

A Diagnostic Study on Consumer Perceptions, Buying Motives, and Friction Points in the Mid-Size Passenger Vehicle Segment: An Empirical Analysis at Garve Škoda

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Abstract

Dealership showrooms are where a manufacturer's brand promise is either turned into a booking or lost to a neighbouring dealer, yet published work on Indian passenger-vehicle retail rarely looks inside a single showroom. This paper reports a three-month practitioner study at the Pimple Gurav showroom of Garve Škoda, an authorised Škoda dealership in Pune, carried out by two sales-consultant interns between 15 May and 15 August 2026. The quantitative base is a structured log of 45 walk-in customers kept by the first author; the second author's observations from the same showroom, and the first author's exhibition and outbound-calling experience, supply the qualitative material. The Kylaq was the most-enquired model (42%), automatic transmission was preferred by 59% of customers who stated a preference, and quality (53%) led a closely bunched ranking of buying motives in which safety (47%) was not clearly behind comfort, roominess or driving feel (49% each). Sixty-four per cent of customers took a test drive, but only three (7%) had booked by the end of the study window. In our experience the main brake on conversion was price: customers repeatedly reported discounts at neighbouring Škoda dealerships, and at other showrooms of the same dealer group, that Pimple Gurav could not match, which we link to the trade's practice of discounting aged-warranty ("DAN") stock. We argue that discount inconsistency inside a single dealer group is an under-documented form of horizontal channel conflict and suggest practical responses. The findings are exploratory.

I. Introduction

Most of what is written about India's passenger-vehicle market is written from the top down: manufacturer sales tables, market-share charts, launch coverage. Much less is written from inside a showroom, on the floor, where a customer who has already decided on a Kylaq is still deciding whether to buy it from this dealer, at this price, this month. That is the vantage point of this paper. We spent three months as sales-consultant interns at Garve Škoda's Pimple Gurav showroom in Pune, and we tried to record, as systematically as an internship allows, what customers asked for, what held them back and what happened next.

The market context was favourable. SIAM figures showed record domestic passenger-vehicle sales in April 2026 (SIAM, 2026), and Škoda reported its best-ever quarter in Q1 2026 and a record first half, led by the Kylaq (Škoda Auto India, 2026; DriveSpark, 2026). National growth, however, says little about what happens to an



individual walk-in. A brand can be growing quickly while a particular showroom loses customers to a dealer a few kilometres away.

The paper makes three modest contributions. It profiles the stated buying motives of 45 logged walk-in customers for the Kylaq, Kushaq and Slavia. It documents, from practitioner observation, a pricing problem that is easy to see from the floor but rarely discussed: discount inconsistency not only between rival dealers but between showrooms owned by the same group. And it records what worked, and what did not, when pitching to high-footfall exhibition crowds and cold-call lists.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The buyer decision process

Kotler and Keller (2016) describe purchase as a sequence of problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. For a high-involvement purchase such as a car, most of the first three stages happen before a customer ever reaches a showroom. Studies of Indian SUV buyers have used the Theory of Planned Behaviour for this reason, treating attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control as drivers of purchase intention (Joghee et al., 2024). The practical implication, which our observations support, is that a sales consultant meets customers who have already formed a view.

2.2 Consultative selling

Rackham (1988) argued that diagnosing a customer's situation and needs before proposing a product outperforms product-first selling. More recent quantitative work, using sales records from five IT firms, reports a statistically significant association between the use of consultative techniques and both shorter sales cycles and better conversion (Masud et al., 2025). That study is business-to-business and not about cars, so we treat it as supportive rather than conclusive, but it fits the needs-first approach we were coached to use at Garve Škoda.

2.3 Channel conflict

Channel conflict is usually divided into vertical conflict, between levels of a channel such as manufacturer and dealer, and horizontal conflict, between outlets at the same level. A systematic review of manufacturer encroachment by Tahirov and Glock (2022) consolidates the literature on why manufacturers add direct or overlapping channels and how the resulting conflict with existing partners is managed. In the sources we reviewed, we did not come across a treatment of price inconsistency between showrooms owned by the same dealer group, which is the form of conflict we kept encountering. We do not claim the topic is absent from the literature, only that we did not find it, and we flag it as a gap for others to confirm or correct.

