

## INFLUENCE OF BRAND NAME ON CONSUMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS- AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON CAR BUYERS.

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### Abstract:

*In the modern society brands not only represent the product or company but also have a strong association with perceived quality, consumers' life style, social class, taste etc. The purpose of this paper is to create a deeper consideration of what influence a brand name can have, when people go for purchasing, choose the products between different brands, especially private vehicle like car. Moreover, this paper also tries to explore the relation between brands and the consumer decision making process. This study has been conducted through literature study as well as questionnaire administered survey. Simple random sampling procedure has been used to determine sampling frame and size and a convenience sample of hundred respondents of different age groups, income and occupation have been considered for the survey. The collected data were analyzed to comply with the objectives and also to draw conclusions. From the study it is revealed that when consumer purchases a car, brand names do influence his/her choice. The study also reveals that branded cars have a great place in consumer mind, when customers go for purchasing a car, they prefer to purchase a well known branded car. Customers do not want to try new or unknown branded cars because they have not much information about the lesser known brand.*

**Key Words:** Brand, Brand name, consumer behavior, purchase decision, level of involvement

**JEL Classification:** M 30

## INTRODUCTION

"A product is something that is made in a factory, a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor, a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated, a successful brand is timeless" (Quiston, 2004, p 345). This statement induces researchers to determine the impact of brand, especially brand name on purchase decision.

The brand history tells us how the people have used the brand as a mark of identification. In the earlier times the brand mark was used to differentiate the goods of one producer to others. Now-a days brand is not only used for differentiation but also used to justify the purchase decision. In this paper researchers tried to identify the influence of brand name on purchase decision.

Brand is a combination of name, symbol and design. Brands represent the customer's perceptions and opinion about performance of the product. The powerful brand is which resides in the mind of the consumer. Brands differ in the amount of power and worth they have in the market place. Some brands are usually unknown to the customers in the marketplace while on the other hand some brands show very high degree of awareness. The brands with high awareness have a high level of acceptability and customers do not refuse to buy such brands as they enjoy the brand performance. Some brands commend high level of brand loyalty.

Brands also have a symbolic value which helps the people to choose the best product according to their need and satisfaction. Usually people do not buy certain brands just for design and requirement, but also in an attempt to enhance their self esteem in the society (Leslie and Malcolm, 1992). Brand names present many things about a product and give number of information about it to the customers and also tell the customer or potential buyer what the product means to

them. Further more it represents the customers' convenient summary like their feelings, knowledge and experiences with the brand. More over customer do not spend much time to do find out about the product. When customer considers about the purchase they evaluate the product immediately by reconstructed product from memory and cued by the brand name (Hansen and Christensen, 2003).

A brand has a value; this depends on the quality of its products in the market and the satisfaction or content of the customer in its products and services. This provides the trust of the customers in the brand. If customers trust a brand quality it makes a positive connection to the brand and customers will have a reason to become a loyal to the brand. Loyalty and trust of the customers is very important for a company because it reduces the chance of attack from competitors (Aaker, 1996).

Brands play a very important role in the consumer decision making processes. It is really important for companies to find out customer's decision making process and identify the conditions, which customers apply while making decision (Cravens and piercy, 2003). Marketers are highly concerned to know how brand names influence the customer purchase decision. Why customers purchase a particular brand also implies how customers decide what to buy. Customers follow the sequence of steps in decision process to purchase a specific product. They start realizing a requirement of product, get information, identify & evaluate alternative products and finally decide to purchase a product from a specific brand. When customers purchase particular brand frequently, he or she uses his or her past experience about that brand product regarding performance, quality and aesthetic appeal (Keller,2008).

