

Exploring the Role of Customer-Centric Car Dealership Interior Design in Sri Lanka: A Study on Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract – This research delves into the vital domain of vehicle dealership interiors, recognizing their pivotal role as the main point of connection between customers and manufacturers. It comprehensively explores the variables of product and furniture arrangement, lighting, and thermal comfort to understand their influence on customer satisfaction. Through meticulous analysis of these variables, the study aims to optimise the dealership environment, creating an inviting and comfortable atmosphere that enhances customer experiences and fosters lasting relationships. The findings provide invaluable insights for car dealerships in Sri Lanka, empowering them to improve customer satisfaction, drive brand loyalty, and attain sustained business success. In conclusion, this research presents valuable recommendations for dealerships to improve their interior development strategies. By prioritising customer-centric enhancements in product and furniture arrangement, lighting, and thermal comfort, car dealerships can create an inviting and comfortable environment, thereby elevating customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and overall business success. These insights serve as a guiding framework for dealerships to elevate their competitiveness in the thriving automotive market of Sri Lanka, setting them apart as preferred destinations for automobile enthusiasts and potential customers alike.

Keywords - Dealership interior design, customer experience optimization, product arrangement, lighting comfort, brand loyalty enhancement

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I. Introduction

Car dealerships play a pivotal role in the automotive industry, serving as the bridge between customers and the products they desire. The significance of car dealership interiors lies in their potential to not only showcase vehicles but also create an inviting and satisfactory environment for customers. In the context of Sri Lanka, where the automobile market is thriving, understanding how car dealership interiors can be developed to improve customer satisfaction becomes crucial. This research aims to explore the factors that impact customer satisfaction in car dealership interiors.

Customer satisfaction is a key determinant of success for any business, and car dealerships are no exception. Satisfied customers are more likely to become loyal patrons, provide positive referrals, and contribute to the overall growth of the dealership. Hence, understanding and enhancing customer satisfaction is vital for the sustainable success of car dealerships in Sri Lanka. By prioritising customer satisfaction, dealerships can build lasting relationships with their clients, leading to increased brand loyalty and continued business. To determine the test subjects that will be studied further, a qualitative study has been carried out inside three local dealerships.

The dealership has been observed properly for one entire working day period, carrying out oral question sessions with the dealership managers and staff members to understand the customer behaviour within the space. Potential customer information safeguarding integrity and confidentiality was also involved in the discussion to grasp a proper idea of what factors should be taken into consideration to be tested further. Upon the details that were discovered, three aspects that were suspected of affecting customer satisfaction have been selected to be researched further.

Under customer satisfaction, the first test subject area to study is Interior Arrangement. Under this category, both the product arrangement and furniture arrangement were considered. The way the products (vehicles) are arranged and displayed in a dealership can significantly impact the customer's perception of available options and influence their overall experience. A well-organised and visually appealing product arrangement can enhance customer satisfaction and make the car selection process more seamless and enjoyable. Even the furniture arrangement within car dealership interiors is an important subject. Comfortable and strategically placed furniture plays a crucial role in creating a welcoming atmosphere for customers. The right furniture arrangement can positively influence customer comfort and satisfaction, encouraging them to spend more time exploring the showroom and engaging with the dealership's offerings.

The lighting inside the car dealership interior will be the next test subject. This plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall customer experience. Adequate and well-designed lighting can create an inviting ambiance, highlighting the showcased vehicles, and enhancing the visual appeal of the space. Lighting can significantly influence customer perceptions, emotions, and comfort during their visit to the dealership. Its impact on customer satisfaction makes it a crucial aspect to be investigated.

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Finally, the temperature inside the dealership space can affect the customer's mood and overall comfort level during their visit. Providing an adequately controlled and comfortable environment can contribute to a more pleasant experience, enhancing customer satisfaction and potentially increasing the likelihood of making a purchase.

