
New Purchase Determinants of Hatchback Car Buyers During Covid-19. A Localised Study

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ABSTRACT

The hatchback car models has been a segment exhibiting promising market growth in India. Buyers from West Delhi Metropolitan area have increasingly adopted hatchbacks as their preferred mode of transportation making its acceptance evident among the buyers. This research work intends to identify and ascertain the changing brand inclination and predisposition of consumers, with respect to hatchback models of cars, during the Covid-19 pandemic spread in the West Delhi markets. The investigation demonstrated that customers in this region predominantly are positively disposed and have a distinct inclination towards Maruti Suzuki brand in hatchback cars. The study deploying a two stage research design involving the exploratory and descriptive methodology, making use of secondary as well as primary data collected with the help of a structured questionnaire, provides us evidence that at the time of making the buying factors and determinants like fuel efficiency, safety, aesthetics, performance attributes and value for money are key considerations affecting customer's brand inclination for hatchback cars. These determinants are consistent with the fact that during this Covid-19 crisis, on account of reduced purchasing power, customers are particularly looking for value for money and fuel efficiency, so that the acquisition and maintenance costs are kept to the minimum, in times of a crisis like Covid-19, which has witnessed considerable erosion in the disposable income of the consumers. The same is substantiated through Exploratory Factor Analysis that performance, safety, value and aesthetics positively influence the customer's satisfaction. Hence, hatchback car marketer's need to focus on worthwhile augmentations enhancing consumer perception regarding the quality of brand, its features and benefits. With tough competition in the Indian market, competitive price and affordability along with superior quality and reasonable maintenance requirements for buyers' becomes a must. Fuel efficiency factor obviously remains an indispensable factor with a distinct bearing on the consumer's choices, especially in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has brought about a considerable attrition in the ability of the consumers to acquire and maintain a passenger car. The marketers' need to consider these crucial dimensions, since Indian consumers are thoughtful of these critical aspects while assigning considerable weightage to them at the time of pre-purchase decision making for buying hatchback car models.

Keywords: Hatchback, Consumer preference, buying determinants, Brand, Customer Satisfaction etc.

INTRODUCTION

In today's day and age, a passenger car has come to be an absolute essential mostly for intra-city movement and mobility. Each family, without exception, having the required wherewithal desires to and dreams of being the owner of a passenger vehicle. The economic liberalization and openness resulting in large scale, privatization, which in turn gave fillip to globalization and the consequent policy adopted by the government of India in 1991, opened the gates for a large number of top foreign passenger vehicle manufacturers. The foreign MNC car brands from all over the world were invited and a conducive atmosphere created for their setting up manufacturing facilities and plants in India.

The automobile industry underwent a drastic transformation, especially in the passenger car segment as a result of the entry of a multitude of foreign players in this segment such as Toyota, Honda, Ford, General Motors, and Hyundai etc. Domestic passenger car makers like Tata, Mahindra and Mahindra, Hindustan Motors and MUL were certainly offered really tough competition by these MNC giants and new rivals on the domestic turf.

The passenger cars come in different and diverse models and configurations such as, Hatchback, Sedan, SUV, etc. Last two decades have seen the hatchbacks as distinct configuration and model emerging as one of the most significantly growing segments in the domestic passenger car market. The first hatchback model launched in India was Maruti 800, way back in the year 1983, which proved to be a run-away success and since then a staggering 2.5 million units have been rolled out from its production lines and sold in the domestic Indian market. As of now, there happen to be a large number of intensely competing brands with hatchback models enabling customers the luxury of a large and diverse number of options and alternatives. The fact that there are a large number of alternatives in this segment is one of the most important factors necessitating the study of studying and exploring the consumer buying behavior in this segment. The constant and relatively steady increase in the population's disposable income, large number of models to choose from combined with easy, hassle free and cost effective, availability of financing happen to be some of the factors driving the growth in hatchback passenger car segment and the future, if anything looks even brighter, notwithstanding the current and present day slump in the market due to the global pandemic, if the past trends are anything to go by. The data affording an insight into the changing consumer tastes and preferences has to be collected, collated, parsed and analyzed in order to provide penetratingly precise and actionable intelligence and insights for the marketers. There exist multiple factors and motivators exercising an undeniably powerful and strong influence on the buying behavior of the masses in the hatchback segment of the passenger car market. This has to be analyzed and confirmed through tapping primary data and the variations and transformations in the attitude and outlook of the buyers' mindset have to be penetratingly probed, explored and analyzed carefully by the marketers, in order to constantly keep optimizing the value proposition and thereby staying relevant, meaningful and competitive in the rapidly evolving dynamics of the current day marketplace.

