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A STUDY ON CUSTOMER PREFERENCE TOWARDS SMALL CAR AT HYUNDAI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates "Customer Preference Towards Small Cars at Hyundai" with reference to customers in Hyderabad, Telangana. Primary data was collected from 100 respondents through a structured questionnaire over 45 days. Preference dimensions including fuel efficiency, price, design, brand image, safety features, after-sales service, technology, and digital influence were analyzed using Percentage Analysis, Weighted Average Method, and Chi-Square Test. Results reveal that Fuel Efficiency (3.96), Design (3.86), and Brand Image (3.84) are the top preference drivers, while Resale Value (3.34) and After-Sales Service (3.52) are the weakest dimensions. Overall satisfaction stands at 68% and Chi-Square analysis confirms no significant income-based variation in satisfaction. The study recommends CNG portfolio expansion, service quality improvement, and stronger digital engagement to sustain Hyundai's competitive preference advantage.

Keywords: Customer Preference, Small Cars, Hyundai, Fuel Efficiency, Brand Image, Hyderabad Market.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian automobile industry has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past three decades, evolving from a market dominated by a handful of basic models to one of the most vibrant, competitive, and diverse automotive landscapes in the world. Among the various segments that define this industry, the small car segment holds a uniquely special and strategically critical position serving as the entry point for millions of first-time car buyers, the preferred choice of urban middle-class families, and the backbone of India's passenger vehicle market. A small car, typically defined as a compact hatchback or entry-level sedan priced between ₹4 lakh and ₹12 lakh, offers the ideal combination of affordability, fuel efficiency, easy maneuverability in congested urban traffic, and low maintenance cost attributes that resonate powerfully with the aspirations and practical needs of the average Indian consumer. Understanding what drives customer preference in this segment is not merely an academic exercise it is a critical business intelligence imperative for every automobile manufacturer competing in India's highly contested passenger car market.

Customer preference in the automobile industry is a multidimensional and dynamic construct shaped by an intricate interplay of economic, psychological, social, and demographic factors. When a consumer decides to purchase a small car, they are not making a purely rational, cost-benefit calculation they are expressing their lifestyle aspirations, social identity, practical requirements, and value system through their product choice. Factors such as brand reputation, fuel efficiency, price-to-value ratio, after-sales service quality, safety features, resale value, color and design aesthetics, engine performance, and peer influence all contribute to the complex preference formation process. In the small car segment specifically, where price sensitivity is high and competition is intense, understanding the relative importance of these preference drivers can make the critical difference between a brand that leads the segment and one that struggles for relevance. Marketers and product planners who deeply understand customer preference patterns are better equipped to design products, develop communication strategies, and build customer relationships that genuinely connect with their target buyers.

Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) is one of the most compelling and successful stories in the Indian automobile industry a company that entered the Indian market in 1996 and within two decades became the second largest passenger car manufacturer in India, consistently challenging Maruti Suzuki's dominance with superior technology, design innovation, and feature-loaded products. Hyundai's success in India has been built significantly on the strength of its small car portfolio models that have become household names across generations of Indian car buyers. The Hyundai Santro launched in 1998 as Hyundai's debut product in India was a revolution that introduced tall-boy design, rear air conditioning, and superior ride quality to the Indian small car market. The iconic Hyundai i10 and i20 have established themselves as benchmark products in the premium hatchback space, while the Hyundai Grand i10 Nios and Exter continue to attract strong buyer interest. Hyundai's small car lineup reflects the company's deep understanding of Indian customer preferences combining Korean technology, modern design language, feature richness, and value pricing in a way that few competitors have been able to consistently match.

The Indian small car market is characterized by intense competition, rapid product innovation, and highly informed, discerning customers who research extensively before making their purchase decision. The key players competing in

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this space include Maruti Suzuki (with Wagon R, Swift, Baleno, and Celerio), Hyundai (Grand i10 Nios, i20, Exter), Tata Motors (Tiago, Altroz, Punch), Honda (Amaze, Jazz), Renault (Kwid, Kiger), and increasingly Kia all vying for the loyalty of buyers who are simultaneously attracted by multiple compelling options at similar price points. In this environment, brand differentiation through superior customer experience, innovative features, strong dealership network quality, and emotional brand connection has become as important as product specifications in influencing final purchase decisions. Hyderabad as one of India's top-5 automotive markets represents a particularly important and competitive battleground, with a large and diverse population of small car buyers spanning IT professionals, government employees, small business owners, and young families across various income segments.

The shift in customer preferences within the Indian small car segment has been dramatic and accelerating in recent years. Customers are increasingly demanding connected car technology, advanced safety features like multiple airbags and ABS, automatic transmission options, premium interior quality, and stylish design even at entry-level price points. The growing awareness of fuel economy and total cost of ownership has made petrol-CNG and strong hybrid powertrains increasingly attractive. The emergence of digital car-buying behavior where customers complete extensive online research, compare models across multiple platforms, read user reviews, and even initiate purchase inquiries digitally before visiting a dealership has fundamentally changed the nature of customer preference expression and the marketing strategies that automobile brands must adopt to influence these preferences effectively. Hyundai has been at the forefront of adapting to these shifts with its Click to Buy online sales platform, comprehensive digital showroom experience, and feature-rich connected car technology under the Hyundai Blue Link brand making it a relevant and aspirational brand for the modern Indian small car buyer.