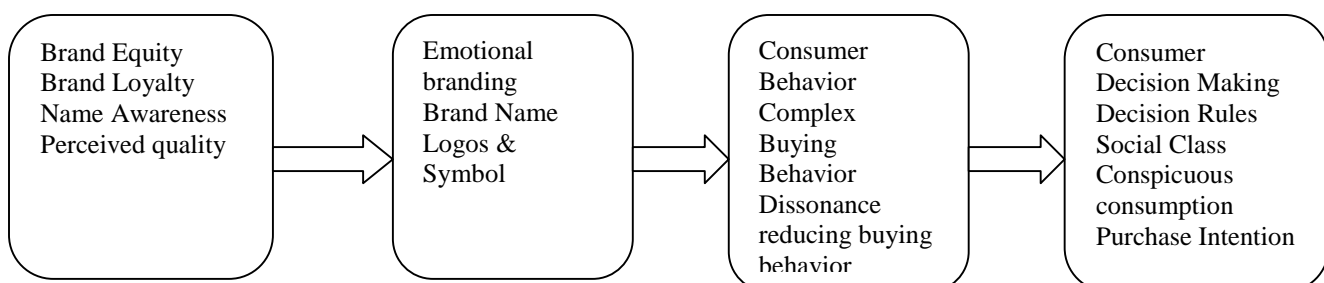
## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Now a days customers have a good knowledge about the brand products, they trust the well known brand name because branded products are offering them good quality what they expect from the brands. Most of the customers are loyal with some specific brands. Customers have high awareness about the known brands as compared to an unknown brand. The primary objective of this research is to determine the influence of brand name on car purchase decision. To comply with the primary objectives the following supportive objectives also considered.

1. To gain knowledge about consumer decision making process, especially with high involvement products, and
2. To know about different issues related to brand and brand selection process.
3. To identify the impact of brand name on purchase decision.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper basically focuses on brand and the link between brand and consumer preferences. The following flow chart shows how this paper divided and explained theories on branding and consumer behavior.



“Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers” (Cravens, 2003)

It can also be defined and explained in the following way--

“Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and / or to that firm’s customers. For assets or liabilities to underlie brand equity they must be linked to the name and / or symbol of the brand. If the brands name or symbol should change, some or all of the assets or liabilities could be affected and even lost, although some might be shifted to a new name and symbol. The assets and liabilities on which brand equity is based will differ from context to context. However, they can be usefully grouped into five categories” (Aaker, 1991, p 15).

1. Brand Loyalty
2. Name awareness
3. Perceived quality
4. Brand association
5. Propriety brand assets

Brand equity is a valuable asset for a company, which they want to, put in their brands. A power full brand enjoys a high level of customer brand awareness and loyalty. Company can have a competitive advantage through high brand equity. Brand equity also involves the value added of product through customer relations and perceptions for the specific brand name.<sup>39</sup> Brand equity assets can be described as a way of adding or subtracting value for customers.

### **Brand Loyalty**

Brand loyalty shows customer preferences to purchase a particular brand; customers believe that the brand offers the enjoyable features, images, or standard of quality at the right price. This belief and faith of the customer becomes a base for new buying habits. Initially customers will purchase a brand for trial, after being satisfied, customers will keep on buying the product from the certain brand. Brand loyalty represents an encouraging approach towards a brand resulting in regular purchase of the brand over time.

“The brand loyalty of the customer base is often the core of brand equity. If customers are indifferent to the brand and, in fact buy with respect to features, price and convince with little concern to the brand name there is likely little equity. If on the other hand, they continue to purchase the brand even in the face of competitors with superior features, price, and convenience, substantial value exists in the brand and perhaps in its symbol and slogan.” (Aaker, 1991, p 39). There are many attributes in the car which helps them creating loyal customer base and even can influence the customers group in such a way that they are using the same brand for generations.

### **Name awareness**

This is the second category of the brand equity. Brand name awareness plays vital role in consumer decision making process; if customer had already heard the brand name, the customer would feel more comfortable at the time of making decision. Customers normally do not prefer to buy an unknown brand, especially if it an expensive product like motor car, TV, refrigerator, apartment etc. Therefore companies’ strong brand name is a wining track as customers choose their brand over unknown brand.

### **Perceived Quality**

It is an essential characteristic for every brand; perceived quality defines a customer’s perception and the product’s quality or superiority. The perceived quality provides fundamental reason to purchase. It also influences brand integration and exclusion to consideration set before final selection. A perceived quality provides greater beneficial opportunity of charging a premium price. The premium raises profit and gives a resource to reinvest in the brand. Perceived quality will enable a strong brand to extend further and will get a greater success possibility than a weak brand.

