

A study of cross cultural marketing strategies in the Automobile industry

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Nature of automobile sector needs bigger, specific and focused domain and approach to survive and grow in this era of Globalization where every company has dream to expand their business activities in different geographies and cultural territories extending not in host country but throughout the world. Cross-culture marketing can be termed as marketing activities or strategies carried out by companies in two or more different cultural environments which place a strong emphasis on managing people with disparate cultural backgrounds in order to complete a deal. In case of automobile players it becomes essential to create organizational structures and management techniques for cross-cultural marketing that are based on various cultural atmospheric conditions. By doing this, they can enhance their cross-cultural marketing potential and better placed in competitive environment. Cultural barriers are a significant factor in the various obstacles that businesses experience in this process. In order to create effective marketing strategies, businesses must comprehend the culture of the new market and the aspects of it. The cultural factors that influence the automobile industry have been discussed in this article which investigates whether automobile companies should follow a localization or global standards approach while undertaking transactional activities in light of economic globalization to attract consumers, establish consumer's satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: automobile, advertisement, cross-culture, cultural difference, cultural essence, marketing strategies, globalization,

1. Introduction

Geographically India is seventh largest country in the world with total area 1,269,210 Square Miles and full of diversity. This diversity is not limited, but spread in every filed, whether it be environmental, cultural, linguistic, topographical or others. India is not just a country but a continent in itself. It has influences of adjoining nations which share cultural, environmental, linguistic and topographical diversity with this country. Test of people in Indian subcontinent changes as diversity, north India has different test, while south India has different test, people of east India prefer different test while west India has different test. Automobile industry has to cover Indian diversity if it eyes to encash the abounded opportunity. As per the geographic and population size India, in itself has great potential for auto sector and global scenario of fast growing economy and demand of reliable, cheap, featured and durable product globally is surging day by day. Globalization and open global market has played important role in boosting automobile industry globally. Nature of automobile sector needs bigger, specific and focused domain and approach to survive and grow in this era of Globalization where every company has dream to expand their business activities in different geographies and cultural territories extending not in host country but throughout the world. As per IBEF report production in automobile industry was 2,84,34,742 units in financial year 2024. And this sector is growing with rapid pace, due to arrival of green fuels and alternative fuels like CNG, Hydrogen, EV and others new innovations. Engineering is getting better day by day, technology is advancing day by day and new markets and opportunities are opening simultaneously as economy is also growing day by day. Through alliances, acquisitions, and mergers, established businesses are surviving and being joined by new ones. A worldwide marketplace is emerging from the global community (Terpstra & Sarathy, 2000), global opportunity is opening trade and export potential in automobile sector, as India has emerged as one of the major global player in automobile sector and automobile exporter. The process of globalization has compelled business to advance in sophistication since open market has provided competitive market and selection opportunity to consumers. In competitive environment, companies have to maintain quality of their product, limit their prices, strengthen their supply chain, improve their after sale services and increase their production for ready availability. In such global competitive environment local and multinational companies are managing and strengthening their management to minimise the cost of production, increase the reach to the customers and optimise their capacity. A third of trade occurs within businesses; Toyota, for instance, ships auto parts from Japan to the USA for final assembly. For many businesses, outsourcing is also becoming a popular option. Companies operate beyond national borders and cultural contexts. Cultural differences present obstacles for organizations operating in new markets and diversity of Indian subcontinent is full of cultural obstacles, in such situation companies has to make their marketing strategy as per the cultural essence of that part. Businesses focus increasingly on cultural elements when defining their marketing strategy, such as language, religion, social conventions and values, education, and way of life (Justyna Dabrowska, 2008). The term "cross-culture marketing" refers to marketing tactics or activities implemented by businesses in two or more cultural contexts that emphasize managing individuals from different cultural backgrounds in order to close a sale. For automobile players, developing cross-cultural marketing organizational structures and management strategies based on diverse cultural atmospheric conditions becomes crucial. They will be in a more competitive environment and be able to maximize their cross-cultural marketing potential by doing this. One of the main causes of the several challenges that firms face during this process is cultural boundaries. Businesses need to understand the elements of the new market and its culture in order to develop marketing strategies that work. Cultural influences are present everywhere, from marketing to product design. Another crucial component of marketing strategy that is greatly impacted by culture is advertising (Mooij, 2010). This study will examine why cross-cultural marketing strategy is essential for automobile industries to thrive in Indian subcontinent to tackle cultural factors influence them. Cultural differences provide a variety of commercial issues, and this study aims to identify strategies that organizations can employ to successfully navigate these obstacles and run their operations. The cultural factors that influence the automobile industry have been discussed in this article which investigates whether automobile companies should follow a localization or global standards approach while undertaking transactional activities in light of economic globalization to attract consumers, establish consumer's satisfaction and loyalty.

