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Customer Engagement and Lead Conversion in Automotive Retail

An Exploratory Research paper at a Škoda Dealership in Pune India

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Abstract

This exploratory research paper examines customer engagement and lead conversion at a private Škoda dealership in Pune, India. The study draws on a confirmed aggregate activity summary of 52 walk-in customers observed during a three-month internship, together with an anonymised 24-record enquiry extract. Of the 52 walk-ins, 45 completed a test drive, six booked within the internship period, and three additional bookings were known to occur later. The enquiry extract shows interest concentrated in the Slavia and Kylaq models, although the extract is not a complete cohort and cannot represent the dealership or market as a whole. Field observations from both authors inform a process-level interpretation of needs discovery, product explanation, test-drive coordination, and follow-up. The analysis is descriptive: it does not estimate causal effects, compare dealerships, or attribute booking outcomes to a single intervention. The findings suggest that a dealership should treat the test drive as an intermediate engagement stage and maintain a consent-aware, structured follow-up process that distinguishes in-period bookings from later conversions. The paper contributes a carefully bounded practitioner account of how customer-journey concepts can be applied to automotive retail while preserving the limits of a small, private operational dataset.

Keywords: *automotive retail; customer engagement; lead conversion; customer journey; exploratory research paper; Pune*

1 Introduction

Automotive retail is a high-involvement setting in which customers move across multiple touchpoints before a booking decision is made. A showroom interaction may include needs discovery, model comparison, product explanation, test-drive coordination, documentation, and later follow-up. For an intern working on the showroom floor, the practical question is not only whether a customer visits, but how the next relevant action is captured and supported.

This paper presents an exploratory practitioner research paper from a private Škoda dealership in Pune. It asks how a small internship record can be used responsibly to describe engagement stages and model interest without overstating what the data establish. The study has three purposes: to describe the observed enquiry-to-booking pathway, to report model interest from an anonymised enquiry extract, and to connect field observations with customer-journey and consultative-selling concepts.

The paper deliberately avoids identifying the dealer organisation, customers, staff, or commercially sensitive practices. It also avoids treating a partial enquiry extract as a population dataset. These boundaries are central to the design, because an operational internship record can illuminate process while still being unsuitable for causal or market-wide claims.



2 Literature Background

2.1 Customer journeys and purchase decisions

Customer decisions develop through need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase behaviour (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In contemporary retail, these stages are not confined to a single channel: customer experience is formed across touchpoints over time (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). For vehicle retail, a showroom conversation and a test drive therefore belong to a broader decision journey rather than an isolated sales event.

Research in the Indian SUV context also shows that behavioural intention is shaped by more than a single product attribute (Joghee et al., 2024). The present study does not test a behavioural model. Instead, it uses this literature to justify documenting the sequential stages through which an automotive prospect may progress.

2.2 Consultative selling in an automotive setting

Consultative selling frames the sales interaction as an effort to understand a customer's situation and needs before recommending a solution (Rackham, 1988). Its original evidence base is not specific to passenger vehicles, so the concept is used here as an interpretive lens rather than proof that a particular technique caused a booking. In this case, needs discovery, model explanation, test-drive coordination, and follow-up are treated as linked stages that can be recorded and reviewed.

2.3 Study purpose

The study addresses a narrow applied question: what can a small, privacy-protected internship record show about customer engagement and lead conversion at one automotive dealership? It does not test hypotheses, rank product features, measure competitor practices, or assess dealership performance beyond the reported cohort.

3 Method

3.1 Design and setting

The study used an exploratory descriptive case-study design. The setting was a private Škoda dealership in Pune, India, during an internship conducted from 15 May to 15 August 2026. The authors worked in customer-facing sales-support activities that included greeting walk-ins, product presentation, test-drive support, enquiry documentation, follow-up, and public-exhibition participation. The organisation is not named in this manuscript.

3.2 Data sources

Two quantitative sources were kept separate. First, a confirmed aggregate internship summary recorded 52 walk-ins, 45 test drives, six bookings within the internship window, and three known later bookings from the tracked cohort. Second, an anonymised 24-record enquiry extract contained date, model, source, and follow-up fields. The extract was used only for the model-interest distribution reported in Section 4.2. It did not contain a complete record of the 52 walk-ins or individual test-drive and booking fields.

Both authors also contributed field observations about the engagement process. These observations were not coded or counted and are used only to interpret operational stages. They are not treated as measured findings, and no claim is made that an observed practice caused a booking outcome.

3.3 Analysis and privacy safeguards

The analysis uses simple counts and percentages. Rates are descriptive, based on the confirmed aggregate summary, and should not be read as estimates for the wider dealership, the Škoda brand, or the Indian automotive market. Individual names, telephone numbers, email addresses, dealership identifiers, and other personal or sensitive operational details were excluded from the manuscript. The dataset was not combined with other internship datasets that used different cohort definitions or totals.



