"Factors affecting brand preference in passenger car buying in Nepal"

AUTHORS	Bharat Rai ⓘ
	Ganesh Bhattarai ⓘ
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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

Bharat Rai, Ph.D., Faculty of
Management, Nepal Commerce
Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Ganesh Bharrarai, Ph.D., Assistant
Professor, Faculty of Management,
Nepal Commerce Campus, Tribhuvan
University, Nepal. (Corresponding
author)

Bharat Rai (Nepal), Ganesh Bhattarai (Nepal)

FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND PREFERENCE IN PASSENGER CAR BUYING IN NEPAL

Abstract

In today's complex and highly competitive marketplace, marketers, realizing a need to develop sustainable strategies, have turned to branding as a solution. Understanding the brand preferences of consumers is always under discussion. In such context, this study measured the effects of price, attributes, brand personality, appearance, and self-congruity on brand preference in buying a passenger car. A deductive reasoning approach, quantitative method, and positivist epistemology with predetermined hypotheses were used. A six-point Likert scale structured survey was utilized to gather the primary information. The sample included 411 passenger car users in Nepal. A judgmental sampling technique and a causal research design were used. Through path analysis, the effect of price, attributes, brand personality, appearance, and self-congruity on dependent variables was identified using structural equation modeling. The study's outcome showed that attribute ($\beta = 0.062$, $p > 0.05$), price ($\beta = -0.041$, $p > 0.05$), and appearance ($\beta = 0.022$, $p > 0.05$) have no significant positive impact on consumer brand preference. Moreover, the study discovered that brand preference is influenced by self-congruity ($\beta = 0.297$, $p < 0.05$) and brand personality ($\beta = 0.232$, $p < 0.05$) in buying passenger cars in Nepal. It is concluded that brand image and prestige are more critical for high-involvement products. These outcomes provide a road map for future scholars and business people with a view of the emerging context of market development.

Keywords	price, attribute, brand personality, appearance, self-congruity
JEL Classification	M30, M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior is a complex process. It is not easy to understand the factors affecting the consumer buying behavior. Many factors influence brand preference because the marketing environment has been changing. The consumer mind is the black box, and no one can understand the factors influencing consumer buying behavior. Product quality, price, features, brand, social factors, size, or color affect consumer's purchase decisions. It was observed that the Nano car was launched in the Nepalese market with low pricing promotion strategies by TATA company, but the car did not become popular in the Nepalese market.

Likewise, the vehicle market is getting crowded, with many passenger car models competing and offering customers brand choices. According to Kwok et al. (2006), middle-class people prioritize price over all other considerations, and an elite class of individuals primarily considers the quality, performance, brand personality, brand image, self-congruity, and features of the cars. The majority of customers engage in those products that are expensive and have a significant impact on consumers' lives (Van Rijnsoever et al., 2009). Passenger cars are highly involved and costly products with considerable risks in the car business. So, to reduce business risk, business people must identify

what factors influence customers' brand preference in buying passenger cars. It is becoming increasingly critical for businesses in these specific circumstances to recognize their customers' varied requirements, wants, goals, and preferences and develop goods in response (Batra, 2015). Therefore, knowing what variables influence Nepalese consumers' purchasing decisions while purchasing passenger cars is essential.

Regarding the previous empirical evidence, there needs to be more consistency in the research findings on the brand preference issue. For example, Rai and Budhathoki (2023) found that product attributes significantly influence brand preference, but Rai (2019) found that product attributes do not considerably influence brand preference. Similarly, Fathima (2019) discovered that the product's prices significantly affect brand preference, but Laohakosol et al. (2019) found that price does not influence brand preference. Likewise, Zainudin et al. (2020) investigated the dimensions of brand personality's impact on brand preference, but Rai (2021) found that the dimensions of brand personality do not influence brand preference. Therefore, further research is required to have a generalizable concept. Likewise, these studies have been done in varied circumstances, at distinct periods, and across different nations. As a result, it becomes essential to understand the factors that influence the brand preference toward passenger cars in the Nepalese context.