2.4 Price negotiation at the dealership

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission's Auto Buyer Study, based on in-depth interviews with 38 recent car buyers, found that consumers often do not realise which parts of a vehicle deal are negotiable and that price, trade-in and financing interact within a single transaction (Sullivan et al., 2020). The context is American, but the underlying point travels: the number on a price list is rarely the number a buyer pays, so the negotiating room a dealer has, and how consistently it uses it, matters.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study had four objectives:

1. To identify and analyse the most common customer objections and price
-related friction points encountered on the showroom floor, particularly in relation to discount expectations and competitive dealer pricing.
2. To study customer feature preferences and buying motives (comfort, styling, quality, fuel economy,



safety, ease of use, roominess and driving characteristics) and their influence on model and variant selection within Škoda's Kylaq, Kushaq and Slavia range.

3. To develop and refine real-time product-pitching techniques for capturing and qualifying warm leads in high-footfall, multi-brand competitive environments such as public exhibitions.

4. To apply core sales and marketing concepts directly to frontline dealership operations and evaluate their practical relevance against real showroom experience.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Design

This is an exploratory, practitioner-based study. It combines a small structured dataset with the authors' field observations. We did not set out to test hypotheses; we set out to describe how customers behaved at one showroom and to read that description against existing theory.

4.2 Setting and data sources

All data come from the Pimple Gurav showroom of Garve Škoda, one of four showrooms of a Pune-based Škoda dealer group, between 15 May and 15 August 2026. Three sources are used, and we are explicit about the strength of each.

- Structured customer log (quantitative). The first author recorded 45 walk-in customers between 31 May and 09 August 2026. For each customer the log captured the model and variant enquired, transmission preference, city or highway usage, an eight-attribute feature checklist (comfort, styling, quality, fuel economy, safety, ease of use, roominess, driving characteristics), test-drive status, RTO registration preference (Maharashtra MH-series or pan-India Bharat BH-series), previous vehicle and exchange interest, and booking status. All figures in Section 5.1 to
5.4 come from this log.

- Field observations (qualitative). Both authors worked the same showroom over the same period and served broadly similar customers. Observations on pricing, competing quotes, negotiation and customer behaviour were not logged in the tracker; they are our recollections and informal notes, compared between us afterwards.

- Exhibitions and outbound calling (qualitative, approximate). The first author represented the dealership at the Sakal Auto Expo in Pune and at an exhibition at Elpro Mall, Pimpri, where the Kylaq and Kushaq were on display, meeting an estimated 50 further customers. The first author also made an estimated 500 to 700 outbound calls, of which an estimated 10 to 20 produced concrete future-purchase leads. These are estimates, not counted records.

4.3 Analysis

The structured data are analysed with simple counts and percentages. The feature checklist allowed multiple selections per customer, so attribute shares do not sum to 100%. With 45 customers the margin of error on a share near 50% is roughly ±15 percentage points, so differences of a few points between attributes should not be over-interpreted.

4.4 Status of the qualitative material

The observations in Sections 5.5 and 5.6 were not coded or counted. We present them as practitioner observations that we believe accurately reflect what we experienced, not as measured findings. Discount figures were quoted to us by customers and could not be verified. Customers are not identified anywhere in this paper, and rival dealerships are deliberately anonymised.



5. Findings

5.1 Models and customer profile

Of the 45 logged customers, 19 (42%) enquired about the Kylaq, 12 (27%) about the Kushaq and 11 (24%) about the Slavia; three (7%) had not decided between two models (Table 1). Twenty-six customers (58%) already owned a car, and five of them (19%) offered it in exchange; the other 19 (42%) were first-time buyers.

Table 1: Model enquired (n = 45)

Model	Customers	Share
Kylaq	19	42%
Kushaq	12	27%
Slavia	11	24%
Undecided between two models	3	7%

The Kylaq was the most-enquired model, as it is Škoda's top seller nationally, where it accounted for well over half of monthly sales in the March 2026 breakup (Rushlane, 2026). Our enquiry mix was more evenly spread, with the Slavia drawing a much larger share of enquiries than it does of national sales. Enquiries are not sales, and the source covers a different month from our study window, so we do not treat this as a test of representativeness.