This research effort represents an in depth and exhaustive study undertaken, with a view to identifying and understanding the consumer buying behavior in hatchback segment of the passenger car market in the West Delhi district of the state of Delhi . As we all know, “Consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy their needs and wants”. Having a precise and stronger grasp and insight into the consumer buying behavior will be a tremendous asset for the brand owners and automobile firms to ensure their survival and growth in the face of an intensely and mercilessly competitive marketplace, which knocks the under performers off their precarious perch, without even giving it a second thought. This serves to enhance the marketer's ability to better forecast

and predict the likelihood of the consumer's acceptance of their various informational and environmental cues and plan their marketing strategies in sync with that. It is also a big aid and helps in the task of crafting an optimum product and brand positioning. A nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the relevant markets is an indispensable prerequisite, for the purpose of opportunity analysis and the resultant designing of a suitably corresponding marketing plan of action accordingly.

We, as a rational and logical beings can't be faulted for wondering as to why people behave the way they actually do in the market place. At times we feel satisfied and in complete accord with our own acts, though hard put to rationalize them. Diverse and different questions keep constantly agitating our minds. The present study and enquiry, particularly focuses on a rational and logical analysis of consumer buying behavior, as it pertains to entry level passenger cars in the hatchback segment. It would be immensely helpful and handy for various entry level passenger car manufacturers and brands to intimately and deeply understand and get to know about the buying behavior and tendencies of the population of West Delhi district of the state of Delhi, contributing immensely to their formulation and execution of effective, impactful and comprehensive marketing and communication strategies for their entry level hatchbacks.

The prime purpose and intent of this study is to be able to provide the marketers and academicians with a comprehensive, actionable and nuanced academic as well as managerial insight and understanding of the consumer buying behavior focused on the universe of its study i.e., West Delhi, falling within the state of Delhi. The paper represents an honest and well intentioned attempt to arrive at a resolution of the question agitating the minds of the academicians and the marketers alike as to the factors influencing and impacting the buyer decision choices, when it comes to the purchase of entry level hatchbacks in the Indian markets with special reference to the West Delhi market, which happens to be the universe of this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

India happens to be a developing country. The standard of living of the Indian people has seen a tremendous improvement since the last two- three decades and same is the case with automobile industry. Post, the Foreign Direct Investment Policy and shift towards opening up of the economy to the foreign investors in diverse sectors of the economy, by the Government of India in 1991, a large number of best of the breed foreign car makers entered India and deluged the car market with the best of models and brands. The consumer was, suddenly spoilt for choice. This suddenly hiked the intensity of competition for the domestic passenger car brands on their own turf. The extremely creative, innovative and attractive cars on offer along with reliability and quality to boot and globally benchmarked processes and business practices, almost overnight, transformed a largely seller's market to the buyer's market, that it is today.