Only a few attempts were made to research the influence of price, attribute, appearance, self-congruity, and brand personality on brand preference. A limited number of comprehensive research studies have been conducted to assess the influence of these factors on the preference for purchasing a passenger car. Moreover, research carried out in one context can not be generalized to another because it is crucial to consider the specific environment when generating and evaluating theory, as cultural norms and practices can differ depending on the situation (Bhattarai, 2021).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The brand is the name, term, word, symbol, and design used to identify the goods and services in the competitive market. Brand preference is people's attitude toward a specific brand and influences purchase decisions. Brand preference is the degree of loyalty in which customers prefer one brand over other competitive brands. Brand preference happens when the customer chooses one brand among the competitive brands. Hellier et al. (2003) argued that brand preference refers to the degree of customer approval toward any goods and services a firm provides to the market compared to competitors. Among the competitive brands, consumers rank different brands and favor one brand over others, which the company offers, called brand preference (Jin & Weber, 2013). Singh et al. (2008) defined a customer's brand preference as their hierarchical priority toward goods and services, among many others. So, it is noted that brand preference is the level of priority of consumers of a specific brand over other competitive brands. Russell and Kamakura (1997) concluded that understanding consumer preference trends and uncovering customer heterogeneity is essential in formulating marketing strategies and designing and developing market segmentation for marketers. Therefore, identifying brand preference, brand choice behavior, and market segmentation is more practical from a management perspective (O'Connor & Sullivan, 1995).

Rai and Budhathoki (2023) researched consumer behavior and discovered that social factors, product attributes, and price significantly influence consumers' buying behavior in purchasing laptops. Kurnia and Hasyim (2023) investigated the effect of product attributes on brand preference. The researchers found that the dimensions of product attributes significantly and positively impact brand preference. Likewise, Rai et al. (2023) conducted research to identify the factors influencing consumer behavior and found that the price factor significantly influences consumer buying behavior toward smartphones. Dharmaraj (2020) also found that most consumers in India prefer the Maruti car due to its attributes, such as after-sale service, price, interior decoration, color, and design. Phuong et al. (2020) confirmed that

car brands significantly contribute to consumer buying decisions, but safety and security features have a lower influence on the buying decision of passenger cars.

Fathima (2019) also found that mobile phones' appearance, price, and attributes significantly affect brand preference. Likewise, Lavuri et al. (2019) showed that the features, cameras, style, and design of mobiles influence the propensity toward branded mobiles. Rakib (2019) discovered that the price, social factors, brand name, and features of cell phones positively influence purchase intention. Sengar (2019) found a significant impact of attributes such as mileage, spare parts availability, capacity loading, and after-sales services on consumer preference for light commercial vehicles.

Wahyuningsih et al. (2023) discovered that brand switching happens due to product attributes and price. Pitso et al. (2023) examined the brand image, price, and perceived quality as significant predictor variables of brand preference for cement brands. Liu et al. (2022) found that product price has less impact on sales of high-involvement products than the product itself, whereas e-WOM awareness effects have a more significant influence. Rai (2021) researched the factors affecting consumers' smartphone purchase intentions and found that price, brand personality, and product features significantly impact customers' intention to buy a smartphone.

Fathima (2019) studied consumers' brand preferences toward mobile phones and found that brand preference has been affected by the appearance, price, and attributes that influence the purchase decision of mobile phones but less than the social factor. Rai (2019) found that the price does not significantly impact the brand selection toward passenger cars. However, brand personality and appearance influence brand preference when buying passenger cars. Similarly, Rakib (2019) discovered that the price, features, brand name, and social influence positively affect the purchase intention of cellular phones. Dhanabalan et al. (2018) examined the research on the factors affecting the consumer's car purchasing decision, and they found that price, brand, cost, style, technical consideration, and utility play an influential role in the decision to buy a passenger car. Laohakosol et al.

(2019) discovered that compatibility, social factors, and product characteristics influenced the purchase intention of mobiles. However, the product quality, price, and country of origin do not significantly impact purchase intention toward smartphones.

Fathima (2019) discovered that mobile phones' appearance, price, and attributes significantly affect brand choice. Lavuri et al. (2019) found that mobile features, cameras, design, and style positively and greatly influence the propensity toward branded mobile. Toufani et al. (2017) showed that aesthetics had a significant but relatively weak direct influence on purchase decisions. Moreover, Afzali and Ahmed (2016) found that aesthetic features are considered when buying. In their study, Ebrahim et al. (2016) confirmed that brand preference has been directly affected by brand personality, attributes, appearance, self-congruity, and price in smartphone buying.

