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Role of Sales Consultants in Car Showrooms being the backbone of the Car Industry in India

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ABSTRACT

Selling a car in the Indian market is not a piece of cake. Every customer is unique and their expectations are unique, such that it is the duty of the seller to convince every customer, such that they would achieve satisfaction at both ends. India is a market of many brands, right from the middle-class people's favorite Maruti Suzuki to luxury vehicles such as Audi, BMW and many more. Selling a car is not just with the technical part, satisfying the customer not just with the aspects of vehicle, it is also with the behavior of the seller and his approach towards the customers. In this article, certain aspects of sale of cars have been discussed in both the customers end and also in the seller's end. This article will throw light on the non-technical sales aspects.

Keywords: Car; market; customer

1.0 Introduction

Cars have become an integral part of life, being used both in industrial and household. People prefer travelling in cars than shared public transportation. This is because of extended comfort that the passenger gets during the travel. This has forced several brands to sell their cars in India and the trend of India in the sale of cars is unique compared with others. The quantity sale of cars in India is as shown in Table 01.

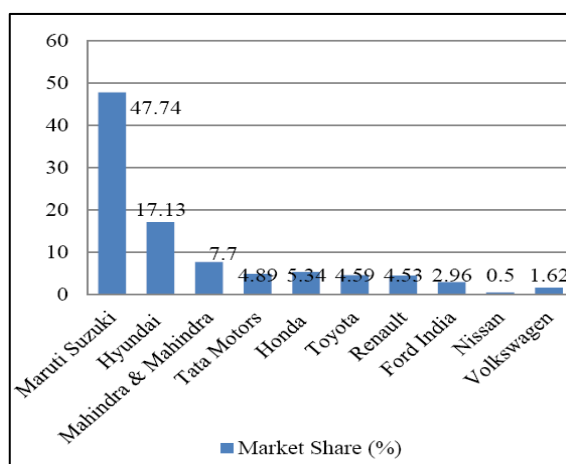
Sale of cars is not just with the way the car operates. It may have interesting features, luxurious outfits, but above all the responsibility of the seller is of prime importance. Major factors that affect the decision of a customer in choosing a particular brand are as prioritized.

1. Budget of the customer (Financial Status)
2. Behavior of the customer advisor/Sales Consultant
3. Aesthetics of the vehicle.
4. Features of the vehicle.

Table 1: Total Quantity of Cars Sold (Top Brands) in India [1],[2],[3]

	Brand	2017	2016	2015
1	Maruti Suzuki	16,02,522	13,94,972	12,89,128
2	Hyundai	5,27,320	5,00,534	4,76,001
3	Mahindra & Mahindra	2,42,365	2,25,345	2,05,427
4	Tata Motors	1,91,107	1,42,962	1,38,245
5	Honda	1,78,755	1,56,107	2,02,390
6	Toyota	1,39,566	1,34,150	1,39,815
7	Renault	1,12,492	1,32,235	53,419
8	Ford India	87,587	86,490	77,809
9	Nissan	53,390	14,725	15,457
10	Volkswagen	47,796	47,323	43,152

Fig 1: Market Share of Leading Car Brands in India [3]



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This article suggests measures that could possibly improve the sales of cars from the sellers' end. Measures and guidelines have been suggested to approach customers and to create an environment of mutual satisfaction

2.0 Customer Attraction and Retention

As mentioned in the previous section, customers are mainly attracted to a car showroom based on their budget and decide to make a deal only based on the behavior of the attending sales consultants. Maruti Suzuki has attracted many customers because their vehicle suits the needs of majority middle class people.

On the other end, in terms of business, every car dealer longs to improve his sales in his showroom by some way. So there has to be a situation achieved that would not put the proprietor of the showroom to a loss as well as to satisfy the customer, and this is achieved only because of the sales consultants. Sales Consultants are the only professionals who directly engage the vehicle with the approaching customers.

