indian markets for passenger cars have resulted in shifting of new capacities and flow of capital to the Indian automotive industry by MNCs.

#### ***Role of Internet Marketing in Consumer Decision Process***

As Internet is rapidly growing and providing the platform for e-commerce marketing, many customers use Internet partly or even fully, for all the buying process stages. Just about one in seventeen people may have access to internet in India, but every third car buyer in the country's top cities start their search on the world-wide web. As per Sharma (2010), four out of every ten new car buyers and three in every ten used car buyers, use internet to do initial research, before making the purchase. Liu and Xuan (2008) discuss the various opportunities for car manufacturers and dealers to utilize the internet marketing medium in the five stages of e-marketing buying process - Problem Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Product Choice, Final Outcome / Post Purchase. The researcher now examines the various theories of consumer behavior, so that it will provide a framework to focus our studies on the behavioral patterns of passenger car industry. Most research in marketing still inhabits the world of cognitive consumers and responsive managers, semi-autonomous buyers and philosophical marketers. The present challenge for marketing researchers is to generate critical interpretations. Behaviour is determined, in whole or part, by internal processing of information, or action of mental traits.

#### ***Consumer Politeness and Complaining Behaviour***

Research suggests that in many cases, companies make good-faith efforts to address the complaints from their disgruntled customers. Many managers, in certain cases, are often prepared to exceed consumer expectations beyond-the-contract or above their proscribed job specification, aimed at striving to address consumer complaints, as notified by Resnik and Harmon (1983)

#### ***Family Influence in Consumer Behavior***

White (2004) discussed the factors that affect car-buyers' choices and comments that people expect to haggle with dealers over price and to receive substantial rebates or incentives as well as low-interest payment plans. He pointed out that with an increase in multi-car households, car dealers and advertisers needed to target the right audience, taking into account the pester power of children and the importance of life stage. Despite the fact that women are the primary buyers of most new cars, he admits that the motor trade has traditionally been contemptuous of women's role in the car-buying process.

#### ***Virtual Brand Community Effect***

The importance of virtual brand communities is growing day by day as a result of consumers increasingly using online tools to contact fellow consumers in order to get information on which to base their decisions. For this reason, it attains importance to explore, some of the effects of participation in a

virtual brand community on consumer behaviour. Luis et al. (2007) proposed the positive effects of participation in a virtual community on both consumer trust and loyalty to the product, brand or organization around which the community is developed. The survey reveals that participation in the activities carried out in a virtual community may foster consumer trust and loyalty to the mutual interest of the community (the free software in this case). In addition, the study also found a positive effect of consumer trust on loyalty. In this respect, this study has shown that managers may foster consumer trust and loyalty by developing virtual brand communities and promoting consumers' participation in them.

#### ***Relationship, Service Package and Price***

Research studies by Garbarino and Johnson (1999) have emphasized the significance and relative prioritization of relationship marketing. Many companies have increasingly been prioritizing their attention and focus to the establishment, development and maintenance of close and lasting relationships with their customers, in order to create a differentiating value addition to their products and / or lowering the product costs to engage in a penetration pricing mechanism. Even in the car industry, which is predominantly driven by the product characterization, classification and orientation, establishing a long-term relationship is being considered to be essential marketing strategy at all distribution levels. Thus, customer knowledge and relationship building, through constantly addressing their needs, are considered to be vitally important selling ingredients to contribute to a car dealer's competitive advantage, as ascertained by Chojkacki (2000). Sharma and Patterson (1999) stated that car dealers were implementing a strategy to position themselves, more effectively in the market place than before, by means of continuous improvement of quality maintenance through services delivery packages, as car dealers are increasingly being confronted by demanding and technologically knowledgeable consumers, shortened product model lifecycles, intensified competition and fragmented market segments.

#### ***Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty***

Customer satisfaction is often used as a predictive measurement of future consumer purchases as hypothesized by Newman and Werbel (1973). Satisfied customers are more likely to resort to repeating purchases in the time of actual instance, as reported by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) in their studies. Moreover, highly satisfied customers will convey their success stories of satisfaction and directly recommend that others try the source of satisfaction, as stated in the studies conducted by Reynolds and Arnold (2000). Fitzell (1998) suggested that such satisfied customers shall become less receptive to the competitor's offerings. A quick observation of customer loyalty is demonstrated by repeated purchase as in the studies by Ball, *et al.* (2004). In practical terms, firms want repeated purchases mainly because such behavior in consumers can apparently show the customer preference for a brand or product, as stated by Bowen and Shoemaker (1998). Some customers have their satisfaction – loyalty linked to the product alone. Keller (1993) evaluated customers, who purchase specific category of products for the first time, were found to focus on the product benefits, and not on the brand. As per Keller, the emphasis in this case, is in the

tangible attributes of the product, which are visible and accountable to the buyer. Customers looking for low-price car, to meet their budget, may necessarily focus on the characteristics of the car, regardless of brand.