Nguyen et al. (2023) discovered a significant positive correlation between the five dimensions of brand personality and choice. Mao et al. (2020) found a direct considerable impact of brand identity, brand personality, brand image, and brand communication on purchase intention.

Sharahi and Heshmat (2020) confirmed a significant positive relationship between brand personality and customers' affinity for insurance brands in Tehran. Bairrada et al. (2019) discovered that brand personality positively impacts consumer behaviors like loyalty and affection toward clothing brands. Zainudin et al. (2020) found that three dimensions of the Halal brand's personality significantly contribute to the development of brand loyalty.

Hardjono et al. (2019) showed that brand personalities like honesty, integrity, sophistication, and robustness positively and significantly impact brand choices for sportswear. Still, excitement factors are not considered in the brand choice. Bukhari (2018) found that product price, brand personality, self-concept, product attributes, and brand trust significantly affect repurchase intention and customers' purchase of imported foods. Munasinghe (2018) found that personality dimensions like sophistication, excitement, sincerity,
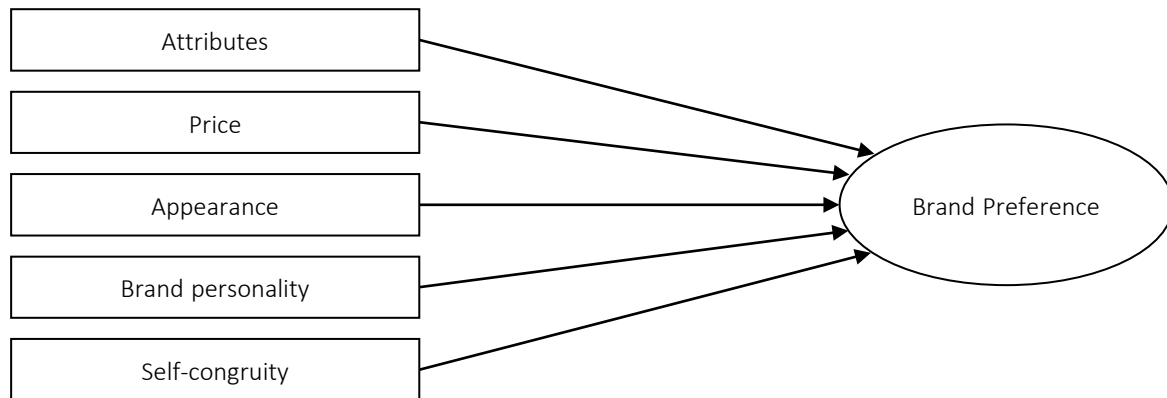
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

and competence influence brand choice. It was also found that the ruggedness dimension does not affect brand choice. Tong et al. (2018) discovered a significant relationship between brand personality and brand trust and commitment of luxury fashion companies. Tsaur et al. (2023) discovered that the staying purpose in a hotel is significantly influenced by self-congruity. Zhang (2022) found that consumers' self-congruity positively and significantly influenced their propensity to exhibit brand loyalty. Li et al. (2022) discovered that the self-image link strongly affects brand preference for actual and ideal self-image congruities. Khalid et al. (2018) found that the intention to purchase cosmetic products was influenced by self-congruity in Malaysia. Sandhu et al. (2018) discovered that purchase intention was influenced by self-congruity. Generally, it is concluded that product attributes, price, appearance, personality, and self-congruity significantly affect brand preference.

Different factors might be considered in the brand preference of passenger cars. Some prefer rational factors, and some prefer emotional factors when buying passenger cars. Whether the reasonable factors or emotional factors influence the brand preference in buying high-involvement products in the Nepalese context is the main unsolved problem for the research.

Hence, this study was carried out to measure the factors influencing brand preference in buying passenger cars in Nepal. More specifically, the study was conducted to identify the impact of attributes, price, appearance, brand personality, and self-congruity on brand preference in buying passenger cars (Figure 1 shows the conceptual model).

