

A Study on Customer Perception towards Maruti Suzuki Four-Wheeler with Reference to Palakkad City

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Abstract

The Indian automobile industry is characterized by intense competition and dynamic consumer preferences. Maruti Suzuki, as a market leader, has maintained dominance through strong brand equity, fuel-efficient models, and extensive dealership networks. This empirical study examines customer perception toward Maruti Suzuki four-wheelers in Palakkad City, Kerala. A structured questionnaire was administered to 200 Maruti Suzuki car owners using convenience sampling. Statistical tools such as percentage analysis, mean score analysis, Chi-square test, correlation, and regression analysis were applied. Findings indicate that fuel efficiency, resale value, and service network accessibility are the most influential perception drivers. After-sales service quality significantly predicts customer loyalty ($R^2 = 0.62$). The study concludes with managerial implications for enhancing brand loyalty through improved service responsiveness and digital engagement.

Keywords: Customer Perception, Brand Loyalty, Service Quality, Automobile Industry, Maruti Suzuki

Introduction

The Indian automobile industry has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the national economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment generation, and technological advancement. Over the past two decades, rising disposable income, expanding urbanization, improved road infrastructure, and increasing aspirations of the middle class have stimulated demand for passenger vehicles. Within this highly competitive environment, understanding customer perception has become critical for automobile manufacturers seeking to sustain market leadership and build long-term customer relationships. Customer perception influences not only purchase decisions but also post-purchase satisfaction, word-of-mouth communication, and brand loyalty.

Maruti Suzuki India Limited occupies a dominant position in the Indian passenger car market, particularly in the small and mid-sized car segments. Since its inception, the company has developed a strong brand image built on affordability, fuel efficiency, low maintenance cost, and an extensive service network. These attributes have enabled Maruti Suzuki to capture a substantial market share across metropolitan cities as well as Tier-II and Tier-III towns. In regions like Kerala, where price sensitivity and fuel economy play important roles in consumer decision-making, Maruti Suzuki vehicles are widely preferred.

Customer perception in the automobile sector is multidimensional. It encompasses product-related factors such as design, safety features, performance, mileage, and resale value, as well as service-related dimensions including dealership experience, responsiveness, reliability, and transparency in after-sales service. Studies in the Indian automobile context suggest that after-sales service quality and dealership interaction significantly influence overall satisfaction and repurchase intention. Moreover, brand trust and perceived value for money often mediate the relationship between product attributes and loyalty outcomes.

Palakkad City, located in the state of Kerala, represents a growing urban center characterized by a mix of salaried professionals, business owners, and agricultural households. With increasing vehicle penetration and improved financial accessibility through loans and leasing options, the demand for passenger cars in Palakkad has witnessed steady growth. In such a market, analyzing customer perception toward a leading brand like Maruti Suzuki becomes essential for understanding local consumer behavior patterns and identifying opportunities for service and product enhancement.

Although several studies have examined customer satisfaction and brand perception in the Indian automobile industry at the national level, limited empirical research has focused specifically on district-level markets such as Palakkad. Local socio-economic conditions, cultural factors, and dealership performance can significantly influence perception patterns. Therefore, a region-specific empirical investigation provides valuable insights for managerial decision-making and strategic planning.

The present study aims to examine customer perception toward Maruti Suzuki four-wheelers in Palakkad City by analyzing demographic characteristics, key purchase determinants, satisfaction levels regarding product and service attributes, and the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty. By employing statistical tools such as percentage analysis, mean score analysis, correlation, and regression techniques, this research seeks to provide a structured understanding of how customers evaluate Maruti Suzuki vehicles and what factors most strongly influence their loyalty.

Understanding these perception dynamics is particularly important in an era where customers are increasingly informed, digitally connected, and comparison-oriented. As competition intensifies with the presence of brands such as Hyundai, Tata Motors, Toyota, and Kia, sustaining positive customer perception requires continuous improvement in product innovation, service excellence, and customer engagement strategies. Hence, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on consumer behavior in the automobile sector while offering practical implications for enhancing customer satisfaction and long-term brand loyalty in Palakkad City.

Review of Literature

Customer perception in the automobile industry has been widely examined in the context of product attributes, service quality, brand image, and loyalty outcomes. Numerous empirical studies indicate that consumer evaluation of automobile brands is shaped by a combination of tangible features such as mileage, safety, performance, and price, along with intangible aspects including brand trust, dealership interaction, and after-sales service quality. In the Indian market, where

competition is intense and consumer awareness is growing, perception plays a pivotal role in influencing purchase intention and repeat buying behavior.

Mittal, Deshmukh, and Kumar (2023), in their study on Maruti Suzuki consumers, found that brand perception significantly mediates the relationship between purchase decision and customer loyalty. Using structural equation modeling, the authors concluded that perceived reliability and value for money are the strongest contributors to repeat purchase intention. Similarly, Nayak and Gaikwad (2020) reported that fuel efficiency and maintenance cost remain dominant factors influencing buying behavior in the hatchback segment, where Maruti Suzuki holds a strong presence. Their empirical analysis demonstrated that middle-income consumers prioritize mileage and affordability over advanced technological features.

Service quality has been consistently identified as a major determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the automobile sector. Yadav and Joseph (2017) examined after-sales service quality in Indian automobile companies and observed that responsiveness, reliability, and assurance dimensions significantly affect overall satisfaction. The study emphasized that efficient grievance handling and timely service delivery enhance long-term customer retention. Supporting this view, Gulhane, Madankar, and Agashe (2019) found a strong positive correlation between perceived service quality and customer loyalty, indicating that service centers act as critical touchpoints influencing brand perception.