Perceived quality has a greater influence in a customer's purchasing process and in brand loyalty. This influence is very important when customers are in a condition, which makes them unable to make an analysis of the quality. Perceived quality can be used as a helping tool when company intends to utilize a pricing strategy with premium price and further extend a brand in several markets (Aaker, 1991).

### **Emotional Branding**

Usually branding starts when company designs a product with great feature and capabilities better than what their competitors are offering. The company then has a "position" in a product distinct category against competitors. The problem increases when neither of the groups has made efforts to create emotional bond between the customers and the company and its product. Emotional branding is the fine approach that clarifies the values of the company to the customers (Marken, 2003). When companies want to know what consumer feels about them, they have to build a personal communication with the customers. This is the good way in a company can consider itself because customer perception is very important for companies. However a company can learn a lot by listening to its customer views. It is essential for companies to correspond by their product by relating to their customers emotionally; otherwise product can be a product and become a brand image in the customer's minds. Emotional Branding also consider brand name which influence consumers decision making process.

### **Brand Name**

The brand name is very significant choice because some time it captures the central theme or key association of a product in a very condensed and reasonable fashion. Brand names can be extremely successful means of communication. Some companies assign their product with a brand name that in reality has nothing to do with the emotional experience but is catchy and a name that people can easily memorize. The core base of naming a brand is that it should be unique, can be easily discriminated from other names, easy to remember and are attractive to customers (Keller, 2008).

In our opinion people have strong connection to brands and brands name. Brand name influences the customer decision in car choice. When people intend to purchase a car, they have many brand names to choose from, but usually people purchase a car with preference to brand name and company reputation in market because of trust and previous experience.

### **Logos and symbols**

Logos and symbols have a long history which shows brand identification of the company. There are different types of logos, which are unique from corporate names or trademarks. Logos and symbol are easy way to recognize a product. It is a greater success if symbol and logos became a linked in memory to corresponding brand name and product to increase brand recall. Customers may perhaps identify definite symbols but be unable to link them any particular brand or product (Keller). Logos helps companies to develop the brand equity through raised brand identification and brand loyalty. Logos are very important assets, companies spend enormous time and money to promote brand logos and symbols.

Logos and symbol are successful way to get a better place in customer mind. If customers find something that is easily identifiable preferably in a positive way, customers feel more comfortable with them. If there is not much difference among brands, then logos and symbols can be a very effective way of differentiating the brands from each other.

### **Consumer Behavior**

Consumer behavior mainly sheds light on how consumers decides to spend their various resources like time, money etc. on various products so as to meet their needs and requirement. Consumer behavior encompasses study of what, when, why and where the consumers will buy their

products. It also focuses on how often the consumers use the products. Furthermore, it also sheds light on how the consumers evaluate the products after the purchase and the effect of evaluations on their future purchases (Schiffman, 2005).

To give an example of how consumer behavior evolves while buying a car, he will start with recognizing his or her need for a car. Then come the information collecting and processing stage. After making up his mind to buy one specific brand, for instance Skoda, the consumer makes the purchase. In the post-purchase stage, the consumer evaluates the performance of the car against the expectations he or she had before buying the car. In this stage, the consumer is either satisfied or dissatisfied. So, it is evident from the last example that study of consumer behavior involves lot of things.

### **Complex Buying Behavior**

Complex behavior can be defined when consumers are highly involved for making a purchase decision. Complex buying behavior calls for high level of involvement on the part of the consumer. In case of high involvement, consumers distinguish salient differences among the competing brands. Consumers' are highly involved in case of expensive and highly self expressive products. The consumer engages in extensive information to search and to learn about product category so as to be able a good purchase decision. For example, when a consumer decides to buy a car, he seeks information about the available brands and compares his collected information about each brand and finally makes up his mind (Kotler, 2007).

### **Dissonance reducing buying behavior**

In case of dissonance reducing buying behavior the level of consumer involvement is also high. Consumers typically undergo dissonance reducing buying behavior in case of costly and infrequent purchase. In this type of consumer behavior the consumers find it difficult to differentiate among the brands. For example, consumer buying carpet may come across of dissonance reducing buying behavior, as carpets are usually expensive and self-expressive. In case of carpets, consumers may deem most of the available carpet brands in the market within a certain price range to be of the same quality. Consumers may respond primarily to a relatively better price. After the purchase consumer might experience post purchase dissonance (after sales discomfort) (Kotler, 2007).