Therefore, to meet those aims, the study proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: *Product attributes significantly influence brand preference.*

H2: *Product price significantly influences brand preference.*

H3: *Appearance significantly influences brand preference.*

H4: *Brand personality significantly influences brand preference.*

H5: *Self-congruity significantly influences brand preference.*

2. METHODS

The study has examined the influence of attributes, appearance, price, self-congruity, and brand personality factors on brand preference. This study was based on positivist epistemology with a deductive approach and a single reality ontological foundation. The study has used quantitative research methods.

Different variables may affect brand preference, but product price, product attribute, product appearance, self-congruity, and brand personality were considered independent variables to measure the effect on brand preference in the study of passenger cars.

The causal research design was used to recognize the influence of attributes, appearance, price,

Table 1. Questionnaire structure

Group and area	Questions	Measurement scale	Remarks
Group A: Demographic information	2	Various options	
Group B: Attribute perception	4		
Group C: Price perception	5		1 = strongly disagree
Group D: Appearance perception	4	6-point Likert scale	to
Group E: Brand personality	4		6 = strongly agree
Group F: Self-congruity	4		
Group B: Brand preference	4		
Total	27		

brand personality, and self-congruity on brand preference. Primary data from passenger car users were collected using a six-point Likert-type scale questionnaire. Closed-ended questionnaires were used to investigate the factors influencing brand preference among passenger car users in the Nepalese market. The structure of the questionnaires is shown in Table 1.

Owners and users of passenger cars were the targeted population of the research. Seven hundred survey questionnaires were distributed for the study through the judgmental sampling technique, and four hundred eleven properly filled information. According to Hair et al. (2018), in social science research, two hundred or more responses are sufficient for testing research hypotheses using structural equation modeling and path analysis. Table 2 shows the general information of the respondents who correctly completed the survey questionnaires and provided feedback on the study.

Table 2. Characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Categorization	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	343	83.5
	Female	68	16.5
Age	Below 20	1	.2
	21-30	54	13.1
	31-40	131	31.9
	41-50	170	41.4
	Above 50	55	13.4
	Total	411	100

Mean was used to understand the actual situation of responses of passenger car users. The standard deviation was used to evaluate the dispersion of a set of data. This study used the correlation to determine the nature of the connection between dependent and independent variables. The impact of independent variables on brand preference was examined using regression path analysis with structural equation modeling (SEM).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the results of the exploratory factor analysis. The CFI, GFI, RMSEA, IFI, AGFI, and NFI were adopted to measure the model fit criteria. The model-appropriate indices were identified. Table 3 indicates that all the model fit's values are in the range of adequacy as prescribed by Byrne (2010). Thus, it is feasible to evaluate the conclusion from the structural model.

Table 3. An overview of model fit

Fit Indices	Suggested range of fit by Byrne (2010)	Model Value	Results
CMIN/DF	<5	3.077	Acceptable
CFI	>0.9	0.946	Good
GFI	>0.9	0.868	Acceptable
AGFI	>0.8	0.835	Good
IFI	>0.9	0.946	Good
NFI	>0.9	0.923	Good
RMSEA	<0.08	0.071	Acceptable

The convergent validity of the independent latent variables was assessed using the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). According to the guidelines proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999), to establish convergent validity, it is recommended that the CR value surpasses 0.7, the AVE value exceeds 0.5, and additionally, the CR value should be greater than the AVE value. Therefore, Table 4 shows that all the values are within the recommended ranges. As well as to establish discriminant validity, it is essential that the AVE value surpasses the maximum shared variance (MSV) value, and the AVE value should also be greater than the inter-construct correlations, as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). Thus, all the values are identified to be in the suggested ranges. It indicates that the model of the study is valid, and there is no validity concern in the model. Therefore, the overall measurement model is fit for further processing of the model.

Table 4. Model validity measures

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	PRI	APA	BRPA	ATTA	BPA	SCA
PRI	0.961	0.834	0.041	0.974	0.913					
APA	0.969	0.887	0.087	0.974	0.160**	0.942				
BRPA	0.945	0.813	0.168	0.967	0.063	0.155**	0.902			
ATTA	0.936	0.787	0.112	0.965	0.202***	0.295***	0.218***	0.887		
BPA	0.853	0.599	0.157	0.925	0.031	0.154**	0.374***	0.210***	0.774	
SCA	0.816	0.528	0.168	0.824	0.153**	0.284***	0.410***	0.334***	0.396***	0.726

Note: ** and *** refer to the statistical significance level at 0.01 and 0.001, respectively. PRI = Price, APA = Appearance, BRPA = Brand personality, ATTA= Attributes, BPA = Brand preference, SCA = Self-congruity.

