

The Study on Consumer Perception Towards Buying Maruti Suzuki Fronx and the Toyota Taisor

1. *Dr. Babu Vinothkumar. Y, Associate Professor, Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology, Coimbatore 641109*
2. *Ms. Sunni Yasmin A Hakim, Assistant Professor, LEAD College of Management, Palakkad, Kerala 678009*

Abstract

The compact SUV segment in the Indian automotive market presents a fascinating paradox with the introduction of the Maruti Suzuki Fronx and the Toyota Taisor. As products of the Suzuki-Toyota global partnership, these vehicles share fundamental platform, engine, and mechanical components. This study investigates the critical role of brand image in shaping consumer perception and purchase decisions between these two near-identical products. Based on established theories of brand image, customer-based brand equity, and self-congruity, this research analyzes how the distinct brand personas of Maruti Suzuki and Toyota influence consumer attitude, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. The findings suggest that despite objective similarities, consumer choice is predominantly driven by subjective brand perceptions—Maruti Suzuki's value of widespread serviceability and cost-effectiveness versus Toyota's premium aura of reliability and global quality. The study concludes by proposing future research directions to explore the evolving connotation of brand image in the era of badge engineering and its long-term impact on customer loyalty in the Indian context.

Keywords: Brand Image, Customer Equity, Consumer Behavior, Consumer Perception, Brand Loyalty, Automotive Industry, India, Maruti Suzuki, Toyota.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian automotive landscape is witnessing a unique phenomenon with the collaboration between Maruti Suzuki and Toyota, leading to the launch of badge-engineered models like the Maruti Suzuki Fronx and the Toyota Taisor. While these vehicles are mechanically synonymous, offering similar performance, features, and pricing, they are marketed under two distinct brand umbrellas with profoundly different images. This scenario creates a natural laboratory to study the power of brand image divorced from product functionality. For consumers, the purchase decision transcends technical specifications, becoming a choice of brand identity. For marketers, this underscores the paramount importance of brand equity. This paper explores how the pre-existing brand images of Maruti Suzuki and Toyota shape consumer perception,

attitude, and ultimately, the buying intention towards the Fronx and the Taisor, reinforcing that in a competitive market, a strong brand image is a primary driver of consumer choice.

II. THE LITERATURE REVIEW ABOUT BRAND IMAGE

Brand image has been extensively defined in marketing literature. As outlined in the foundational work of Herzog (1963) and Dichter (1985), it can be understood as the consumer's general perception and impression of a brand. In the context of the Fronx and Taisor, this translates to Maruti Suzuki's image of being the "common man's car"—fuel-efficient, affordable to maintain, and with an unparalleled service network—versus Toyota's image of superior quality, rugged reliability, and a more premium global stature ("The Toyota Reliability").

Furthermore, the symbolic perspective (Levy, 1973; Noth, 1988) posits that products carry meanings beyond their function. Owning a Maruti Suzuki may symbolize practicality and smart value, while owning a Toyota might symbolize success and a preference for uncompromised quality. The personification perspective (Martineau, 1957; Sirgy, 1985) is equally critical: Maruti Suzuki is often perceived as an accessible, friendly, and youthful brand, whereas Toyota is perceived as a mature, sophisticated, and trustworthy adult. These established brand associations form the bedrock upon which consumer perceptions of the Fronx and Taisor are built, despite their identical engineering.

2.1 Theoretical Framework and Empirical Insights:

Brand image is conceptualized through multiple lenses: as a general perception of the brand (Herzog, 1963; Newman, 1985), a repository of symbolic meanings (Noth, 1988; Levy, 1973), and a form of brand personification (Martineau, 1957; Sirgy, 1985). These perspectives are summarized in the following table extracted from the source:

Perspective	Sources	Definition of Brand Image
General Perception	Herzog (1963)	Consumers’ general perception and impression of a brand
	Newman (1985)	Consumers’ perception of a product’s total attributes
	Dichter (1985)	Consumers’ general impression of the product or service
Symbolic Meaning	Noth (1988)	The symbolic meaning embedded in the product or service
	Sommers (1964)	Consumers’ perception and recognition of a product’s symbolic attribute

