

**Factors Influencing the Consumer Preference  
for Automobile Brands: An Empirical Study  
With Reference to Maruti-Suzuki in Coimbatore City**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Indian automobile industry is facing a period of slow-growth. The manufacturers frequently announce various promotional offers for pushing the vehicles in the market and are struggling to achieve the targets. Though this crash continues, the companies do not stop launching new models – that too with predatory pricing.

The recent interim budget of the Union government has announced a cut in the excise duty on cars and the car-makers have decided to pass on this benefit to the customers by dropping the car prices. The developments like these are going on in the market on the one hand, whereas the consumers in the car market have their own preferences towards various brands. There are certain factors that influence the consumer preferences.

This paper is an attempt to find out the factors that influence the consumer preference for automobile brands, with a special reference to Maruti-Suzuki. This is based on an empirical study conducted in Coimbatore city, recently. The tool specifically designed and standardized by the authors for the purpose of this study was used for data collection.

The Quota sampling technique was adopted for this purpose. Frequency analysis, Correlation analysis and Alpha testing have been done. Few hypotheses were framed and tested with the aid of Chi-Square Test. The study has brought out some interesting findings. This study provides scope for many other related studies in future.

**Key words:** Consumer-preference, Automobile-brands, Mileage, Price, Design

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

India is the second most populated country in the world and the growth rate of Indian economy is also high as compared to developed countries, which attracts the presence of huge demand in the Automobile Small Car Industry. India is becoming emerging market for worldwide auto giants. For most of the people, purchasing a car is the second most important and expensive decision, next to purchase of a house; for the automotive manufacturers, first-time car buyers give them the opportunity to create positive brand image which definitely could be reflected in next coming years because consumers could make repeat car purchasing. The concept of “buying behavior” is of prime importance in marketing and has evolved over the years. It is very important to understand consumer buying behavior as it plays a vital role while purchasing products. Day to day human wants are growing, expectation is growing. Car Models are no exception to this behavior. Consumer behavior is fairly complex as Car Purchase implies a high level of social and psychological involvement. Consumer buying behavior is a blend of Economic, technological, political, cultural, demographic and natural factors as well as Customer's own characteristics which is reflected by his attitude, motivation, perception, personality, knowledge and lifestyle. This leads to constant modifications of Car Models and its features in terms of their size, capacity, styling etc. and today we see a new model coming into the market practically every quarter. Market has become very competitive and has become very ‘important place’ to study the behavior of consumers and also provides useful insights what a consumer requires in a product in a constant dynamic environment.

## NEED FOR THE STUDY

Customer satisfaction is fundamental to the success of any organization. Without satisfied customers, no business or agency can survive for long. Therefore, in this context, the study on *“customer perception towards Maruti”* Suzuki brand becomes vital. According to the Consumer Reports' annual Car-Brand Perception Survey, consumers perceive each brand in seven categories: quality, safety, performance, value, fuel economy, design/style, and technology/innovation. Combining those factors gives us the total brand-perception. It is only through research that a company will be able to study the buying behavior of consumers. With better understanding of factors that influence the consumer preference for selecting the automobile brand will help the companies to take necessary actions required to meet the customer's need. They can identify their own strengths and weaknesses, where they stand in comparison to their competitors, chart out the future progress path and improvement. The passenger car market changed very rapidly due to the fierce competition and advance technology, therefore, it requires the automotive manufactures to understand the consumer's preference on time and take fast actions to reflect market changes quickly. So it would be very interesting to know consumer's preference in today's fast-changing passenger car market and how is the customer buying process.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The Study aims to find out the factors that influence the customers to select the automobile brands with special reference to Maruti Suzuki Brand. Without knowing the factors, we cannot measure exactly in what way the customer is selecting the automobile brand. So Satisfied Customers able to create new customer effectively through their word of mouth. One mistake can have far-reaching effects on future as well as current customers. So it is essential to find out the customer satisfaction and their expectation towards Automobile brands with special reference to Maruti Suzuki Brand. If any dissatisfaction exists so that remedial measures can be taken by the Company to improve their products and services.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Consumer behavior consists of all human behavior that goes in making before and post purchase decisions. One can succeed in the competitive market only after understanding the complex consumer behavior. An understanding of the consumer enables a marketer to take marketing decisions which are compatible with its consumer needs.