This research aims to bridge the existing research gap by examining the specific impact of Product Arrangement and Furniture Arrangement, Lighting and Thermal Comfort on customer satisfaction inside car dealerships. By gaining insights into these variables and their relationship with customer satisfaction, this study seeks to provide valuable recommendations for improving car dealership interiors in Sri Lanka, leading to enhanced customer experiences and long-term business success.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the critical factors influencing customer satisfaction within car dealership interiors in Sri Lanka. The findings will provide valuable insights that can guide car dealerships in their efforts to improve customer satisfaction and drive business growth. It is evident that a customer-centric approach, coupled with careful attention to the arrangement of products and furniture, lighting and temperature control, can greatly influence customer perceptions and satisfaction levels. Implementing the recommendations will enable car dealerships to create memorable experiences for their customers, strengthen brand loyalty, and gain a competitive edge in the automotive market of Sri Lanka.

II. Methodology

In this research, the chosen methodology follows the research onion model, which comprises interconnected factors to guide the investigation on improving customer satisfaction through user centric car dealership interior development in Sri Lanka. The research philosophy is rooted in positivism, enabling an exploration of subjective views and openly discussing ongoing situations. Adopting an inductive research approach, numerical data will be collected through a structured questionnaire from car enthusiasts and customers visiting car dealerships, facilitating statistical analysis of the independent variables (Product Arrangement and Furniture Arrangement, Lighting and Thermal Comfort) and their impact on the dependent variable (Customer Satisfaction).

Primary data collection occurs through the structured questionnaire, assessing participants' experiences and preferences. The research choice employed would be a mixed method since both quantitative information and qualitative information are used. This makes the research strategies utilised in the research into case studies and surveys. The research strategy involves a cross-sectional design, gathering data at a specific point in time from diverse car buyers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions.

The sampling strategy utilises convenience sampling to select participants based on their availability and willingness to engage. With an anticipated sample size above 100, the study aims to ensure a representative range of participants. The collected data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics will summarise the

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participants' responses, offering a clear overview of their perceptions. Subsequently, inferential statistics, like regression analysis, will explore the relationship between the independent variables and Customer Satisfaction.

Through this interconnected methodology, this research seeks to unveil valuable insights into the factors influencing customer satisfaction in car dealership interiors in Sri Lanka. By aligning the research on factors, this study provides meaningful recommendations for optimising the customer experience within car dealerships, contributing to enhanced customer satisfaction and the sustained success of automotive businesses in Sri Lanka. The target locations tested in this research are the two German manufacturer vehicle dealerships, BMW and Audi, with which their main showrooms located in Sri Lanka were evaluated.

III. Vehicle dealership interior space

Vehicle dealership interiors refer to the physical space within an automotive showroom where selling, merchandising, and customer interactions take place. It serves as the primary connection point between customers and vehicle manufacturers. Inside the dealership, various activities occur, such as showcasing vehicles, offering test drives, discussing vehicle specifications, negotiating prices, and finalising sales transactions. Additionally, dealerships may provide post-sales services, such as maintenance, repairs, and customer support. The interior design and layout of the dealership play a crucial role in creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for customers. A well-designed and organised dealership interior can positively influence customer perceptions, foster a sense of trust, and enhance the overall customer experience, ultimately leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.

To enhance customer satisfaction, this research focuses on three key variables: product and furniture arrangement, lighting, and thermal comfort. By analysing how vehicles are organised and furniture is placed, evaluating lighting adequacy, and ensuring thermal comfort, the aim is to optimise the dealership environment, creating a welcoming ambiance and enhancing customer experiences during the car selection process. These improvements are vital for fostering lasting relationships with customers and driving overall dealership success.

In this research, data was collected through a comprehensive questionnaire distributed to car enthusiasts and customers at automobile showrooms in Sri Lanka. The primary objective was to investigate the factors influencing customer satisfaction within car dealership interiors, focusing on three independent variables: Product Arrangement, Furniture Arrangement, and Thermal Comfort. The data analysis process involved utilising SPSS software to derive meaningful insights from the collected responses. By delving into the relationship between these variables and customer satisfaction, this research aims to contribute valuable knowledge and practical implications for enhancing customer experiences and dealership performance.

