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# Key drivers of automobile brand choice in sub-Saharan Africa: the case of Ghana

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The paper aims to investigate the determinants of automobile brand choice in Ghana. Specifically, the paper seeks to hypothesize that consumers of automobiles make their purchases based on a multiplicity of factors.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A quantitative approach using questionnaires was adopted to survey 1,020 respondents drawn from various workplaces, churches and homes. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis.

**Findings** – The study established that the attributes of a car, emotional connection, external influences, awareness and accessibility make a strong and significant contribution to automobile brand choice in Ghana.

**Originality/value** – The study is one of the few of its nature in sub-Saharan Africa. The new theoretical and empirical insights into factors influencing consumers' purchase decision of automobiles from the study will be significant to automobile manufacturers and dealers operating in developing countries such as Ghana.

**Keywords** Automobiles, Brand choice, Ghana, Brand management, Consumer psychology, Brand awareness, Buying behaviour

**Paper type** Research paper

**An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.**

## Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa and specifically Ghana, market liberalization has ushered in a new economic system where companies compete for the attention of customers to their brands. As such, consumers are daily presented with an array of brands to meet their ever-growing needs. Scholars like (Walker, 2008; Lim and O'Casey, 2001) assert that consumers adopt products as conscious expressions of their identities and the brands they select are often a symbolic representation of their personality and lifestyles. As a result, a lot of caution often predates the decision-making process especially for high involving products like automobiles. However, consumer brand choice has been made more difficult, especially within an environment that is cluttered with different products, promotions, price information in addition to other economic indices (Huang *et al.*, 2010; Hennessy and Tol, 2011).

Interest in consumer brand choices has grown among marketing practitioners and scholars in the process of understanding consumer brand selection (Hansen and Christensen, 2007). In a Pakistani study for instance, Athar (2006) noted that for the automotive industry, there are a lot of brand choices of cars to compare and evaluate before making a purchase decision. Hence, it is very critical for companies to understand the customers' requirements and provide the products that satisfy their needs. Further studies

on consumer brand selection, spanning different products could be found in the works of (Ross and Harradine, 2004; Radder and Huang, 2008; Shabbir *et al.*, 2009; Tang *et al.*, 2011). The results from these studies indicate that multiple factors have underpinned consumer brand choices. However, the results on the relative importance of these factors have not been consistent. For instance, some scholars have found awareness as a major determinant of brand choice (Keller, 2001; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2010; Huang and Sarigollu, 2012) while others found brand image (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Freling and Forbes, 2005; Baek *et al.*, 2010), or accessibility (Lin and Chang, 2003; Van Auken, 2003; Kim, 2008), price (Erdem *et al.*, 2006; Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2009; Ching *et al.*, 2009) as the major determinants of brand choice. Subsequently other external factors such as country-of-origin (COO or CO) and impact of family and friends were also found to influence consumer choice of brands (Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2008; Wang and Yang, 2008).

Moreover, studies on automobile choice have mostly focused on developed country consumers (De Haan *et al.*, 2006; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2011; Lieven *et al.*, 2011, Tang *et al.*, 2011) with very little focus on automobile brand choice in developing countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Recent research indicates that the market for the automobile industry is generally saturated in developed countries but believed to be growing in developing countries (Simon and Reed, 2007; Peters *et al.*, 2011). Thus developing countries could provide a major market for automobiles, hence understanding their brand choice decisions is a strategic necessity for automobile manufacturers and dealers. The purpose of this study is to integrate the various factors determining consumer brand choice of automobiles and to empirically investigate them within a developing country context. The study will thus, provide automobile manufacturers and dealers with the critical factors influencing consumer choice of automobiles in developing countries and help to develop appropriate marketing strategies for satisfying them.

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## Literature review and conceptual framework

### The concept of brands

The concept of brand and branding have been discussed by several contemporary marketing scholars (De Chernatony and McDonald, 2003; Jones and Slater, 2003; Bertilsson, 2009). A brand is defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these that identifies the maker or seller of a product or services (Aaker, 1991; Kotler and Keller, 2009). Brands have also been viewed to go beyond the physical components of what they stand for to encompass additional attributes which are important considerations for consumers' buying decisions (De Chernatony and McDonald, 2003). In modern times, brands function as symbols that enable consumers to identify and separate one producer from another; empowering consumers with the ability to trace one product back to the manufacturer and hold them responsible for its quality (Koehn in Bertilsson, 2009). Moreover, brands are today ascribed with almost divine characteristics that serve as strategic business assets essential for firms to develop if they are to compete successfully (Bertilsson, 2009).

### Drivers of brand choice

There is unequivocal evidence that researching into factors that underpin consumers' needs and wants is crucial to formulating marketing strategies to serve them. A search through the literature indicates that multiple factors underpin consumers' choice of automobiles. The next section discusses snapshots of the major factors and formulates hypotheses to guide the empirical investigation.

#### *Brand awareness*

Several researchers (Jiang, 2004) have found brand awareness to be an important element that plays a vital role in consumer's choice of brands. Lin and Chang (2003) established in their study that brand awareness has the most powerful influence on consumers' purchase decisions and ultimately leads to consumer brand loyalty. Keller (2009) argues that in order to gain customer-based brand equity, the consumer must be aware of, and be familiar with the offering and hold brand associations that are strong, favorable and unique in comparison with other brands offered in the same category. Similarly, Esch *et al.* (2006) assert that customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is aware and familiar with the brand and holds positive associations about the brand in memory. In discussing the concept of brand awareness, Keller (2009) refers to it as the strength of the brand node in memory, which explains how easy it is for the consumer to remember the brand. Hence, the first task of advertising is to build brand awareness and expose the brand to all potential consumers (Keller, 2009).