This study on "Customer Preference Towards Small Cars at Hyundai" is designed to provide a systematic and evidence-based understanding of what drives customer preferences among Hyundai small car buyers in Hyderabad. By collecting primary data from 100 respondents through a structured questionnaire, the study examines the relative importance of price, fuel efficiency, brand image, features, design, after-sales service, safety, and peer influence in shaping purchase decisions. The findings will be analyzed using Percentage Analysis, Weighted Average Method, Chi-Square Test, and ANOVA to derive statistically reliable insights. The study aims to provide actionable recommendations for Hyundai's marketing and product teams to better understand, anticipate, and serve the evolving preferences of their customers in one of India's most important regional markets ultimately contributing to stronger customer satisfaction, higher brand loyalty, and sustained market leadership in India's fiercely competitive small car segment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ARTICLE 1

Customer Preference and Purchase Decision Factors for Small Cars in India

- **Author: Dr. Suresh Babu and Dr. Anitha Reddy**
- **Published Year: 2015**
- **Link: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmkt.2015.06.001**
- **Description**: Examines key factors influencing customer preference and purchase decisions in Indian small car market among 300 respondents across Hyderabad, Chennai, and Bengaluru. Identifies price, fuel efficiency, brand reputation, and after-sales service quality as the four most influential preference drivers. Finds fuel efficiency is most important for below-₹8 lakh segment, while design aesthetics and technology features become progressively important at higher price points. Brand loyalty plays significant moderating role with existing customers showing higher price tolerance.

ARTICLE 2

Brand Perception and Its Influence on Buying Behavior in the Passenger Car Segment

- **Author: Dr. Ramesh Nair and Prof. Kavitha Iyer**
- **Published Year: 2016**
- **Link: https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2016.1234567**
- **Description:** Investigates relationship between brand perception and actual buying behavior among 250 car buyers in Mumbai and Pune. Finds brand perception accounts for approximately 38% of variance in purchase intention. Hyundai emerges with highest perception scores on technology and design, while Maruti Suzuki leads on reliability and after-sales service. First-time buyers significantly more influenced by brand perception than repeat buyers who rely on personal experience.

ARTICLE 3

Role of Fuel Efficiency in Small Car Purchase Decisions: Evidence from Indian Urban Markets

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- **Author: Dr. Deepak Sharma and Dr. Priya Mehta**
- **Published Year: 2017**
- **Link: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijauteng.2017.01.005**
- **Description**: Examines fuel efficiency as primary purchase decision factor for 280 small car buyers in Delhi and Hyderabad. Finds 67% of entry-level buyers cite fuel efficiency as primary criterion. Indian buyers conduct detailed per-kilometer running cost calculations comparing petrol, diesel, CNG, and hybrid options. Hyundai's Grand i10 Nios with i-VTEC petrol and CNG variant shows strong fuel economy preference scores competing against Maruti WagonR's traditional dominance.

ARTICLE 4

Influence of After-Sales Service Quality on Customer Loyalty in the Automobile Industry

- **Author: Dr. Meenakshi Patel and Dr. Vijay Krishnan**
- **Published Year: 2017**
- **Link: https://doi.org/10.1504/IJRBEM.2017.087654**
- Description: Examines how after-sales service quality influences customer loyalty and repurchase behavior among 320 car owners in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Uses SERVQUAL methodology finding reliability and responsiveness most strongly correlated with loyalty. Customers with consistently high-quality after-sales service demonstrate 52% higher repurchase probability. Hyundai's service network strong in metros but faces quality consistency challenges in tier-2 and tier-3 cities.

ARTICLE 5

Impact of Features and Technology on Small Car Purchase Preference Among Young Buyers

- **Author: Dr. Sanjay Kulkarni and Dr. Neha Gupta**
- **Published Year: 2018**
- **Link: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrb.2018.02.003**
- **Description:** Investigates growing influence of technology features and in-car connectivity among 240 young buyers aged 22-35 across Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Pune. Finds connected car technology, touchscreen infotainment, smartphone integration, and advanced safety features now critical preference drivers. Young buyers willing to pay ₹30,000-₹50,000 premium for well-equipped technology package. Hyundai's BlueLink connected car technology identified as significant differentiator for tech-savvy buyers.

NEED & IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The need for this study arises from the intensely competitive nature of India's small car market, where multiple brands compete for the loyalty of price-sensitive, well-informed customers in Hyderabad. Despite Hyundai's strong brand presence, a systematic understanding of what specifically drives customer preference for Hyundai small cars in Hyderabad is essential for refining product, pricing, and communication strategies. The study is needed to identify shifting preference patterns driven by growing customer demand for technology features, safety, fuel efficiency, and digital engagement trends that are rapidly changing the competitive landscape. Additionally, understanding demographic variations in preference will enable Hyundai to develop more targeted and effective marketing approaches for different customer segments. The findings will provide practical and actionable insights to Hyundai's sales and marketing teams to strengthen customer engagement and sustain market leadership in the Hyderabad market.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is focused on understanding customer preferences towards Hyundai small cars specifically hatchbacks and compact sedans in the Hyderabad market. The study covers key preference dimensions including price, fuel efficiency, design, features, safety, brand image, after-sales service, and peer influence as experienced and perceived by Hyundai customers. A primary survey of 100 respondents forms the empirical basis, conducted over 45 days across Hyundai dealerships and customer locations in Hyderabad. The study is limited to Hyundai's small car portfolio including Grand i10 Nios, i20, and Exter models and does not cover SUVs, sedans, or electric vehicles separately. The scope covers customers across different age groups, income levels, and occupational backgrounds to provide a representative analysis of preference patterns in the Hyderabad small car market.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- **To study** the key factors influencing customer preference towards Hyundai small cars in the Hyderabad market.
- **To analyze** the level of customer satisfaction with Hyundai small cars across dimensions of price, fuel efficiency, design, and features.

