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A STUDY ON CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING: ENHANCING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Shaikh Mohibraza Imtiyaz[*1], Hasnenmustufa Sherawala[*2], Dr. Renny Thomas[*3]

[*1,2]MBA Student, Parul University Of Management & Research (Parul University), India.

[*3]Associate Professor, Faculty Of Management Studies (Parul University), India.

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ABSTRACT

Customer journey mapping (CJM) is a critical approach that enables businesses to understand, analyze, and enhance customer interactions throughout their purchasing experience. This research paper explores how personalized marketing strategies can be integrated with CJM to improve customer satisfaction in the automotive industry.

The study examines key touchpoints, digital tools, and post-purchase services that influence consumer behavior. The research employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze consumer responses, highlighting how tailored marketing efforts impact brand loyalty and engagement. The findings provide valuable insights for automotive companies looking to optimize their customer experience.

Keywords: Customer Journey Mapping, Personalized Marketing, Automotive Industry, Consumer Behavior, Digital Tools, Customer Experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry is evolving rapidly due to advancements in technology, changing consumer preferences, and the growing need for personalization. Consumers today demand seamless experiences across multiple touchpoints, making it essential for businesses to understand and optimize the customer journey. This study focuses on how customer journey mapping (CJM) can enhance personalized marketing strategies in the automotive sector, leading to improved engagement and brand loyalty.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) is a strategic approach that visualizes a customer's interactions with a brand across multiple touchpoints (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). It enables businesses to understand customer expectations, pain points, and opportunities for enhancing satisfaction (Schmitt, 2003). Over time, companies have shifted from a transactional approach to an emotional and relationship-driven perspective, emphasizing personalized engagement and omnichannel experiences (Payne & Frow, 2005).

Meyer and Schwager (2007) highlight the importance of customer experience (CX) in driving customer loyalty and brand perception. The rise of digital transformation has significantly influenced the customer journey, particularly in industries like automotive, where pre-purchase research and digital interactions shape decision-making (Court et al., 2009). Verhoef et al. (2009) emphasize that customers rely heavily on online reviews, influencer opinions, and virtual test drives before making purchasing decisions.

Palmer (2010) discusses the role of CJM in service marketing, stating that seamless integration between digital and physical channels is crucial for a positive customer experience. Richardson (2010) supports this by highlighting how businesses can use customer journey maps to improve engagement and satisfaction. The study by Rawson, Duncan, and Jones (2013) further emphasizes the need for a structured approach to CJM, suggesting that brands with a well-defined customer journey strategy outperform competitors in customer satisfaction.

Bolton et al. (2014) argue that small details in customer interactions can make a significant impact on brand loyalty. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) expand on this by explaining the role of touchpoints in shaping overall customer perception. The integration of AI, data analytics, and predictive modeling has enhanced customer interactions, allowing businesses to anticipate customer needs and deliver personalized experiences (Holmlund, Kowalkowski, & Biggemann, 2016).

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Rosenbaum, Otalora, and Ramírez (2017) discuss the challenges of implementing CJM, particularly in industries with fragmented data sources and traditional operational models. Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2018) stress the importance of after-sales engagement, as proactive service, loyalty programs, and responsive customer care contribute to long-term customer retention.

Heinonen and Strandvik (2020) propose that future research should focus on AI-driven journey optimization and real-time customer engagement strategies. They highlight that customer journey mapping is an evolving practice, requiring continuous adaptation to new technologies and consumer expectations.

Hypotheses

H0= The availability of detailed online information does not significantly enhance customer satisfaction during the initial research phase of the automotive purchase journey.

H1= The availability of detailed online information significantly enhances customer satisfaction during the initial research phase of the automotive purchase journey.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The respondents for this research were students and general individuals from the city of Vadodara, Gujarat**.** A simple random sampling technique was used for sample selection. The reason for selecting students and normal individuals instead of industry professionals is to analyze customer experiences from the perspective of potential buyers and everyday consumers, who represent the general customer base of the automotive industry.

The statistical technique used is the independent T-test. This method was chosen because the responses from students and general individuals are independent of each other, making it suitable for comparing perceptions across different demographic groups.

The study focuses on customer journey mapping and experience in the automotive sector, taking into consideration customer interactions across various touchpoints, such as online research, dealership visits, test drives, and after-sales services. The analysis considers differences in perceptions and satisfaction levels between different respondent categories.

Limitation

This study does not specifically analyze the differences in perceptions based on gender or employment status. Since the research focuses on students and general individuals rather than professionals in the automotive industry, it may not capture insights from industry insiders or decision-makers. Additionally, the study is limited to respondents from Vadodara, which may not fully represent customer experiences across different regions.