Consumer behavior theorists (Wilson, 2000; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009) have argued that brands that have some level of awareness are far more likely to be considered as opposed to those with lower levels of awareness (Mowen and Minor, 2001). Notably, consumers with high brand awareness do not always spend a great deal of time or cognitive effort in making purchase decisions. They often try to minimize decision-making by using heuristics such as "I buy the brand I have heard of" or "choose the brand I know" or purchase only familiar, well-established brands (Keller, 1993). Hence, the first hypothesis for the study is stated as follows:

- H1. There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and consumer brand choice of automobiles.

#### *Brand image*

Kotler and Keller (2009) described brand image as the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers about the brand. In today's dense marketplace, consumers often decide to purchase brands based on their image or identity. The identity of a brand is central to the brand's strategic vision since it embodies the basic characteristics that will sustain it over time; just as a person's identity provides direction, purpose and meaning (Aaker, 1996). Thus, a brand's identity is the sum of unique associations that consumers have when confronted with the brand (Keller, 2003).

Marketing researchers (Keller, 2009; Bian and Moutinho, 2011) have proposed that brand image is an important element of brand equity. Evidence of the role of brand image as a specific influence on consumers' perceptions about products or services has been provided in both qualitative and quantitative studies (such as Martinez *et al.*, 2008; Pappu *et al.*, 2005; Tasci *et al.*, 2007). The results indicate that a brand is a powerful means of differentiation and as a result becomes a competitive marketing strategy for positioning. For instance, Kwon (1990) reported that positive brand image is mostly associated with preferred brands. Also Lassar *et al.* (1995) found out that brands with high image ratings always have higher brand equity and premium price. When the customer experiences that the brand is delivering the benefits that it promised to undertake, brand bonding occurs (Kotler and Keller, 2009) and the customer's resistance to switching to an unknown brand increases (Aaker, 2003). Thus, the brand's image becomes the compass of its identity, pointing towards the place where it can leverage the most power in the category in which it competes and establish the most powerful influence within the lives of its potential users. In the automobile industry, different automobiles have been endowed with different brand images. We formulate the second hypothesis for the study as follows:

- H2. There is a positive relationship between brand image and consumer brand choice of a car.

#### *Accessibility*

Another area that has been of immense interest with regards to literature on consumer brand decision-making is the convenience with which consumers are able to obtain their choice of brands often referred to as accessibility (Branding Strategy, 2010). According to Lin and Chang (2003), convenience of a brand has a significant impact on consumers' brand choice. In other words, easy access to brands in a store is vital when buying any product. The car brand must be available where consumers shop or within a reasonable distance for it to be considered within the choice set (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009; Van Auken, 2003).

Certainly, distribution channels and location are important to brand accessibility, but so also are hours of operation, waiting times, product availability and process simplicity. Within the context of consumer decision making, especially when evaluating potential alternative brands during the pre-purchase stages, the evoked set refers to the specific brands (or models) a consumer considers when making a purchase within a specific product category (Lin and Chang, 2003). Regardless of the total number of brands in a product

category, a consumer's evoked set tends to be quite small on average, often consisting of only three to five brands based on their accessibility and convenience to the consumer (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009).

In a study by Emmelhainz *et al.* (1991), it was found that a substantial amount of consumers (32 percent) switched brands due to out-of-stock situations. A similar study conducted recently by Kim (2008) also reported 21 percent of consumers behaving in a like manner. For several automobile buyers, accessibility may not only be limited to the car but also the availability of showrooms and spare parts. We state the third hypothesis of the study as follows:

*H3.* There is a positive relationship between accessibility and consumer brand choice of a car.

#### *Emotional connections*

Recent studies indicate that consumers do connect emotionally with their brands (Aggarwal, 2004; Algesheimer and Dholakia, 2005; Lynch, 2004; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). The concept has been labeled "emotional brands" because consumers may form an intimate bond with a brand, a bond that is passionate, similar to the emotional bond a consumer experiences with close circle of friends and/or family (Aggarwal, 2004). Consumers' perceived "emotional value" refers to their affective reactions to a brand (Supphellen, 2000). General feelings for brands are often reported in elicitation sessions (e.g. "this brand makes me feel good"). The feelings about brands can be mild, intense, negative or positive (Keller, 2001). Morris *et al.* (2002) found that emotional response to a brand is a strong predictor of purchase intention and accounts for more than twice the variance of cognition.

Gobe (2001) emphasizes the importance of emotions and proposes the use of emotional branding as a methodology to connect the consumer to the product in an emotionally profound way. Thus, through emotional branding, a firm creates controls on consumer's emotions and makes them better receptors to brands (Travis, 2000; Gobe, 2001). Some consumers also become emotionally attached towards a particular car brand based on their personal ethical value considerations. In this regard, several car brands now prefer to enter new markets with emotional promises rather than with assurances of trustworthiness (Menges, 2003; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2009). A good experience with a car brand will remain in the consumer's emotional memory as a connection made on a level far beyond their basic transportation needs. The fourth proposed hypothesis for the study is stated as follows:

*H4.* There is a positive relationship between emotional connection and consumer brand choice of a car.

