

Impact of first impressions on female consumer behavior and adapting sales psychology in the automotive industry in semi-urban Vijayawada, India

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Abstract

Owing to the immense population of India (approximately 1,428,627,663) and the high drive towards advancing transportation, India has become a hot spot for the automobile industry to prove itself and witness extreme growth. This growth is fueled by the high profitability of customers, distributors, and consumers in their target market, attracting globally successful brands like Hyundai, Kia, and Toyota (Das, 2021). In the United States, women buy 62% of all new cars sold and influence more than 85% of all car purchases. Interestingly, in India, a report by Spinny indicates that 80% of passenger-car buying decisions are taken by women in the family. Additionally, 46% of second-hand car buyers are women (Mukherjee, 2016). As the sales industry and psychology collaborate to boost profitability, this paper is a study highlighting the current female consumer behavior in India and the techniques used to adapt sales psychology to increase profitability in the female consumer market.

Keywords: female consumers, automobile industry, first impression, sales, psychology

Introduction

Males majorly dominate as the primary consumers of the automobile industry, but not for long. India's female car buyers nearly doubled to 10-12% from about 6% in a span of 5 years (2012-2017) (Das, 2021), and the rate just keeps rising. India's automobile industry has an incoming potential demographic target market: women. Present car companies like Kia and Mahindra, along with others, have noticed that there will be a swift change in their target market and have adapted psychological moves to boost their brand and product representation to the soon-to-be-dominating target market. Examples of such initiatives include the #SheDrives event by Ford, where Ford partnered with Autocar India to create a pro-driving experience for women of all ages on a custom-made autocross track.

Apart from highlighting the new Hyundai SUV—Hyundai VENUE—the company asked one of India's highest-ranked female YouTube vloggers, Prajakta Koli to cover the event of New York International Auto Show 2019. She also shared about the car with her fans and followers in her vlog made in collaboration with Hyundai. In this manner, the engagement with these companies developed through the first meetings. The seven-second impression is a well-known concept mostly applied by businesses as a method of developing a favorable and persuasive attitude by the company towards the product over the consumer which Prajakta utilized while marketing the product. It is in the first ten minutes that the method of approach for female consumers should be changed, bearing in mind that most women are likely to plan to buy a car based on their first impression. This research goes a notch higher to discuss the various aspects that female consumers consider while being served by sales executives when buying a car.

Methodology

The data collection method employed in this study consists of two broad categories, namely, quantitative, and qualitative. The quantitative investigation was in the form of a survey and the qualitative in the form of an analysis of case data and interviews conducted in car showrooms in Vijayawada. The data used in this study were collected from the survey directed at the interests of women during the first ten min of a car introduction. The survey included the following questions:

- “How crucial is the initial impression of a car to your buying decision?”
- “Out of technical features, the exterior, safety, benefits, brand, price, and interiors, which two do you think are most significant where the first ten minutes of a car's introduction is concerned?”
- “How important is it to make a positive first impression when meeting a female customer?”
- “What sales techniques do you use to attract female customers? Select all that apply.”
- “What is your initial approach when meeting a female customer for the first time?”
- “How often do you use sales psychology techniques when selling to female customers?”
- “Can you describe a successful sales strategy you have used with a female customer? [first time meeting]”

Data

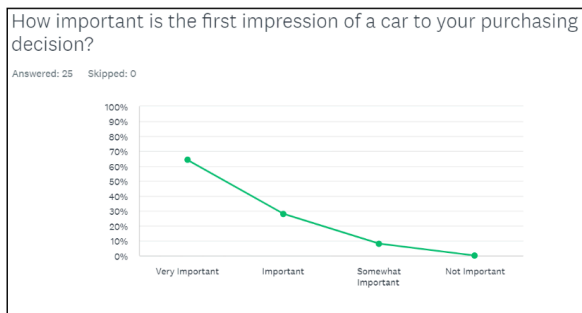
The data obtained is both quantitative and qualitative and represented through surveys conducted for the research and audio interviews from a nearby car showroom (Figure 1).