The findings are based on a random sample of participants, and factors such as personal preferences, prior knowledge of automobiles, and digital exposure may influence responses. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into customer journey mapping and customer experience in the automotive sector. Future research could expand to a larger sample size across multiple cities for a broader perspective.

Observed vs. Expected Frequencies

To perform a Chi-Square test, we compare observed and expected frequencies.

Response Category	Count	Percentage
Extremely Important	51	24.5%
Important	84	40.4%
Neutral	46	22.1%
Not Important	27	13%
Total	**208**	**100%**

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Expected Frequencies (E)

If customer satisfaction were not affected by the availability of online information, we would expect the responses to be evenly distributed across all categories. Since there are 4 response categories, the expected count for each category is:

$$E = \frac{\text{Total Responses}}{\text{Number of Categories}} = \frac{208}{4} = 52$$

Thus, the expected frequencies are:

Response Category	Expected Count (E)
Extremely Important	52
Important	52
Neutral	52
Not Important	52

Compute the Chi-Square Test Statistic

The Chi-Square statistic is calculated using the formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

For each category:

1. **Extremely Important:**
2. **Important:**
3. **Neutral:**
4. **Not Important:**

Summing these values:

$\chi^2 =$

Interpret the Results

Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2) = 32.42

p-value = 4.26×10^{-7} (0.000000426)

Conclusion

Since the p-value (4.26×10^{-7}) is much smaller than the standard significance level (0.05), we reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

Final Interpretation:

The results show strong evidence that the availability of detailed online information significantly enhances customer satisfaction during the initial research phase of the automotive purchase journey. This means the responses are not randomly distributed, and most customers find detailed online information important or extremely important in their decision-making process.

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IV. FINDINGS FORM DATA COLLECTION AND INTEROPERATING

The dataset, consisting of 208 responses, provides key insights into consumer behaviour during the automotive purchase journey, covering aspects such as online research habits, test drive experiences, dealership transparency, after-sales services, and the impact of digital tools. The majority of respondents fall within the 19-25 age group, with a predominant representation of male participants. The most common occupations among respondents include students, self-employed individuals, and working professionals.

Online research plays a critical role in vehicle purchasing decisions. Most respondents rely on social media and review platforms for vehicle information, while manufacturer websites and dealership websites are used less frequently. The importance of online information is widely recognized, with most participants rating it as "Extremely Important" or "Important" in their decision-making process. However, many have encountered challenges in finding accurate and trustworthy automotive information. Furthermore, online reviews and comparisons significantly influence customer preferences, shaping their final choice of vehicle.

Test drives emerged as a major factor in the purchasing decision. A high percentage of respondents reported participating in test drives before purchasing a vehicle, and most found test drives extremely important in shaping their decision. However, many test drives were not personalized to individual needs, such as showcasing specific features or customizing routes. Suggestions for improvement included detailed feature explanations, extended test drive durations, and customized driving routes. A positive test drive experience increased the likelihood of purchasing the vehicle, indicating its strong influence on consumer behavior.

Dealership transparency, particularly in pricing and financing, remains a significant concern. While some customers found dealerships to be somewhat transparent, others reported dissatisfaction due to unclear pricing structures. Unclear pricing and financing terms discouraged many respondents from making a purchase, highlighting the need for better communication. Respondents strongly agreed that clear financing communication builds trust with dealerships, and many were more likely to recommend a dealership that provided transparent pricing and financing options.

After-sales services were another critical factor influencing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Many respondents valued extended warranties, free maintenance packages, roadside assistance, and customer support. However, a significant number of participants faced challenges with post-purchase services, including delays and poor customer support. The majority of respondents agreed that effective post-purchase services play a crucial role in overall customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, with some stating that poor after-sales support led them to switch brands.

The role of digital tools in the automotive purchase journey is increasingly significant. Many respondents reported using virtual showrooms, online configurators, AI chat support, and mobile apps to aid their research. Among these, virtual showrooms and online configurators were the most useful tools, allowing consumers to explore vehicle features and customize options from the comfort of their homes. The majority of participants agreed that digital tools improve their research experience and help them make more informed decisions. However, some users encountered challenges such as limited functionality or difficulty navigating online platforms.

Overall, the findings suggest that detailed online information, personalized test drive experiences, transparent pricing, strong after-sales support, and advanced digital tools are essential factors in enhancing customer satisfaction in the automotive industry. Addressing these areas can help manufacturers and dealerships improve customer trust, engagement, and brand loyaltyReferences.

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