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A. Product and Furniture Arrangement in vehicle dealership Interiors

The first category to be evaluated is product arrangement and furniture arrangement. Over here, using the term “product”, what is identified would be the vehicles on display. Previous studies highlight that an organised and visually appealing product display positively influences customer perceptions and enhances the overall shopping experience (Smith et al., 2018). A well-designed showroom layout encourages customers to explore the offerings, spend more time inside the dealership, and potentially make a purchase (Mittal & Kamakura, 2015). Additionally, comfortable furniture arrangements create an inviting ambiance, fostering a sense of relaxation and contentment, which contributes to higher customer satisfaction (Grewal et al., 2020). These findings underscore the significance of effective product and furniture arrangement in optimising the overall dealership experience and bolstering customer satisfaction levels. By integrating insights from the literature, this research aims to identify ways to enhance these aspects within vehicle dealership interiors and deliver valuable recommendations for improving customer experiences.

Inside a car dealership, the manufacturer's proud product would be automobiles and that sets the tone of the atmosphere to the customer. Using arrangement what is considered would be an evaluation of how the placement of the product and furniture Layout within the space. Respondents were asked about the comfortability of their movement within the space, ease of finding pathways, and overall satisfaction with the arrangement as well. This category aimed to understand how the organisation and presentation of products and furniture influenced customer satisfaction and their perception of the dealership's brand and offerings. Also using furniture arrangement, this category sought to explore how strategically placed and aesthetically pleasing furniture could enhance customer comfort, influence their willingness to spend time in the showroom, and contribute to a positive overall experience. They considered Avenues from this category the research was, Product visibility, Product display layout, Customer interaction spaces and seating placement.

Figure 1
Statistics of product arrangement

		Product Arrangement			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Outstanding	30	18.8	18.8	18.8
	Very satisfied	33	20.6	20.6	39.4
	Satisfactory	31	19.4	19.4	58.8
	Unsatisfied	29	18.1	18.1	76.9
	Poor	37	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of responses shows that 18.8% of participants rated the product display as "Outstanding," while 20.6% were "Very satisfied," and 19.4% found it "Satisfactory." Conversely, 18.1% were "Unsatisfied," and 23.1% rated it as "Poor."

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Figure 2
Statistics of furniture arrangement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Outstanding	43	26.9	26.9	26.9
	Very satisfied	30	18.8	18.8	45.6
	Satisfactory	24	15.0	15.0	60.6
	Unsatisfied	28	17.5	17.5	78.1
	Poor	35	21.9	21.9	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

From the frequency table, it is evident that the majority of respondents rated the provided seating as "Outstanding" (26.9%) or "Very satisfied" (18.8%). However, a considerable proportion of respondents also rated it as "Unsatisfied" (17.5%) or "Poor" (21.9%), indicating areas for improvement.

The research findings underscore the importance of optimising both product and furniture arrangements within car dealerships to enhance customer satisfaction. Improving the organisation and visual appeal of product displays can positively influence customer perceptions, leading to increased satisfaction. Addressing concerns expressed by customers who rated the product arrangement poorly can result in notable improvements to their overall experience, fostering higher customer loyalty. Moreover, investing in comfortable and ample seating arrangements can create a welcoming atmosphere, contributing to greater customer satisfaction and retention.

B. Lighting

Lighting inside a vehicle dealership refers to the illumination fixtures and design elements integrated within the space to provide visibility and enhance the overall ambiance. This aspect is important to the research topic, as lighting directly influences customer perceptions and experiences during their visit. Previous research highlights that well-designed lighting enhances the overall shopping experience and positively impacts customer perceptions (Hultén et al., 2019). Adequate lighting accentuates displayed vehicles, making them more appealing to potential customers (Mehta & Zhu, 2017), while creating a welcoming ambiance that fosters positive emotional responses (Bloch, 2016). On the other hand, poor lighting may lead to visual discomfort and reduce satisfaction levels (Tuzovic & Kuhn, 2018). This study aims to explore the significance of lighting in car dealerships, assess its effects on customer satisfaction, and provide insights to optimise lighting arrangements for an enhanced dealership experience.