Customers who enter a showroom are of the three types:

- 1 Customers who have decided only the brand (Eg. Only Volkswagen) [C1]
- 2 Customers who have decided the brand and the vehicle (Eg. Volkswagen and Passat) [C2]
- 3 Customer who have neither decided their brand nor their vehicle but have only fixed the budget. [C3]

2.2 C1 customers

For customers who have decided the brand, it is the duty of the sales consultant to introduce various cars that the dealer sells and the sales consultant must be capable of suggesting a vehicle that could possibly satisfy the customer. The following guidelines are suggested while attending such customers.

- 1 Sales consultants are very good orators and will definitely have very good convincing skills. But this case is slightly different. While attending C1 customers, sales consultant should be good listeners too. This is because the brand has attracted the customer in some way.
- 2 It is very important that the sales consultant observes the customer. The customer may be an automobile engineer (who knows technical

details) or he could be farmer who does not know much about the vehicle. After proper observation and enquiry, the sales consultant must explain about the car in a way that pleases the customer. For example, the automobile engineer will not be pleased to hear about the technical stuff as he would have gained knowledge on it, but the farmer has to be explained about the facilities that the vehicles have to a greater extent

- 3 The sales consultant must not try to win the conversation with such customers. The sales consultant must make the customer feel that, when this particular car is chosen, it will satisfy the needs of the customer.
- 4 It is important that when comparing the variants of cars in the showroom, the sales consultant does not project the negatives of one car over the other. For example, the sales consultant must not project that Nissan Car X will be more energy efficient than Nissan Car Y. Customer may get a negative impression on the variant, and in future, if the customer's friend or colleague is interested in such a variant, the customer may portray it in a negative way, which itself spreads a negative word.
- 5 Sales consultants must be specific to what they want. If mileage is customer's main concern and if that is evident in customer's words, then the sales consultant must throw some light on what the customers want. Customers will get satisfied only when what they expected has been fulfilled. Speaking words after words on something that the customers feel that it is not important to him is a waste of time.
- 6 Such customers who have chosen their brand often get attracted to additional features than additional discounts. But this also has some exceptions. A sales consultant in a Volkswagen showroom selling a Volkswagen Passat must concentrate in satisfying the customer with additional features than additional discounts. Whereas a customer in a Maruti Suzuki will be attracted towards additional discounts. This is because of the majority of the middle class Indians prefer Maruti Suzuki owing to the point that it has a variety of cars in almost all ranges.
- 7 Sales consultants attending such customers must be polite. This is because; one harsh word or one procrastinating event in the showroom will make

a negative impression of the entire brand that the customer has chosen. For example, If the customer wants to buy specifically a Honda car, then it is understood that the customer has some sort of trust towards the brand. If the sales consultant is not good enough to handle the customer, it is a complete failure.

- 8 During test drive of the car for C1 customers, it is suggested for the sales consultant to drive the vehicle for a few minutes, explain everything about the brand features and then let the customer drive the vehicle. The customer may be an average driver, and he may not experience the fullness of the car. Sales consultants must impress such customers with a smooth drive and not with a harsh one.
- 9 Sales consultants must not rush to C1 customers for advance payment and booking. The customer has already chosen the brand. If the customer is satisfied in choosing the car, the person will definitely book the car. Too much of follow-up on C1 customers to book the vehicle will create an impression that the dealer is money minded? Sales consultants must learn to give plenty of time to C1 customers.
- 10 The sole duty of the sales consultant while attending C1 customers is to retain the customer with the brand and to allow the customer to choose the vehicle.

2.2 C2 customers

C2 customers are the trickiest ones. They know what they want. They would have done a review of various cars and would have fixed the car as their dream one. Here are a few guidelines for sales consultants to attend such customers.

- 1 When a C2 Customer enters a showroom, the customer will definitely point to what he wants. If the sales consultant identifies that the customer is of C2 Category, the sales consultant must explain the car directly. The sales consultant must not utter any word about other variants of cars of the same brand unless the customer asks to do so.
- 2 The sales consultant must keep in mind that the customer has sufficient knowledge of the car. If the sales consultant is able to identify that the customer lacks knowledge in any of the feature of the car, the sales consultant must explain, to a greater extent, that particular feature.