Literature review

In global competitive automobile market, if companies want to be in race, then they have to be well aware of the importance of cross-cultural marketing and they have to formulate their marketing strategy according to the influential factors governing. According to Berry (1980), a marketing research project is considered cross-cultural if it is carried out among different countries or cultural groupings, as opposed to different regions or ethnic groups. These requirements are a perfect fit for the diverse Indian environment. Its 28 states differ from one another in terms of ethics, topography, language, culture, and the environment. That's why this study can be classified as cross-cultural research under other headings such as "international marketing research" (research on global issues), "foreign research" (research carried out in a nation other than the one where the research commissioning organization is located), or "multinational research" (research carried out in all or most of the major nations where the company is represented). Despite the fact that these ideas can sometimes be distinguished precisely (e.g. Terpstra and Sarathy, 1990). In academic circles, cross-cultural research has become increasingly popular in specialized and international business publications. In terms of business, the United States spends just 39% of global marketing research dollars. In Western Europe, about 40% of all marketing research is done, and in Japan, only 9%. Germany, the UK, France, Italy, and Spain are the countries in Europe where the majority of research is conducted (Demby, 1990). India has rapidly adopted the environment and focus is being shifted upon more precised researched operations. Marketing research has taken on a really multinational character as a result of market globalization, and this tendency is probably here to stay (e.g. Malhotra et al., 1994). Boddewyn (1981), for instance, bemoaned the fact that research designs created in the United States were imported into other countries without the necessary adaptations. In their study of country-of-origin (COO) studies, Bilkey and Ness (1982) noted a number of methodological issues that beset this line of inquiry. Consequences of not paying heed to the cross-cultural essence can be seen in the case of Ford motors operation failure in India. The company has failed to understand cultural influence of Indian market. In spite of being good and reputed product it miserably failed in Indian market. Ford employs a global strategy and standardized product line, but it developed the "Ford Ikon" exclusively for Indian consumers in an effort to forge an emotional connection. Ford motors started its operation in Indian automobile market in year 1995 with Rs.1700 Crore, but eventually bind up its business in year 2021 owing poor sales resulting in a loss of \$2 billion. [<https://auto.hindustantimes.com>] Situation in case of Kia Motors is just opposite. As company started its operation in year 2019 and reached domestic sales of 1 million units within 59 months of its entry in Indian market. [<https://www.businessstoday.in>] Korean company researched Indian market, evaluated cross-cultural influence of Indian subcontinent and tested success in very short span of time.