By studying the factors influencing and impacting customer's choices, it is very well possible to develop precisely customized marketing strategies that. (Menon, 2017). Buyers' passenger car selection and choice depends on every single accessory and component of the passenger cars and numerous other attendant factors and circumstances (Peter and Donnelly, 2011). A study carried out in Malaysia established that product safety happens to be a critical factor and major consumer concern impacting the purchase of vehicles (Kassim et al 2016). Another factor having an important bearing is the buyers' financial conditions which additionally impacts their decision preferences. In on more study conducted in the city of Pune, the income fluctuations and increased fuel prices proved decisive in driving the buyers to go for entry level passenger cars. (John and Pragadeeswaran, 2014). Rajasekar and Rameshkumar (2015) established with the help of a study that fuel efficiency and prices exercised a strong influence on the buyers of Madurai, while deciding about the purchase of passenger cars. Demographic factors like the kind and type of employment has also been shown to be a major factor influencing their income and consequently their preference in passenger car purchase. One study conclusively established that well employed people at various places and sectors have a higher tendency to buy high end cars as compared to the ones in business or self-employment (Kumar et al, 2016). In view of the same, tastes and priorities are strongly recommended to be analyzed and explored by the marketers (Davey and Balakrishnan 2017). Moreover, buyers, their drives and motives are very difficult constructs to generalize, on account of undeniably acute and sharp differences existing and persisting between generations, their wants and acuties. Therefore, strategies carried into implementation, after in-depth and penetrating study of the markets are likely to pull, more number of buyers (Davey and Balakrishnan 2017). An empirical study conducted in the city of Hyderabad brought out that entry level car industry in Hyderabad is overwhelmingly dominated by brand Maruti. What is more, purchase decisions influencers like friends and family recommendations exercise a strong influence on passenger car buying behavior (Ravinder and Srikrishna, 2017). Recommendations and endorsements and good word of mouth coming from friends has also been shown to be extremely decisive factor influencing passenger car buying decision choices amongst of people of Coimbatore (Sudhakar and Venkatapathy, 2009).

Though, quite a number of studies have focused on brand preference and brand choice determinants as it pertains to passenger cars, only a small number of them have trained their focus on entry level segment of the hatchback cars. So far, there has been no comprehensive and exhaustive research effort aimed at determination of the factors impacting and influencing the entry level hatchback purchase decision choices as it pertains to the users residing in the Greater Noida area of the National Capital Region. In view of the same, the extant study is specifically designed to explore, discover and establish the factors exercising strong and significant influence on the customers' brand preference and proclivities for entry level hatchback car models in the national capital region of Greater Noida.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate, explore and understand the brand preference/choice inclinations as it pertains to the entry level hatchback passenger cars in the West Delhi District of the state of Delhi, during Covid-19 pandemic.
2. To study and understand the features and factors exercising a strong influence and driving the buyers to go for entry level hatchback car configurations in general, as it pertains to the buyers residing the West Delhi district of the state of Delhi, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, a pilot survey has been conducted to understand the consumer behavior in the West Delhi region including areas of Pitampura, Rohini, Punjabi Bagh, Janak Puri, Patel Nagar etc. We have actualized arbitrary examining strategy to comprehend the conduct of the clients who need to buy a hatchback car. The specimen information and data have been gathered from 200 customer through online organized questionnaire. Keeping in mind the end goal to comprehend the conduct part of buyer for hatchback car purchases and the brand inclinations and dispositions during the Covid-19 pandemic, investigations have been done. Further, to comprehend the key factors that are moving the buyers towards the brand choices and inclinations towards hatchback passenger cars during the Covid-19 pandemic, and if it is significantly different compared to the normal times, the exploratory factor examination has been executed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To conduct the survey, demography of the population was first studied (Table 1) to see the position of consumers.

Table 1: Demographic factor analysis of 200 consumers of West Delhi region involved in the survey.

Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Stage (Years)		
up to the age 20	4	2.00%
21 to 30	80	40.00%
31 to 40	65	32.50%
41 to 50	22	11.00%
Beyond 50	29	14.50%
Sex		
Male	132	66%
Female	68	34%
Educational Condition		
No Proper qualification	2	1.00%
Higher Secondary	10	5.00%
Graduate	69	34.50%
Post-Graduate	102	51.00%
Qualified Professional	15	7.50%
Others	2	1.00%
Profession		
Business Profession	30	15.00%
Professionals person	40	20.00%
Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Occupation		
Government	40	20.00%
Private	55	27.50%
MNCs	4	2.00%
Retired	10	5.00%
Home Maker	21	10.50%
Monthly Household Income (#)		
Up to 25000	68	30.00%
25001 – 50000	79	39.50%
50001 – 75000	24	12.00%
75001 – 100000	17	8.50%
Above 100000	12	6.00%
Marital Status		
Married	50	25.00%
Unmarried	102	51.00%
Divorced	43	21.50%
Widowed	5	2.50%
Family Type		
Nuclear	95	47.50%
Joint	105	52.50%