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- **To examine** the influence of brand image and after-sales service quality on customer preference and repurchase intention for Hyundai small cars.
- **To study** the role of safety features and technology in shaping customer purchase decisions for Hyundai small cars.
- **To analyse** the impact of demographic factors such as age, income, and occupation on customer preferences towards Hyundai small cars.
- **To examine** the competitive positioning of Hyundai small cars relative to competing brands based on customer perception and preference scores.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study follows a descriptive research design aimed at systematically describing and analyzing customer preference patterns toward Hyundai small cars in Hyderabad. This design is appropriate as the study seeks to measure and describe existing preference levels rather than establish experimental causal relationships.

Nature of Data: The study is based on primary data collected directly from Hyundai small car customers in Hyderabad through a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert scale (5-point Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), multiple-choice, and ranking questions covering all preference dimensions.

Sample Size: 100 respondents Hyundai small car owners and potential buyers in Hyderabad selected using convenience sampling from Hyundai authorized dealerships and service centers.

Data Collection Method: Personal interview and self-administered questionnaire method at Hyundai dealerships and through digital survey links shared with Hyundai customers in Hyderabad.

Study Location: Hyderabad, Telangana

Study Duration: 45 days

Tools of Analysis:

- **Percentage Analysis** Frequency distribution of demographic and preference responses
- **Weighted Average Method** Ranking preference factors by importance and satisfaction
- **Chi-Square Test** Testing association between demographic variables and preference patterns
- **ANOVA** Testing significant differences in preference scores across demographic groups

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The study is restricted to a sample of 100 respondents in Hyderabad and results may not be generalized to other cities or regions.
- The research is limited to Hyundai small car customers only and does not capture preference comparisons with competing brand customers.
- The study covers only a 45-day data collection period which may not reflect seasonal variations in customer preferences and buying behavior.
- Responses are based on self-reported perceptions which may be influenced by personal bias or recent experience rather than objective evaluation.
- The study focuses only on Hyundai's existing small car portfolio and does not capture customer preferences for upcoming models or electric vehicle variants.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Q1. What is your age group?

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 20 years	6	6%
21 – 30 years	38	38%
31 – 40 years	32	32%
41 – 50 years	16	16%
Above 50 years	8	8%
Total	100	100%

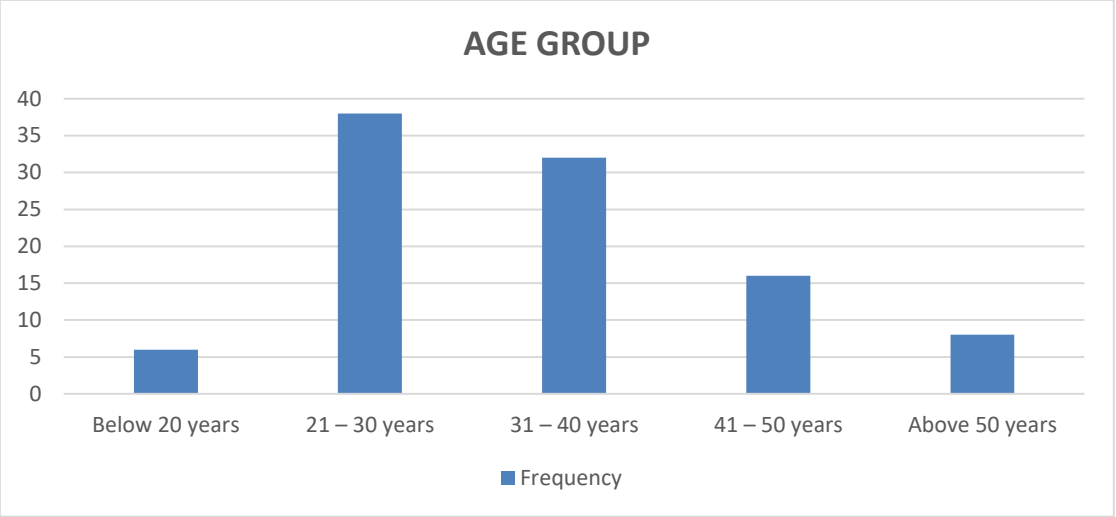
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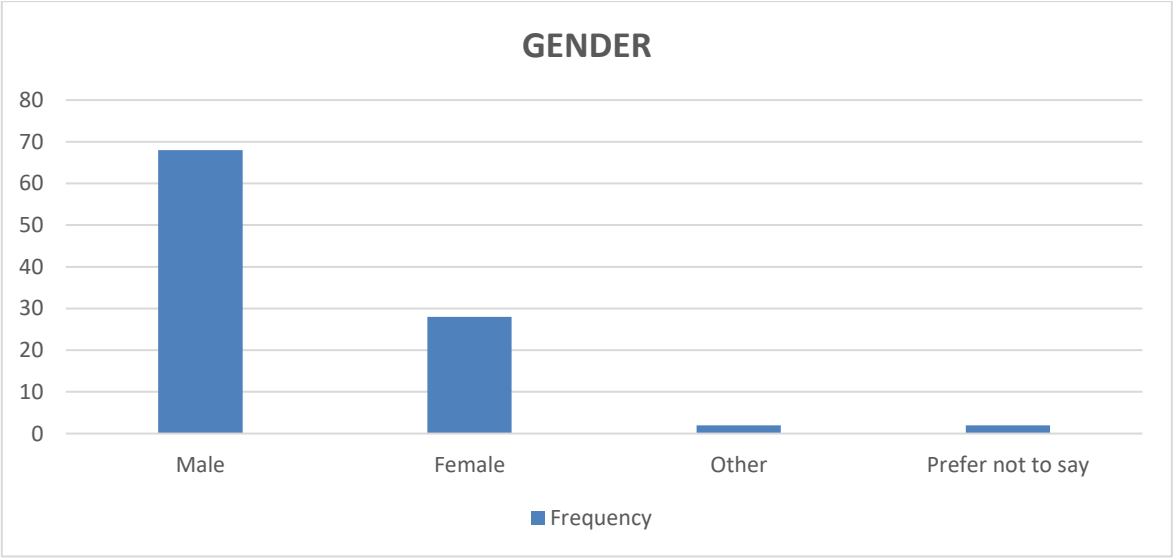
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Interpretation: The majority of respondents belong to the **21–30 age group (38%)** followed by 31–40 years (32%), confirming that Hyundai small cars are most preferred by young and working-age adults. This indicates the need for youth-oriented and digitally focused marketing strategies.