#### *Price*

Nowlis and Simonson (2000) empirically provide evidence that price affects consumers' choice of brands. Generally, it is accepted that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for brands that they perceive to have high value (Erdem and Swait, 1998; Hermann *et al.*, 2007). McDonald and Sharp (2000) stated that price can be used as a reason for brand choice in two ways; either by going for the lowest price in order to escape financial risk or the highest price in order to achieve product quality. According to Soderlund (2000), price, place and brand are three important factors when deciding on consumers' purchase choices in product brands.

Cadogan and Foster (2000) argued that price is probably the most important consideration for the average consumer. Consumers with high brand loyalty are willing to pay a premium price for their favored brand, so, their purchase intention is not easily affected by price. Consumers' satisfaction may be built by comparing price with perceived costs and values.

Price perceptions directly influence satisfaction judgments as well as indirectly through perceptions of price fairness (Hermann *et al.*, 2007). As a reflection of the brand's ability to command a price higher than its competitors, the price premium construct is consequently important for all types of car brands, despite their actual position within the category of automobiles (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2009). The fifth proposed hypothesis for the study is thence as follows:

*H5.* There is a positive relationship between price and consumer brand choice of a car.

#### *Automobile attributes*

According to Uggla (2004), attributes such as quality are an integral part of brand identity. Product quality encompasses the features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. In other words, product quality is defined as "fitness for use" or "conformance to requirement" from the consumer's expected standards of the brand (Russell and Taylor, 2006).

A product's design and style are favored by all consumers (Kuksov, 2004). This makes it an extremely powerful and unique tool in the modern marketing environment. Some marketers believe that the design and style of a car brand are actually more influential than advertising in influencing consumers, as they yield a more direct impact on how they perceive and experience the product. Hofmeyr and Rice (2000) assert that "in most cases, our experience has been such that style and designs are more likely to influence the consumer perception of the brand as compared with advertising". For car brands with low advertising, support, style and design take on an even more significant role as the key medium for communicating the brand's positioning (Rundh, 2005). Consumers are familiar with the flamboyant design of the Hummer Jeep, the uniqueness of the Jaguar, the mechanical accuracy of Mercedes and BMW among others. As such, we hypothesize that:

*H6.* There is a positive relationship between car attributes and consumer choice of a car.

#### *External influences*

In today's era of globalization, COO of the manufacturing brands is increasingly becoming more important than the actual country of manufacture. COO refers to the country that a manufacturer's product or brand is associated with. Traditionally, this country is called the Home-Country or similarly, the country from which the brand initially originated. Thus, for example, the Honda brand connotes a Japanese COO, while Chevrolet consumers feel that they are using an American brand. In a study by Wang and Yang (2008), image of the COO of a car was found to be a positive moderator in the relationship between brand personality of a car and consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, they affirmed that, a positive COO image could enhance brand personality's positive impact on purchase intention, whereas a negative COO image could significantly decrease the positive

brand personality effect on purchase intention. However, researchers have suggested that the effect varies from one product category to another (Pappu *et al.*, 2005; Wu and Lo, 2009).

Andaleeb (1995) hinted earlier that consumers, in some instances, have had perceptions about products and brands based on their COO and might thus have a positive or negative connotation towards them when it comes to purchasing brands from stereotyped countries. The concept of COO effects on consumer purchase decisions have also been studied by several scholars (Samiee *et al.*, 2005; Usunier, 2006; Samiee, 2010; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2011). Other studies have also reported external factors such as consumer's family, reference groups and the consumer's role and status as major influencers of brand choice (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009). Our final hypothesis for the study is stated as follows:

*H7.* There is a positive relationship between other external influences and consumer choice of a car.

The reviews indicate the multiplicity of factors that could influence consumer choice of automobiles. We integrate these perspectives to form a broader conceptual framework to guide the current study. Figure 1 illustrates our conceptual model of automobile brand choice.

## Research design and methodology

### Survey instrument

Consistent with previous studies on brand choice (Hansen *et al.*, 2007; Huang *et al.*, 2010), a survey approach using questionnaires was adopted. The design of the questionnaires was primarily based on multiple-item measurement scales adopted from previous research on brand choice. The first section of the questionnaire elicited demographic information on age, gender, occupation, income levels and educational qualifications together with the brands of cars they have bought. The second section obtained information on the determinants of automobile brand choice. The questionnaire was a Likert scale type, and anchored on 1 "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree". Awareness was measured with four variables and was adopted from the literature (Keller, 2008). Image was also adopted from the works of (Erdem and Swait,

2004; Baek *et al.*, 2010) and was measured with three items. Moreover accessibility was measured with four items and was culled from the literature (Van Auken, 2003). In addition emotional connection was also adopted from the literature (Belaid and Behi, 2011) and is measured with four items. External influence was equally adopted from the literature (Wang and Yang, 2008; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009) and was measured with five items. Furthermore, price was adopted from the works of (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2009) and operationalized with three variables. Similarly, car attributes was operationalized with four variables from previous studies (Russell and Taylor, 2006). Finally, the dependent variable, overall brand choice was also adopted from the literature (Radder and Huang, 2008; Shabbir *et al.*, 2009) and measured with three variables.