Total 200 individuals preferring hatchback cars were included in the survey. The demographic analysis showed that the surveyed population had only 34% female individuals while 66% were males. On studying the age group of individuals, 2.0% were up to the age of 20 years, 40% between 21-30 years, 32.5% between 31-40 years, 11% between 41- 50 years and 14.5% were above 50 years.

The study of educational status of the individuals showed that 51% of the population had post graduate degree and 34.5% were only graduates. 1% had no formal education, 5% studied till higher secondary level and 7.5% were qualified professionals.

Out of the people preferring hatchback cars, highest, 55% were in private sector, 15% of individuals had their business and 20% each were professionals and in government sector. Rest 2% individuals worked in MNCs, 5% were retired and 10% were homemaker.

39.5% of the individuals in the survey were in the income group from 25001- 50000, 12.0% were in 51001- 75000 income group and 8.5% were in 75001- 100000 income group. 34% individuals had less than 25000 household incomes while 6 % had above 100000 incomes.

Among 200 individuals, half of them were unmarried, 25% were married, 21.5% were divorced and 2.5% were widowed. If we see the family type of individuals involved in the survey, 52.5% had joint families while 47.5% lived in nuclear families.

Brand Preference for Hatchback Cars by Consumers of West Delhi

Table 2: Brand Preference for hatchback cars among 200 consumers of the West Delhi district of the state of Delhi:

Brand	Frequency	Percentage
Maruti Suzuki	120	60.00%
Hyundai	30	15.00%
Ford	3	1.50%
Nissan	3	1.50%
Tata	5	2.50%
Volkswagen	8	4.00%
Honda	20	10.00%
Chevrolet	1	0.50%
Toyota	4	2.00%
Skoda	4	2.00%
Others	2	1.00%
Total	200	100%

According to the investigation, 60.00% of customers preferred brand of Maruti Suzuki hatchback auto or cars surveyed by Hyundai (15.0%), TATA (2.50%), Honda (10.0%), Skoda (2.00%), Ford & Toyota (3.50%), Volkswagen (4.00%), Chevrolet (0.50% per cent) , Nissan (1.50%), and others (1.00%) (Table 2).

Factors impacting the Buyers' Brand Inclinations of Hatchback Cars

With a specific end goal to group the elements influencing brand's image inclination for hatchback car, the exploratory factor examination with Rotated component analysis was done (Table 3). The after effects of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO test) measure of examining amplexness (KMO=0.904) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity (chi-square value= 3064.242; significance=0.000) demonstrates that the factor investigation technique used was suitable (Table 4). The principal segment technique for factor examination (Table 5) was done with Eigen esteems more noteworthy than the one through Varimax revolution utilizing the outcomes got through turned segment lattice are exhibited in Table 3. The general percent of difference of 63.484 shows that each measure exhibits worthy inward consistency. It can be clearly inferred that wellbeing, execution, stylish, esteem, and decision are the main components impacting the buyers' image inclination for hatchback passenger cars.

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis for the factors affecting consumers brand preference towards hatchback cars using Rotated Component Matrix.