Due to the emergence of globalization and liberalization there is a stiff competition among the Automobile industries which are focusing attention in capturing the Indian markets and automobiles are no more considered as luxury once, now occupies a part of day-to-day life and has become a necessity. Customers have now changed their attitude that yesterday's luxuries are today's necessities. To be a successful marketer it is absolutely essential to study the factors that influence the prospective buyers and track them in an effective way.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the factors that influences the customers to select the Maruti Suzuki brand Car.
- To find out the satisfaction drivers, in the perception of the customers.
- To analyze the perceived quality of the Maruti Suzuki brand according to the customers of Coimbatore District.
- To analyze the post - purchase behavior of the Maruti Suzuki customers.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

- **Mr. Vishal.S.Rana Dr.Murlidhar A.Lokhande (2013)<sup>1</sup>**, “**Performance Evaluation of Maruti Suzuki India Limited: An Overview**”, Maruti Suzuki India Limited is India’s leading & largest Passenger car manufacturer which accounting for nearly 50 percent of the total industry sales. With a view to cater the demand of all types of customer the company has variety of brands in its basket i.e ranging from the peoples car Maruti 800 to the stylish hatch-back Swift, SX4 Sedan and luxury sports utility vehicle (SUV) Grand Vitara. The company has received ample awards and achievements due to its continuous innovations and technological up gradations. The company today is very conscious about safeguarding the environment from vehicle pollution which resulted in launching of its advanced K-Series engines. Despite of stiff competition, Maruti Suzuki India Limited is presently considered as the leading automobile giant due to its remarkable Economic, Environmental & Social performances. The object of this paper is to evaluate the performance of Maruti Suzuki India Limited with respect to Export, Sales, Production and Sales Network.
- **Sagar at al. (2004)<sup>2</sup>**, in his paper titled, “**Technological Change in th Indian Passenger Car Industry**”, discussed, as to how the Indian car industry has advanced technologically, driven by a confluence of factors such as intense competition, demanding consumer preferences, government policies (especially tightening emission standards), and the global strategies of the various players. They elaborate that cars manufactured in India are based on designs, incorporating advanced technologies, that are often comparable with those available globally and Indian car exports are also growing.
- **MandeepKaur and Sandhu (2006)<sup>3</sup>**, in their paper, “**A Study on Factors Influencing Buying Behaviour of Passenger Car Market**”, attempted to find out the important features which a customer considers while going for the purchase of a new car. The study covers the owners of passenger cars living in the major cities of the State of Punjab and the Union Territory of Chandigarh. The respondents perceive that safety and comfort are the most important features of the passenger car followed by luxuriousness. So the manufacturers must design the product giving maximum weightage to these factors.
- **Chidambaram and Alfreed (2007)<sup>4</sup>**, in their study, “**A Study on Brand Preference of Passenger Car with Reference to Coimbatore City**”, postulates that there are certain factors which influence the brand preferences of the customers. Within this framework, the study reveals that customers give more importance to fuel efficiency than other factors. They believe that the brand name tells them something about product quality, utility, technology and they prefer to purchase the -passenger cars which offer high fuel efficiency, good quality, technology, durability and reasonable price.
- **SatyaSundaram (2008)<sup>5</sup>**, in his study, “**Car Market: Ride The High Tide**”, analyzed how the competition makes the automobile manufacturer to launch at least one new model or a variant of the model every year. This survey also pointed out that diesel cars are becoming popular in India and the announcement of reductions in excise duties by the government has helped to some extent to boost the demand.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research Methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them.

**EMPIRICAL STUDY**

Empirical research relies on experience or observation alone, often without due regard for system and theory. It is data-based research, coming up with the conclusions which are capable of being verified by observation or experiment. We can also call it as experimental type of research. It is necessary to

get facts at the firsthand, at their source, and actively to go about doing certain things to stimulate the production or desired information. Here the researcher must set the working hypothesis and should get enough facts for proving or disproving his hypothesis.

### ***SAMPLING UNIT***

A decision has to be taken concerning a sampling unit before selecting sample. It may be geographical, construction unit or it may be a social unit. Here I have selected the geographical such as Coimbatore district as my sampling unit.

### ***SAMPLE SIZE***

This refers to the number of items to be selected from the universe to constitute a sample. In this project 460 Respondents are selected to get optimum result.

### ***SAMPLING TECHNIQUE***

The researcher must decide the type of sample he will use. i.e., he must decide the technique to be used in the items for the sample. Quota sampling technique is applied here.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

#### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

A detailed questionnaire consisting of 5-point scale was constructed for the purpose of the study. A pilot study was conducted. Based on the observations in the pilot study, the tool for data collection was revised, refined and standardized.

