

Customer Relationship Management Practices in Automobile sector-A Study of Passenger car buyers in Bengaluru

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ABSTRACT

CRM or Customer Relationship Management is the set of practices that involve companies to manage their relationships with their customers. The major aim of such an approach is to engage with customers more thoroughly and understanding their expectations from the car companies. The CRM model can prove to be an excellent marketing approach especially for the automobile industry. It is because this industry is a very lucrative industry but also very slow because people buy automobiles only after a certain period of time so it is important for companies to provide them with the best experiences so that they wouldn't think about switching brands the next time they purchase an automobile. A sample of 322 people from the automobile sector was surveyed to know the role and significance of different customer relationship management practices in the automobile sector. Factor analysis was applied to get the appropriate results. It is found in the present study that there are different customer relationship management practices in automobile sector like Operational Customer Relationship Management, Analytical Customer Relationship Management, Strategic Customer Relationship Management, and Collaborative Customer Relation and they play a significant role in the automobile sector.

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INTRODUCTION:

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) refers to the set of practices that involve companies to manage their relationships with customers. It involves analysing the interactions between companies and their customers. The major aim of such a practice is to engage customers and increase sales outputs. In this management practice data is derived from different sources so that a company can make informed decisions about their services. It helps not just to boost sales but to make everlasting relationships with customers. CRM is a big and complicated system. It has many advantages. A research conducted by Matis and Ilies (2014) on understanding the Customer Relationship Management in the insurance industry indicated that working on building consumer relationships is very important for the insurance sector consider how high risky the job sector is. The CRM system can help to identify and analyse consumer data, their behaviour related to a particular product or service, or even identifying profitable customers. If done accurately, CRM can

help companies to prevent the wastage of their resources like time and money and focus only upon the potential customers. When a company obtains data about consumers from various sources, they can understand about customer demands, feedbacks and focus on the potential clientele. CRM gives companies a competitive advantage over the others as their time and efforts go only on selective potential customers and not to the wider audience who may or may not want their services or products. Having greater knowledge of the needs of their existing clients, companies may even try to become better and research for better ways to retain those customers. They may provide excellent offers to attract their customers who could then refer the company to other people. This way they can broaden their customer base and improve their sales. According to a research by Reinartz et al. (2004), the main components of CRM involve building and managing customer relationships. Once the companies get a hold of how their customers respond and react to their services companies may put this understanding into

providing innovative incentives, provide the best of services, and dedicate resources to only the potential customers. The study undertook the task of investigating whether the CRM practices actually improve organizational practices. They also tried to quantify the improvement in the performance of the companies. It is believed that since companies put so much effort into understanding the customer's requirements, and then customise their services as per their needs, they are bound to benefit from it and increase their sales. Now since, customers would be more willing to buy the products from the specific company it automatically translates to increased consumer satisfaction. With CRM, even the consumers are benefitted as they get exactly what they need and sometimes with added benefits. Now the companies obtain their data via various modes, like call centres, or even social media. So many companies engage with different social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and then understand consumer habits, their search options and track their opinions to draw their attention towards their companies. However sometimes, companies often face criticisms for over engaging or violating customer's privacy.

Automobile Industry in India: India is one of the world's leading automobile producer and consumer. According to the reports by India Brand Equity Foundation, the automobile industry contributes to about 7.1 per cent of the entire GDP. By 2026, India is expected to be the world's third largest automotive market in terms of volume. India is also the world's largest two wheeler and three wheeler producer indicating that most of our population is middle class and young. Now, for an industry so huge and growing, it is imperative that efficient management strategies are adopted that may help the various automobile companies in improvising their sales and reach the target audience. It is also important that companies understand the levels of customer satisfaction for the betterment of their services. In today's era, it is

the goal of each automobile company to imbibe the latest technology, use unique and attractive designs, maximise their efficiency so maximum customers are attracted to their services, hence best marketing strategies could help companies gain a competitive advantage over the others. CRM is thus an efficient tool for automobile makers who wish to pursue more research into their customer needs so they could improve and increase their sales and image in the market.