### **Brand and Retail Loyalty**

Customer satisfaction can be considered the central determinant in all phases of the contact chain. Multi-dimensional recording of customer loyalty reveals clear differences in the interactions, first, with brand loyalty and, second, with dealer loyalty. In contrast to the opinion widely held in practice, customers in the automotive sector definitely do not perceive the brand and the dealer as one unit. Since similar studies in different countries come to almost the same conclusions, it can be argued that the results are valid in several cultural settings. The results obtained by Huber and Herrmann (2001) are so fundamental that they can be translated into implications even by internationally operating companies. Brands are important in the consumer market. They are the interface between consumers and the company, and consumers may develop loyalty to brands. This study by Lau and Lee (1999) proposes that trust in a brand is important and is a key factor in the development of brand loyalty. Factors hypothesized to influence trust in a brand include a number of brand characteristics, company characteristics and consumer-brand characteristics. The findings reveal that brand characteristics are relatively more important in their effects on a consumer's trust in a brand. The results also show that trust in a brand is positively related to brand loyalty. Marketers should, therefore, take careful consideration of brand factors in the development of trust in a brand.

In these days, car owners desire to upgrade their models and brands to avail of the new features and environmental changes and comforts of competing brands. On that account, whether to remain loyal to their existing brand / product or to switch over to a new brand / product is a million dollar question that bothers many car owners. There lie the fortunes of many automobile manufacturers and retailers. In this confusing scenario, some of the car buyers switch from one brand to another at trade-in time, whereas some other car owners display consistent choice of sticking to their brand / product from purchase to purchase, as hypothesized by Sambanandam and Lord (1995). When it comes to the product evaluation stage, quality products, positive showroom acoustics, ambience, positive showroom experience and a consistent and formidable after-sales-service, are all essential and central to the loyalty formula, and manufacturers have been concentrating on these considerable efforts in these directions, as illustrated by Illingworth (1991). As the customer satisfaction level increases, in due course of the time, as more interaction takes place between the customer and the retailer, it results in a better customer relationship between the dealer and the customer. An increased level of customer satisfaction leads to customer delight. At this point of time, customer delight slowly culminates into customer loyalty towards the brand and the satisfied customer at this level will have no difficulty in recommending the brand to his friends, relatives and peers at office. This will definitely influence the customer's post purchase behaviour. On the other side, if the post purchase scenario does not lead to higher satisfaction level, customer may not be willing to recommend the brand to other; Moreover, dissatisfied customers tend to spread negative news on the brand to his associates. This behavioral aspect influences his future upgrade of the car model, whenever the

customer decides to go for a replacement of his car brand / model, in future course of time. Ewing (2000) investigated brand loyalty by examining actual past behaviour and its impact on future behavioral intentions, as well as willingness to recommend the brand to another customer known to him. Findings indicated that purchase expectation / intention remain a valid research metric. It would appear that the brand / consumer interface offers greater predictive ability than the retailer / consumer interface. Willingness to recommend a brand to another consumer does not seem to be influenced by past behavior, but the higher the respondent's expectation to purchase the brand, the higher will be their willingness to recommend the brand. Menon (Feb 2012) and Jacob & Khan (2010), reported in their studies that there was considerable proportion of modern women car buyers, which has increased three fold in the recent years. Companies have started to dig deep into the Indian women's psyche and attention for details. Marketers may need to look at the needs of women customers, who are increasingly growing in the segment. There is also a substantial influence of women in the car purchase decision of the family. The trend has replicated in the State of Andhra Pradesh as well, where we can see many women driving the car in the city and towns. Menon (Feb 2012) also observed that car makers have woken up to the new reality of internet providing a key role in their marketing and communication strategies. Internet has witnessed increased brand building efforts by car companies over the past few years.