Achieving comparability can be made much more difficult if one is unfamiliar with the environments and cultures of the nations where the research is being undertaken. One way to achieve comparability is to demonstrate the equivalency of psychological concepts and data across cultural groups, or to accept universals from other disciplines. It is possible to use universals from anthropology, sociology, languages, or biology to develop such dimensional identification. For instance, a list of basic biological needs, a list of shared cultural elements (myth, language, etc.) from anthropology, and a list of necessary conditions for social interaction (such role distinction) from sociology could all be adopted as universals (Lonner and Triandis, 1980). The establishment and maintenance of successful business relationships and interactions between organizations and their consumers are influenced by a variety of forces and elements that make up the marketing environment (Kotler, 1991). Young marketer and entrepreneur Ragulan (2010) states that “if the business targets a range of audience from several locations, a cultural analysis needs to be done when starting a business”. Businesses must focus more on comprehending the cultural context in order to align the marketing mix with customer preferences. In the automobile sector, cross-cultural influences are more difficult to manage and anthropologically, market behaviors are culturally restricted (Donald Bradley, 2005). In their year 2000 article, Ian and Jamie discussed mergers and acquisitions as a component of a cross-cultural corporate strategy to comprehend local clients. They discussed buyer-supplier relationships, partnerships, and cross-cultural joint ventures as strategies for adjusting to a new culture. When companies, plan their marketing strategy, it’s important to focus on cultural differences between their target markets, e.g. same strategy cannot be applied to cultural segments of Purvanchal regions and cultural segments of North-East regions, if companies wants to cover Indian market. To reduce production costs, the biggest automakers in the world keep investing in manufacturing sites in developing economies. Prior to this, US manufacturers had formed strategic commercial alliances with Japanese and European automakers. Global rivalry has intensified as a result of industry mergers (BERA, 2004). Frank Gunnemann (2005) expounded on the influence of culture on the automotive sector. He focused on the cultural differences in attitudes, perceptions, and values among Asian, American, and European consumers. He claimed that as technology advances, conventional marketing techniques are becoming less effective. Frank claims that the most efficient approach to effectively communicate with a target demographic is through suitable product placement. Many firms launch cars that are specifically designed for a country in order to avoid cultural differences. Companies have used a variety of marketing techniques to address cultural differences. For example, they have advertised BMW, Jaguar, Aston Martin, and other brands in movies (participatory advertisements like the James Bond series). (Ian & Jamie, 2000); customer attachment through special occasions (such as Independence Day, the Jubilee Celebration, etc.); and mergers and acquisitions are more effective in certain nations in understanding consumer preferences (Thomas Glemser, 2011). Researchers discovered that linguistic differences can necessitate changing brand names and taglines. Ford’s affordable truck was promoted as Fiera to Spanish-speaking consumers, but the word meant “ugly old woman” in the language (Ian and Jamie, 2000) which presented a significant challenge for the marketer. Researchers claim that while German automobiles are known for their superior engineering, in order to successfully sell their products in these developing nations, German automakers must take into account cultural variations (Daniel, John, Chang-Hong, 2004). Although, scenario in Indian subcontinent is something different, people here prefer utility vehicles instead of brand to show off.

Developing a marketing plan has a bigger influence on product sales since it opens up channels of communication with potential customers, who may become future clients for businesses. According to Darley and Luethge (2003), marketing communication is the process of influencing other people's behavior by disseminating concepts, knowledge, or emotions. The comprehension and interpretation of customers vary according on the national culture (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Advertisements remind people what items mean to people's lives in addition to informing them about goods and services. Social and culturally relevant language in advertisements aids in the public's understanding of sponsors, goods, and services as well as commercial messaging. Concepts, images, and text convey societal values and priorities (Dyer, 1982). Advertising conveys culture and the reflection of people by combining symbols, language, customary behaviors, and cultural allusions to produce thoughts, impressions, and concepts (Lester, 1997). It also captures ideas, images, wants, conventions, and the values of society (Valdivia, 1997). In order to understand consumer behavior and the efficiency of advertising, academics have employed cultural models with language. Advertisement represents a wide range of cultural dimensions. As an illustration: De Mooij (2010) employs the Hofstede (2001) model and the mapping technique to discern cultural variations in product purchase motivations. Mooij (2010) identified four components of style in advertising. Every component will change depending on the culture: appeal, communication style, basic advertising form and execution. Advertising needs to make an emotional, cultural, geographic, traditional, ethical, and ecological connection with the public. It ought to discern between social and mental processes. The mental process encompasses the ways in which individuals perceive, classify, learn, and process information. Emotions, motivation, and interpersonal relationships are all part of the social process. Both procedures have an impact on mass and interpersonal communication. Style and attractiveness in advertising are also impacted by these procedures. Jennifer A. Waldman (2011) looked at many car advertisements in her paper “Culture and Metaphors in Advertising” to assess cultural variations. There is a notable distinction between the Netherlands and other countries in those consumers there prioritize value and safety (De Mooij, 2000). Advertisements companies used to lure north Indian customers are quite different from advertisements used to lure south Indian customers. People from hilly area prefer sturdy, stiff and durable vehicles over stylish and sophisticated vehicles. In Indian condition players like Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai etc. have good understanding of Indian cultural influence, hence they create advertisements and customer approach system as per the need, test and satisfaction of Indian consumers.