Quantitative

The quantitative data was drawn from surveys conducted to understand the current market stance of both female consumers and the on-field sales associates. Thus, the quantitative data is broken down into two points of view by their correspondence namely, female consumers, and sales executives.

First POV: Female Consumers

Figure 1
Female consumers take on importance of first impression



First impressions are important in the purchase of cars for women in India. 64% of the women agreed with the statement that the initial introduction is crucial while 28% of the female respondents believed that it was rather important than a higher priority, while 8% of the female respondents believed the first impression is sometimes important (Figure 1).

Figure 2
Attention focused on features during the first meet

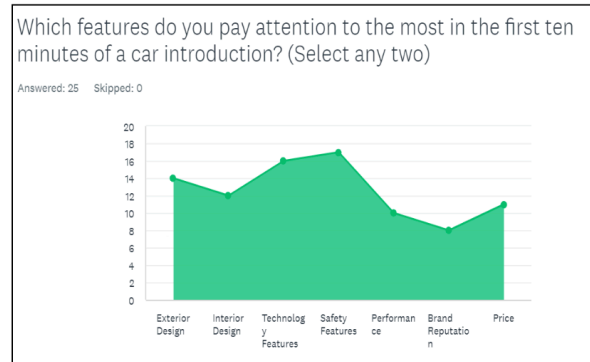


Figure 2 reflects the aspects that women focus on during the first inception of the car buying process. Safety features that will help them during their first 10 minutes of introduction are perceived as especially important by 68.3% of the women, followed by technical features by 64% and then come design, brand reputation, price and performance/fuel efficiency.

Figure 3
Sales associates impact over sale

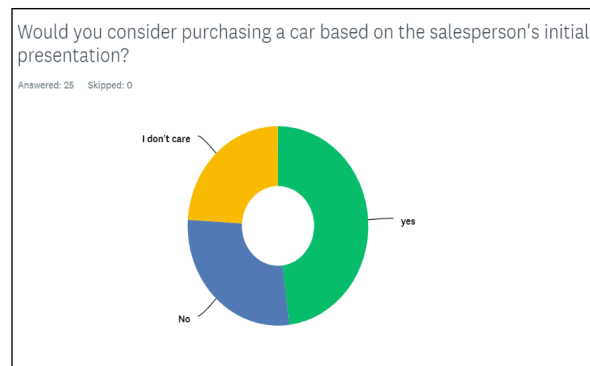


Figure 3 explores the muted communication impression that female consumers must make to avoid being presented as sales associates; both men and women, with the majority of 48% of respondents, agree with considering a salesperson in the first presentation, while 28% of the respondents do not consider, and lastly 24% do not care.

Figure 4
Likelihood to recommend based on initial impression

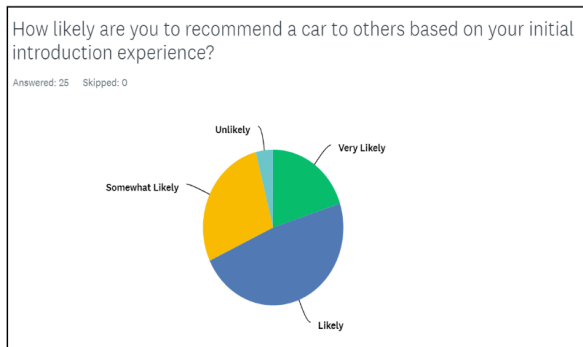


Figure 4 states that word of mouth is the best marketing technique; the data shows that 48% of women are likely to recommend a product to others once they experience it which can be seen in data from Figure 4, with 48% of respondents likely to recommend, while 20% are very likely and 28% are somewhat likely to recommend, and only 4% are unlikely to recommend.