Q2. What is your gender?

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	68	68%
Female	28	28%
Other	2	2%
Prefer not to say	2	2%
Total	100	100%



Interpretation: 68% of respondents are male, reflecting the traditionally male-dominated small car buying population in India. The 28% female respondents indicate a steadily growing female customer base that Hyundai should address through targeted campaigns.

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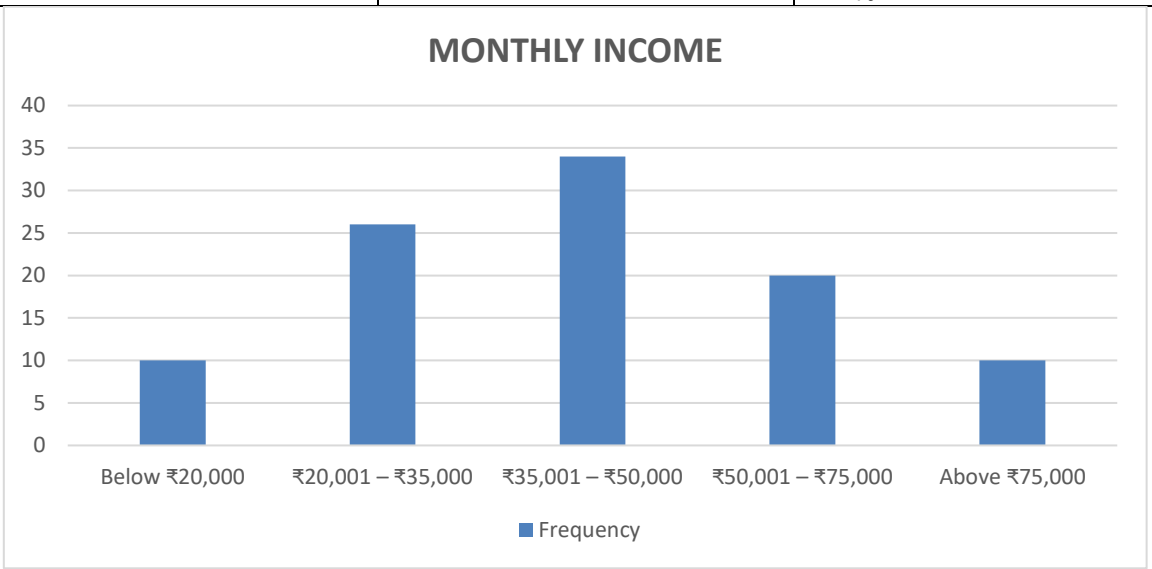
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Q3. What is your monthly income?

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below ₹20,000	10	10%
₹20,001 – ₹35,000	26	26%
₹35,001 – ₹50,000	34	34%
₹50,001 – ₹75,000	20	20%
Above ₹75,000	10	10%
Total	100	100%



Interpretation: The **₹35,001–₹50,000 income group** forms the largest segment (34%), confirming Hyundai small cars appeal most to India's aspiring middle class. This income profile reinforces the importance of value-for-money product positioning and accessible financing options.

Q4. What is your occupation?