3 Customers of C2 Category are attracted toward more of discounts than more of additional feature. This is contrary to C1 Customers. Sales consultants attending such customers must be prepared towards discounts to attract and retain the customer.

4 C2 Customers will generally be prepared and the sales consultant's role will be more of answering the questions of the customer than explaining the feature. It is suggested to the dealer that a suitable sales consultant is appointed to attend such customers. Car specific sales consultants must be appointed.

5 Sales consultant must be very fast in processing for such customers. Additional features must be added to the car only after the customer's approval and full satisfaction. Dealers must also not remove certain inevitable accessories, in giving huge discounts. This will give a negative impression on the customer and will not refer the car to anyone else with that particular dealer.

6 Any dissatisfaction to the customer created through the behavior of sales consultant will affect the impression of dealer in case of C2 customers. These customers know the potential of the brand as well as the car. So the dissatisfaction will be purely an act of the sales consultant. If the customer moves to a different dealer or is not satisfied, then the sales consultant must be upgraded for good communication skills and interpersonal skills. The caliber of a sales consultant can be evaluated based on the number of C2 customers he satisfies.

7 During test drive of the car, C2 customers must be first allowed to drive the vehicle. This is just the opposite of C1 customers. C2 customer will be excited about the vehicle. They will long to have that car of their own. In such cases they would have already travelled in that car or would have driven it from someone else. Hence C2 customers must be allowed to drive for a few minutes and after that the sales consultants may take over to explain the features.

8 During test drive for C2 customers, the sales consultants must explain the customers only what is important and must not spend time in explaining less important things. Sales consultants must avoid speeches on engineering of the vehicles. They must concentrate in

explaining the operative elements in the vehicles.

For example, when a TATA Hexa is taken out for a test drive for a C2 customer, it is suggested that the sales consultant explains about the sport interior design, indulgent seats, ambient mood lightings, and intuitive utility spaces and must avoid talking about alloy wheels, smoked projected head lamps, Dynamic floating roof and wraparound chrome feature lines. The latter features must be explained inside the showroom. Talking about features that are in the exterior of the vehicle than the interior features will lessen the excitement of C2 customers.

- 9 When attending C2 customers, it is important that the sales consultant encourages the customer to buy the car, projecting it to be the customer's dream car. Customers will get attached to the sales consultant if certain points are dealt emotionally. Emotional attachment between the sales consultant and the customer will achieve a long lasting relationship between the customer and the dealer. But sales consultants must stick to limits and must not go into personal aspects of the customers.

2.2 C3 Customers

Handling C3 customers are quite easy comparatively. C3 customers have no choice of what they want and it is the sole responsibility of the sales consultant to retain the customer.

- 1 C3 customers will have lesser knowledge about the car. They will have only minimum knowledge on the trends and will ask a number of questions. Hence the sales consultant who is attending C3 customers will have to be prepared to answer a lot of questions.
- 2 Sales consultants attending C3 customers must first try to retain the customer with the brand. Since the customer has not decided the brand, it is of prime importance that the sales consultant first registers a good impression of the brand with the customer. For example, C3 customers will have an oscillating thought, between Nissan and Skoda, they will have in mind to visit both showrooms. So it is the duty of the sales consultant to not let the customer lose interest in the brand.
- 3 Sales consultants attending C3 customers must introduce the brand before introducing the cars. They must compare their brand with other

brands and must project the positives of their brands. Retaining C3 customers mainly depends upon the communication skills of the sales consultant.