Need for research in India's automobile industry:

In the world of cut throat competition, where so many companies are fighting to prove their mettle in the automobile industry, what makes one stand out better than the other is their marketing strategy. The Companies that master the art of marketing, automatically become more successful than the others. Now there are various parameters over which automobile companies are judged be it their technology, design, innovation, efficiency and one of the most important aspect, pricing. In India, where majority of the population is middle class, companies have to cater to all the demands of these customers. Automobiles are still a luxury for a huge percentage of population and people have emotional connection to their automobiles that they buy with their hard-earned money. Being aware of customers' expectations could help automobile companies in aligning their strategies with the customers for increasing their likeability. A CRM or Customer Relationship Management is one of the best tools that increases interaction among companies and customers. With an efficient CRM system, companies can understand the consumers' needs well and hence make informed decisions about it. With the consumer centric approach of the CRM strategies companies can gain greater insights into what customers expect from automobile and how they perceive each company. Automobile companies can therefore divert all

their resources into the target audience and hence improve their profitability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research by Dibeesh (2016) focusses upon how the Customer Relationship Management approach is gaining popularity among various business groups in the world. It has been increasingly used to understand customer loyalty. The major focus at the moment for companies is to retain their existing clientele before focussing upon gaining new ones. Now automobiles are something that are not consumed by one customer on a day to day or even a regular basis. It is only after a certain amount of years has passed that a consumer wishes to invest in automobiles. Hence it is imperative that the automobile brands provide the best of services so that the customers do not have to look at any other brands for their services. Some of the services that customer focuses upon is the availability of service centres, how readily the spare parts are made available, efficiency of the service providers, promptness of the service and so on. A questionnaire was prepared to understand whether customers believe that brands fulfil their promises and whether their services are efficient and if customers would remain loyal to then or would want to try other companies providing the same services. It was concluded that a proper Evaluation of CRM does prove beneficial and helps to improve customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Naru and Jain (2020) conducted a research on the role of Customer Relationship Management in the Auto Car Industry. CRM according to them is a combination of 3P's called People, Process and Planning where technology plays an important role. Since CRM has a consumer centric approach, this research focussed on how companies provide the after sales facilities like servicing, cost of repair, and timely updates. Ensuring best after sale services is important for retaining customers. The study suggested that focussing upon the above mentioned aspects is necessary for a company for

retaining their customers, increasing their image in the automobile market and improve their sales and profits. They identified the various in-practice methods of CRM and tested their importance and effectiveness, especially in the Automobile industry.

A research conducted by Patil and Waghmare suggests that companies are becoming more consumer centric. CRM has become an effective tool to serve customers. Companies are looking for ways to build stronger and lasting relationships with their customers. Due to plethora of information available on the web, customers have become informed and therefore more demanding. An effective CRM approach can therefore help them in providing efficient services and improve consumer loyalty. The paper dealt with understanding the effectiveness of CRM in the automobile dealers of Ahmedabad. It was concluded that CRM helps dealers to approach the best potential customers and provide them with the best services. They also concluded that CRM helped them to increase their reputation in the market.

A research was conducted by Hassana et al. (2015) on the effects of Customer Relationship Management on the levels of Customer Satisfaction. A good relationship between companies and customers is important for success of the business. Customer Relationship Management approach was found to be positively correlated to customer satisfaction. CRM was also found to increase a company's productivity and hence their market share. It also helped improve customer loyalty.

A research by Jadhao and Kedar (2016) was aimed at understanding the service Quality challenges in Indian Automobile Industry. Automobile industry first thrive upon their designs and technology and later upon their service qualities. It is imperative for them to maintain a strong hold of both these areas in order to attract maximum customers. This paper

identified various characters that could be improved by automobile companies. These were lack of skilled manpower, lack of motivation and training, delay in delivery, inadequate commitment to service quality, unavailability of proper machinery and adequate service centres. Therefore, if automobile companies also focussed upon improving these characters they may provide greater customer satisfaction and improve customer retention.