### **Problem Definition for the Study**

With the proliferation of the many passenger car makes and models in India, which are mostly offering similar value proposition in the passenger car segment, the car segment has largely been differentiated. The problem of the study is intended to explore and unearth the differentiating parameters in such a homogenous and synchronized passenger car market, thus influencing the consumer purchase behavior of passenger cars in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

### **Objectives**

The major objective was to build up a Consumer Purchase Behaviour Model, with major parameters influencing the behavioural patterns of the passenger car owners. More specifically, the objectives were to study the influence in terms of:

- Information Gathering and Consumer Purchase Initiation.
- Personal Preferences of Car.
- Influence Factors based on the Car Manufacturer.
- Influence Factors based on car model.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology adopted in this research study comprises of the following stages:

- Literature Review, that is the secondary research.
- An exploratory stage that is the Primary Research, consisting of Depth interviews with Car Dealers of new and second-sale cars, Car Financing Agencies and car owners in the cities of Guntur, Vijayawada, West Godavari, East Godavari etc.,. Questionnaires were devised to drive the in-depth interview with car dealers of various manufacturers, second-hand car dealers, car financing agencies, and car owners in the

cities of Guntur, Vijayawada, West Godavari, East Godavari etc., Andhra Pradesh, India.

- For depth interviews, sample selection of dealers of 10 major car brands such as Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors, Ford, Toyota, General Motors, Skoda, Hyundai, Honda, Renault, Mitsubishi, Hindustan Motors, Tata Motors, and Fiat India were chosen from the City of Cochin. A few of the second-sale dealers were chosen from the City of Cochin, again randomly, to get their views on preferences of buyers of second-sale cars. Similarly agents of most of the car financing agencies were chosen randomly from the city of Cochin. Twenty five Car owners were chosen randomly from the city neighborhood, to elicit their preferences on the car purchase and related features.

### **Summary of Findings**

- About one fourth of the car owners were having diesel vehicles. This showed a preference towards diesel passenger cars. The research results showed that about one seventh of car owners owned a second car in the family, which indicated an increasing trend for buying another passenger car for the city drive for family usage, while using the first car for office and business usage.
- Foreign manufacturers occupied over a simple majority market share the cars purchased by the car owners, showing a clear preference of foreign brands in the Andhra Pradesh car market.
- It was found that there was a significant difference between the five car segments, while customers evaluated their customer satisfaction level for their passenger cars.
- It was observed that in the information gathering and consumer purchase initiation stage, information received from the friends, opinion from family members and Information received from the office colleague were the prime sources where customers gathered information on car models and brands.
- When it came to short listing from the alternative brands and models, personal preference based on personal needs was one of the criterion used by car passengers. In this criterion, car passenger prime requirement needs in the top slots were - family wanted a car for functions, social gathering, need to travel long distance on trips and need to upgrade from two-wheeler to four-wheeler.
- Personal preference based on convenience factors was yet another criterion to short list brands and models. Engine performance, safety & security and good after-sales service topped the consumer requirements list. Good after-sales service was an additional requirement for small and medium car segments, whereas safety and security requirements topped the need category of higher sedan car segment.
- In the category of personal preferences based on comfort factor requirement of the car owners, style & looks of the car, comfort in driving and value for money topped the requirement list.
- In the category of identifying the cars based on the manufacturer criterion, importance attached to the car brand, dealer and show room experience and after-sales service package topped the category list.

- When it came to the question of why the customers choose their favorite brands, based on influencing factor of specific car models, driving comfort of the specific car, advanced technology of the model and interior design were the deciding criteria chosen by the car customers.
- External Influence was a dominating influential factor, in car customers choosing their selected car models. family (wife, son / daughter), relatives and friends, topped the list of criteria for selection.
- On the question of customer satisfaction on their chosen models, car customers chose the factors such as Fuel efficiency, value for money and power of the car were the top reasons for their satisfaction.
- When it came to specific hypothesized statements on the chosen models, price of the car, advanced technology, market re-sale value of the brand and model, security features, safety features and driving comfort were the consolidating factors, which contributed to the ultimate selection of their chosen models.