Objective of the study

This study will:

1. Analyse the essence of cross-cultural marketing strategy for automobile companies or business
2. Analyse cultural influence on consumers and automobile industries

Research methodology

In this study, a qualitative method was employed, focus more on understanding the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, anxieties, and other factors that influence an individual's behavior (Gibson, 2004), which are more or less concerned to social science. Since Automobile industry’s growth and sustainability heavily depends upon social trait, this method justifies the selection. Primary data for this study were acquired via in-depth interviews, observations and interaction with focus groups, selected randomly. Case studies, papers, journals, books, published and unpublished articles, and online journals have all been employed in this research to collect secondary data which has worked as supporting or supplementary material. Analytical tools and method has been used for result finding. Total 10 cultural region have been taken into account, covering four major metropolitan cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai), five corner of India (North, south, east, west and central) and one hill area. Total 100 participants have been taken into consideration, ten from each cultural region. The age group of the participants vary between 25- 45 years. Focus area for cross-culture questionnaires were culture, environment, topography, language, religion, social conventions, values, education, and way of life.

Results/findings

Both primary and secondary data collected has been analysed on various front. One of the prominent question participants have been asked was, “whether culture influences the decision of consumer while considering products for them?” Significant numbers of respondent were positive towards cultural influence of mind of customers while they choose their product. Almost all respondent agree to the facts that culture in one way or others, influence consumer decision. Automobile comes under durable commodity which remains in service to a very long time; hence this product is emotionally connected to the consumer. Indian consumer religiously attaches themselves to the product and generally it can be seen saying people phrases like “this vehicle is my lucky mascot”. On observing respondents, reaction, mood, feeling and behaviour towards cultural traits while selecting automobile product it has been notices that cultural factors influence in product design and defining business and marketing strategies. Respondents feel that culture is important; people are used to act according to their surrounded culture. While choosing any product, people think whether that will be accepted to his/her culture or not.

Table -1 culture influence on consumer decision

| Cultural regions | Cultural influence | Cross-cultural essence |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Delhi | 97% | Very High |
| Mumbai | 96% | Very High |
| Kolkata | 95% | Very High |
| Chennai | 98% | Very High |
| North India | 96% | Very High |
| South India | 97% | Very High |
| East India | 94% | Very High |
| Central India | 95% | Very High |
| West India | 97% | Very High |
| Hilly Area | 99% | Very High |

Data source- data analysis and research observation

Secondary data analysis confirms the findings and it has been found that source of culture could be – Language, Nationality, Education (general), Profession (specialised), Ethnicity (group), Organisation (corporate), Social influence, Sex, Family, and Religion as noted by Jean-Claude Usunier and Julie Anne Lee (2005).

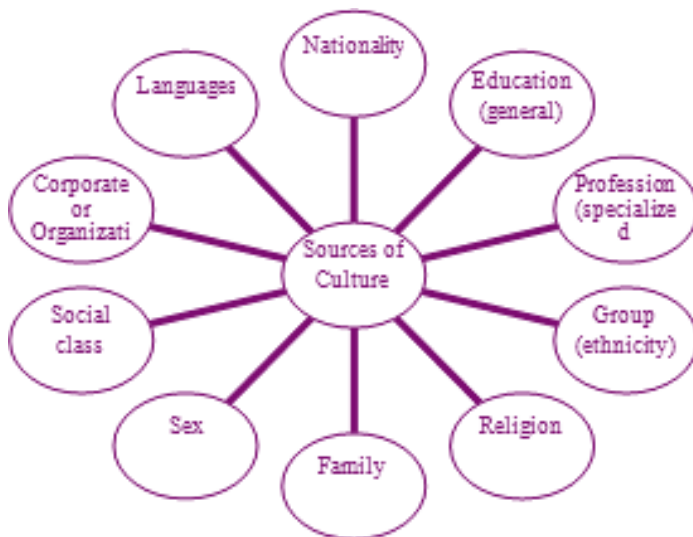
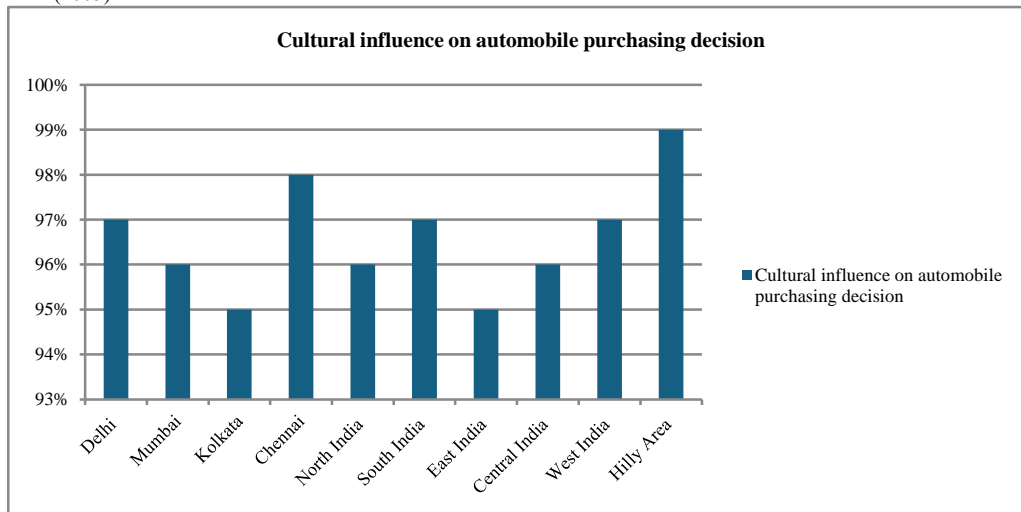