The study by Jomphe et al. (2013) intended to understand the key factor of success of using Customer Relationship Management software in the automobile industry. CRM has been increasingly used by companies. CRM software gather customer data, organises them, automate their treatment and synchronize the process of business. The study identified users and establishment as the key factors driving the success of CRM software. The study also showed the success of CRM software also led to company being able to rope in new clients.

The study by Pavithra and Hussain (2018) contemplated that Toyota motors are the third largest automobile industry in India. The CRM practices are used to cater directly to the target audience. Now the research was conducted by the Survey method where the authors studied various aspects of customer's habits like the car that they own, their source of information regarding automobile purchases, if they are satisfied with Toyota's fuel efficiency etc. The research indicated that Toyota is among the most sought after cars in India with a decent customer base however they must do something to attract customers to their small cars segments. It also showed that Toyota motors are one of the reputable companies in India.

Amineha and Kosacha (2016) conducted a research on assessing the customer satisfaction levels with respect to the product quality of automobile industry. Now customer satisfaction is the key for companies to master in the highly competitive

market. Various criteria were identified like the pricing, brand recognisability, engine performance, quality and price of spare parts, servicing, design etc. Now a research like this is imperative because it helps companies identify the areas they are lacking in. They may utilise this information into making their services more consumer centric and hence increase their market.

Xu et al.(2017) conducted a research on the relative effects of product and service quality in the automobile industry. With this research the researchers wanted to identify the factors that lead to customer satisfaction and whether higher satisfaction could lead to greater customer retention or not. Now, the research suggested that a greater service quality has become more of a necessity for companies and not something that gives a competitive advantage to a company over the other. Customer satisfaction is linked to greater product quality and is directly related to customer loyalty. Also, customer satisfaction is negatively linked to customer willing to switch brands. The research also reaffirms that customer satisfaction is the most important aspect that companies need to master both in terms of product and service quality in the automobile industry.

Shinde (2014) conducted a research to analyse the behaviour of consumers of automobile passenger cars. The research helps marketers to identify and understand customer expectations and align their services. Various pointers were studied for passenger cars like the Value for money, fuel efficiency, design and technology, durability, safety and comfort of driving etc. It was understood that Value for Money tops this list. Also globalising their brands can help companies penetrate into markets easily and increase their recognisability, irrespective of the locally available brands. Another major discussion put forward by this research was that today most of the car manufacturers depend upon the Gulf countries for their fuel efficiency. If companies could think if

alternative fuel ideas, they may gain an advantage over the others. It finally suggested companies to align their services with the customer needs if they wish to increase their reputation in the market.

The research by Nataraj and Nagaraja (2012) focussed upon how online buyer's perceive the websites of car manufacturers in India. Online car booking and purchase are gaining popularity in the current times. Internet is a greater source of information for customers. Car manufacturers have used this to their benefit and created an online presence by launching their own websites. This would help customers gain greater insights into the product detail. It also influences buyers to purchase a particular automobile. Their e-commerce has definitely helped companies drive their sales. Their show that their websites can be used to increase customer satisfaction levels and build greater trust in customers.

Menaka and Ashath (2014) conducted a research to study the consumer buying behaviour and customer satisfaction towards the Indian automobile industry. Consumer satisfaction is a post purchase behaviour of consumers. Generally, customers want the best products and services at a cheaper rate. The demands of passenger cars has been changing throughout. With the large section of Indian population being middle class, Customers are more inclined to buy small cars. Manufacturers can use this to their benefit are try to penetrate deeper by advertising their products and making campaigns and spreading awareness of their brands. Hence, consumer preferences drive the market.

Srivastava and Matta (2014) studied the consumers behaviour towards passenger cars. Understanding consumer needs is important for manufacturers to develop their customers to meet customer needs and designing proper marketing strategies. In Delhi NCR, consumption of automobiles is not just a travel necessity but a status symbol too. Hence, marketers can use this to their advantage and

engage better with their customers to know their needs.