	Levy (1973)	The symbolic meaning of purchasing the product or service
Personification	Martineau (1957)	Brand image reflects consumers' characteristics; they purchase to express themselves
	Bettinger (1979)	The personification of a product (e.g., "adult" or "children")
	Sirgy (1985)	Image of the brand resembles human personality

Empirical studies further validate the significance of brand image in consumer decision-making. For instance, Eric and Bright (2008) identified reliable quality and user-friendliness as key determinants of mobile brand choice in Ghana. Similarly, Das (2012) highlighted that Indian youth prefer mobile handsets with reputable brands, smart appearance, advanced features, and usability. These findings underscore the importance of functional and symbolic attributes in brand image formation.

III. BRAND IMAGE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

3.1. Impact of Brand Image on Customer's Attitude toward the Brand

Keller's (1993) concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is directly applicable. A consumer's attitude towards the Taisor is heavily influenced by the strong, favorable associations already held for Toyota—such as the legendary durability of the Innova and Fortuner. This positive brand image, built over decades, is transferred to the Taisor, creating a "halo effect" where the vehicle is perceived as inherently more robust and premium than the Fronx.

Conversely, Maruti Suzuki leverages its brand awareness and association with hassle-free ownership. A consumer's attitude towards the Fronx is shaped by confidence in Maruti's vast service network and low cost of ownership (Lassar et al., 1995). This aligns with the self-concept theory (Sirgy, 1985); a consumer who sees themselves as practical and economically savvy may find the Maruti Suzuki brand image more congruent with their self-identity, leading to a more favorable attitude towards the Fronx.

3.2. Impact of Brand Image on Consumer's Behavioral Intention

Brand image is a key predictor of purchase intention. For a first-time car buyer or someone for whom affordability is paramount, the Maruti Suzuki brand image directly fosters a purchase intention towards the Fronx, driven by the anticipation of long-term satisfaction derived from low running costs and easy serviceability.

For the Taisor, Toyota's brand image fosters behavioral intention through a different pathway: the promise of higher resale value and the prestige of owning a Toyota badge. As Netemeyer et al. (2004) confirmed, strong brand equity dominates consumer response. Even if the product is identical, the intention to buy a Toyota-branded product can be stronger for consumers who prioritize these symbolic benefits. This intention is a direct function of the brand's perceived ability to enhance the owner's social image, a powerful driver in the Indian consumer market.

IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

4.1. Enrich the Connotation of Brand Image

Future research should explore the role of "brand feeling" (Roberts, 2004) in this context. As the market evolves, how do emotional campaigns—for instance, Maruti Suzuki focusing on youthful aspiration and Toyota on adventurous legacy—differentiate the Fronx and Taisor beyond rational attributes? Studies could measure the emotional connection (e.g., sense of freedom, pride of ownership) each brand evokes and how that translates into a competitive advantage in a badge-engineered scenario.

4.2. Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

The relationship between brand image and post-purchase satisfaction and loyalty in this unique case needs empirical validation. Will a Taisor owner report higher satisfaction due to the premium Toyota image, even if the driving experience is identical to the Fronx? Conversely, will the superior service experience of Maruti Suzuki lead to higher loyalty among Fronx owners? Future longitudinal studies should track owners of both vehicles to determine if the initial brand image influences long-term satisfaction and repurchase loyalty, or if the identical product experience eventually homogenizes consumer perception.

V. CONCLUSION

The case of the Maruti Suzuki Fronx and Toyota Taisor serves as a potent testament to the immense power of brand image in the Indian consumer's psyche. While the products are objectively similar, the subjective brand associations of Maruti Suzuki and Toyota create two distinct perceptual entities in the marketplace. Consumer perception, attitude, and behavioral intention are filtered through the lenses of Maruti's value-centric, practical image and Toyota's quality-centric, premium image. The choice between the Fronx and Taisor is, therefore, less about the vehicle and more about the consumer's alignment with a brand's symbolic meaning and perceived identity. For automakers, this underscores that in an era of collaborations and platform sharing, investing in a strong, differentiated, and emotionally resonant brand image is not just important—it is essential for survival and growth.

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