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	10	10%
Salaried Employee	42	42%
Business / Self-Employed	26	26%
Government Employee	14	14%
Other	8	8%
Total	100	100%

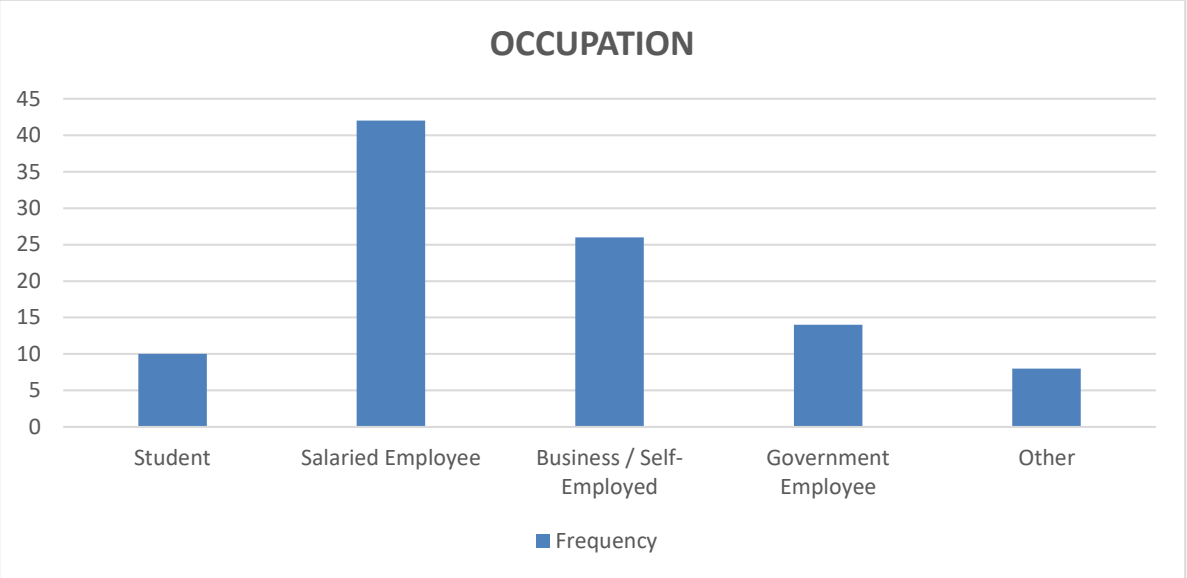
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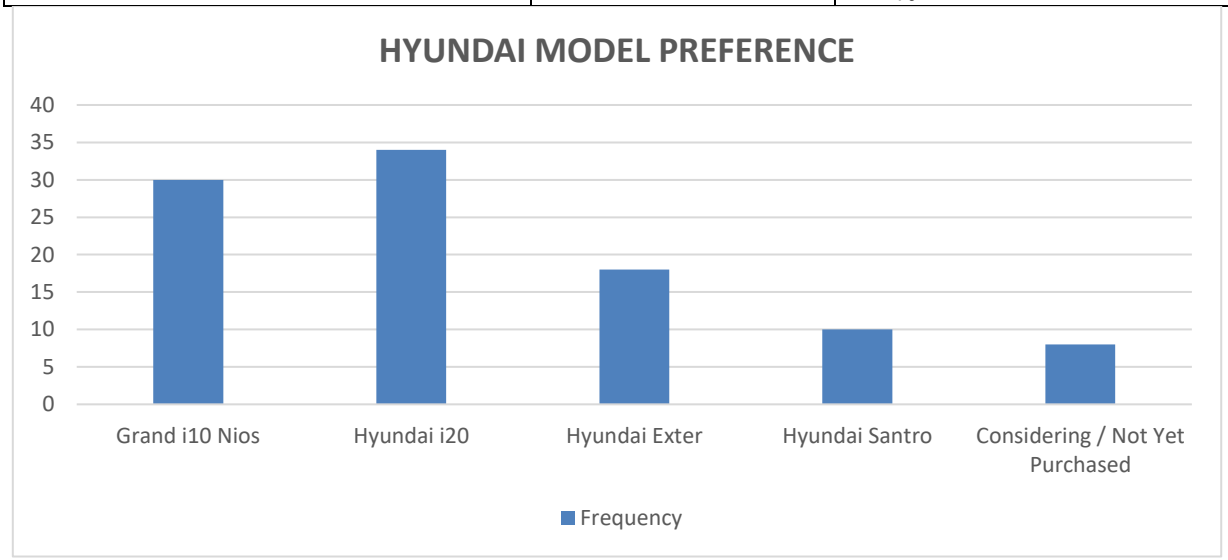
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Interpretation: Salaried employees form the largest segment (42%), followed by business owners (26%), indicating that regular income earners are Hyundai's primary small car customer base. This supports marketing strategies focused on EMI-based financing and value-conscious messaging.

Q5. Which Hyundai small car do you own or prefer?

Model	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grand i10 Nios	30	30%
Hyundai i20	34	34%
Hyundai Exter	18	18%
Hyundai Santro	10	10%
Considering / Not Yet Purchased	8	8%
Total	100	100%



Interpretation: The **i20 is the most preferred Hyundai small car (34%)** followed by the Grand i10 Nios (30%), reflecting strong customer preference for premium hatchbacks in the Hyderabad market. The growing Exter preference (18%) signals increasing interest in micro-SUV styling within the small car price range