Second POV: Sales Executives

Figure 5
Sales associate take on importance of first impression

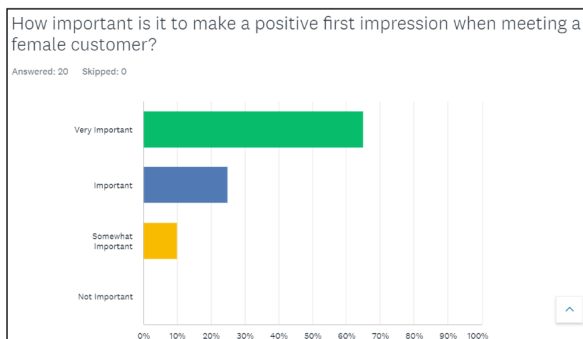


Figure 5 clearly showcases that 65% of sales associates commonly consider first impression as very important, and 25% of sales associates back this up by considering the aspect of first impression important,

while only 10% agree with the statement of first impression being important only in a few cases.

Figure 6
Sales associates take on features females prioritize

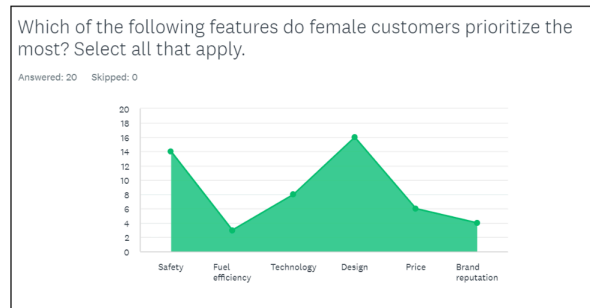
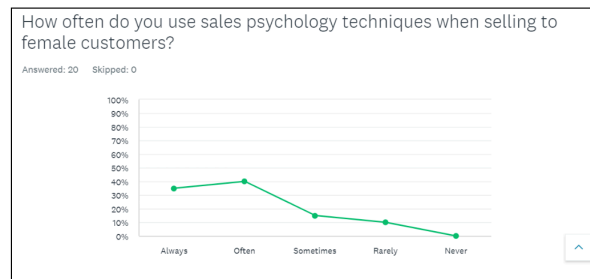


Figure 6 showcases the sales associates understanding of their female customers, where 80% of the sales executives agree that design both interior and exterior is a crucial aspect for women during their initial interaction, 70% of sales executives support the claim of safety being a top priority of women while their initial interaction during choosing a car to buy. Technology with 40% is at 3rd place, according to the sales associates, followed by price at 30%, brand reputation at 20%, and finally fuel efficiency at 15%

Figure 7
Regularity of utilizing psychology



In Figure 7, 40% of sales associates often use sales psychology to drive sales and gain trust, while 35% of the sales associates always work using sales

psychology in every interaction possible, and 10% of sales executives rarely or never use sales psychology when in presence of female customers.

Figure 8
Successful sales strategies used during first meeting

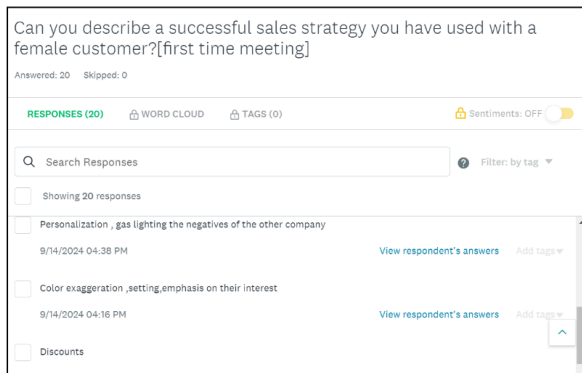


Figure 8 holds data on the responses collected from sales associates on the topic of successful psychological strategies that drive sales and interaction from female customers, including gaslighting the negatives of the competitors, offering and creating comfort while personalizing the experience of buying with connection via their interest, agreeing with the customer while providing discount vouchers, and exaggerating the color options during primary interaction .

Figure 9
Training to cater to female customers

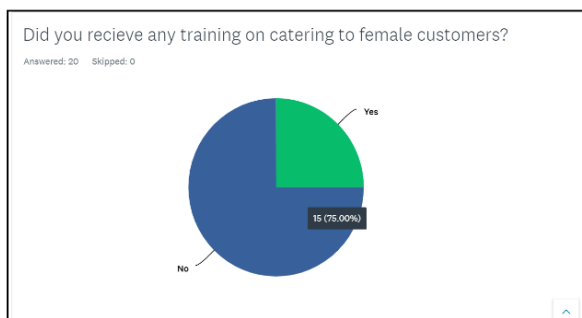


Figure 9 dives into the present situations in the automobile industry in Vijayawada [semi-urban] and clearly highlights the strong need for action, as over 74% of sales associates do not receive training on handling customers, while only 25% of sales associates receive at least basic training to handle the increasing target market, calling for immediate action to cater to the rapidly growing target market.