5.2 Transmission, usage and registration

Of the 44 customers who stated a transmission preference, 26 (59%) wanted an automatic and 18 (41%) a manual, so manual buyers were far from a niche. Usage was overwhelmingly urban: 37 customers (82%) described mainly city driving and eight (18%) regular highway use. Thirty-two customers (71%) wanted MH-series registration and 13 (29%) the BH series. We had expected more BH interest given Pune's mobile workforce; in the log, local registration was the clear default.

5.3 Buying motives

Quality was the attribute selected most often (24 customers, 53%), followed by comfort, roominess and driving characteristics (22 each, 49%), safety (21, 47%), styling (20, 44%), fuel economy (19, 42%) and ease of use (14, 31%) (Table 2, Figure 1). The top six attributes lie within 11 percentage points of each other, well inside the margin of error. The honest reading is not that one attribute wins, but that customers wanted several things at once, and that safety, which we had assumed would be the strongest opening argument for a European brand, was no more prominent than comfort or roominess.

Table 2: Attributes selected by customers (n = 45, multiple selections allowed)

Attribute	Customers	Share
Quality	24	53%
Comfort	22	49%
Roominess	22	49%
Driving characteristics	22	49%
Safety	21	47%

Styling	20	44%
Fuel economy	19	42%
Ease of use	14	31%

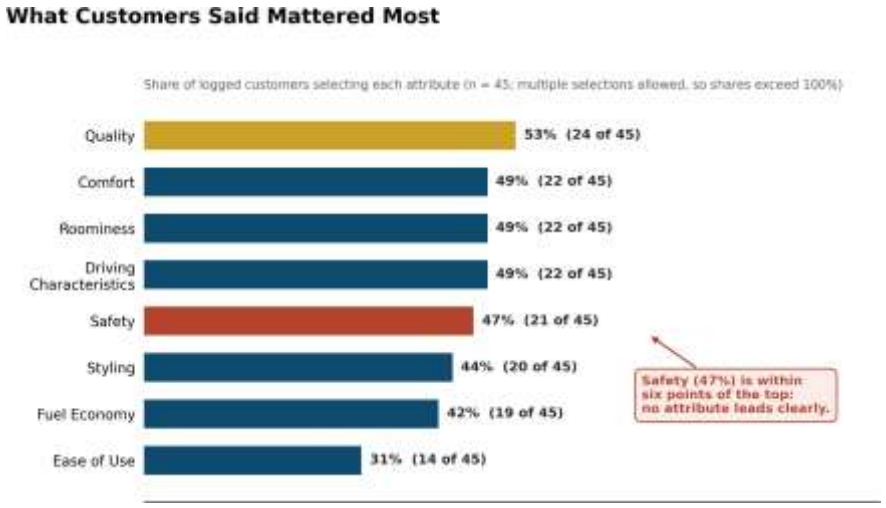


Figure 1: Share of logged customers selecting each attribute (n = 45)

5.4 The conversion funnel

Of the 45 logged customers, 29 (64%) took a test drive, and three (7% of walk-ins, or 10% of those who test-drove) had booked by 09 August (Figure 2). The first stage is healthy: nearly two in three customers were engaged enough to drive the car. The funnel shows where customers fell away, not why. Many of the remaining 26 test-drive customers were still deciding when the log closed, and around ten leads with Diwali-linked purchase plans remained open, so the booking rate within our window understates eventual conversion.



Figure 2: Showroom funnel, 31 May – 09 August 2026 (n = 45)

5.5 Price friction and channel conflict (observations)

In our experience, price was the objection raised most often once a customer had driven the car. We did not tally objections, so we cannot give counts, but the pattern was consistent across both our shifts. Customers repeatedly told us that two neighbouring Škoda dealerships (which we call Dealer A and Dealer B) had quoted them roughly ₹20,000 to ₹50,000 less than we could on the same model and variant. Customers and colleagues linked



this to those dealers' heavier discounting of what the trade calls "DAN" stock: vehicles on which the factory warranty has already started because they have been in stock for some time, and which dealers are keen to clear.

More surprising to us was that the same problem existed inside the dealer group. More than once, customers said another showroom of the same group had offered a better discount than ours. That left the consultant with no good answer: the usual arguments about stock freshness, warranty and service reputation do not apply when the cheaper quote comes from a sister showroom. Other factors, including finance arrangements, waiting periods and festive-season timing, also delayed bookings, and we cannot apportion the test-drive-to
-booking gap between them. We believe price was the largest factor, but this is our judgement, not a measured result.