- 4 After comparing various brands, the sales consultant must observe the customer and must also enquire about the financial status of the customer in a very polite manner. This is because to suggest a suitable variant of car to the customer. Customers will lose interest if a car is suggested beyond their financial limits. Hence financial analysis of the customer is very important and this must be done in a very polite manner as some customer may not be open-minded.
- 5 The following protocol is suggested for C3 customers.
 - Welcome the walk-in customer with a brand motive. (For example, welcome them with a cheer tag "Welcome to Tata Motors, and we are happy to have you"). Greet them with a welcome drink or snacks.
 - Sales consultant has to speak with the customer for 5 -10 minutes and must categorize the customer to be C1, C2, and C3. If identified to be C3, then the sales consultant must thoroughly observe the customer and must guess the taste of the customer and must make a mind-map of the cars that will suit the customer. This is an internal examination that has to be done by the sales consultant and must not reveal the information with the customer.
 - The sales consultant must explain in brief about all the cars that the brand sells and must explain only about the positives of each variant. The sales consultant must not compare one car over the other (quoting negatives). Volkswagen has launched its first digital showroom in India in Coimbatore on August 07, 2017 with start-of-the art technologies. Such digital explanations to customers will attract more of C3 category.
 - The customer will immediately respond or show interest in a particular car and will ask a few questions about the car. The customer may feel that the particular car will suit their needs. In such a case, sales consultant must act as per the wish of the customer and must explain about the features of the car to a greater extent. During this stage, the sales consultant must not indulge into business making activities like recommending a

high version of the car, or adding extra features to it. This is because; C3 customers are very vulnerable to decision changing. If C3 customers feel that the dealer is more of money-making then it is a loss.

- If the customers are confused in making a decision, then the sales consultants must recommend a car that will suit both the financial aspects as well as the choice of the customer. However, the choice of color of the car must be made by the customer and it is suggested that the sales consultant do not make choices over colors.
 - After the customer is satisfied with the decision, the sales consultant may request the customer for a test drive and in doing so, the sales consultant has to drive the vehicle first (This is similar to C1 customers).
 - During test drive for C3 customer, it is suggested to drive the vehicle in roads where the traffic is bit low. This is because, C3 customer will have some oscillation in the decision that they have made and the drive must be made in a serene environment that the customer's mind works in such a way that it validates the decision. Strictly no music during test drives.
 - After the test drive, if the customer is satisfied the sales consultant may proceed for the payment options. If the customer is not satisfied, then immediately another variant of car has to be suggested and the procedure has to be repeated.
 - When C3 customer is not satisfied with the car, after test drive, then the sales consultant may enquire what was uncomfortable for the customer and the points that the customer suggests must be taken into account in recommending another car.
1. This protocol is nothing but the process of converting a C3 customer to a C1 customer. But during this process, if customer feels that the process is more of money-making, then the sales consultant who had attended the customer has to be better trained for polite business making.

4.0 Healthy Habits of Sales Consultants

Certain habits of sales consultants will attract customers and will drive the customer to book car with the dealer. It is necessary that the dealer appoints the right person in sales.

- 1 Sales consultants have to be adaptable to customers. Each customer will be of his/her own unique character and sales consultant must be patient enough to accommodate the negatives of a customer's character. Some customers may be short tempered. Some customers may not speak well. Some customers may fight. Some customers may not like open minded sales consultants. Hence, sales consultants must be ready to accept whatever situation occurs and must try to explain the customer with patience and a smile.
- 2 Customers dislike money-minded sales consultants. Sales consultants do have targets. They will have to achieve the targets within the stipulated time. It is suggested that the sales consultant keeps this part behind the screen. Customer satisfaction should be the primary concern of the sales consultant. One customer satisfied will recommend the sales consultant too many more customers and this is how business should take off.
- 3 Sales consultants must be punctual. If a customer has requested the consultant for a test drive at the customer's place, it is the responsibility of the sales consultant to arrive on time. Customers will find the test drive attractive only when they are happy minded. Sales consultants who arrive late for test drive probably lose the customer. Sales consultants will have to plan their travel to the customer's place using modernized applications like Google Maps, Google Navigations systems.
- 4 Sales consultants must not fake a specification and must remain honest regarding the product. Sales consultants must keep in mind that he himself is a customer for a different product. Sales consultants must remember that it is important that they remain loyal to the job.
- 5 Sales consultant must never discuss about the religious views, political views of the customer. If the comments of the sales consultant are against the views of the customer, then this will create a friction between the sales consultant and the customer.
- 6 Sales consultant must not talk about their salary or incentives to the customer. Even if the customer enquires about such details, the sales consultant may avoid answering diplomatically.