3. RESULTS

The study used descriptive and inferential statistics. Table 5 presents the mean, standard deviation, and correlation.

According to the data shown in Table 5, the average scores for all the variables, i.e., attributes, price, appearance, brand personality, self-congruity, and brand preference, are 4.88, 5.03, 5.09, 4.81, 4.34, and 4.51, respectively, more than the mid-point 3. This means most responses were inclined toward brand preference in buying passenger cars in Nepal. The values of the standard deviation of all variables were below 1. This indicates that the data are more consistent with the minimum value of 1 and maximum value of 6.

The relationship between independent and dependent variables was analyzed using the correlation

coefficient. Table 5 and Figure 2 present a significant and positive relationship between attributes and brand preference, appearance and brand preference, brand personality and brand preference, and self-congruity and brand preference. Still, there is no significant positive relationship between price factor and brand preference in passenger car buying.

SEM was utilized to measure the predefined hypothesized association between independent variables and brand preference. Two indices were used to analyze the model. First is the R^2, which represents the value explained variance by the independent variables and shows the power of prediction of the anticipated model. Second is a path coefficient (β) that represents the level of impact of the independent factors on the dependent variable.

The study's five independent variables explained only 22 percent of the variance in brand prefer-

**Table 5.** Descriptive and correlation insights

Variables	Mean	SD	ATTA	PRI	APA	BRPA	SCA	BPA
ATTA	4.88	.692	1					
PRI	5.03	.717	.198**	1				
APA	5.09	.741	.282**	.179**	1			
BRPA	4.81	.720	.221**	.054	.149**	1		
SCA	4.34	.707	.311**	.158**	.253**	.394**	1	
BPA	4.51	.783	.182**	.052	.144**	.422**	.381**	1

Note: ** indicates the statistical significance level at 0.01. PRI = Price, APA = Appearance, BRPA = Brand personality, ATTA= Attributes, BPA = Brand preference, SCA = Self-congruity.

Table 6. Summary of hypotheses testing

DV	Path	IV	Estimate (β)	SE	CR	P	Results
BPA	←	ATTA	.062	.049	1.253	.210	Rejected
BPA	←	PRI	−.041	.046	−.895	.371	Rejected
BPA	←	APA	.022	.043	.506	.613	Rejected
BPA	←	BRPA	.232	.053	4.338	***	Accepted
BPA	←	SCA	.297	.072	4.100	***	Accepted