Additionally, various types of lighting are used in vehicle dealership interiors. Combining ambient, accent, and task lighting is commonly employed to achieve an optimal environment (Bloch, 2016). Ambient lighting provides general illumination, creating a comfortable and inviting

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atmosphere (Mehta & Zhu, 2017), while accent lighting highlights specific areas or features, drawing attention to key elements within the showroom (Hultén et al., 2019). Task lighting ensures sales representatives can provide accurate information and facilitate smooth interactions (Tuzovic & Kuhn, 2018). Appropriate lighting combinations significantly contribute to customer satisfaction and positively impact their overall perception of the dealership's offerings and services. This research aims to provide valuable insights to car dealerships in optimising their lighting arrangements for a pleasant and satisfying customer experience.

Well-designed and strategically placed lighting can accentuate the displayed vehicles, create a welcoming atmosphere, and positively impact customer satisfaction. Generally, various types of lighting are used in car dealerships, including ambient lighting, task lighting, accent lighting, and natural lighting through windows and skylights, each serving specific purposes to enhance the showroom's overall appeal and functionality. The avenues which will be considered under this category would be natural and artificial light, lighting placement and illumination intensity.

Figure 3
Statistics of lighting

		Lighting			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Outstanding	26	16.3	16.3	16.3
	Very satisfied	34	21.3	21.3	37.5
	Satisfactory	31	19.4	19.4	56.9
	Unsatisfied	32	20.0	20.0	76.9
	Poor	37	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

The data collected on the "Lighting" variable reveals customers' perceptions of the lighting inside the car dealership's space. From the analysis, it is evident that opinions vary significantly. Approximately 16.3% of participants rated the lighting as "Outstanding," while 21.3% found it "Very satisfied." Another 19.4% rated it as "Satisfactory," followed closely by 20% who considered it "Unsatisfied." Lastly, 23.1% of respondents rated the lighting as "Poor." These results highlight the importance of addressing lighting conditions to create an optimal environment for customers.

The data collected on the "Lighting" variable indicates that customers' perceptions of the lighting inside the car dealership's space vary significantly. The results emphasise the need for careful consideration and improvements in lighting to create a more appealing and satisfying interior environment for customers. Addressing lighting concerns can contribute to enhancing the overall customer experience and promote a positive impression of the car dealership in Sri Lanka.

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C. Thermal comfort

Thermal Comfort investigated how temperature control inside the car dealership impacted customer satisfaction. Previous studies highlight that providing a comfortable temperature environment positively influences the overall shopping experience and customer perceptions (Gauthier et al., 2019). Maintaining an appropriate temperature inside the showroom creates a sense of comfort and relaxation, enhancing the customer's mood and overall satisfaction (Turley & Milliman, 2018). On the contrary, uncomfortable thermal conditions may lead to customer discomfort and dissatisfaction (Bitner, 2019). Research suggests that factors such as temperature control, ventilation, and air quality play crucial roles in creating a comfortable environment (Turley & Milliman, 2018). Proper temperature control ensures that the showroom remains at a pleasant level throughout different seasons, providing customers with a comfortable experience (Gauthier et al., 2019). Adequate ventilation and air quality also contribute to thermal comfort by ensuring the circulation of fresh air and maintaining a healthy indoor atmosphere (Bitner, 2019). Understanding these sub-variables is essential for dealerships to optimise thermal comfort and enhance customer satisfaction. This study aims to provide valuable insights to car dealerships in creating an optimal thermal environment that fosters positive customer experiences and improves overall satisfaction levels.

By examining existing literature, this research seeks to investigate the role of thermal comfort in car dealerships, assess its effects on customer satisfaction, and offer insights to optimise thermal conditions for a more pleasant and enjoyable dealership experience.

For the context of this study, respondents were questioned about their comfort level within the space and their perception of the temperature. This category aimed to uncover the significance of maintaining an appropriate and pleasant indoor temperature to ensure customers felt at ease, which in turn could influence their overall satisfaction and likelihood of returning to the dealership. By analysing these three sampling categories, the research aimed to gain valuable insights into the factors that contribute to customer satisfaction and guide improvements in car dealership interior design in Sri Lanka. The factors considered under this main category are Heating and cooling systems, Temperature preferences and ventilation systems.