5.6 Pitching in high-footfall settings (observations)

At the two exhibitions, visitors were mostly browsing, attention was short, and only the Kylaq and Kushaq were on display. A compressed version of the showroom pitch worked better than a full consultative one: the car on display for attention, a short walk-through of two or three features for interest, an invitation to sit inside or take a brochure for desire, and a direct request for a phone number and purchase timeline for action. Two or three quick questions about the customer's current car, budget and timing separated genuine prospects from casual visitors, so that time went to the former. The same discipline applied to cold calling: of an estimated 500 to 700 calls, an estimated 10 to 20 (very roughly 1.5 to 4%) produced a lead with real future-purchase intent. Qualifying quickly, rather than working harder on every contact, was the main lesson.

6. Discussion

Four points follow from reading the findings against the literature.

First, customers arrive late in the decision process, as the buyer-decision model and the SUV-buyer literature would predict (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Joghee et al., 2024). Most walk-ins named a model and often a competing quote before we spoke. Opening with general product awareness wastes the conversation; a direct comparison with the alternative the customer is already considering is more useful.

Second, motives were spread across many attributes rather than concentrated in one. This supports a consultative approach (Rackham, 1988; Masud et al., 2025): since no attribute reliably leads, the consultant has to ask. Our log suggests starting with quality and comfort, but treating that as a default to be tested in each conversation rather than a script.

Third, the large drop between test drive and booking, read with our observations on pricing, suggests that the binding constraint at this showroom was not product appeal, since customers engaged with the cars, but the terms on which they could buy. Discount inconsistency inside a dealer group is a form of horizontal channel conflict that the review by Tahirov and Glock (2022) does not appear to address, and the negotiation dynamics described by Sullivan et al. (2020) suggest why it matters: when price is negotiated case by case, inconsistent room to negotiate becomes inconsistent outcomes for identical customers. We offer this as a hypothesis for testing with pricing data, which we did not have.

Fourth, on applying classroom concepts, the sales funnel gave us a way to see where customers dropped out; AIDA gave the exhibition pitch a usable structure; consultative selling explained why asking beat telling; and channel-conflict theory named a problem we would otherwise have called "bad luck with discounts". Each concept was useful, though none replaced the judgement needed in the moment.



7. Recommendations for the Dealership

- Set discount bands centrally for all showrooms in the group, tied to stock age, so that the same car carries the same negotiating room wherever the customer walks in.
- Plan clearance of aged (DAN) stock proactively, with pre-approved discounts, rather than reacting to rival quotes.
- Give each festive-season lead a named owner and follow-up dates, since many leads mature after the first visit.
- Train consultants to diagnose before pitching, treating quality and comfort as the starting hypothesis rather than a fixed script.
- Track calling and exhibition leads in a shared, simple CRM so they receive the same follow-up as walk-ins.

8. Conclusion

At one Pune showroom, customers wanted a range of things at once, nearly two in three were engaged enough to take a test drive, and few had booked by the end of our window. In our experience the difference lay less in the product than in price and its inconsistency, including inconsistency between showrooms owned by the same group. If that observation holds in larger and better-documented samples, then improving conversion is partly a pricing-governance question and only partly a selling-skills question. We offer these findings as an exploratory, first-hand account to be tested, not as established results.

9. Limitations

- One showroom, a three-month window and 45 logged customers: results are exploratory and not statistically generalisable.
- The structured log was kept by one author. The second author's observations from the same showroom were not recorded in a structured form and are used only qualitatively.
- Observations on pricing, objections, exhibitions and calling were not coded or counted; call, lead and exhibition figures are estimates from memory.
- Competitor discount figures were reported by customers and could not be verified; we had no access to dealership pricing or financial data.
- The study window is short relative to a car purchase cycle, so the booking rate is a snapshot.
- Comparison with national model mix uses a different period and compares enquiries with sales.
- Because we were interns, our customers may differ from those served by senior staff.

Author Contributions

The first author maintained the structured customer log, carried out the analysis and drafted the paper. Both authors contributed field observations from the Pimple Gurav showroom, discussed and interpreted the findings, and reviewed and revised the final text.



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