Note: PRI = Price, APA = Appearance, BRPA = Brand personality, ATTA= Attributes, BPA = Brand preference, SCA = Self-congruity.
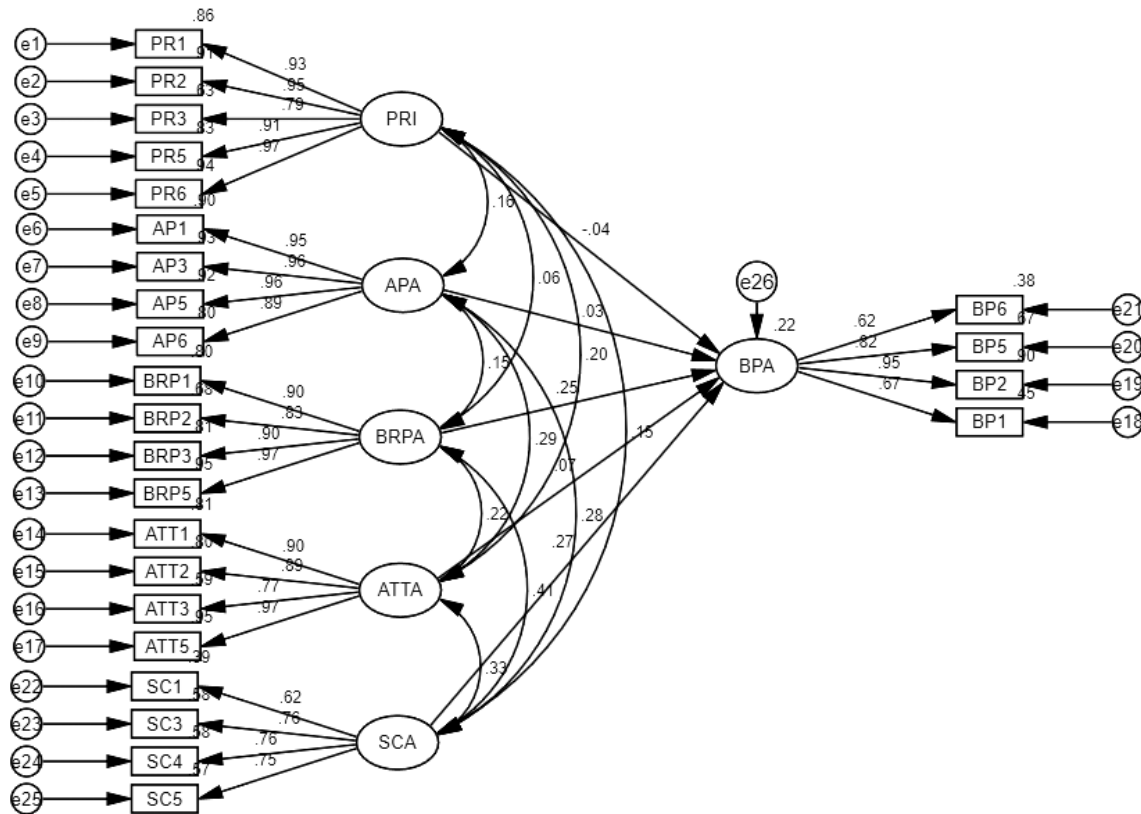
Note: PRI = Price, APA = Appearance, BRPA = Brand personality, ATTA= Attributes, BPA = Brand preference, SCA = Self-congruity.

Figure 2. Structural model

ence for buying a passenger car in Nepal. This shows that all the independent factors were good predictors of brand preference. 78 percent of variance was unexplained by these variables, and the remaining other variables will explain that.

4. DISCUSSION

This study used attribute, appearance, price, self-congruity, and brand personality as independent variables to measure brand preference. The path analysis derived from the structural model examined the influence of price, attributes, appearance, self-congruity, and brand personality on brand preference toward the passenger car.

The hypothesis testing's result (Table 6) shows that brand preference is not significantly affected by the attribute of passenger cars ($\beta = 0.062$; p = 0.210), which rejects H1. This finding revealed that the attributes of the passenger car do not affect the brand preference in the Nepalese market. The result was dissimilar from the prior findings

of Dharmaraj (2020), Kurnia and Hasyim (2023), and Rai and Budhathoki (2023) that attributes significantly influence brand preference. This finding is in opposition to the theory of the buying behavior of consumers. The earlier conclusions were derived from several studies on various products, circumstances, socioeconomic groups, and nations. Therefore, it might be possible that the study's conclusions differ from earlier conclusions.

Another result presented in Table 6 shows that price has no significant positive effect on brand preference ($\beta = -0.041$; p = 0.371), and H2 is not supported. This finding shows that the price factor of passenger cars does not influence brand preference. This finding is opposed by Dahal et al. (2020), Liu et al. (2022), Pitso et al. (2023), and Wahyuningsih et al. (2023), who showed that price factors significantly influence brand preference. This finding was controversial with the theory of economics regarding price and purchases. The passenger cars were regarded as prestigious products, and the price was not considered for prestigious products in the buying.

The subsequent finding of the study was that the appearance factor of passenger cars does not influence brand preference. H3 is rejected by the study's finding ($\beta = 0.022$; $p = 0.613$), which means the appearance of passenger cars does not influence brand preference. The finding is dissimilar from the findings of Fathima (2019), Ghimire et al. (2023), and Lavuri et al. (2019) that the appearance of a product influences brand preference. This finding differs from the consumer behavior theory. The rational factors are not considered in buying luxurious products but rather emotional ones.

The subsequent research outcome indicated that the brand personality factor of passenger cars highly influences brand preference ($\beta = 0.232$; $p = 0.000$), and H4 is accepted. This finding was similar to the outcome of Mao et al. (2020) and Nguyen et al. (2023), who found that brand personality significantly influences brand preference. This finding is based on the universal truth that the brand personality factor might influence brand preference. Brand personality is the most essential factor for the prestigious product rather than the rational factors.