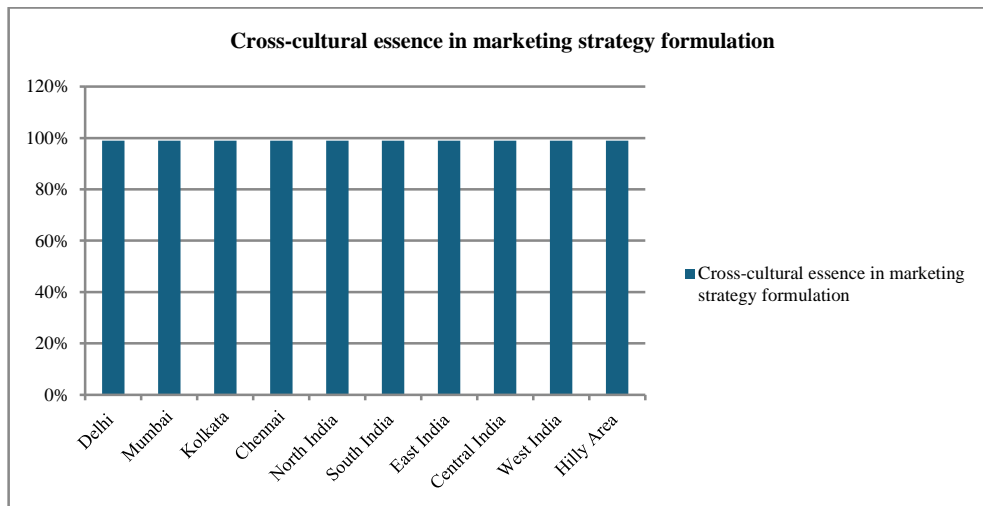
Fig. 1 Depicting sources of culture and its influence on consumer decision. (Source: Jean-Claude Usunier and Julie Anne Lee (2005))

When participants were enquired about the essence of cross-cultural essence while designing market strategy for their automobile product in India; almost 100% respondent were positive and quite confidence on marketing strategy formulation by companies as per the cultural influence of Indian states or regions. An observatory case study conducted in this regard shows that Automobile giant, Maruti Suzuki, uses different mode of advertising their product in different parts of India. They have different set of linguistic advertisement for different regions, Tamil advertisement for Tamil people, Gujarati Advertisement for Gujarati people, Hindi with regional or local touch for Hindi speaking belt. It has also been observed that in festive session, their advertisements contents tilt towards religious touch. For rural India they have different plan, and for urban areas they have different plan, as in rural areas they prefer luring people with, sturdiness, durability, spaciousness and reliability, while in rural areas they lure people with luxury, comfort, status, family and security.

Table -2 *cross-cultural essence while formulating marketing strategy*

| Cultural regions | Cross-cultural essence in marketing strategy formulation | Cross-cultural essence |
|------------------|--|------------------------|
| Delhi | 99% | Very High |
| Mumbai | 99% | Very High |
| Kolkata | 99% | Very High |
| Chennai | 99% | Very High |
| North India | 99% | Very High |
| South India | 99% | Very High |
| East India | 99% | Very High |
| Central India | 99% | Very High |
| West India | 99% | Very High |
| Hilly Area | 99% | Very High |

Data source- data analysis and research observation (1% may be detected if domain increase)



