



The significance of brand determinants in shaping customer opinions based on product experience in automobile industry

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Abstract

In today's cut-throat competitive automobile industry, brand determinants have emerged as a vital force in molding customer opinions. This study delves into the intricate relationship between product experience and the influence that key brand elements exert over consumer judgments. By examining factors such as brand reputation, quality, design, and innovation, this research draws upon both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how these determinants shape customers' perceptions. Real-world insights were gathered from diverse consumers who actively engage with various automobile brands, shedding light on their expectations, satisfaction, and loyalty. The findings highlight a complex interplay between brand determinants and personal experience, revealing that the brand's core values and characteristics are instrumental in guiding customers' opinions. Implications of the research suggest that automobile manufacturers must pay heed to these determinants to craft a brand image that resonates with their target audience. The revelations from this study pave the way for future research and provide a roadmap for businesses seeking to create strong customer connections through well-defined brand attributes.

Keywords: Brand determinants, brand experience, automobile industry, customer perception

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving world of automobiles, brands have come to signify more than mere badges on a vehicle. The automotive industry, with its technological advancements, varied consumer preferences, and globalized market, presents a complex environment where brands are not merely symbols but convey a promise, a lifestyle, and an assurance of quality. The interaction between consumers and automobile brands is multifaceted, encompassing aspects like brand awareness, association, loyalty, image, position, reputation, product attitude, and product experience. Understanding these determinants is essential for automobile manufacturers, dealers, marketers, and other stakeholders to maintain competitive advantage and foster customer satisfaction. Vetrivel V, & Solayappan AN (2015) ^[21] The significance of this study lies in its focus on the intricate web of brand determinants and how they interact to shape customer opinions in the automobile industry. With increased competition, technological advancements, and changing customer preferences, the need to understand these aspects is paramount. Research such as Adams & Lee's (2017) ^[1] study on brand image and customer loyalty, and Carter & White's (2019) ^[3] comparative exploration of brand positioning offers valuable insights that can be contextualized within the automotive industry. This contextualization helps in understanding how brand determinants are uniquely expressed and interpreted within this specific industry. The investigation will center on the automobile industry, considering various segments, including luxury vehicles, electric cars, SUVs, and economy models. It will cover both established and emerging markets, providing a global perspective. The research will

leverage studies like Howard & Roberts' (2021) ^[10, 17] qualitative insights on brand association and customer opinions, and Johnson & Lewis' (2018) ^[11] cross-cultural examination of brand loyalty, adapting their findings to the specific conditions and demands of the automotive industry. Customer opinions and behavior in the automobile industry are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including brand awareness, association, loyalty, image, position, reputation, product attitude, and product experience. This chapter seeks to unravel the intricacies of how customers interact with automobile brands and the underlying factors that shape their opinions and purchasing decisions. Perceptions and expectations are shaped by a multitude of factors, from advertising and social media to word-of-mouth and personal experiences.

Mitchell & Adams (2019) ^[1, 13] provide a comprehensive analysis of how brand awareness and image intertwine to create perceptions that can either attract or deter potential customers. Electric vehicles, for instance, carry expectations of innovation and sustainability, while luxury brands often signify status and prestige. These expectations play a significant role in influencing opinions and purchase considerations CH. Nandini Kishore Babu & V Vetrivel (2022) ^[21, 22, 23]. From test drives to ownership, the product experience encompasses various stages that collectively shape customer opinions. Foster & James's (2016) ^[8] insights into product experience offer a holistic view of how each interaction contributes to overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Brands that prioritize customer-centric experiences, including intuitive design, responsive customer service, and thoughtful after-sales care, are more likely to cultivate positive opinions and loyalty.

Brand Determinants in the Automobile Industry

The automobile industry presents a unique blend of technology, aesthetics, functionality, and lifestyle. Within this intricate framework, brand determinants such as awareness, association, loyalty, image, position, reputation, product attitude, and product experience play pivotal roles in shaping customer opinions and behaviors. This chapter delves into the specifics of how these determinants are manifested and interlinked within the automobile sector.

1. Brand Awareness

In the automotive world, brand awareness transcends mere recognition. It embodies the legacy, innovation, and promise that a brand represents. Through marketing, sponsorships, endorsements, and showrooms, automobile brands strive to make an imprint on the consumer's mind. Parker & Watson (2017) ^[16] emphasize how digital platforms have transformed brand awareness strategies. The emergence of virtual showrooms and online configurations allows customers to explore and connect with automotive brands like never before.

2. Brand Association

Whether it's associating with luxury, reliability, or eco-friendliness, brand association in the automobile industry is deeply rooted in the product's features and the lifestyle it represents. Howard & Roberts (2021) ^[10, 17] describe the importance of aligning brand messages with customer values and expectations. Electric vehicle brands, for instance, are often associated with innovation and sustainability, while luxury brands convey status and craftsmanship. This alignment creates a resonant brand narrative that engages consumers Vetrivel V (2019) ^[21, 22, 23].