### Population, sample and data collection

The data were collected in March, 2011. A database of registered private cars in Accra within the last five years was obtained from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) out of which the respondents were conveniently selected and contacted on phone for appointment. The questionnaire for the study was first pre-tested on 20 executive MBA students of the University of Ghana Business School who owned cars. Five research assistants were trained to aid in the data collection due to the large number of respondents. Subsequently, the questionnaires were answered by the respondents who were contacted at various meeting points – workplaces, university campuses, churches and homes. After four weeks, 1,045 responses were obtained out of which 1,020 were found usable for the analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, *t*-test, exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis.

## Data analysis, interpretation and results

### Demographic characteristics of respondents

The descriptive analysis from Table I indicates that 58.5 percent of the respondents were males while 41.5 percent were females. In terms of age, a greater part of the respondents (81.0 percent) were above the age of 35 years indicating that they were adults who could own cars in

**Figure 1** Conceptual framework for drivers of consumer brand choice of cars

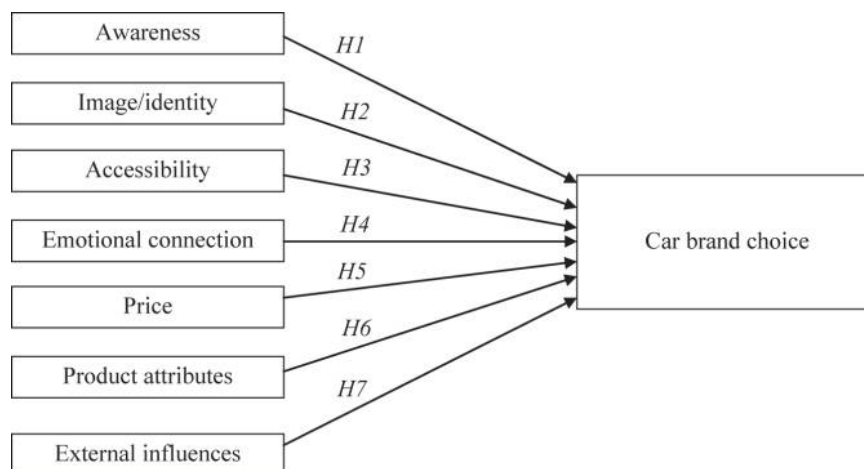


Table I Demographic profile of respondents

Profile of respondents	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	597	58.5
Female	423	41.5
Total	1,020	100
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
25-35	194	19.0
36-45	368	36.1
46-55	236	23.2
Above 55	222	21.7
Total	1,020	100
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
SHS	45	4.4
Professional	204	20.0
Tertiary	254	24.9
Postgraduate	482	47.3
PhD	35	3.4
Total	1,020	100
<b>Profession</b>		
Unemployed	30	2.9
Self-employed	159	15.6
Salaried employee	798	78.3
Pensioner	33	3.2
Total	1,020	100
<b>Annual income (in GHC)<sup>a</sup></b>		
Below 10,000	67	6.6
10,000-50,000	710	69.7
51,000-100,000	204	20.0
101,000-150,000	22	2.2
Above 150,000	15	1.5
Total	1,020	100

Note: <sup>a</sup>Approx. GHC 1=\$0.714 during period of study

Ghana. Furthermore, the educational background of the respondents revealed that 24.9 percent were tertiary degree holders, 47.3 percent had post-graduate degrees, 3.4 percent had PhDs, while 4.4 percent had secondary education certificates. The remaining 3.4 percent had other professional qualifications. It is evident from these statistics that a number of the respondents had more than just a high school educational certificate indicating that education background in Ghana is highly correlated with car ownership. With respect to the profession of the respondents, 2.9 percent were unemployed while 93.9 percent had employment. Out of the working class, 15.6 percent were self-employed whilst 78.3 percent were salaried employees. Additionally, 3.2 percent of the respondents were on pension. Subsequently, a look at the annual income ranges of the respondents revealed that 6.6 percent earned less than GHC 10,000 annually, 69.7 percent earned between GHC 10,000 to GHC 50,000 annually, 20.0 percent earned from GHC 51,000 to GHC 100,000 annually, 2.2 percent earned from GHC 101,000 up to GHC 150,000 annually whilst 1.5 percent of the respondents have annual earnings of above GHC 150,000. Table I illustrates the demographic profile of respondents.

### Automobile brands used by respondents

An analysis of the car brands used by respondents is presented in Table II. The results indicate that Toyota had the highest number of users with 334 users representing 32.7 percent, Nissan (161 respondents), Volkswagen/VW (89 respondents), BMW (69 respondents), Mercedes Benz and Honda (59 respondents each), Kia (56 respondents), Hyundai (47 respondents), Ford (25 respondents), Peugeot (24 respondents), Audi (22 respondents), Tata (14 respondents), Jaguar, Rover and Skoda (11 respondents each), Rexton (eight respondents), and Mitsubishi (seven respondents). Respondents who use Suzuki were five whilst Jeep had four. Renault and Chevrolet had two respondents each.

### Descriptive statistics

Table III displays the means and standard deviations of the various variables used in the questionnaire. The results indicate moderate to high mean values. From the table the highest mean was 3.7732 (I buy a car that is durable) while the lowest was 2.6512 (I buy a car used by my family members and friends).

### Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The variables measuring consumer choice of automobiles were factor analyzed. Prior to the extraction of factors, the Bartlett test of Sphericity (Approx.: Chi-square = 9,115.383, df. 853, sig. 0.000) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (value of 0.931) confirmed that there was significant correlation among the variables to warrant the application of exploratory factor analysis. Only factors whose eigen values were equal or greater than 1 were selected (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). Moreover variables with loadings of at least 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and factors with a reliability threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair *et al.*, 2010) were

Table II Brands of cars used by respondents

Brand of car	Frequency	%
Toyota	334	32.7
Nissan	161	15.8
VW	89	8.7
BMW	69	6.8
Mercedes Benz	59	5.7
Honda	59	5.7
Kia	56	5.5
Hyundai	47	4.6
Ford	25	2.5
Peugeot	24	2.3
Audi	22	2.1
Tata	14	1.4
Skoda	11	1.1
Jaguar	11	1.1
Rover	11	1.1
Rexton	8	0.9
Mitsubishi	7	0.7
Suzuki	5	0.5
Jeep	4	0.4
Renault	2	0.2
Chevrolet	2	0.2
Total	1,020	100.0

Table III *t* test (descriptive statistics)

Variables	Mean	Std dev.	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
I buy cars which are well advertised	2.9098	1.20681	48.821	1,019	0.000
I buy car brands whose name I remember best	2.9463	1.25172	47.662	1,019	0.000
I choose a car with a unique feature	3.2707	1.32951	49.813	1,019	0.000
I prefer a car with low running cost	3.5902	1.44429	50.334	1,019	0.000
I buy a car which is perceived prestigious and luxurious	3.3634	1.14355	59.555	1,019	0.000
I buy a car of high quality	3.4683	1.35062	51.997	1,019	0.000
I prefer attractive and well-designed cars	3.4756	1.28396	54.812	1,019	0.000
I choose a car that is safer	3.7537	1.50640	50.455	1,019	0.000
I will buy a car that is durable	3.7732	1.62190	47.106	1,019	0.000
My brand of car stands for something important to me	3.3805	1.25155	54.692	1,019	0.000
My car brand socially connects me to people	3.2000	1.00073	64.748	1,019	0.000
I buy unique and admirable cars	3.3341	1.18179	57.126	1,019	0.000
My car makes me feel good	3.4756	1.31221	53.631	1,019	0.000
I prefer a car which is widely available	3.4610	1.26634	55.340	1,019	0.000
I buy a car which have showrooms all over the country	3.3415	1.26084	53.662	1,019	0.000
I buy a car which have spare parts readily available	3.7366	1.46145	51.771	1,019	0.000
I choose cars with maintenance and repair services available	3.5829	1.52540	47.560	1,019	0.000
I buy a car which is lowly priced	2.9854	1.08773	55.574	1,019	0.000
I buy a car which is highly priced	2.9073	1.11938	52.591	1,019	0.000
My brand of car gives me value for money	3.5537	1.24043	58.009	1,019	0.000
I will buy a car because of its country of origin	3.3098	1.19663	56.005	1,019	0.000
I buy a car recommended by my family and friends	3.0902	1.16977	53.491	1,019	0.000
My car brand reflects my social status	3.2024	1.12343	57.720	1,019	0.000
I prefer a car used by my family members and friends	2.6512	1.34975	39.773	1,019	0.000

selected for the analysis. In the initial exploration, all the 25 variables were factor analyzed which subsequently yielded eight factors as illustrated in the principal component factor loadings Table IV. The eight factors altogether explain satisfactory 63.6 percent variance.

#### Varimax rotated principal component loadings

The 25 variables were later rotated using the Varimax rotation as the extraction method. The results revealed that the variables loaded perfectly onto the eight factors. Four variables loaded highly on Factor 1 and were all related to the attributes of the cars. Factor 2 also had four variables which were also related to the emotional attachments which respondents had towards their brand of cars. Furthermore, Factor 3 had three variables which related to the image held about the cars. The fourth Factor had three items and these related to consumer awareness of the brand of car. Factor 5 related to the respondents' ease of accessibility of a car brand. In addition, Factor 6 had three items and related to the price of the car brands whilst Factor 7 had three factors which were all related to the influence of external factors. The final Factor 8 had only one item (My car brand reflects my social status).

#### Re-specification and reliability of the EFA

The internal reliability of the eight factors was analyzed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Only factors that met the minimum value of 0.7 as postulated by (Hair *et al.*, 2010) were accepted for further analysis. Also, in order to test the value of the variables that loaded onto the factors, item-to-total correlation was set above 0.3 (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Factor 8 was subsequently merged with factor 7 on the basis of conceptual fitness. The result is illustrated on Table V. Consequently, the factors that determine consumers' choices

of automobiles in Ghana are labeled as Car attributes, Emotional connection, Image of car, Awareness, Accessibility, Price of car and External influences.

#### The dependent variable

The variables measuring brand choice were also checked for their loadings and Cronbach's alpha. Results showed that all the variables used had high loadings between 0.661 and 0.782 with a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha value of 0.902, giving an indication that the variables used also represent a complete structure measuring consumer automobile choice.