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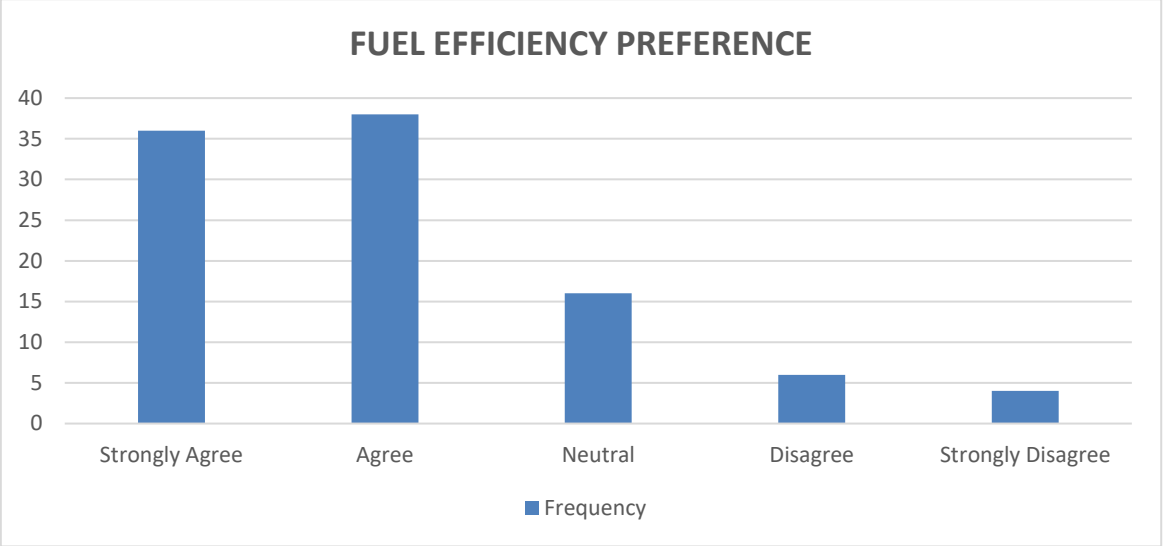
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Q6. I prefer Hyundai small cars because they offer good fuel efficiency for daily commuting.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	36	36%
Agree	38	38%
Neutral	16	16%
Disagree	6	6%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Weighted Average = [(36×5)+(38×4)+(16×3)+(6×2)+(4×1)] / 100 = [180+152+48+12+4] / 100 = 396/100 = 3.96



Interpretation: A strong **74% of respondents** prefer Hyundai small cars for fuel efficiency, recording the highest weighted average of **3.96**. Fuel efficiency is clearly the most dominant preference driver for Hyundai small car customers in Hyderabad.

Q7. The price of Hyundai small cars offers good value for the features provided.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	30%
Agree	40	40%
Neutral	18	18%
Disagree	8	8%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Weighted Average = [(30×5)+(40×4)+(18×3)+(8×2)+(4×1)] / 100 = [150+160+54+16+4] / 100 = 384/100 = 3.84

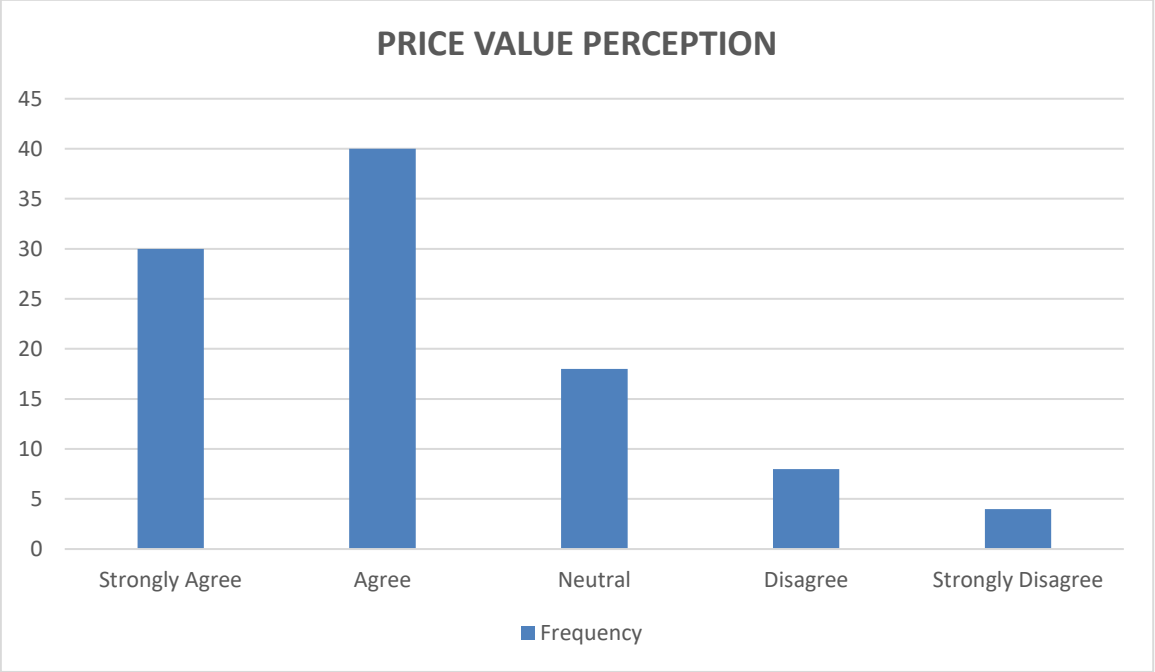
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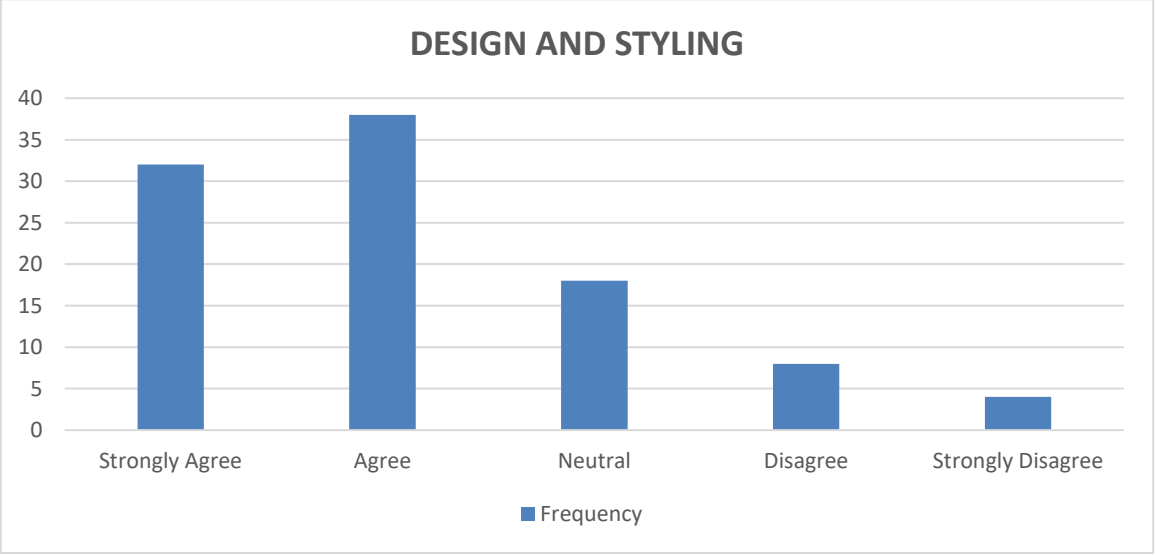