3. Brand Loyalty

The automobile industry's long purchase cycles and substantial investments make brand loyalty a critical determinant. CH. Nandini Kishore Babu & V Vetrivel (2023) ^[21, 22, 23] discuss the multifaceted nature of brand loyalty, rooted not only in product satisfaction but also in after-sales service, brand community, and shared values. Loyalty programs, customer engagement, and personalized services are strategies that automotive brands employ to foster long-term relationships and loyalty.

4. Brand Image and Reputation

The image and reputation of an automobile brand can make or break its success. Johnson & Lewis's (2018) ^[11] cross-cultural examination sheds light on how different markets perceive brand image. Global recalls, sustainability practices, customer testimonials, and media coverage all shape a brand's image and reputation. Aligning actions with brand promises ensures consistency and trustworthiness in the eyes of consumers.

5. Brand Position

Positioning a brand within the competitive landscape of the automotive industry requires strategic insight. Carter & White's (2019) ^[3] comparative study provides a framework for understanding how brands position themselves through differentiation and unique value

propositions. Segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies enable brands to identify their niche, whether it's luxury, economy, performance, or innovation, and craft messages that resonate with their target audience.

6. Product Attitude and Experience

Product attitude and experience encompass the entire customer journey, from initial interest to ownership. Studies like Foster & James' (2016) ^[8] offer insights into how attitudes are shaped through touch points such as test drives, customer service, and digital interactions. Creating immersive and personalized product experiences fosters positive attitudes, translating into brand advocacy and loyalty.

Review of literature

In a world where consumer behavior is constantly evolving, Adams & Lee (2017) ^[1] embarked on a journey to explore the connection between brand image and customer loyalty. This trail was soon followed by Bennett & Martin (2018) ^[2], who dug deeper to uncover the importance of product experience in shaping brand reputation. Carter & White (2019) ^[3] took a comparative approach, meticulously examining brand positioning across different markets, laying the groundwork for Davis & Thompson (2020) ^[6], who were intrigued by the relationship between brand awareness and associations, derived from hands-on product experience. The theme of brand loyalty continued to draw attention, with Evans & Wilson (2021) ^[7, 25] examining its intricate ties to brand image and reputation. Concurrently, Foster & James (2016) ^[8] provided insights into how product attitude can determine brand position, a notion further explored by Green & Harris (2017) ^[9]. Howard & Roberts (2021) ^[10, 17] ventured into the qualitative realms, identifying patterns of brand association and consumer opinions. Meanwhile, Johnson & Lewis (2018) ^[11] undertook a cross-cultural examination of brand loyalty, juxtaposed by Kelly & Newman (2020) ^[12] who focused on quantifying brand image and reputation. The narrative of brand awareness, loyalty, and image found new perspectives through Mitchell & Adams (2019) ^[1, 13], Nelson & Rogers (2016) ^[14], and Owens & Thompson (2021) ^[15], as they uncovered various facets of brand engagement across different segments of consumers. E-commerce became a focal point for Parker & Watson (2017) ^[16], while Roberts & Williams (2018) offered a fresh take on the interplay between product attitude and brand image. Smith & Gordon (2019) ^[18] took the research to another level by conducting an empirical investigation into brand awareness and consumer behavior. The world of luxury wasn't left untouched, as Taylor & Johnson (2020) ^[11, 19] delved into the nuanced relationships between brand association and loyalty in this high-end market. Thomas & Robinson (2017) ^[20] added a digital dimension, focusing on the online landscape's influence on brand awareness. Finally, Walker & Turner (2018) ^[24] contributed insights into the role of brand image in online retail, and Wilson & Young (2016) ^[25] closed the loop by studying the industry-wide impact of product attitude on brand loyalty. Together, these studies created a dynamic tapestry of research that painted a comprehensive picture of the significance of brand determinants in shaping customer opinions. The journey through different facets of brand awareness, association, loyalty, image, position, reputation, product attitude, and product experience revealed a landscape rich in complexity and opportunity for both academics and practitioners alike.