#### Multiple regression analysis

In order to test the relationship between the factors that motivate consumers to choose their brand of automobiles as well as overall brand choice within the Ghanaian automobile industry, a multiple regression analysis was used. Brand choice was used as the dependent variable whilst the drivers of brand choice were used as the independent variables. Table VI presents a summary of the multiple regression least squares results for the dependent and independent variables. Similarly, Table VII also presents the correlation results of the independent variables.

The results from Table VI indicate that there is a strong and significant relationship between the determinants of automobile choice by consumers and overall brand choice ( $F = 179.625$ , Prob. $F$ -stats  $< 0.00$ ). The  $R$ -square value = 0.714 indicates that the independent variables explain 74.2 percent of the variance in overall consumer choice of automobiles with an adjusted  $R$ -square of 71.3 percent. On the individual determinants, car attributes was found to be the most important determinant of brand choice ( $\beta = 0.429$ ,  $t = 9.121$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). This was followed by



Table IV Principal component factor loadings

Variables	Communality	Factor	Eigen value	Percent of variance	Cumulative percent
I buy cars which are well advertised	0.666	1	3.052	12.906	12.906
I buy car brands whose name I remember best	0.611	2	2.103	11.694	24.600
I buy well-known car brands	0.657	3	1.467	8.725	33.325
I choose a car with a unique feature	0.704	4	1.305	7.907	41.232
I prefer a car with low running cost	0.544	5	1.216	6.683	47.915
I buy a car which is perceived prestigious and luxurious	0.593	6	1.201	5.905	53.820
I buy a car of high quality	0.699	7	1.083	5.428	59.248
I prefer attractive and well-designed cars	0.600	8	1.030	4.393	63.641
I choose a car that is safer	0.813				
I will buy a car that is durable	0.787				
My brand of car stands for something important to me	0.664				
My car brand socially connects me to people	0.565				
I buy unique and admirable cars	0.679				
My brand of car makes me feel good	0.684				
I prefer a car which is widely available	0.555				
I buy a car which have showrooms all over the country	0.516				
I buy a car which have spare parts readily available	0.784				
I choose cars with maintenance and repair services available	0.739				
I buy a car which is lowly priced	0.615				
I buy a car which is highly priced	0.640				
My brand of car gives me value for money	0.642				
I buy a car because of its country of origin	0.519				
I buy a car recommended by my family and friends	0.741				
My car brand reflects my social status	0.667				
I buy a car used by my family and friends	0.659				

Emotional connection ( $\beta = 0.132$ ,  $t = 4.660$ ,  $p = 0.008 < 0.05$ ), External influences ( $\beta = 0.079$ ,  $t = 4.225$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ), Awareness ( $\beta = 0.123$ ,  $t = 3.591$ ,  $p = 0.020 < 0.05$ ) and Accessibility ( $\beta = 0.120$ ,  $t = 2.164$ ,  $p = 0.013 < 0.05$ ). The results provide support for *H1*, *H3*, *H4*, *H6*, and *H7*, the remaining two hypotheses (*H2* and *H5*) were rejected in the current study.

The Image and Price factors ( $\beta = 0.094$ ,  $t = 3.666$ ,  $p = 0.097$ ,  $> 0.05$ ) and ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $t = 2.805$ ,  $p = 0.055$ ,  $> 0.05$ ). This means that in Ghana, automobile users do not significantly consider the positioning or the perceived image associated with a car brand in their purchase decisions. Moreover, price is not a major determinant of consumers' decision to purchase an automobile among the sample considered for the study.

Pearson correlation analysis was used to provide evidence of convergent validity. From Table VII, the correlation coefficients for the seven factors measuring brand choice were all positive within the range of 0.084 to 0.782, most of which were significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level.

## Discussion of results

Finding from the study establishes the fact that the attributes of a car make a strong and significant contribution to automobile brand choice in Ghana. The findings confirm results from previous studies (Uggla, 2004; Kuksov, 2004; Russell and Taylor, 2006) who found that a product's attributes are of great concern to consumers when making purchases. For automobile users, the core features of the car are important considerations in the choice of the car brand. The design, color and glaze, performance, and size all come

into play in influencing consumer choice. Similarly, emotional connection was also found to be a major determinant of consumer brand choice of cars, thereby confirming previous works of (Morris *et al.*, 2002; Gobe, 2001) that assert that consumers sometimes do not make purely rational decisions when deciding which products and services to purchase. Thus, there is an indication that personal emotional attachments towards some car brands influence consumers in the purchase of cars in Ghana.

Furthermore, external influences were also seen as a key determinant of automobile brand choice and is also consistent with previous studies (Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2008; Wang and Yang, 2008; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009) who emphasized on the role played by external influences in brand choices. According to Keller (1993), cultural differences such as social values could explain consumer choice of brands. In addition to external influences, accessibility was also a major factor which is considered by automobile consumers when making car purchases. For most Ghanaian car buyers, not only must the car be available at the various dealer showrooms, but must also have locations where access to spare parts and maintenance services are achieved. Some earlier studies (Lin and Chang, 2003; Kim, 2008) have found the significant role played by accessibility as an antecedent to consumer convenience in brand choices. In congruence with previous studies on brand awareness (Lin and Chang, 2003), it is fair to further posit that awareness of a car brand significantly influence purchase in Ghana.