### **Recommendations**

- The increasing number of women car owners, using the car for their office, personal and family work, thus becoming an influential group, calls for the attention of car manufacturers and marketers to focus their strategic efforts in this direction.
- There were sizeable numbers of car customers, with clear preferences for diesel cars, due to the ever increasing cost of petrol in the last few years. Manufacturers might need to tackle this increasing need for diesel car customers and their preferences. It is evidently acknowledging this fact that the focus of manufacturers to bring out diesel version of their car models.
- Since there is perceptible and significant difference between the five car segments, marketers might need to address segment wise behavioral patterns and preferences to meet up with their requirements.
- Since, information received from the friends, opinion from family members and Information received from the office colleague were the prime sources in information gathering and consumer purchase initiation process, marketers might want to focus on these factors to catch the attention of the intending future customers.
- When it came to personal preferences based on personal needs, the top slot needs were - family wanted a car for functions, social gathering, need to travel long distance on trips and need to upgrade from two-wheeler to four-wheeler. These requirements call for segment wise marketing, as the needs varied from segment to segment.
- When it came to short listing cars on personal preferences based on convenience factors, engine performance, safety & security and good after-sales service topped the consumer requirements list. Good after-sales service was an additional requirement for small and medium car segments, whereas safety and security requirements topped the need category of higher sedan car segment. Easy availability of car models in the market was also a deciding requirement factor. Customers were tempted to switch over to

competing brands and models, if their chosen model is readily available in the market. This calls for tremendous amount of market awareness, intelligence and strengthen the availability of popular models in the market, based on these specific requirement needs.

- In the category of personal preferences on comfort factors, style & looks of the car, comfort in driving and value for money topped the requirement list. Car segment wise analysis also brought out these specific comfort requirements across all the brands. Manufacturers might look into these aspects to their car design, so to attract car passengers, prone to decide the models based on these criteria.
- Based on the manufacturer criterion for selection, importance attached to the car brand, dealer and show room experience and after-sales service package topped the category list. Car manufacturers and dealers might look into these specific aspects of social and status symbol requirements, based on the manufacturer brand, to boost up their demand. It was also known that the foreign cars provided a better perception on these requirements category. Thus, the joint ventures with known car makers in the world (specifically Japanese and US make cars) were the favorites) might prove to be an additional image booster to the Indian car manufacturers.
- When it came to the question of why the customers choose their favorite brands, based on influencing factor of specific car models, driving comfort of the specific car, advanced technology of the model and interior design were the deciding criterion chosen by the car customers. The car manufacturers might need to concentrate on these parametric factors, which played a dominant role in short listing the models and brands.
- External Influence was a dominating influential factor, in car customers choosing their selected car models. family (wife, son / daughter), relatives and friends topped the list of criteria for selection. Marketing techniques to influence these deciding factors might be useful to the dealers and manufacturers.
- On the question of customer satisfaction on their chosen models, car customers chose the factors such as Fuel efficiency, value for money and power of the car as the top reasons for their satisfaction. Manufacturers might need to focus on these factors to ensure higher customer satisfaction for their models.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was restricted to the passenger car owners of the State. Due to the wide spread of the city, the questionnaire was administered to the urban and rural areas of the five districts of the State. The sample size of 750 was also chosen, considering the cost involved in covering more units in each selected district. The survey was also limited to five car segments – Small Car, Hatch Back, Sedan, Higher Sedan and Multi Purpose Vehicle (MPV).

#### **Scope for Further Research**

There is further scope to cover other car segments, like Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV), Executive Sedan, Luxury Segments etc. Also study could be extended to other districts of the State. There is also scope for conducting the study in other States of India, as that would open up more findings.

## **CONCLUSION**

As in other industries, the scenario in domestic Indian Automobile Industry is quite different from the Global Automobile Industry. The industry actually developed in two clear stages - .the Maruti era (1983 onwards) and the post-liberalization era (1992 onwards). Compared to the global automobile sector, where substantial research has been done, very little empirical research has been conducted on the Indian automobile industry. Moreover, no organized study has been conducted in the area of passenger car industry, with specific reference to the State of Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh State is well known for its consumerism, due to the higher purchasing power, very high literacy rate and inflow of foreign money into the State, from the huge number of people of the State working in US, Europe, Australia, and other Asian and Gulf counties. With many car manufacturers launching their product in the Andhra Pradesh state, the study will definitely benefit the stakeholders of car manufacturers, dealers, financing agencies, to formalize and strategize their policies towards an effective marketing strategy. The parameters developed in this paper and the model which has been conceptualized was tested through an extensive research and quantitative analysis, to establish it's acceptability.

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