Vigneshwaran and Mathirajan (2021) proposed a theoretical framework linking service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in automobile after-sales service centers. Their findings suggest that satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between service quality and loyalty, reinforcing the importance of maintaining consistent service standards. Singh (2022), focusing specifically on Maruti Suzuki, reported high satisfaction levels among customers due to transparent billing practices, availability of spare parts, and trained service personnel, though improvements were suggested in personalization and follow-up communication.

Brand image and trust are also prominent themes in automobile perception studies. Choudhury and Mishra (2018) identified dealership reputation, brand credibility, and peer recommendations as significant factors influencing car selection. Their findings highlight that consumer trust reduces perceived risk in high-involvement purchases such as automobiles. Nag and Bhattacharjee (2022), comparing Maruti Suzuki and Tata Motors, observed that Maruti Suzuki enjoys superior perception in terms of resale value and service network reach, which strengthens its competitive advantage in semi-urban and rural markets.

Malhotra and Nandi (2012) examined consumer behavior in the small car segment and concluded that price sensitivity and fuel economy dominate decision-making in emerging markets like India. Their study emphasizes that value perception often outweighs premium branding in the mass market segment. Kumar (2018), analyzing the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in the vehicle industry, confirmed that satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the brand and exhibit repurchase behavior, thus reinforcing the strategic importance of maintaining positive customer perception.

Collectively, the literature indicates that customer perception toward automobile brands is influenced by a combination of product performance, economic value, service quality, and brand credibility. While national-level studies provide broad insights, region-specific investigations remain limited. Particularly in cities like Palakkad, where socio-economic and cultural factors may shape consumer expectations differently, empirical research is necessary to understand localized perception dynamics. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining customer perception toward Maruti Suzuki four-wheelers with specific reference to Palakkad City.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze demographic profile of Maruti Suzuki customers in Palakkad.
2. To identify key factors influencing customer perception.
3. To evaluate satisfaction level toward product and service.
4. To examine relationship between service quality and brand loyalty.
5. To offer suggestions for improvement.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine customer perception towards Maruti Suzuki four-wheelers in Palakkad City. The study is empirical in nature and is based primarily on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to Maruti Suzuki car owners residing in Palakkad. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility considerations, and a sample size of 150 respondents was selected to ensure adequate representation across different age groups, income levels, and occupations. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first section captured demographic information such as age, gender, education, occupation, and income, while the second section measured perception variables including product quality, price, fuel efficiency, brand image, after-sales service, resale value, and overall satisfaction using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Secondary data were collected from journals, company reports, websites, and previous research studies to support the theoretical framework. The collected data were coded and analyzed using statistical tools such as percentage analysis, mean score analysis, chi-square test, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between independent variables (product attributes, price perception, service quality, and brand image) and the dependent variable (overall customer satisfaction). Reliability of the scale was tested using Cronbach’s alpha to ensure internal consistency. The findings are presented in tables and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions regarding customer perception towards Maruti Suzuki vehicles in the study area.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	138	69%
	Female	62	31%
Age	Below 30	48	24%
	30–45	92	46%
	46–60	44	22%
	Above 60	16	8%
Income	Below 3L	36	18%
	3L–6L	84	42%
	6L–10L	56	28%
	Above 10L	24	12%

Source: Primary data

Table 2 Factors Influencing Purchase Decision (Mean Score)

Factor	Mean Score (5-point scale)	Rank
Fuel Efficiency	4.52	1
Resale Value	4.41	2
Service Network	4.38	3
Brand Image	4.21	4
Price Affordability	4.17	5
Safety Features	3.89	6
Interior Design	3.75	7

Source: Primary data

Table 3 Satisfaction Level Towards Product Attributes

Attribute	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean
Mileage	118	62	12	8	4.45
Comfort	96	74	18	12	4.21
Performance	88	82	20	10	4.18
Safety	64	86	34	16	3.94
Maintenance Cost	110	70	12	8	4.41
Safety Features	3.89	6			
Interior Design	3.75	7			

Source: Primary data

Table 4 Satisfaction Towards After-Sales Service

Dimension	Mean	Std. Dev
Responsiveness	4.32	0.64
Reliability	4.28	0.59
Assurance	4.19	0.71
Empathy	3.98	0.76
Tangibles	4.11	0.68

Source: Primary data

Table 5 Correlation between Service Quality and Brand Loyalty

Variable	Brand Loyalty (r-value)	Significance	Result
Service Quality	0.79	$p < 0.01$	Strong positive correlation exists.

Source: Primary data

Table 6 Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

Predictor	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Service Quality	0.62	12.45	0.000
Product Satisfaction	0.31	6.88	0.000
Brand Image	0.22	4.11	0.001

$R^2 = 0.62$

Model Significance: $F = 54.33$ ($p < 0.001$)

Interpretation: Service quality is the strongest predictor.

Table 7 Chi-Square Test (Income vs Satisfaction)

Value	Result	Interpretation
Chi-square	12.67	Significant relationship exists
df	6	
p-value	0.048	

Source: Primary data

Major Findings

1. Majority respondents are male (69%) aged 30–45.
2. Fuel efficiency and resale value are primary drivers.
3. Overall satisfaction level is high (Mean >4.0).
4. Strong correlation (0.79) between service quality and loyalty.
5. Regression confirms service quality as strongest predictor.
6. Income significantly influences satisfaction level.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Maruti Suzuki enjoys strong customer perception in Palakkad City, primarily due to mileage, resale value, and service network strength. After-sales service quality significantly influences brand loyalty. To maintain leadership, the company must focus on safety innovation, digital service integration, and personalized customer engagement strategies.

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