Findings from the study also suggest that a car's brand image does not to a significant extent influence consumers in their purchase of car brands in a developing country such as

Table V Internal consistency and final revised structure

Factor and items	Number of items	Loadings	Item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha
<i>Factor 1: car attributes</i>	4			0.890
I buy a car of high quality		0.682	0.493	
I prefer attractive and well-designed cars		0.557	0.658	
I choose a car that is safer		0.807	0.674	
I will buy a car that is durable		0.785	0.595	
<i>Factor 2: emotional connection</i>	4			0.803
My brand of car stands for something important to me		0.526	0.591	
My car brand socially connects me to people		0.513	0.485	
I buy unique and admirable cars		0.582	0.587	
My brand of car makes me feel good		0.520	0.498	
<i>Factor 3: image of car</i>	3			0.709
The queues in the bank are reasonable		0.563	0.607	
I am always served when it is my turn		0.692	0.563	
I am happy with the procedures in the bank		0.585	0.560	
<i>Factor 4: awareness</i>	3			0.701
I buy cars which are well advertised		0.685	0.614	
I buy car brands whose name I remember best		0.682	0.569	
I buy well-known car brands		0.788	0.650	
<i>Factor 5: accessibility</i>	4			0.794
I prefer a car which is widely available		0.627	0.457	
I buy a car which have showrooms all over the country		0.523	0.653	
I buy a car which have spare parts readily available		0.785	0.592	
I choose cars with maintenance and repair services available		0.737	0.554	
<i>Factor 6: price of car</i>	3			0.703
I buy a car which is lowly priced		0.586	0.492	
I buy a car which is highly priced		0.562	0.562	
My brand of car gives me value for money		0.739	0.621	
<i>Factor 7: external influence</i>	4			0.741
I buy a car because of its country of origin		0.513	0.553	
I buy a car recommended by my family and friends		0.568	0.586	
I buy a car used by my family and friends		0.655	0.634	
My car brand reflects my social status		0.665	0.529	

Table VI Multiple regression analysis for key drivers of automobile brand choice in Ghana

Variable	Beta	SE	t	Prob.
Constant		0.236	5.844	0.000
Awareness	0.123	0.036	3.591	0.020 *
Image/positioning	0.094	0.041	3.666	0.097
Car attributes	0.429	0.057	9.121	0.000 **
Emotional connection	0.132	0.059	4.660	0.008 **
Accessibility	0.120	0.058	2.164	0.013 *
Price	0.023	0.047	2.805	0.055
External influence	0.079	0.054	4.225	0.000 **

Notes:  $n=1,020$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; SE of estimate=0.47380;  $R$ -square = 0.742; Adj.  $R$ -square = 0.713;  $F$ -statistics = 179.625; Prob. ( $F$ -stats.) = 0.000

Ghana. This is to assert that consumers in Ghana may not merely buy a car brand just because it is positioned to have a certain image. This is, however, incongruent with previous studies (Pappu *et al.*, 2005; Baek *et al.*, 2010; Bian and Moutinho, 2011) which have postulated the indispensable role played by a brand's image on consumers when making

purchase decisions. Again, unlike past studies (Erdem *et al.*, 2006; Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2009; Ching *et al.*, 2009) which emphasized on the effects of prices on brand choice of products, this study found a contrary result. This may be deduced from the fact that while some consumers are inclined to buy highly priced products as a sign of quality, others may stick to low-priced ones due to other individual economic circumstances. The findings suggest that the features of the cars are more important to the consumers than the price imposed on it by the dealers.

## Conclusions and implications

The study was initiated to investigate the drivers of consumer brand choice in Ghana. Using the survey method, data were collected from 1020 automobile owners in Ghana. The current study makes a contribution to the literature on automobile marketing and will be of significance to automobile manufacturers and dealers who are entering developing countries such as Ghana as a market expansion strategy. The study found that the selection of car brands in Ghana is based on multiplicity of factors, with some directly attributed to the brands while others are external cues associated with the brands. This means that manufacturers of

Table VII Correlation of the independent variables

	Awareness	Image	Car attributes	Accessibility	Price	External influences	Emotional connection
Awareness	1						
Image	0.084	1					
Car attributes	0.085	0.779 **	1				
Accessibility	0.095	0.715 **	0.782 **	1			
Price	0.105 *	0.596 **	0.342 **	0.345 **	1		
External influences	0.108 *	0.587 **	0.127 *	0.652 **	0.643 **	1	
Emotional connection	0.095	0.651 **	0.701 **	0.640 **	0.626 **	0.544 **	1

Notes: \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); \*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

automobiles must endow their cars with relevant consumer features such as style, design, comfort and safety. Efforts must be made to promote these differences to consumers through advertisements, exhibitions and trade shows in order to create strong preference for the brands. In addition, car manufacturers must further provide external cues such as opening more showrooms, availability of increase spare parts, accessories and service centers to provide after sales services to customers. The study found out for instance that Mercedes has only one showroom and one service center in Ghana. Private garages could be licensed to provide the needed after sales services to customers. It may also be very important for brand managers to leverage on the power of their brand promise to get consumers emotionally connected to their brands. Experiential marketing platforms, where consumers meet others on regular basis to share their consumption experiences of the brands, should be incorporated into the marketing strategies of the manufacturing companies.

The current study was limited to the automobile industry in Ghana. Therefore, the result cannot be generalized to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Future research should replicate the study in other countries in order to confirm the results of our findings. Also our study seems to suggest that price was not a significant determinant of automobile brand choice. Considering the fact that most of the respondents were well educated and received high incomes, their economic circumstances might be different from the majority of the people who have lower education, job opportunities and incomes. Further studies are needed to investigate the relative impact of demographic and economic variables such as gender, educational level and incomes on consumer brand choice of automobiles in other developing countries.