Qualitative Data

In this study, I interviewed local car dealers on how they applied psychology to sell cars and saw the various behaviors of the female consumers. These include interviews conducted with salespersons from Hyundai, Tata, Kia, and Suzuki. Note that all collected data are in their most raw form possible. It was necessary to get permission from the salesperson and the consumer for each speech audio-recorded for this study. The raw data collected includes conversations between the salesperson and me. The data from Kia, for instance, reveals the following techniques used to drive female consumers, starting at one's car before making a purchase suggestion.

- Emphasizing the point of upgrade.
- Presenting options as broadly as possible and giving information on the number of colors and stock.
- Emphasizing comfort, which is important for women in a family car most of which are focused on comfort, particularly of the driver and the person sitting beside her.

To do this, it is necessary to replace the term “budget” with the term “invest.” The women’s team deals with female customers with the intention of interacting. Ten questions including body type, current car, fuel, and who is driving also, recommending automatic cars for women customers.

Kia's sales employees think that while men may buy more cars, women are the final decision-makers. To ensure this, they encourage the customers to opt for Kia by pointing to other aspects including the fact that Kia has brought out many world-first features including six airbags and a 360-degree camera system.

But, on the other hand, Toyota's sales employee argues that most women are not interested in the driving feel, but a 360-degree view, safety, and blind-spot system. Based on such arguments, they argue that most female consumers are motivated by discounts, and therefore, they hold back the discounts until the very last stage and then give the discounts to leave an impression. They need oriented analysis.

Suzuki's approach is distinct. They make sure that the customer is comfortable and relaxed, wanting to know more about her preferred model. This employee has given information that most female consumers are semi-segregated in their usage. For some reason, they prefer odd colors, although if the color does not match their choice, the employees suggest other colors emphasizing the advantages of such colors. They will inquire about the price bracket, but the salesperson sees that women do not care about technology, but items like moon roofs.

Altogether, the data from the interviews points to the fact that it can be beneficial to apply psychology-related measures to lure female clients for sales. This entails things like language makeovers like; using the term 'invest' instead of 'spend'; female-oriented selling crews; customization and safety points. Kia, Toyota, and Suzuki have also applied or considered the above-mentioned strategies to some extent; for instance, Kia has established safety factors as their key selling points, Toyota has studied the customers' needs and timing for discount offers, and Suzuki

has linked the concepts of comfort and relaxation to sales promotion programs.

Understanding Limitations

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the sample size is quite limited to one region and can not completely suffice to make an extremely detailed conclusion that outlines the struggle of sales, and more responses are needed to make valid conclusions. Therefore, more investigations are needed to prove generalizability across the country. Moreover, there is a dearth of information on women who are directly involved in first-hand car purchases in India, which forms the major constraint of this study. Vijayawada is still a developing place with regards to new markets, the concept of open mindedness and stereotypes, thus the study conducted by researchers in such other regions with common problems to land on a well backed up research work.

Conclusion

The data drawn from both of the surveys deals with the customers engagement during the initial interaction of the product in terms of positive first impression, where both female consumers and sales associates had similar understanding of the positive first impression concept, and the data from the graphs and pie charts call for a updated approach towards female buyers by arranging special instructions, making sure they are comfortable and gain trust in the company and sales associate. It is possible to use data from female consumers and make changes based on sales psychology in their behavior patterns to create demand. At the present time, organizations do not fully articulate this principle. However, by providing segmented and individual approaches, companies may achieve great and massive profitability levels. Increasing profitability can be done by identifying the behavior patterns of the consumers,

increasing the satisfaction levels of the customers, and increasing the brand equity by providing the right information to the target market further driving sales.

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