### **Consumer Decision making**

The consumer decision making process defines different steps when a consumer goes through to purchase a product. If customer wants to make a purchase he or she takes a sequence of steps in order to do complete this purchase. Problem recognition includes when consumer feel a significant difference between the current state and ideal so consumer thinks there is some problem to be solved. The problem may be small or big. In the second step, the consumer seeks information about the product. The extent of information search relies on the level of consumer involvement. In case of expensive products, the level of involvement is high. Conversely, in case of relatively cheap products the level of involvement is usually low. In the third step, the consumer evaluates the different attributes of the brands. Consumer may consider the product attributes and compare brand products. In the final step consumer makes his choice about a product.

It's true that a consumer may not necessarily go through all the decision making steps for every purchase he or she makes. At times, consumer makes his or her decision automatically and the decision may be based on heuristics or mental shortcuts. Other times, in case of high involvement products consumer may take a long time before reaching a final purchase decision. It depends on consumers' importance of the products like purchase of a car or home. More over consumers try to make an estimated brand universe on the basis of available information about the brands, and to make an estimated the utility function on the basis of past consumption experience (Solomon, 2006).

### **Social Class**

Social class is an invisible stratification of the inhabitants of the society into different groups based on some traits of the people. Inhabitants in a society can be divided into different social classes according to their income level, occupation, education and so forth. Social class of a person is determined by a wide variety of set of variables including income, family background and occupation (Solomon, 2006). A person's social class can be defined by what he or she does with money. The consumption choice of a person also determines the person's position in society. Every social class varies from each other because of having its own traits that set it apart from other class. Social classes vary in costumes, language patterns and many other activities and preferences. This class of consumer will possibly never buy a product on an experimental basis. Social class is very important source to know which social class person belong. Mostly people have different preference and choices from others (Stephens and Townsend, 2007).

### **Conspicuous Consumption**

Conspicuous Consumption can be defined as the way of consumption by the people who have the financial ability to afford expensive brands not only just to consume the products but also to show off with the view to inspire envy among others. People of higher class usually go for a wide array of status symbols for consuming conspicuously. Conspicuous consumption is related to the person's social class, generally the upper class consumer would purchase and display exclusive items to show-off their wealth and power. They purchase expensive branded products like cars, latest electronics even if it is not necessary for them to purchase (Solomon, 2007).

### **Purchase Intention**

The purchase intention shows customers preference to purchase the product, whose image is very close to customer. Moreover customers are well aware of certain brand name through advertising, from their past experience or information from their friends and relatives (Teng, 2008). The intention of a consumer to purchase a particular brand can be defined as his willingness to buy that brand. After being exposed to a TV commercial, a consumer might be interested about the product but being just interested in a product does not mean that the consumer has the intention to buy the product

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

The Survey Method has been chosen to carry out the research. The researchers divided the whole work mainly into two parts- secondary research and primary research. In the secondary research the researcher has made use of the available literature and other relevant publications to find out the theoretical framework and also to know what early research mentioned regarding selected topic. For primary research survey method has been considered. To carry on the survey a questionnaire administered personal-contact approach has been used. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample of 5 respondents and based on this minor changes were made to improve the clarity of the questionnaire. The sampling procedure used for the study was simple random sampling. A convenience sample of 100 customers of Chittagong, Bangladesh had been chosen for the research. No restrictions were made on the age, background, sex or location. In order to analyse the data descriptive statistics were employed. The frequency distribution had been used as a descriptive statistical tool.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Only one city (Chittagong) of the country had been considered. Findings might vary according to the location, income level, standard of living etc. and all of those factors had not been considered separately.
2. Only the descriptive statistics had been used to analyse the data, no steps had been taken to use inferential statistics. There might be some sorts of variance in the overall result if it is tested by inferential statistical techniques.