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## Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

*This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.*

Changes to economic and market conditions have created new opportunities for companies to expand their brands into new territories. Such developments have occurred in sub-Saharan African nations like Ghana where consumers now have an ever growing number of brands competing to meet their needs. In view of the heightened competition, it is more important than ever that academics and marketers identify factors which influence consumer choice of brands.

The body of research concerning brands is substantial. A brand functions as the sum of various attributes which indicate meaning to the consumer and helps them differentiate between alternative offerings. Different studies have found that products have symbolic as well as functional value. Consequently, people often select brands which they perceive to closely reflect their self-perceived identity. This further complicates a decision-making process where an array of product-related factors must be considered too. In high-involvement categories like automobiles, these complexities are particularly evident.

Previous studies have pinpointed various factors that influence the brand selection process. However, evidence remains inconclusive as to the respective importance of these factors. Most research has been confined to developed countries where the automobile market has often reached saturation point. As the market in developing nations is generally growing, the automobile industry would benefit from having a greater understanding of consumer brand preference.

Factors which determine brand choice include:

- *Brand awareness.* Found to have the strongest impact on purchase decisions in some studies. Familiarity makes it easier for consumers to recall a brand and also helps to create brand loyalty. Holding brand associations which are powerful, positive and unique also contributes. Since consumers also tend to simplify the purchase decision process by opting for brands they know, advertising which builds brand awareness has a crucial role to play.
- *Brand image.* This construct reflects “the perceptions and beliefs consumers hold about the brand”. Brand associations shape the uniqueness of a brand and help to sustain it over the longer term. Research shows that favored brands invariably boast a positive brand image. Delivering on brand promises can also boost image and increase loyalty. Image is especially influential within certain product categories, such as automobiles.
- *Accessibility.* The automobile sector is one where access to the brand will impact on consumer choice. Location and distribution are thus important to ensure availability and deter consumers from switching to an alternative brand if their preferred choice is unobtainable. Accessibility also extends to such as showrooms and parts, meaning that opening hours, waiting times and processes must help enhance customer experience with the firm.

- *Emotional connections.* Consumers are likely to prefer brands which they are able to form “an intimate bond” with, various scholars assert. Such emotional connections can mirror those experienced with close friends and impact on purchase intention. However, feelings can be positive or negative and variable in their intensity. Personal values and positive experiences might determine emotional attachment to a particular brand and this is apparent where automobile preference is concerned.
- *Price.* The role of this factor is widely acknowledged within the research community. Many consumers are typically willing to pay higher premiums for brands perceived as offering superior quality. Loyalty towards a specific brand triggers the same effect. Conversely, some individuals are attracted by lower price as this constitutes less financial risk.
- *Automobile attributes.* Quality is inextricably linked with a brand’s identity and is indicated in certain sectors by design and style. With automobiles, such attributes can influence consumers more than advertising. Certain scholars believe that the direct association with how they experience the product explains this. Design and style themselves help advertise the brand and communicate how it is positioned.
- *External influences.* Country-of-origin (COO) is known to influence consumer perceptions and choice of brands. COO is based on stereotypical images associated with certain countries and scholars argue that the construct can moderate the positive relationship between brand personality and purchase intention. A favorable COO increases the positive impact, while the opposite usually occurs when COO is negative. Brand selection can likewise be influenced by external factors including the consumer’s status, role, family and other reference groups.

Narteh *et al.* further explore the significance of these factors in a survey of car owners in Ghana. Subjects were contacted at various meeting points and 1,020 usable responses were obtained. Males accounted for 58.5 percent of the sample and females 41.5 percent, with most being over 35 years-old. The qualifications held by a sizeable number of respondents suggest correlation between educational level and car ownership.

Data revealed participant usage of a wide variety of automobile brands, with Toyota being the most popular. Various hypotheses were tested and the results indicated that consumer brand selection was positively influenced by brand awareness, accessibility, emotional connection, automobile attributes and external influences. Contrary to expectation, it appears that perceived brand image and price do not significantly impact on which car brand buyers in Ghana choose.

The identification of these key determinants adds further support to studies conducted earlier. Consumers are enticed by various car attributes and the importance of emotional connections illustrates that decisions are not made on a rational basis alone. The authors likewise note the influence of external factors and suggest that brand preference could also be influenced by different cultural characteristics.

Various features relating to such as design, style and comfort must be emphasized if car manufacturers are to attract consumers in the Ghanaian market. Promoting these features in order to differentiate their brand is also advised by Narteh *et al.* Advertisements, exhibitions and trade shows are channels recommended. A focus on accessibility is essential and should include opening new showrooms and providing an efficient after-sales service, perhaps using private garages where necessary. Nurturing an emotional connection between consumer and brand is perceived to be important too. This can be aided by concentrating on the brand promise and by

creating “experiential brand platforms” where consumers might share their experiences with the brand.

Research elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa is needed before these results can be generalized to other countries in the region. Given the surprise findings about price and brand image, the authors advocate further exploration of these factors.

*(A précis of the article “Key drivers of automobile brand choice in sub-Saharan Africa: the case of Ghana”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)*

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