According to Zakia Binte Jamal's (2017) observations, culture has an impact on automobiles based on consumer desire, fashion, and taste. Car ownership has evolved from being an economic decision to one that is more emotive and dramatic. These sentimental and emotional values are influenced by the cultural worldview. India and the UK drive on the right side of the road, whereas the UAE and the EU drive on the left, and other nations have varied automobile sizes. India's consumers like compact automobiles, the Ukraine prefers sedans, and Russia and the UAE like SUVs. She also observed that whereas individuals in India choose inexpensive automobiles due to the country's high petrol prices, those in the UK choose luxurious vehicles. As, commercial in India targets their consumers on the basis of their cultural traits. While advertising a tractor commercial no company dares to depict a suited-booted person drive that stuff to lure their consumers as in western countries, because Indian tradition and dressing is different, hence they prefer a village Chaoudhary with roudbaar personality in their ad. One observation confirms that, in India, the majority of vehicle commercials emphasize family values and fuel efficiency, however in the UK, the majority of car advertisements highlight the automobiles' unique personalities and originality.

Primary and secondary data analysis shows that automobile industry being poised for larger domain for its survival requires overcoming cultural challenges posed by diverse nature of its existence. In Indian subcontinent people are emotionally attached to their culture, although in world scenario it may not be too big issue but still it has been observed that culture influences the consumer buying habits. In case of consumerism, ultimate boss is consumer, not company and consumers are surrounded by their cultural traits as Society, tradition, culture, environment, topology, human nature, health, fear, belief, profession etc. Automobile industry as it is specific, and has to target specific section of society, i.e. economically strong enough to afford. As per Hindustan Times report published (27 Dec. 2022, <https://hindustantimes.com>), only 7.5% people in India owns a car, hence automobile industry left with only maximum 10-12% potential market to cover. In order to overcome these cultural barriers, businesses must research the cultures of the various domains where they want to expand their operations and develop tactics that fit those particular cultures and connect with existing cultural traits. Companies typically enter into joint ventures with local businesses because they have expertise and knowledge of the local market and can better comprehend the cultures of those areas. Comparing primary and secondary data reveals the differences in auto advertisements in Indian subcontinent. Zakia Binte Jamal's (2017) suggests 95% brand value while purchasing keeping in mind price and quality as other important factors.

Implications of the research

This research confirms that automobile companies have to consider their marketing strategy before launching their product or communicating with their potential customers very carefully with proper research, survey and planning, where cultural influence of that domain must be kept on priority basis. Cross-cultural marketing strategy is essentially needed of automobile industry as it has very limited domain size to thrive on. This research findings will encourage automobile companies to consider cross-cultural marketing strategy as one of the important factor in their product marketing along with other essential considerations.

Conclusion

Globalization, economic growth, and technological advancements have brought about great opportunity as well as fierce competition for the local and international auto industries. Automotive manufacturers are always working to entice new customers to associate with their brand. As a result, it has been normal to take into account cultural aspects that are significant while making decisions. The core of cultural variables has been analyzed in this research in order to build commercial or marketing strategies. The goal of this research was to identify the cultural factors that are truly important to businesses. Before developing marketing plans for a new domain, automakers should take these factors into account. Companies should research consumer behavior, purchasing patterns, and preferences before venturing into a new market, according to secondary data as in case of Ford India, where company failed miserably to connect to the Indian consumer in spite of specific design and good product. The automotive business is influenced by culture in every aspect, from product design to distribution. By comprehending the culture and forming strategic alliances, mergers, and acquisitions to comprehend the local market, automakers are overcoming cultural barriers.

Suggestions based on research findings

1. Cross-cultural marketing strategy – every automobile company should keep in their mind that ultimate boss are their consumers, hence they have to design, communicate and plan according to their bosses, not as per their own notions.
2. Every automobile company need proper market research before entering into market, as it provides clear understanding of domain's cultural and economic conditions. Economic boom generally results into product sales as it has been witnessed during COVID-19 session, sales of automobile sector has nosedived in every country.
3. It is advised that automakers employ both conventional and unconventional marketing techniques. Traditional methods employed by firms include advertising, billboards, and promotional campaigns. Since cars are high-engagement items, it is advised that businesses run customer involvement initiatives such as test drives and trivia competitions that connect to their cultural traits and make them feel like being their own.
4. Carry out R&D programs to assess cross-cultural traits and innovative ideas to connect with consumers culturally and avoid standardized approach or notional approach or alien approach or hired approach.

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