Dhanabalan et al. (2018) conducted a research on understanding the factors that influence consumer's car purchasing decisions. Indian automobile industry is saturated with a plethora of local and International brands that provide similarly priced and designed automobiles. Now with such great options to choose from, what decided the consumer car purchasing behaviour. It was concluded that consumer purchase patterns are greatly influenced by the brand, price, quality, design, utility etc. Therefore companies can approach this with the help of CRM tool and cater to their customers effectively.

Bhattacharya et al. (2014) aimed to understand the various aspects of Supply Chain management in the Indian Automotive industry. The research was aimed to understand the challenges faced by the Indian automobile industry so that new ways could be find out of dealing with these complexities. The research showed that the industry is yet to meet the International standards of Supply chain management. The necessity of the hour is to develop strategies for improvement in the supply chain if marketers wished to have a reputation in the International market. The major focus upon cost reduction, fuel efficiency in order to draw the consumers attention towards them.

The research by Kaviya and Ramu (2018) was aimed at analysing the CRM approach with respect to TVS. CRM requires proper planning and implementation and can only prove beneficial if client driven activities are undertaken by the company. TVS has the best utilisation of this approach. They provided customers with efficient services like call centres for listening to their queries, exchange of vehicles, offering interesting discounts etc. Thus many other companies can also benefit if they use the CRM approach.

Sakthivel et al. (2016) conducted a research on the CRM approach used by Honda, the two wheeler manufacturer. CRM is important for market planning. The research paper analyses how Honda used CRM to their benefit and whether or not customers are satisfied with their product and service quality. It suggested that customers were satisfied with the services offered by Honda

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To find different Customer Relationship Management Practices in Automobile sector.
2. To find the role and significance of Customer Relationship Management Practices in Automobile sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted with the help of survey method in which 322 people from different

sections of the automobile sector are considered. Structured questionnaire was used to know different kinds of Customer Relationship Management Practices in Automobile sector and their significance. Primary data was collected through random sampling and Factor analysis was applied to get the appropriate results.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. It is seen that in the total number of 322 respondents 58.1% are male and 41.9% are female in which 19.6% are working as Client servicing manager, 22.0% as customer relationship manager, 21.4% are CRM experts, 18.9% are relationship managers and 18.0% are product managers. Among them 33.8% have a working experience of below 5 years, 34.8% are working from 5-10 years, and 31.4% are working from more than 10 years in the automobile sector.

Table 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage
Gender		
Male	187	58.1
Female	135	41.9
Total	322	100
Designation		
Client servicing manager	63	19.6
Customer relationship manager	71	22.0
CRM expert	69	21.4
Relationship manager	61	18.9
Product manager	58	18.0
Total	322	100
Work experience		
Below 5 years	109	33.8
5 to 10 years	112	34.8
Above 10 years	101	31.4
Total	322	100

FACTOR ANALYSIS

Table 2 KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity" and "Measure of Sampling Adequacy"

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.926
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5498.088
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

It may be observed from the table that the value of KMO is 0.926 which is more than the 0.6 hence it confirms the validity of the factor analysis. The value under significance column is .000 which shows that null hypothesis shall be rejected viz. Sample is not adequate and alternate hypothesis will be accepted viz. Sample is adequate (Hair and Black, 1995).

The factor analysis has been applied with certain default settings and criteria. The factors have been

grouped on the basis of the Eigen values. The minimum Eigen values should be at least 1. Table 3 shows that the total number of variables or statements is 20; hence 20 factors can be produced from factor analysis. However, with the help of Eigen values (more than 1), it is found from the table only 4 factors have been produced. These 4 factors explain around 75% of the variance which is more than the minimum criteria of variance explained i.e. 66% (Williams et al., 2012).