- 7 Sales consultants must talk to the customer in the language that is comfortable to the customer. Sales consultants may prefer to explain in regional languages than English. If the customer does not understand the regional language or if the customer's background is more of English speaking, then the sales consultant may explain in English.
- 8 If a customer requests test drive at a time when the sales consultant is not available, then the sales consultant must substitute another sales consultant for the test drive and must not indulge into convincing the customer for another appointment time. Satisfaction of the customer is very important more than achieving self-target goals.
- 9 Sales consultant must not expose any details about the total sales of the dealer showroom, the variant which is fast moving in terms of sales or which is slow moving in terms of sale.

5.0 Recommendations for the Administration of Car Dealer Showrooms

Car dealers strive to achieve a situation of maximum profit and maximum customer satisfaction. To achieve such a scenario, the following measures are suggested:

- 1 During service of the vehicle, it is suggested that the sales consultant who sold the car introduces the customer to the service section and creates a channel of trust between the customer and the service section. The service advisors and service engineers of the showroom have to remain in a long term relationship with the customer. Hence it will be even more effective that the sales consultant who sold the car to the customer introduces the customer to the service section.
- 2 When displaying various cars in the showroom, it is suggested to display slow selling cars in the one end of the glass display and fast selling cars in the other when the showroom is facing the road. Never place any car at a point it is less visible to people who travel in the road. It is a kind of visual marketing to attract people towards the showroom.
- 3 Comfort of the customer is very important inside the showroom. It is suggested that customers are made to sit in comfortable chairs inside the showroom, when talking to sales consultant.

Sales consultants must not use their mobile phones while attending customers. Care must be taken by the administration that the customer feels comfortable inside the showroom.

- 4 Place charts or boards that contain offers of the car before the car. Never place price boards before the car in display. Prices have to be explained only by the attending sales consultant. People who travel on the road who cross the display will get attracted to the hefty discount and may make a visit inside. Whereas, when the showroom places the price boards before the car in display, it may not be that attractive comparatively.
- 5 The administration must also show interest in the welfare of the sales consultants. Sales consultants are dynamic people who will have to convince customers in the showroom, travel from end to end for test drives, spend time with accounts and planning. Hence the administrative must conduct activities that will reduce the stress of sales consultants. Get-togethers, Team picnics can be arranged periodically for sales consultants that will reduce their work stress. Sales consultants are the backbone of the showroom and the way the administration treats the sales consultant reflect the total sales of the dealer.
- 6 An innovative measure can be adopted. During delivery of a car to a particular family, a name board can be placed at the showroom entry stating that this family will be delivered with this variant of car today. A welcome note can be placed for the family. This will create a trust among new customers. For example, on the delivery day, a greeting board can be placed like "We welcome Mr & Mrs Rajesh to drive home their new Volkswagen GTI. Happy Driving!"

6.0 Conclusions

This article discusses about the importance of sales consultant in a car showroom. Though engineering may reach its heights of innovation, it is each one of the sales consultant of the car showroom who makes the customers buy the products. Sales consultants skip food, skip personal commitments, and skip family just for sake of satisfying customers. They travel long; spend most time in test drives and to match the needs of the customer.

It is requested to customers not to be harsh with any sales consultant as it will seriously hurt the person and will discourage the person to do sales. Being in sales is more of social than more of professional. This article deeply insists that only through certain behavioral techniques of sales consultants, the total sales of the showroom can be improved. Hence the suggested measures can be practically implemented in car showrooms.

Acknowledgement

The authors dedicate this article to all sales consultants in car showroom who work day and night for the benefit of customers. It is through these sales consultants that the entire car industry in India is sustaining. Sales consultants may take pride that they are the backbone of an entire industry.

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