4 Findings

4.1 Observed engagement pathway

The aggregate activity summary shows strong movement from walk-in to test drive. Of 52 walk-ins, 45 completed a test drive (86.5%). Six bookings were completed during the internship period. Three further bookings from the tracked cohort were known after the internship. The later bookings show why a short observation window should not be treated as a final assessment of lead quality.

The funnel should be read as a time-bounded sequence rather than a single conversion score. The first transition records engagement with the vehicle, whereas the booking outcome can mature after the period in which the interaction was initially recorded. Accordingly, the in-period booking count and the known later bookings are displayed separately. This presentation avoids implying that all prospects who had not booked by the end of the internship were lost leads.

Table 1. Confirmed aggregate engagement pathway

Stage	Customers	Descriptive rate
Walk-ins recorded	52	100.0% of walk-ins
Test drives completed	45	86.5% of walk-ins
Bookings within internship period	6	11.5% of walk-ins; 13.3% of test drives
Known later bookings	3	Reported separately from in-period bookings
Known total bookings	9	17.3% of walk-ins; 20.0% of test drives



Figure 1. Confirmed aggregate customer engagement pathway

The data do not identify why individual prospects did or did not book. They therefore support a process description, not an explanation of the causes of conversion. The practical implication is limited but useful: post-test-drive status should remain visible until a lead reaches a documented outcome or a customer-appropriate closure point. For routine review, separating active prospects, in-period bookings, later bookings, and closed leads would be more informative than relying on one percentage alone.



4.2 Model interest in the anonymised enquiry extract

The 24-record enquiry extract showed a close concentration of recorded interest in the Slavia and Kylaq models. This distribution is a snapshot of the supplied extract only. It cannot be generalised to all walk-ins, dealership sales, or market demand because the extract is partial and was not linked to the complete engagement cohort. It does, however, show the value of recording the model field consistently: a small operational extract can help a sales team prepare relevant product information and organise follow-up without claiming to represent the entire market.

Table 2. Model interest in the anonymised enquiry extract

Model	Enquiry records	Share of extract
Kylaq	11	45.8%
Kushaq	1	4.2%
Slavia	12	50.0%
Total	24	100.0%

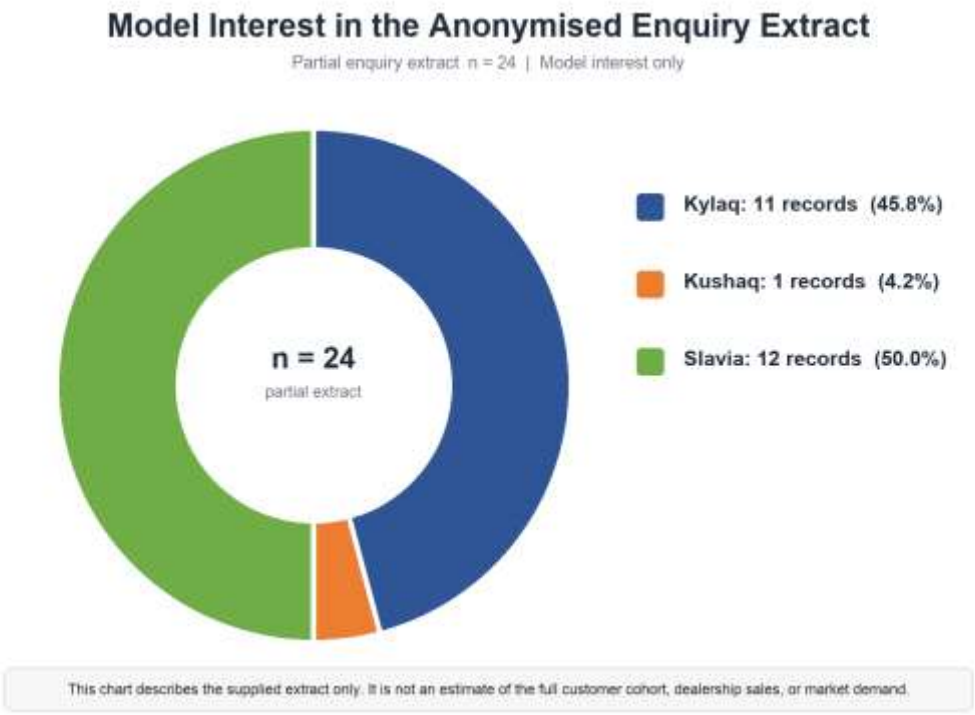


Figure 2. Model interest in the anonymised enquiry extract

4.3 Field observations on engagement

The authors' field observations suggest that four stages were operationally connected: identifying the customer's intended use and priorities, offering a relevant model explanation, coordinating the test drive, and documenting the next contact. The early conversation gives the customer an opportunity to articulate intended usage, timing, and model questions. The product explanation can then be tied to those stated needs rather than delivered as a generic feature list. A test drive creates a further opportunity to record a customer's questions and an appropriate next action. Exhibition interactions were shorter and focused on qualification and a next step rather than a complete showroom discussion. These observations provide practitioner context only; they were not coded, counted, or tested against booking outcomes.