Table 3 Variance Extracted "Exploratory Factor Analysis" (EFA)

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.871	44.356	44.356	8.871	44.356	44.356	4.959	24.794	24.794
2	2.513	12.563	56.920	2.513	12.563	56.920	4.075	20.376	45.170
3	2.292	11.461	68.380	2.292	11.461	68.380	3.214	16.070	61.241
4	1.351	6.756	75.136	1.351	6.756	75.136	2.779	13.895	75.136
5	.733	3.667	78.803						
6	.659	3.296	82.099						
7	.573	2.863	84.962						
8	.457	2.287	87.249						
9	.371	1.857	89.107						
10	.356	1.778	90.885						
11	.308	1.540	92.425						
12	.256	1.281	93.706						
13	.231	1.154	94.860						
14	.214	1.069	95.929						
15	.185	.927	96.856						
16	.155	.773	97.629						
17	.141	.706	98.334						
18	.128	.641	98.976						

19	.114	.568	99.544						
20	.091	.456	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

It is found from the table 3 that the 4 factors or factors explain 75% of the variance. The 1st Factor explains 24.794% of the variance followed by the 2nd Factor that explains 20.376% of variance, 3rd Factor explains 16.070% of variance, and the last 4th factor explain 13.895% of variance.

Figure 1 presents the plot based on the Eigen Values derived from the main table 'Total Variance Explained'

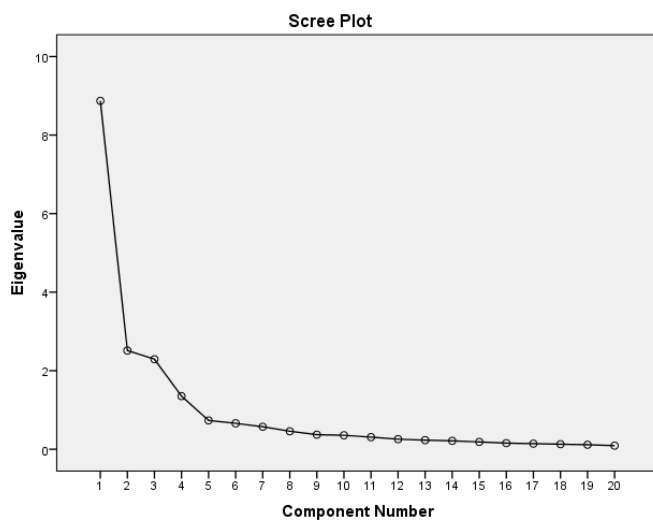


Figure1 Scree Plot

Figure 1 show that there is a steep fall in the line till 4th factor till the Eigen value of 1. Later the fall of line is very less and later the gap between the 'factor number' axis and line reduces which shows that later factors are less important because the Eigen values of those factors are below 1.

Constructs or Factors:

Table 4 Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
VAR00020	.868			
VAR00019	.860			
VAR00021	.857			
VAR00018	.841			
VAR00022	.814			
VAR00023	.797			
VAR00035		.897		
VAR00032		.882		
VAR00031		.869		
VAR00033		.866		
VAR00030		.754		
VAR00037			.839	
VAR00038			.824	
VAR00036			.777	
VAR00039			.767	

VAR00003				.755
VAR00006				.733
VAR00004				.714
VAR00007				.666
VAR00005				.665
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.				

Development of the Factors/ Factors

There are 4 factors out of 20 variables/statements. These factors represent the different variables that are highly correlated with each other. The 1st factor is constituted by 6 variables namely connecting the brand with the customers, Automating the sales to reach to new customers, Marketing automation so offer product and to approach new customers, Managing the campaigning activities, Automation of the services to retain the customers, and Management of issues to solve the customer. The factor has been named as **‘Operational Customer Relationship Management’**. The variance explained by this factor is 24.794 %. 2nd Factor is constituted by 5 variables namely measuring the satisfaction level of the customers, Analyzing the electronic data of the customer systematically, Collecting customer’s details from various sources, Analyzing buying pattern of the customers, and Collecting and analyzing sales data. The factor has been named as **‘Analytical Customer Relationship Management’**. The variance explained by this factor is 20.376%. 3rd Factor is