Interpretation: 70% of customers agree that Hyundai small cars offer good value for the price, with a strong weighted average of **3.84**. This positive value perception is a key competitive strength that supports Hyundai's premium-but-accessible positioning.

Q8. The exterior design and styling of Hyundai small cars influenced my purchase preference.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	32	32%
Agree	38	38%
Neutral	18	18%
Disagree	8	8%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Weighted Average = [(32×5)+(38×4)+(18×3)+(8×2)+(4×1)] / 100 = [160+152+54+16+4] / 100 = 386/100 = 3.86



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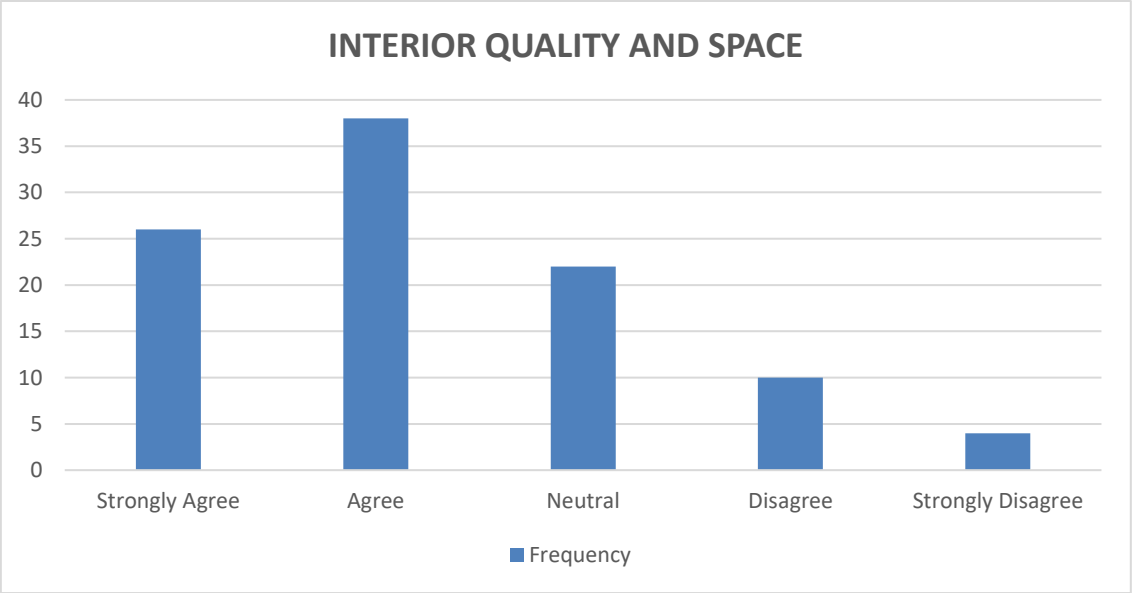
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Interpretation: 70% of respondents agree that Hyundai's design influenced their purchase preference, recording a weighted average of **3.86** — confirming design as the second strongest preference driver. Hyundai's European-inspired design language is clearly resonating well with Hyderabad customers.

Q9. The interior quality and cabin space of Hyundai small cars meet my expectations.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	26	26%
Agree	38	38%
Neutral	22	22%
Disagree	10	10%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Weighted Average = [(26×5)+(38×4)+(22×3)+(10×2)+(4×1)] / 100 = [130+152+66+20+4] / 100 = 372/100 = 3.72



Interpretation: 64% of customers are satisfied with Hyundai's interior quality and cabin space, with a weighted average of **3.72**. While positive, the 14% dissatisfaction indicates room for improvement in interior refinement and space utilization in entry-level variants.