### **TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS**

The following tools have been applied for analyzing the collected data.

1. Cronbach's Alpha Testing
2. Frequency Analysis
3. Correlation
4. Chi-square Test
5. One way ANOVA
6. Factor Analysis
7. KMO Test

#### **Cronbach's Alpha Testing**

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.632	51

As shown above, fifty one variables were taken for Cronbach's alpha testing. Here the value for Cronbach's alpha is .632. If some items may be reduced alpha value may go higher.

## FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

**TABLE 1**

PRIMARY REASON FOR THE RESPONDENTS TO PURCHASE A CAR					
	Primary Reason	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Need	221	48.0	48.0	48.0
	Comfort/Convenience	183	39.8	39.8	87.8
	Status/Prestige	49	10.7	10.7	98.5
	Others	7	1.5	1.5	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA**

From the table, we come to know 48% of the respondents purchased car for their basic need, 39.8% of the respondents purchased car for their comfort, 10.7% of the respondents have purchased car for their prestige and remaining 1.5% of the respondents purchased car for other reasons.

**TABLE 2**

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS WHEN PURCHASING THE CAR						
Characteristics		Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not at all Important
Quality	No	346	107	4	2	1
	%	75.2	23.3	.9	.4	.2
Price	No	205	222	27	6	-
	%	44.6	48.3	5.9	1.3	-
Install	No	156	221	57	26	-
	%	33.9	48	12.4	5.7	-
Usage	No	176	225	54	5	-
	%	38.3	48.9	11.7	1.1	-
After sales service	No	192	231	27	4	6
	%	41.7	50.2	5.9	.9	1.3

**SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA**

From the table 2, we come to know 75.2% of the respondents feel quality is extremely important, 23.3% of the respondents feel quality is very important, .9% of the respondents feel quality is somewhat important, .4% of the respondents feel quality is not very important, .2% of the respondents feel quality is not at all important.

48.3% of the respondents feel price is very important, 44.6% of the respondents feel price is extremely important, 5.9% of the respondents feel price is somewhat important and 1.3% of the respondents feel price is not very important.

48% of the respondents feel install or first use experience is very important, 33.9% of the respondents feel install is extremely important, 12.4% of the respondents feel install is stall is somewhat important, 5.7% of the respondents feel install is not very important.

48.9% of the respondents feel usage is very important, 38.3% of the respondents feel install is extremely important, 11.7% of the respondents feel usage is somewhat important, 1.1% of the respondents feel install is not very important.

50% of the respondents feel after sales service is very important, 41.7 % of the respondents feel after sales service is extremely important, 5.9 % of the respondents feel after sales service is somewhat important, .9% of the respondents feel after sales service is not very important.



**TABLE 3**

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE PRESENT MODEL					
	Criteria	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Price	77	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Mileage	134	29.1	29.1	45.9
	Maintenance	79	17.2	17.2	63.0
	Look/Aesthetics	51	11.1	11.1	74.1
	Safety features	18	3.9	3.9	78.0
	Company's Service	11	2.4	2.4	80.4
	Space	5	1.1	1.1	81.5
	Comfort	26	5.7	5.7	87.2
	Ready Availability	3	.7	.7	87.8
	Fuel Type	8	1.7	1.7	89.6
	Two or More Option	40	8.7	8.7	98.3
	Others	8	1.7	1.7	100.0
	<b>Total</b>		460	100.0	100.0

**SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA**

From the table 3, we come to know 29.1% of the respondents select the present model due to Mileage, 17.2% of the respondents select the present model due to Maintenance, 16.7% of the respondents select the model due to the Price, 11.1% of the respondents select the present model due to Look/aesthetics, 8.7% of the respondents select the model due to two or more options, 5.7% of the respondents select the model due to Comfort, 3.9 % of the respondents select the model due to Safety features.

**CORRELATION**

**CORRELATION BETWEEN GENDER VS. FUTURE RECOMMENDATION**

		Gender	Future Recommendation
<b>Gender</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.375**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	460	460
<b>Future Recommendation</b>	Pearson Correlation	.375**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	460	460

From the above table, it is interesting to note that the variables “gender” and “future recommendation” are positively correlating (.375\*\*). Though the degree of correlation is only (.375\*\*), it need not be ignored. Here the variable “Future Recommendation” denotes the interest /willingness of the customers to recommend the respective brand to their friends/relatives/known persons in their network for their purchase decisions in future. As 67% of the respondents are male we can assume mostly the male are willing for such recommendation in future and this may have resulted in the above said correlation.