constituted by 4 variables namely concentrating on customer behaviour, enhancing the knowledge about the customer, improving the customer interactions, and Customizing and maintains the long term relation with customers. The factor has been named as **‘Strategic Customer Relationship Management’**. The variance explained by this factor is 16.070% and the 4th Factor is constituted by 5 variables namely sharing customer data to sales team for better sale activities, sharing customer feedback to marketing team to make effective strategies, Helps in collaborating all the sections of the company with each for better performance, Supporting document management systems to ease the access and Promoting customer centric culture in the organization. The factor has been named as **“Collaborative Customer Relationship Management.”** The variance explained by this factor is 13.895%.

Table 5 Factors, Factor Loading, and Reliability

SL. No.	Factor Names	Factor Loadings	Factor Reliability
1.	Operational Customer Relationship Management		0.955
1.	Connecting the brand with the customers		
2.	Automating the sales to reach to new customers		
3.	Marketing automation so offer product and to approach new customers		
4.	Managing the campaigning activities		
5.	Automation of the services to retain the customers		
6.	Management of issues to solve the customer		

2.	Analytical Customer Relationship Management		0.936
1.	Measuring the satisfaction level of the customers		
2.	Analyzing the electronic data of the customer systematically		
3.	Collecting customer's details from various sources		
4.	Analyzing buying pattern of the customers		
5.	Collecting and analyzing sales data		
3.	Strategic Customer Relationship Management		0.931
1.	Concentrating on customer behavior		
2.	Enhancing the knowledge about the customer		
3.	Improving the customer interactions		
4.	Customizing and maintain the long term relation with customers		
4.	Collaborative Customer Relationship Management		0.766
1.	Sharing customer data to sales team for better sale activities		
2.	Sharing customer feedback to marketing team to make effective strategies		
3.	Helps in collaborating all the sections of the company with each for better performance		
4.	Supporting document management systems to ease the access		
5.	Promoting customer centric culture in the organization		

Construct wise Reliability

The reliability statistics "Cronbach's alpha" was applied which portrays the reliability of all constructs that measures the **"Role and significance of Customer Relationship Management Practices in Automobile sector"**

The values of reliability for 4 constructs were found 0.955, 0.936, 0.931, and 0.766 from construct 1 to 4 respectively. The minimum value of reliability of a construct should be 0.7, hence the reliability of all the constructs is above the critical value, and hence the constructs formed are robust.

CONCLUSION

The research has suggested that adopting Customer Relationship Management practices by the automobile dealers is an excellent way of understanding in detail what the customers demand. It is one of the best tool with which

companies can interact with their customers, assess the quality of their interactions and then make informed decision about their marketing strategies or product and service qualities. 'Customer is the king' is reiterated time and again in the research. It shows that companies ought to keep their focus consumer-centric if they wish to improve their reputation in the market. Also, for the automobile industry it is imperative that the companies try their best to retain their customers. Indian automobile industry is fairly dominated by small and mid sized cars that is required to cater to the large middle class population in India. Getting an automobile in a middle class household is no less than a celebration. Therefore, company must keep in mind, the emotional value associated with their products and provide their customers with an enriching experience if they wish to retain their customers. Also, Adopting CRM approach is going

to give the companies an edge over those who focus only upon their product quality as companies would prevent their resources in wasting time with customers who are not all that willing to invest in their companies. The CRM approach can help countries identify the target audience and work towards converting them into leads. They may focus upon improving their services by catering to exactly what their consumers needs. Hence CRM is an excellent tool that is utilised properly can help companies prosper in the world.

It is found in the present study that there are different customer relationship management practices in automobile sector like Operational Customer Relationship Management, Analytical Customer Relationship Management, Strategic Customer Relationship Management, and Collaborative Customer Relationship Management. The study also concludes that there are so many significant roles of these practices such as connecting the brand with the customers, Measuring the satisfaction level of the customers, Managing the campaigning activities, Customizing and maintain the long term relation with customers and Helps in collaborating all the sections of the company with each for better performance.

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