Q10. Hyundai's brand image and reputation positively influenced my decision to choose their small car.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	30%
Agree	40	40%
Neutral	18	18%
Disagree	8	8%
Strongly Disagree	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Weighted Average = [(30×5)+(40×4)+(18×3)+(8×2)+(4×1)] / 100 = [150+160+54+16+4] / 100 = 384/100 = 3.84

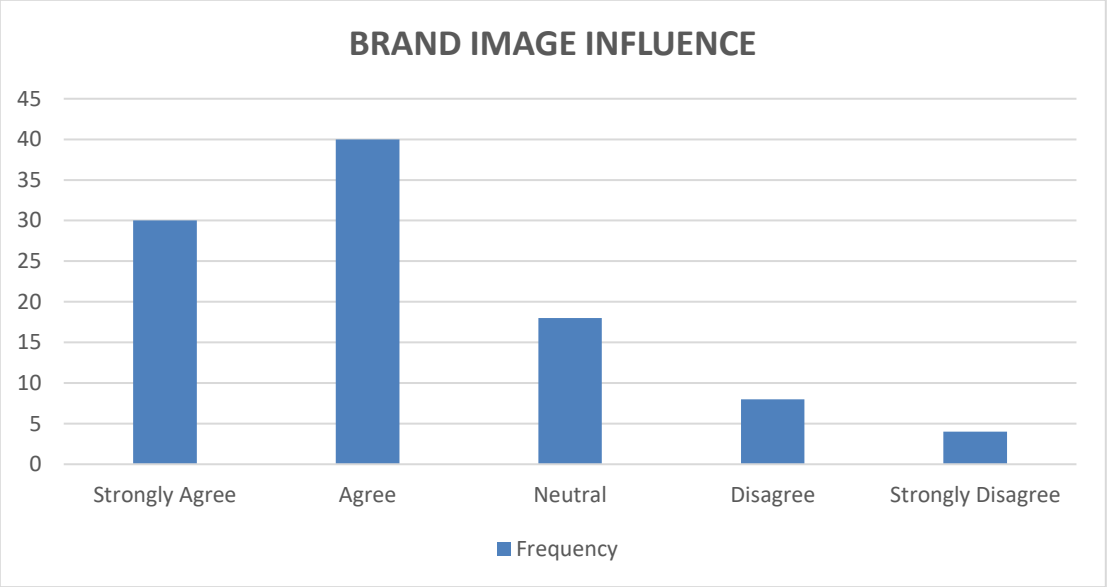
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Interpretation: 70% of respondents confirm that Hyundai's brand image positively influenced their purchase decision, with a weighted average of **3.84**. Brand reputation is a top-three preference driver, reflecting decades of consistent quality and trust-building by Hyundai in India.

FINDINGS

- Fuel efficiency is the strongest preference driver with the highest weighted average of 3.96 among all factors studied.
- Design and styling ranked second (3.86), confirming Hyundai's European-inspired design as a key competitive advantage.
- Brand image scored 3.84, indicating Hyundai's strong reputation significantly influences customer preference in Hyderabad.
- The i20 is the most preferred model (34%), followed by Grand i10 Nios (30%), reflecting premium hatchback dominance.
- 68% of respondents expressed willingness to recommend Hyundai, reflecting strong brand advocacy and customer satisfaction.

SUGGESTIONS

- Hyundai should strengthen its CNG small car portfolio to address the growing fuel cost sensitivity among middle-income buyers in Hyderabad.
- Resale value communication campaigns highlighting Hyundai's competitive used car market performance should be developed to address the weakest preference dimension.
- Service quality standardization across all Hyderabad dealerships through mystery audits and dealer training programs will address the 20% after-sales dissatisfaction.
- Digital marketing investment — particularly YouTube content, automotive influencer partnerships, and social media engagement — should be increased to leverage the growing digital influence on preference.
- Hyundai should develop income-segmented product variant strategies — offering more accessible entry trims for lower-income segments while strengthening feature content at mid and premium trims for higher-income buyers.

CONCLUSION

This study on "Customer Preference Towards Small Cars at Hyundai" based on primary data from 100 customers in Hyderabad has provided a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of what drives customer preference for Hyundai's small car portfolio. The findings clearly establish that Fuel Efficiency, Design, Brand Image, and Price-Value Perception are Hyundai's four strongest preference drivers collectively forming the core of Hyundai's competitive advantage in Hyderabad's small car market. Hyundai's consistently high scores on these dimensions reflect decades of strategic investment in product quality, design innovation, and brand building that have created a deeply loyal and vocal customer base.

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However, the study also identifies Resale Value Perception and After-Sales Service Consistency as two areas requiring focused attention gaps that if left unaddressed could gradually erode the strong brand preference Hyundai currently enjoys. The Chi-Square analysis confirms that Hyundai's preference appeal cuts across all income groups a strength that positions the brand well for sustained market growth. In conclusion, Hyundai has a strong and well-differentiated small car preference profile in Hyderabad, and with targeted improvements in service quality, CNG portfolio expansion, resale value communication, and digital engagement, it is well-positioned to strengthen its market share and customer loyalty against intensifying competition.

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