## CORRELATION BETWEEN PRODUCT/SERVICE IS WORTHY VS. PRODUCT/SERVICE IS COMPETITIVELY PRICED

		Worthy	Competitively Priced
<b>Worthy</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.571**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	460	460
<b>Competitively Priced</b>	Pearson Correlation	.571**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	460	460

The above table shows a positive correlation between “*worthy*” and “*Competitively Priced*” (.571\*\*). The satisfaction levels of the customers over the worthy and Competitively Priced are positively correlating here. The logic or reason behind their correlation may be the customers who are satisfied with the price they spend on the purchase of the car is worthy and they will be mostly satisfied that their brand car is competitively priced.

### CHI SQUARE TEST

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between “Gender” and “Make of the Car Used”.

<b>GENDER AND MAKE OF THE CAR</b>			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	36.948 <sup>a</sup>	15	.001
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	40.359	15	.000
<b>Linear-by-Linear Association</b>	.043	1	.836
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	460		

The table value for  $\chi^2$  for df 15 at 1% significance level is 30.58. The Calculated value is higher than the table value, so the hypothesis is rejected. So there is significant relationship between gender and make of the car used.

### FACTOR ANALYSIS

#### Principal Component Analysis

There are several components and attributes that determine the ultimate satisfaction level of the users of the automobiles. The researcher wanted to test “what are the factors influencing the level of satisfaction and perception of the automobile-users?”. Here researcher selected some of the components like interiors, exteriors, seating, driving-comfort, Air-conditioning, safety, efficiency of the engine, fuel-efficiency, etc. Then the Data reduction option was used in the SPSS software for analyzing the factors.

**TABLE-5.5.1**  
**Correlation Matrix**

	Exteriors	Interiors	Storage and space	Audio/Entertainment/Navigation	Seats	Air-conditioning	Driving	Engine	Visibility	Safety	Fuel	Service
Exteriors	1	0.583	0.475	0.409	0.403	0.343	0.41	0.475	0.349	0.443	0.409	0.434
Interiors	0.583	1	0.54	0.505	0.491	0.442	0.504	0.413	0.36	0.469	0.465	0.485
Storage and space	0.475	0.54	1	0.658	0.554	0.457	0.406	0.338	0.366	0.467	0.281	0.375
Audio/Entertainment/Navigation	0.409	0.505	0.658	1	0.645	0.546	0.406	0.352	0.462	0.485	0.197	0.312
Seats	0.403	0.491	0.554	0.645	1	0.638	0.433	0.319	0.445	0.505	0.216	0.318
Air-conditioning	0.343	0.442	0.457	0.546	0.638	1	0.347	0.307	0.474	0.458	0.209	0.336
Driving	0.41	0.504	0.406	0.406	0.433	0.347	1	0.643	0.333	0.46	0.479	0.398
Engine	0.475	0.413	0.338	0.352	0.319	0.307	0.643	1	0.472	0.504	0.423	0.356
Visibility	0.349	0.36	0.366	0.462	0.445	0.474	0.333	0.472	1	0.64	0.278	0.233
Safety	0.443	0.469	0.467	0.485	0.505	0.458	0.46	0.504	0.64	1	0.354	0.362
Fuel	0.409	0.465	0.281	0.197	0.216	0.209	0.479	0.423	0.278	0.354	1	0.343
Service	0.434	0.485	0.375	0.312	0.318	0.336	0.398	0.356	0.233	0.362	0.343	1

The above table shows how the selected components and attributes of the Maruti brand vehicles that influence the level of satisfaction of the customers are correlating among themselves. The variables which do not correlate with other variables are to be normally deleted before going for PCA. But, here the researcher has shown all the variables, for an understanding of the level and degree of correlation.

### KMO and Bartlett's Test

The KMO test given below is also supporting the inclusion of all variables for PCA.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.898
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2612.152
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

### Kaiser's Measure of Sampling Adequacy

Kaiser has described MSAs above .9 as marvelous, above .8 as meritorious, above .7 as middling, above .6 as mediocre, above .5 as miserable, and below .5 as unacceptable. Here the MSA is .898. It is meritorious and very near to marvelous level. It is considerably good. So, no variable need to be dropped before going for PCA.