The last finding was the self-congruity factor of passenger cars' influence on brand preference ($\beta = 0.297$; $p = 0.000$), and H5 is also accepted. The finding is similar to Li et al. (2022), Tsaur et al. (2023), and Zhang (2022) that self-congruity might influence brand preference. This finding is also based on the universal truth that self-congruity affects brand preference; it is in line with the theory of consumer behavior.

CONCLUSION

The research goal was to examine the factors influencing brand preference in buying passenger cars in Nepal. The study investigated the impact of attributes, appearance, price, brand personality, and self-congruity to measure brand preference.

The study's first objective was to identify the impact of attributes of passenger cars on brand preference. The study's finding shows that the attributes of passenger cars do not influence brand preference. Therefore, it is concluded that the functional attributes of the passenger car are not strongly considered by consumers when choosing a passenger car. It shows that the addition of passenger cars' available attributes may not guide to enhance consumer brand preference.

The study's second objective was to identify the impact of the appearance of passenger cars on brand preference. The visual appearance of passenger cars includes non-functional attributes. The study's findings show that the visible appearance of passenger cars is not considered an essential factor in selecting a vehicle in Nepal.

The third objective of the study was to examine the impact of the price of passenger cars on brand preference. The research result indicates that passenger car prices do not influence brand preference. It is concluded that the price of the passenger car was not considered an important variable in shaping brand preference toward passenger cars in Nepal.

The fourth objective was to explore the influence of brand personality on brand preference for passenger cars. The result shows that brand personality influences brand preference. It is concluded that the brand personality of the passenger car is accorded higher importance by consumers when selecting the passenger car brand. It shows that personality factors might lead to an increase in consumers' brand preference toward passenger cars. Usually, Nepalese customers purchase their passenger cars based on the equity of the brand name, which influences brand preference. Consumers want to connect emotionally with reputed brands. The brand is considered a significant factor for high-involvement products.

Moreover, the last and fifth objective of the study was to examine the impact of self-congruity on brand preference toward passenger cars. It was found that self-congruity significantly influences brand prefer-

ence towards passenger cars. It is concluded that self-congruity has been perceived as a substantial factor in improving brand preference for a passenger car. The higher degree of uniformity between the self-image of consumers and the brand image of passenger cars may lead to brand preference. It means consumers of passenger cars try to match the brand image with their self-image of the passenger car. It may be so because the consumers want to enhance their self-image through the passenger car's brand image and want to be in a position where their self-concept is strong. Passenger cars are regarded as a prestigious product in Nepalese society because the price is not considered for the prestigious products but the brand and image. It is also concluded that the rational factors are less focused than the emotional ones.

These outcomes may contribute to brand preference theory. Theoretically, it infers that consumers are more emotional than rational when buying a passenger car because reasonable factors such as attributes, price, and appearance have no significant impact on the brand preference, but emotional factors such as brand personality and self-congruity have a substantial and positive influence on the brand preference in the selection of passenger car. The marketing manager and sellers should not consider the rational factors in formulating marketing strategies. Still, emotional elements such as brand personality and self-congruity must be highly regarded for the prestigious products.

Limitations of the study offer further research directions. First, this study can be done in developed and underdeveloped countries with diverse socioeconomic origins, perspectives, characteristics, cultures, customs, behaviors, purchasing power, and attitudes. Second, additional service sectors can use this paradigm. Other goods apart from passenger cars can be investigated. This model can be used to explore brand preference using demographic factors. Fourth, the study's missing independent variables may be used to determine passenger automobile brand preference. These findings will pioneer empirical evidence and lay the groundwork for future research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Bharat Rai, Ganesh Bhattarai.
Data curation: Bharat Rai, Ganesh Bhattarai.
Formal analysis: Bharat Rai.
Investigation: Bharat Rai.
Methodology: Bharat Rai, Ganesh Bhattarai.
Project administration: Bharat Rai, Ganesh Bhattarai.
Supervision: Bharat Rai, Ganesh Bhattarai.
Validation: Bharat Rai, Ganesh Bhattarai.
Writing – original draft: Bharat Rai.
Writing – review & editing: Ganesh Bhattarai.

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