5 Discussion

5.1 Reading the engagement funnel

The findings illustrate the value of viewing automotive retail through a customer-journey lens. The progression from walk-in to test drive was substantially higher than the in-period booking count, while known later bookings showed that the internship window captured only part of the decision process. This pattern is consistent with the need to track touchpoints over time, but it does not establish that any single interaction or follow-up action produced the observed outcomes.

In a practice setting, a funnel is useful when it prompts a clear question at each stage. A walk-in record should show whether an enquiry has been captured. A test-drive record should show whether a next action has been agreed. A booking record should distinguish a confirmed decision from a prospect who remains active. The present data cannot identify the best follow-up interval or message, but they do show why a short observation window needs a later-conversion field.

5.2 Interpreting model interest with appropriate caution

The partial model-interest extract offers a second, narrower insight. A dealership can use a structured enquiry record to prepare model-specific information and test-drive invitations, but the record must be interpreted according to its actual coverage. The present extract supports a description of recorded model interest, not an inference about customer preferences in Pune or about overall Škoda demand. In particular, the small Kushaq count should not be interpreted as low market demand; it only reflects the entries included in this extract.

5.3 Contribution of the research paper

Together, the aggregate pathway and the field observations emphasise a modest operational point: the test drive is an intermediate engagement stage, not a final outcome. A visible lead status, an agreed next action, and later-conversion reporting can improve the quality of process review without turning a small internship record into a claim of organisational performance. The contribution of this paper is therefore methodological as well as practical: it demonstrates how authors can report private operational internship data transparently, separating confirmed aggregated counts from partial extracts and qualitative observations.

6 Practical Implications

For comparable automotive retail settings, the case supports a simple but disciplined lead workflow. The aim is not to standardise every sales conversation. Instead, it is to ensure that each interaction leaves an accurate, privacy-aware record of the next appropriate action.



Figure 3. Recommended consent-aware lead workflow

The workflow begins with recording only the information needed to support the next contact: the enquiry date, source, model of interest, and a preferred contact route where consent has been obtained. After needs discovery and the test



drive, a named owner can record the next action, its timing, and the customer's stated preference. The final stage should retain the distinction between active, in-period, and later outcomes. This supports continuity without converting a private operational record into a public customer database.

Table 3. Evidence to process recommendation matrix

Observed evidence	Process recommendation	What to record or review
45 of 52 walk-ins completed a test drive	Treat the test drive as a milestone that triggers a documented next action	Test-drive status, feedback, responsible owner, next-action date
Three known bookings occurred after the internship period	Report later bookings separately from in-period bookings	Outcome date, active status, later-conversion field
The 24-record extract supported only model interest	Record model and source consistently before extending analysis	Model, enquiry source, coverage period, missing fields
Exhibition contacts require a follow-up path	Use the same controlled lead process for event-originated contacts	Consent, source, preferred contact method, next step

These recommendations are process improvements rather than tested interventions. Their effects on booking outcomes should be evaluated only through a future consent-aware, longitudinal study with a complete customer-level dataset.

7 Limitations

- The study concerns one private dealership, one three-month internship period, and a small operational cohort; it is exploratory and not statistically generalisable.
- The 52-customer engagement pathway is an aggregate summary. It does not provide a complete row-level record for a multivariable or causal analysis.
- The 24-record enquiry extract is partial and supports only the reported model-interest distribution.
- Field observations were not coded or counted and are presented only as contextual practitioner observations.
- The paper does not assess pricing, competitor behaviour, individual consultant performance, organisational finance, or customer satisfaction because verified data for those topics were not used.

8 Conclusion

This study provides a bounded account of customer engagement and lead conversion at a Škoda dealership in Pune. The confirmed aggregate pathway shows substantial movement from walk-in to test drive, while later bookings demonstrate the limits of evaluating conversion within a short internship window. The partial enquiry extract adds a carefully qualified view of model interest. Rather than claiming a causal formula for conversion, the paper argues for disciplined, privacy-aware tracking of the customer journey across enquiry, test drive, follow-up, and eventual outcome. Future research should use a larger, consent-aware longitudinal dataset with consistent lead definitions and a pre-specified analysis plan.

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