Rotated Component Matrix					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Exterior Design (Look & Style)	0.15	0.043	0.74	0.041	0.094
Leg Spacing	0.251	0.653	0.26	0.064	-0.084
Dash Board & Interior Design	0.342	0.073	0.708	0.111	0.09
Speed Alert System	0.456	0.161	0.426	0.135	0.334
Mileage (Fuel Consumption)	0.122	0.719	0.09	0.341	-0.193
Seat Belt Reminder	0.7	0.202	0.117	0.182	-0.005
Side Fenders	0.721	0.001	0.225	0.277	-0.093
Seats comfort	0.334	0.547	0.452	0.028	0.041
Boot Space area	0.408	0.573	0.227	0.255	0.049
Sharp head lamps	0.263	0.273	0.644	0.255	-0.161
Defoggers	0.72	0.362	0.073	0.128	0.062
Anti-Lock Braking System	0.613	0.462	0.193	0.035	0.097
Suspension quality	0.467	0.457	0.443	-0.101	0.141
Tubeless Radial Tyres	0.472	0.281	0.436	0.094	0.212
Driver Airbags	0.604	0.217	0.332	0.141	0.328
Reverse Parking Sensors	0.678	-0.005	0.364	0.141	0.26
Door & Window Features	0.456	0.011	0.525	0.231	0.317
Infotainment System	0.091	0.282	0.087	0.733	-0.081
Cost Effective/Free initial Insurance	0.313	-0.12	0.258	0.701	0.165
Post Sales Service Support	-0.197	0.441	0.364	0.257	0.412
Attractive Financing	0.164	0.217	-0.093	0.684	0.192
Resale Value	-0.01	0.383	0.147	0.732	0.022
Brand Reputation	0.271	0.054	0.187	0.64	0.224
Price of car	0.2	0.664	-0.179	0.258	0.307
Range of Colors	0.382	0.148	0.179	0.253	0.662
Cost Effective Maintenance	0.122	0.801	-0.017	0.141	0.265
Attractive/Free Servicing Options	0.02	0.501	0.412	0.186	0.293

Table 4: Table showing the results of Bartlett's Test and KMO.

Bartlett's Test and KMO		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Quantity of Selection Adequacy.		0.904
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx Chi-Square	3064.242
	Df	350
	Sig.	0

Table 5: Principal component analysis of the factors through Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization carried out on Eigen values >1 (Rotation converged in 8 iterations).

S. N	Factor Name	Items	Rotated Component Matrix	Eigen Values	Variance (%)
1	Safety	Seat Belt Reminder	0.702	10.401	17.084
		Speed Alert System	0.453		
		Reverse Parking Sensors	0.678		
		Anti-Lock Braking System	00. 613		
		Defoggers	00. 722		
		Tubeless Radial Tires	00. 472		
		Suspension quality	00. 468		
		Driver Airbag	0.604		
		Side Fenders	0.71		
2	Performance	Mileage (Fuel Consumption)	00. 716	2.483	15.73
		Leg Spacing	00. 665		
		Boot Space area	00. 572		
		Seats comfort	00. 547		
		Post Sales Service Support	0.43		
		Cost Effective Maintenance	0.7		
		Price of car	00. 664		
		Attractive/Free Servicing Options	0.502		
3	Aesthetic	Sharp head lamps	00. 645	1.89	12.964
		Dash Board & Interior Design	0.704		
		Exterior Design (Look & Style)	00. 743		
		Door & Window Features	0.525		
4	Value	Attractive Financing	00. 682	1.345	11.946
		Cost Effective/Free initial Insurance cover	0.701		
		Infotainment System	00. 736		
		Brand Reputation	00. 638		
		Resale Value	00. 732		
5	Choice	Range of Colors	0.661	1.01	5.734
		Cumulative % of Variation			63.458

CONCLUSIONS

The fact that a significant number of people residing in West Delhi district are distinctly inclined towards the entry level hatchbacks, particularly from brand Maruti, which focuses primarily on middle class customers, goes to show that due to the sharp decline in the disposable income, brought about by the Corona Virus Pandemic and the resultant loss of income and employment, purchases of expensive, high-end passenger cars have suffered a setback and entry level cars which are mostly hatchbacks, from value for money brands like Maruti are pulling most of the customers during this pandemic.