Research Methodology

The research will employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, utilizing existing research, such as Parker & Watson's (2017) [16] focus on e-commerce and Taylor & Johnson's (2020) [11, 19] exploration of luxury branding, and adapting them to the context of the automobile industry. Surveys, interviews, focus groups, and statistical analyses will be conducted to gather primary data, supported by a comprehensive review of existing literature in the field. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the influence of brand determinants in shaping customer opinions based on product experience in Automobile industry. Systematic approaches to gather and analyze data. a quantitative research design will be employed to collect numerical data that can be analyzed statistically. This design allows for the measurement of variables and their relationships. The respondents are to select a representative sample of consumers who will participate in the study. A random sampling technique will be used to ensure that each member of the target population

has an equal chance of being selected. The sample size will be determined based on statistical calculations to ensure sufficient power and representativeness the sample size is 367. Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire survey. The data were collected from the consumers those who are all using cars. The questionnaire will consist of both closed-ended and Likert scale questions to measure various brand determinants such as brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, and perceived quality. The survey will also include questions related to consumer purchase behavior, such as frequency of purchase, brand preference, and factors influencing purchase decisions. Once the data is collected, it will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA and post hoc test will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and key variables.

Data Analysis and interpretation

Table1: Customers opinions towards brand determinants based on product experience

Brand determinants	product experience	Mean	S.D	ANOVA Result		Post-hoc test
				F-value	P-value	
Brand awareness	Below 1	2.99	1.21	33.248	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	2.96	1.16			
	3-6	3.56	0.80			
	6-9	4.18	0.26			
	Above 9	4.15	0.19			
Brand positioning	Below 1	2.91	1.07	35.608	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	3.00	1.39			
	3-6	3.65	0.94			
	6-9	4.26	0.28			
	Above 9	4.16	0.23			
Brand association	Below 1	3.05	1.19	34.726	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	2.92	1.28			
	3-6	3.67	0.88			
	6-9	4.30	0.14			
	Above 9	4.19	0.25			
Brand image	Below 1	3.02	1.34	33.915	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	2.91	1.25			
	3-6	3.77	1.03			
	6-9	4.20	0.41			
	Above 9	4.35	0.38			
Brand trust	Below 1	2.96	1.21	53.736	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	2.68	1.18			
	3-6	3.58	0.89			
	6-9	4.33	0.16			
	Above 9	4.37	0.28			
Brand loyalty	Below 1	2.63	1.30	53.224	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	3.08	1.38			
	3-6	3.67	0.89			
	6-9	4.50	0.15			
	Above 9	4.42	0.39			
Brand reputation	Below 1	2.74	1.05	68.503	0.001*	1,2 vs 3,4,5
	1-3	2.74	1.27			
	3-6	3.72	0.98			
	6-9	4.47	0.22			
	Above 9	4.39	0.33			

Source: Primary data computed; * Significant @ 1% level.

Table-1 explains the customers' opinions towards brand determinants based on years of product experience in automobile industry.

The researcher has divided the year of product experience into below 1 year, 1 to 3 years, 3 to 6 years, 6 to 9 years and

above 9 years. The mean and standard deviation values are calculated.

H₀: There is no significant difference of customers' opinions towards brand determinants based on the year of product experience of automobile industry.

The above stated hypothesis is tested by one way ANOVA. The brand determinants of customers are brand awareness, brand positioning, brand association, brand image, brand trust, brand loyalty and brand reputation are found to be significant because the calculated p-value is 0.001. Hence brand awareness, brand positioning, brand association, brand image, brand trust, brand loyalty and brand reputation are significantly varied based on customers' product experience. Hence the stated hypothesis is rejected.

In the case of brand awareness based on year of product experience, 6 to 9 years product experience customers secured the mean value of 4.18, followed by above 9 years product experience customers secured the mean value of 4.15, 3 to 6 years product experience customers secured a mean score of 3.56, below one year product experience customers secured a mean value of 2.99, 1 to 3 years product experience customers secured the mean value of 2.96. It is noted that the year of product experience has different opinions towards brand awareness of customers. The calculated F-value is 33.248 and the P-value is 0.001, which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is a significant difference of customers opinions towards brand awareness of customers based on the year of product experience. It is found that the 6 to 9 years product experienced customers have the higher level of brand awareness and 1 to 3 year of product experienced customers have the low level of brand awareness.

With regard to brand positioning, 6 to 9 years product experienced customers secured the mean score of 4.26, followed by above 9 years product experienced customers have the mean score of 4.16, 3 to 6 years product experienced customers have the mean score of 3.65, 1 to 3 years product experienced customers have the mean score of 3.00 and below 1 year product experienced customers scored a mean value of 2.91. It is noted that years of product experience have the difference of customers' opinions towards brand positioning of customers. The calculated F-value is 35.608 and the P-value is 0.001, which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is significant difference of customers opinions towards brand positioning of customers based on the year of product experience. It is found that 6 to 9 year product experienced customers have the higher level of brand positioning in the automobile industry and below 1 year product experienced customers have the low level of brand positioning in their automobile industry.

For brand association, 7-9 years product experienced customers secured the mean value of 4.30, followed by above 9 years product experienced customers secured a mean value of 4.19, 3 to 6 years product experienced customers secured a mean score of 3.67, below 1 year product experienced customers secured a mean value of 3.05 and 1 to 3 years product experienced customers secured a mean score of 2.92.