Communalities	Initial	Extraction
Exteriors	1.000	.529
Interiors	1.000	.597
Storage and Space	1.000	.584
Audio/Entertainment/Navigation	1.000	.713
Air - Conditioning	1.000	.627
Driving	1.000	.612
Engine	1.000	.600
Visibility	1.000	.459
Safety	1.000	.564
Fuel	1.000	.613
Service	1.000	.410
Seats	1.000	.714

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.



The above table shows the Sums of Squared Loadings [SSL] for each variable across factors. Such an SSL is called communality. This is the amount of the variable's variance that is accounted for by the components. The loadings are correlations between variables and components and the components are orthogonal, a variable's communality represents the  $R^2$  of the variable predicted from the components. For our data the communalities are Exteriors .529, Interiors .597, Storage and Space .584, Audio/Entertainment/Navigation .713, Air-Conditioning .627, Driving .612, Engine .600, Visibility .459, Safety .564, Fuel .613, Service .410 and Seats .714.

### Deciding the Components to Retain

After the above steps, the researcher wanted to decide how many components to retain. One handy rule of thumb is to retain only components with **Eigen values** of one or more. That is, drop any component that accounts for less variance than does a single variable. Another device for deciding on the number of components to retain is the **Scree test**. This is a plot with Eigen values on the ordinate and component number on the abscissa. Scree is the rubble at the base of a sloping cliff. In a scree plot, scree is those components that are at the bottom of the sloping plot of Eigen values versus component number. The plot provides a visual aid for deciding at what point including additional components no longer increases the amount of variance accounted for by a nontrivial amount.

Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.708	47.567	47.567	5.708	47.567	47.567
2	1.315	10.960	58.527	1.315	10.960	58.527
3	.953	7.939	66.466			
4	.661	5.510	71.976			
5	.627	5.223	77.199			
6	.593	4.944	82.143			
7	.500	4.170	86.313			
8	.395	3.290	89.603			
9	.370	3.079	92.683			
10	.330	2.748	95.430			
11	.284	2.369	97.799			
12	.264	2.201	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Out of the 12 components taken up for this analysis, only the first two components have Eigen values greater than 1. There is a big drop in Eigen value between component 1 and component 2. On a Scree plot, component 3 through 12 would appear as Scree at the base of the cliff composed of components 1 and 2. The components 1 and 2 approximately account for 59% of the total variance. So, the researcher shall retain only the first two components.

### FINDINGS

- 48% of the respondents purchased car for their basic need, 39.8% of the respondents purchased car for their comfort.
- Majority of the respondents feel all the attributes are extremely important when purchasing the car.
- 29.1% of the respondents select the present model due to Mileage, 17.2% of the respondents select the present model due to ease of maintenance.
- The variables **“gender”** and **“future recommendation”** are positively correlating (.375\*\*). Though the degree of correlation is only .375\*\*, it need not be ignored. Here the variable “Future Recommendation” denotes the interest/willingness of the customers to recommend the respective brand to their friends/relatives/known persons in their network for their purchase decisions in future. As 67% of the respondents are male we can assume mostly the male are

willing for such recommendation in future and this may have resulted in the above said correlation.

- There is positive correlation between “*Worthy*” and “*Competitively Priced*” (.571\*\*). The satisfaction levels of the customers over the worthy and Competitively Priced are positively correlating here. The logic or reason behind their correlation may be the customers who are satisfied with the price of the car find it worthy for the amount spent for it.
- Out of the 12 components taken up for this analysis, only the first two components have Eigen values greater than 1. There is a big drop in Eigen value between component 1 and component 2. On a Scree plot, component 3 through 12 would appear as Scree at the base of the cliff composed of components 1 and 2. The components 1 and 2 approximately account for 59% of the total variance. So, the researcher shall retain only the first two components.

## CONCLUSION

Everyone likes to own a car. Few decades back car was a luxurious product. Only limited number of people had cars and limited number of brands was available. But nowadays there are plenty of cars available with more designs and brands. Car is becoming a basic need like food, water, shelter that everyone wants to hold to lead a better life. It is mainly due to the reasons like standard of living, high disposable income, women are equally earning, etc. They want to spend the amount earned for their shopping, entertainment, surfing and purchasing new products available in market and for their updation and for their happiness. The buyers have wide number of options and variety of brands. The income levels of the families, education, occupation, experience in their relative field, age, gender are influencing the selection of the brand and the model. The present study shows that the respondents are overall satisfied with Maruti brand. The main factors that influence the respondents to select the present model are mileage, maintenance and price. Maruti brand can further concentrate more on designs and the emerging technologies that may attract diverse segments.

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