Figure 4
Statistics of Thermal Comfort

		Thermal comfort			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Outstanding	28	17.5	17.5	17.5
	Very satisfied	33	20.6	20.6	38.1
	Satisfactory	37	23.1	23.1	61.3
	Unsatisfied	33	20.6	20.6	81.9
	Poor	29	18.1	18.1	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

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The data collected on the variable "Thermal Comfort" reveals customers' perceptions of their comfort level inside the car dealership in terms of temperature. The results indicate that the majority of customers had varying levels of satisfaction with thermal comfort. Among the participants, 17.5% rated their experience as "Outstanding," 20.6% as "Very Satisfied," 23.1% as "Satisfactory," 20.6% as "Unsatisfied," and 18.1% as "Poor."

The analysis of the "Thermal Comfort" variable revealed diverse perceptions among customers regarding their comfort level inside the car dealership. While a significant proportion expressed satisfaction, there were also dissatisfied customers. The findings suggest that the car dealership's interior temperature is an essential factor in shaping customer experiences and overall satisfaction. By understanding these preferences, car dealerships can tailor their environments to better meet customers' expectations and enhance their overall satisfaction. Further investigation into the relationship between thermal comfort, other variables, and customer satisfaction will provide valuable insights for improving car dealership interiors in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlights the crucial role of car dealership interiors in influencing customer satisfaction. The study examined three independent variables - Product and Furniture Arrangement, Lighting, and Thermal Comfort - to explore their impact on customer experiences in Sri Lanka. The findings underscore the significance of a well-organised and visually appealing product display, which positively influences customer perceptions and overall satisfaction. Investing in comfortable and sufficient seating arrangements is also essential, as it enhances the dealership's ambiance and leads to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of proper lighting in creating an inviting atmosphere, which contributes to customers' positive experiences. Adequate lighting arrangements can accentuate displayed vehicles' features, making them more appealing and attractive to potential customers. Additionally, the research further explores the role of thermal comfort in car dealerships. Maintaining a comfortable temperature environment enhances the overall shopping experience, influencing customer mood and satisfaction levels.

The research as a whole, provides valuable insights and practical implications for car dealerships in Sri Lanka, helping them optimise their interiors to ensure higher customer satisfaction, loyalty, and business success. By addressing the identified factors, dealerships can create more enjoyable and customer-centric environments, fostering positive emotional responses and long-lasting relationships with their interested parties and clients which will be beneficial for the survival of the manufacturers and even to customers since a better user focused product and space to interact will be provided.

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Recommendations

Based on the research findings, notable key recommendations emerge for car dealerships to improve customer satisfaction and enhance their business. Firstly, it is crucial for dealerships to reevaluate their product and furniture arrangement strategies, focusing on creating visually appealing displays that not only showcase vehicles effectively but also improve customer navigation and browsing experiences. Investing in comfortable seating options and strategically placing furniture can further enhance customer comfort and engagement, encouraging them to spend more time exploring the showroom and interacting with the dealership's offerings.

Secondly, car dealerships should prioritise adequate and appropriate lighting throughout their interiors. Proper lighting plays a significant role in creating an inviting and pleasant atmosphere, positively influencing customers' mood and perceptions during their visit. By combining ambient, accent, and task lighting, dealerships can accentuate the features of displayed vehicles, draw attention to key areas, and ensure that sales representatives can provide accurate information to customers efficiently. A well-lit showroom can significantly contribute to a more enjoyable customer experience, potentially leading to increased customer satisfaction and repeat visits.

Furthermore, the aspect of thermal comfort should not be overlooked. Dealerships need to pay attention to temperature control and air conditioning to ensure a comfortable experience for customers, regardless of external weather conditions. Maintaining an optimal temperature inside the showroom can positively impact customer satisfaction, making them feel at ease and more likely to spend additional time exploring the offerings and making informed decisions about potential purchases.

By implementing these comprehensive recommendations, car dealerships can create a more customer-centric approach, putting customer satisfaction at the forefront of their operations. These efforts will foster long-term relationships with their clientele and ensure sustained business success in the competitive automotive market of Sri Lanka. Emphasising the importance of a pleasant and engaging customer experience will not only improve the dealership's reputation but also position it as a preferred destination for potential car buyers in the region.

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