## Findings of the study

### (i) Demographic Information of the respondents

The following table (table nr.1) represents the demographic information of the respondents. The first table provides the gender information which shows that 90% of the respondents were male and 10% respondents were female. The survey shows majority of the respondents were male and the main reason for this is because more men drive a car than female in Bangladesh, especially in Chittagong. Sample has been selected randomly without any bias and all the respondents are basically car owners.

Furthermore the table provides the respondents age-group information. The first age group (25 to 35 years) accounted for 32% and next 36 to 45-years-age-group accounted for 26%, the 46 to 55-years-age-group were 24% and the 56 to 65 years-age-group were 14% and above 65 years age group respondents were 4%.

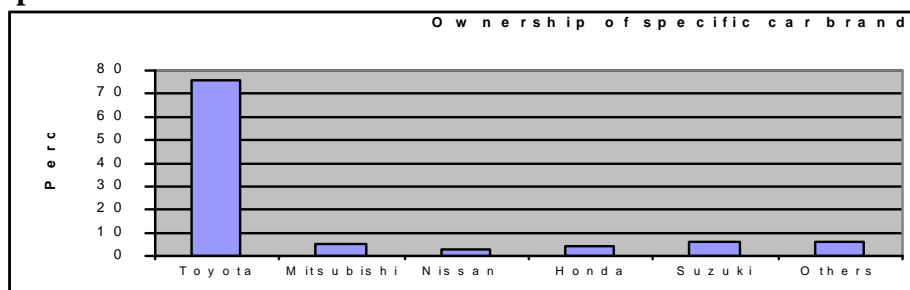
The table also explains the respondents' income. Data shows that 19% respondents' annual income are 75,000 and 26% respondents annual income is between 76,000 to 1,25,000 and 22% respondents earn annually between 1,26,000 to 1,75,000 and 20% respondents' annual income is between 1,76,000 to 2,25,000 and 13% respondents' earning annually more than 2,26,000. All respondents have a different brand car, matching their individual income level.

From the table (table nr. 1) it is also clear that 35% respondents are in private service and 40% respondents run their own business and 10% respondents are doctors and 10% respondents are lawyers and 5% respondents are belong to other occupation.

**Table no. 1. Demographic information of the respondents**

Variables	Measuring Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	95	95
	Female	05	5
Car ownership	Yes	100	100
	No	0	0
Age Group	25 to 35	32	32
	36 to 45	36	36
	46 to 55	24	24
	56 to 65	14	14
Income	75,000	19	19
	76,000- 125,000	26	26
	126,000- 175,000	22	22
	176,000-225,000	20	20
	More than 226,000	13	13
Occupation	Private Service	35	35
	Own business	40	40
	Doctor	10	10
	Lawyer	10	10
	Others	5	5

Source: Field Survey

**(ii) Ownership of specific car brand****Figure no. 1. Ownership of car Brand (Source: Field survey)**

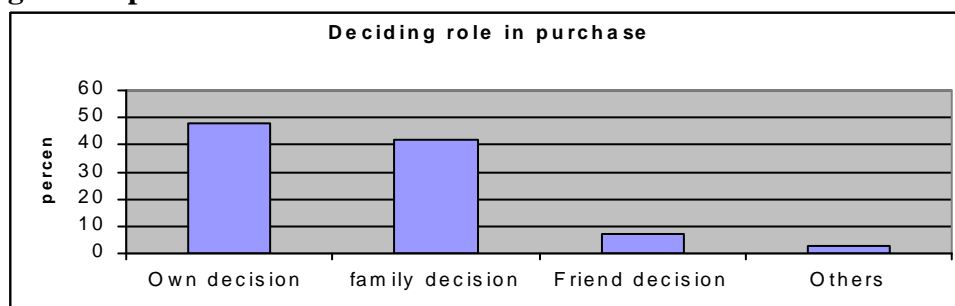
After having asked the respondents which brand car they own, five different brand car names were given which include nearly all the available brands in Bangladesh market. 76% cases replied to have Toyota brand car and 5% respondents are running Mitsubishi brand car and 3% respondents owned Nissan brand car. 4% respondents replied to have Honda brand car and 6 % respondents owned Suzuki brand can and 6% owned other companies branded cars. The majority of respondents which is 76% answered to have own Toyota brand cars. This is the highest percent of brand car user in survey.