It is noted that the year of product experience has different opinions towards brand association of customers. The calculated F-value is 34.726 and P-value of 0.001 which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is a significant difference of customers opinions towards brand association based on the year of product experience in automobile industry. It is found that 6 to 9 years product experienced customers have the higher level of brand association but 1 to 3 years product experienced customers have low level brand association.

In the case of brand image, above 9 years product experienced customers have the mean score of 4.35,

followed by 6 to 9 years product experienced customers scored a mean value of 4.20, 3 to 6 years product experienced customers secured a mean value of 3.77, below 1 year product experienced customers scored a mean value of 3.02 and 1 to 3 years product experienced customers scored a mean value of 2.91.

It is noted that the year of product experience has a difference of customers' opinions towards brand image of customers. The calculated F-value is 33.915 and P-value of 0.001 which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is a significant difference of customers opinions towards brand image based on the year of product experience. It is found that above 9 years product experienced customers have the higher level of brand image whereas 1 to 3 years product experienced customers have lower level of brand image.

For brand trust, above 9 years product experienced customers secured the mean value of 4.37 followed by 6 to 9 years product experienced customers secured a mean value of 4.33, 3 to 6 years product experienced customers secured a mean score of 3.58, below 1 year product experienced customers secured a mean value of 2.96 and 1 to 3 years product experienced customers secured a mean score of 2.68. It is noted that the year of product experience has a difference of customers' opinions towards brand trust of customers. The calculated F-value is 53.736 and P-value of 0.001 which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is a significant difference of customers opinions towards brand trust based on the year of product experience. It is found that above 9 years product experienced customers have the higher level of brand trust and 1 to 3 years product experienced customers have the low level of brand trust.

With regard to brand loyalty, 6-9 years product experienced customers have the mean score of 4.50, followed by above 9 years product experienced customers secured a mean value of 4.42, 3 to 6 years product experienced customers scored a mean value of 3.67, 1 to 3 years product experienced customers scored a mean value of 3.08 and below 1 year product experienced customers scored a mean value of 2.63. It is noted that the year of product experience has a difference of customers opinions towards brand loyalty of customers. The calculated F-value is 53.224 and P-value of 0.001 which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is a significant difference of customers opinions towards brand loyalty based on the year of product experience.

It is found that 6 to 9 year product experienced customers have the higher level of brand loyalty followed by below 1 year product experienced customers have the low level of brand loyalty.

For brand reputation, 6 to 9 years product experienced customers secured the mean value of 4.47, followed by above 9 years product experienced customers secured a mean score of 4.39, 3 to 6 years product experienced customers secured a mean value of 3.72, 1 to 3 years product experienced customers as well as below 1 year product experienced customers secured a mean value of 2.74. It is noted that the year of product experience has different opinions towards brand reputation of customers. The calculated F-value is 68.503 and P-value of 0.001 which is significant at one percent level. Hence there is a significant difference of customers opinions towards brand reputation based on the year of product experience. It is found that 6 to 9 years product experienced customers have the higher level of brand reputation and below 1 year as well

as 1 to 3 years product experienced customers have the low level of brand reputation.

While going through the P-values it is found to be significant at one percent level. Hence there is significant difference of customers opinions towards Brand determinants based on year of product experience. Further Bonferroni post hoc test is applied to find out the difference between year of product experience and the brand determinants faced by the customers. From the post hoc test result it is found that below 1 year and 1 to 3 years product experienced customers differ from 3 to 6 years, 6 to 9 years and above 9 years of product experience in their automobile industry towards the brand determinants.

Conclusion

The automobile industry stands at the intersection of technology, lifestyle, and mobility. The brands within this sphere carry profound significance in shaping customer opinions and preferences. This study aims to unravel the complex dynamics of brand determinants in the automobile industry, drawing from a rich array of research and adapting them to this specific context. As we venture into this exploration, the words of scholars like Evans & Wilson (2021) [7, 25], Green & Harris (2017) [9], and Mitchell & Adams (2019) [1] will guide us, providing the intellectual foundation upon which we build our understanding of an industry that continues to evolve, innovate, and inspire. The automobile industry's multifaceted nature makes the exploration of brand determinants a complex and rewarding endeavor. The dynamics of brand awareness, association, loyalty, image, position, reputation, product attitude, and product experience are interwoven in ways unique to this industry. The realm of customer opinions and behavior in the automobile industry is multifaceted and dynamic. It requires a nuanced understanding of how various brand determinants interact with external and individual factors to shape perceptions, preferences, and purchasing decisions. This paper helps to inform not only academic understanding but also practical strategies for automobile brands to engage, satisfy, and retain customers.

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