Another factor which is significant, in the context of the present Covid-19 pandemic, is that safety features are being emphasized in the extreme, by average buyers. Safety features like Anti-Lock

Braking System, Speed Alert System, Reverse Parking Sensors, Defoggers, Driver Airbag, Side Fenders, Speed Alert Systems etc had a high eigen value and explained as high as 17.084 percent of the variance, which is very significant. The fact that buyers are emphasizing safety quality and features even in low priced entry level hatchback passenger cars, is significant under the existing circumstances of widespread Covid-19 epidemic because it has to do a lot with human psychology and psychographics, wherein at times of extreme crisis and threat perception around them, people tend to be extra sensitive about their safety, even though the steps they are taking to ensure their safety may not be directly relevant to the threats that they are encountering. This is exactly what has happened, because even though the threat due to Covid-19 is emanating from a different source- virus, but due to high concerns for safety and well being of their loved ones, people are even going to the extent of exercising extreme safety precaution, even in their purchases of consumer durable items like autos and four wheelers.

One other significant outcome of the study in respect of the present Covid-19 pandemic, is that in normal times, the entry level hatchback buyers invariably are predominantly influenced and impacted by the performance factors like fuel efficiency and mileage, cost effective maintenance, affordable pricing of the car, post sales service support, attractive/free servicing options etc , but in the present circumstances of Covid-19 and resultant impact on buying behavior, these performance factors have ended up taking the second place to the consideration of safety factors, with an eigen value of just 2.483 and accounting for a total variance explained of only 15.73 percent as against 17.084 percent for safety features. Clearly this is a big shift in the passenger car buying preferences and in respect of variables influencing the buyers' purchase decision making.

From the other collateral findings of the study, it clearly appears that hatchback passenger cars are largely popular among unmarried males between 21-30 and 31-40 years of age. This study additionally validates that professionals and private segment purchasers lean more towards hatchback automobiles and majority of them are post-graduates. Study also establishes that joint family individuals with household income between Rs. 25001 to 50,000 are more inclined and favorably disposed towards hatchbacks in the passenger car segment.

The survey clearly demonstrates and amply brings out a distinctly pronounced inclination of shoppers towards Maruti Suzuki mark in hatchback auto models. As in current car segment, customers exhibit an unmistakably enhanced inclination towards factors like safety, value for money, wellbeing, execution, stylishness, and aesthetics factors, all the more now days at the time of settling on their buying choice. Component Matrix examination demonstrates that security, execution, stylishness, and esteem are emphatically impacting the customer's in their choice and furthermore gives general fulfillment to the hatchback auto purchaser's. In the scenario obtaining today where the buyers tend to be extremely safety conscious, very aggressive, discriminating, hard to please and increasingly emotionally constrained, circumspect, and value conscious- shoppers taste, preferences and motivations and

inclinations are prone to quick shifts and fluxes, the hatchback auto makers need to particularly concentrate more on safety, performance, value for money, execution, stylishness, esteem, and range of choices available, with the implicit and underlying goal that customers will have a superior attention to nature of the brand. As in the present passenger car market, there is vicious and intense rivalry among the brands in terms of specifics and attributes such as value, better quality and minimal effort as well. Additionally, Delhi buyers clearly appear to be more cognizant and conscious about the cost competitiveness, safety and fuel efficiency. In view of the same, it is advised that the passenger car makers concentrate specially on factors like safety, cost-effectiveness, increased fuel efficiency, low maintenance cost, better looks and aesthetics, comfort, safety and better driving experience and attractive value proposition so as to be able to make a sharp and pronounced impact on the buyers' psyche and achieve consistently high brand following and brand equity in the intensely competitive passenger car market that obtains today. In the days to come, all the above full spectrum of issues pertaining to their market offer and corresponding delivery have to be properly and effectively redressed by the passenger car makers, consistent with a complementary marketing communication design, if at all they intend to make any significant and meaningful impact in the fiercely safety conscious, highly competitive and extremely demanding marketplace for passenger cars today, where there has been a significant erosion in the purchasing power of the majority of buyers, on account of the economic slowdown and recessionary pressures brought about by this global pandemic of Covid-19, whose end is nowhere in sight even after exacting such a heavy toll on the life, liberty and livelihood of the masses around the world.

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