**(iii) Extent of information search:****Table no. 2. Extent of information search before buying**

	Frequency	Percent
Extensive information search	52	52
Compared only few brands	33	33
Limited information search	12	12
No information search	3	3
Total		

Source: Field survey

The above table (table nr.2) shows the extent of the information search before buying a car. 52% respondents go for extensive information search where as 33% compared only few brands before finally making their purchase decision. The survey also reveals that 12% respondents were engaged in limited information search before making their final choice, especially those who are changing their old models. However, 3% respondents did not search any information before buying a car. According to the result of the survey, it can be inferred that most potential buyers usually engage in extensive information search.

**(iv) Deciding role in purchase decision****Figure no. 2. Role in purchase decision (Source: Field survey)**

This section tried to explore whether the purchase decision was the respondents own individual decision or a collective decision. As we can see in the above bar diagram that the majority of the respondents replied that when they purchased a car that was their own decision and also a good number of respondents answered that the purchase decision was their joint family



decision and the lowest number of respondents replied to have consulted with their friends before buying, this is followed by the "others" which points out that the respondents sought others namely co-workers etc. suggestions in a very occasions before making buying decision.

#### (v) Most important attribute considered before buying

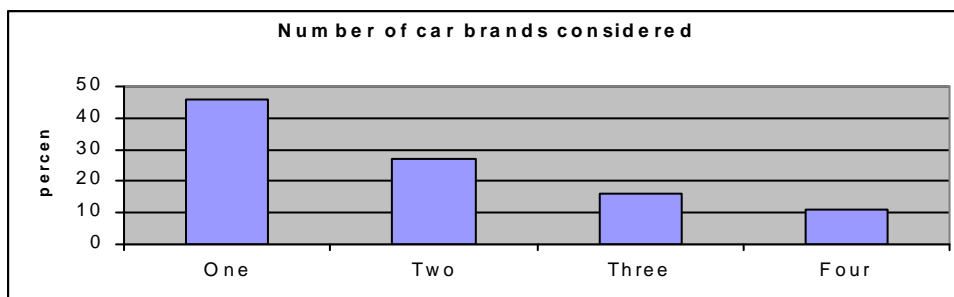
**Table no. 3. Most important attribute for considering buying**

	Frequency	Percent
Price of the product	28	28
Both price and quality	17	17
The brand name of the product	39	39
Design of the product	12	12
Other attributes	04	04

(Source: Field survey)

Regarding which most important aspect the respondents considered when he or she made a purchase decision., the information depicts that the purchase decision of a potential buyer is influenced by a number of factors namely past experience, brand, quality and price. The majority of the respondents (39%) answered when they purchased a car they considered the well known brand name followed by 28% respondents who considered the car price. However, 17% said they considered both quality and price. Moreover, 7% respondents considered the car design while 4% considered the other attributes.

#### (vi) Number of car brands considered



**Figure no. 3. Number of car brands considered before buying**

The respondents were asked how many brands they normally consider before taking final buying decision. The above chart shows that 46% respondents consider only one brand when they take buying decision where as 26% respondent replied that they considered two different brands and 17% respondents considered three brands. Only 11% respondent compared four different brands while taking their decision to buy a car.

#### (vii) Consideration for lesser known brand

**Table no. 4. Consideration for lesser known brand**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I did	19	19
No, I did not	65	65
Yes, I did but not much	16	16

(Source: Field survey)

This is very interesting question to know about respondents' viewpoint regarding lesser known brand. The respondents have been asked whether they considered the lesser known brand cars alongside well known brand car. It is found that more than 65% respondent answered "No, I did not" which means the respondents mainly considered only the brands that were in their evoked

set. 19% respondents replied "Yes, I did" and 16% respondents answered "Yes, I did but not much".

**(viii) Quality perception of the customers between well known brand and lesser known brand— Branded products have better quality**

**Table no. 5. Branded products have better quality**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I agree	69	69
No, I don't agree	11	11
I agree, but it's not always true	20	20

(Source: Field survey)

When it comes to the question regarding a branded product quality it is more interesting that they have very strong association. The majority 69% answered "Yes, I agree" and 11% respondents replied "No, I don't agree" and 20% respondents views "I agree, but it's not always true".

**(ix) Well known brand as status symbol**

**Table no. 6. Brands signify the status**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I agree	43	43
No, I don't agree	16	16
Not necessarily	21	21
I agree, but it's not always true	20	20

(Source: Field survey)

The basic intention of this option was to find out whether a well known brand car is a status of symbol. The majority, 43% of respondents answered "Yes, I agree" and 16% respondents replied "No, I don't agree" and 21% respondents views that "Not necessarily" and 20% respondents "I agree, but it's not always true". From the table it is clear that respondents consider brand as status symbol.

**(x) Brand and social class**

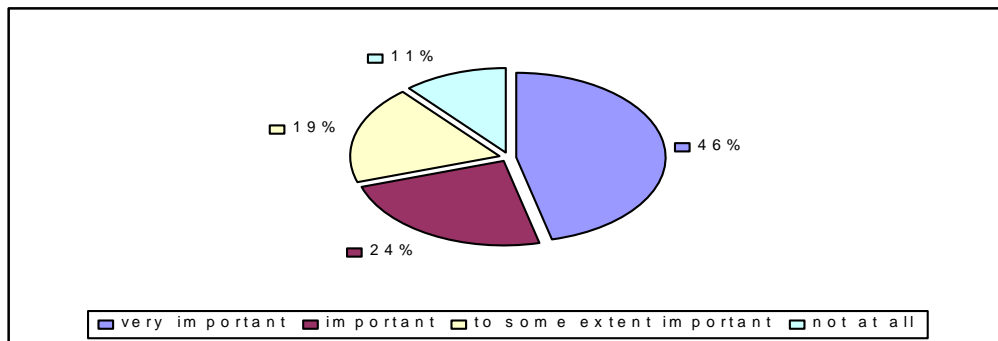
**Table no.7. Brands define social class**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I agree	41	41
No, I don't agree	14	14
Not necessarily	19	19
I agree, but it's not always true	26	26

Source: Field survey

Information revealed that respondents considered the branded products signify their social class. As many as 41% respondents' noted that "Yes, I agree" and 26% respondents replied that "Yes, I agree but it is not always true" and 19% answered "Not necessary" and 14% respondents "No, I don't agree".

**(xi) Importance of brand name on product attributes**



**Figure no. 4. Importance of brand name to desired attributes**

(Source: Field survey)

The above diagram shows that 46% respondents considered that brand name relative to desired attribute is “Very important” and 24% respondents “Important” 19% respondent answered “to some extent important” and 11% respondents answered “Not at all important”.

#### (Xii) Preferences of branded products:

**Table no. 8. Preferences of branded products**

	Frequency	Percent
Always	56	56
Frequently	17	17
Sometimes	19	19
Never	08	08

(Source: Field survey)

To find out whether people always go for branded products, respondents are being asked about their perception towards branded products. The majority (56%) respondents replied that they always prefer branded products. On the other hand, 19% respondents answered they go “some times” and 17% expressed that they go “Frequently” and 8% answered “Never” go. The above result indicates that majority consumers prefer to buy branded products as it is the symbol of quality, status and reliability.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to create a deeper consideration about the influence of brand name on purchase especially car purchase. In order to comply with this a questionnaire administered survey has been conducted among 100 respondents and data revealed that brand name has strong influence on purchase decision. From the study it is clear that well known branded cars are very famous among the people because consumers trust the brand name. This also indicates that people often purchase well known brand cars since they are aware of the brand performance or perhaps they have a good past experience about the brands car. This makes customer’s become loyal with the specific brand. Brand offers superior quality of the service up to the customer’s expectation and satisfaction. Further more, people are much attached to the branded products, as majority of the people purchase the branded products with the belief that brands show their status and life style in the society. The study shows that how automobile brands companies become successful by getting close to the customers and designing their cars according to the customers needs.

## FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE

This study was limited to one industry, automobile, and one city Chittagong. This theme can be extended to other industry like consumer durables and other cities of the country. Further research can also be conducted on a large scale with large sample size considering some more variables relevant to the topic. This paper only considers descriptive statistical tools whereas inferential tools can also be applied in the further research to validate and prove the assumption.

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