



The Digital Shift and Shifting Gearboxes: Social Media's Impact on Car Purchases and the Evolution of India's Top 5 Car Sales (2021–2026)

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Abstract

The Indian automotive industry is going through a significant change in the way consumers research and purchase cars. Traditionally, buying a car was largely a physical and dealer-driven process. Customers would visit several showrooms, speak with sales representatives, examine brochures, take test drives, and gradually narrow down their choices. In recent years, however, smartphones, affordable internet access, and the growing influence of digital media have changed this process considerably.

This study examines how social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, automotive forums, and short-form video platforms influence consumers during the pre-purchase stage of buying a car. It also looks at how these changing digital habits relate to developments in India's passenger vehicle market and the performance of the country's top-selling models between 2021 and 2026.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining passenger vehicle sales data with an analysis of consumer discussions and interactions across digital platforms. Particular attention is given to user-generated content (UGC), independent automotive reviews, customer experiences, and short-form videos. These forms of content have become important sources of information for consumers who want to understand a vehicle beyond the information provided by manufacturers.

Social media has also made it easier for prospective buyers to compare safety ratings, real-world fuel economy, ownership experiences, features, pricing, and maintenance costs before visiting a dealership. As a result, consumers are increasingly reaching the showroom with a much clearer understanding of the products they are considering.

These changes in consumer behaviour have occurred alongside an important shift in the Indian passenger vehicle market. Between 2021 and 2026, traditional hatchbacks have faced increasing competition from compact SUVs, micro-SUVs, and other feature-rich family vehicles. The growing appeal of higher seating positions, SUV-inspired styling, technology, practicality, and perceived safety has contributed to this change in consumer preference. Social media has helped amplify these preferences by presenting vehicles not simply as means of transportation, but also as products associated with lifestyle, aspiration, convenience, and social identity.

The study therefore argues that automobile manufacturers can no longer depend primarily on traditional advertising and showroom-based selling. Building consumer awareness and trust increasingly begins much earlier in the purchase journey, often through digital platforms and peer-to-peer recommendations. For sustained market leadership, automotive brands need to combine their physical retail networks with a strong and credible digital presence.

IndexTerms - Social Media Marketing, Consumer Purchase Behaviour, Automotive Industry, Top 5 Car Sales, User-Generated Content (UGC), Indian Passenger Vehicle Market, Digital Disruption, Automotive Influencers, Online Consumer Behaviour, Digital Car-Buying Journey\

1. INTRODUCTION

FOR MANY YEARS, BUYING A PASSENGER VEHICLE IN INDIA WAS PRIMARILY A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE. CONSUMERS GENERALLY VISITED DEALERSHIPS, COMPARED MODELS IN PERSON, CONSULTED SALES REPRESENTATIVES, COLLECTED BROCHURES, AND TOOK TEST DRIVES BEFORE MAKING A DECISION. SINCE PURCHASING A CAR INVOLVES A SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL COMMITMENT, BUYERS OFTEN SPENT WEEKS OR EVEN MONTHS EVALUATING THEIR OPTIONS. DEALERSHIPS CONSEQUENTLY PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN PROVIDING INFORMATION AND INFLUENCING THE FINAL PURCHASE DECISION.

THE GROWTH OF SMARTPHONES AND AFFORDABLE MOBILE INTERNET HAS CHANGED THIS PROCESS. CONSUMERS CAN NOW ACCESS A LARGE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION WITHOUT DEPENDING ENTIRELY ON A SALESPERSON OR DEALERSHIP. BEFORE VISITING A SHOWROOM, A POTENTIAL BUYER CAN WATCH VEHICLE WALKAROUND VIDEOS, COMPARE PRICES AND SPECIFICATIONS, READ OWNERSHIP EXPERIENCES, EXAMINE CRASH-TEST RESULTS, AND SEE HOW A CAR PERFORMS IN REAL-WORLD DRIVING CONDITIONS.

THIS HAS MADE SOCIAL MEDIA AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT PART OF THE AUTOMOTIVE PURCHASE JOURNEY. PLATFORMS SUCH AS YOUTUBE AND INSTAGRAM ARE NO LONGER USED ONLY BY MANUFACTURERS FOR ADVERTISING AND BRAND PROMOTION. THEY HAVE ALSO BECOME SPACES WHERE CONSUMERS, AUTOMOTIVE JOURNALISTS, INFLUENCERS, AND VEHICLE OWNERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS.

THE TYPE OF CONTENT AVAILABLE TO CONSUMERS HAS CHANGED AS WELL. A POTENTIAL BUYER CAN NOW WATCH A DETAILED REVIEW OF A VEHICLE, COMPARE ITS FUEL EFFICIENCY WITH COMPETING MODELS, VIEW A LONG-TERM OWNERSHIP REPORT, OR SEE SHORT VIDEOS HIGHLIGHTING ITS FEATURES WITHIN A FEW MINUTES. COMMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS UNDER SUCH CONTENT CAN PROVIDE ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES THAT MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE THROUGH OFFICIAL ADVERTISING.

AN IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT IS THAT THE CONSUMER HAS GAINED GREATER CONTROL OVER THE INFORMATION-GATHERING PROCESS. INSTEAD OF ENTERING A SHOWROOM WITH LIMITED KNOWLEDGE AND RELYING HEAVILY ON A SALESPERSON, BUYERS CAN ARRIVE WITH A SHORTLIST THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DEVELOPED THROUGH ONLINE RESEARCH. THE SHOWROOM EXPERIENCE THEREFORE INCREASINGLY BECOMES A STAGE FOR CONFIRMATION RATHER THAN INITIAL DISCOVERY.

AT THE SAME TIME, CONSUMER PREFERENCES IN THE INDIAN AUTOMOBILE MARKET HAVE BEEN CHANGING. FACTORS SUCH AS RISING HOUSEHOLD INCOMES, CHANGING URBAN LIFESTYLES, CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY, IMPROVED ACCESS TO VEHICLE FINANCING, AND THE GROWING POPULARITY OF SUV-STYLE VEHICLES HAVE INFLUENCED PURCHASING DECISIONS. THE SALES PERFORMANCE OF DIFFERENT MODELS BETWEEN 2021 AND 2026 REFLECTS SOME OF THESE BROADER CHANGES.

THE RISE OF COMPACT AND MICRO-SUVs IS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT. VEHICLES IN THESE CATEGORIES OFFER BUYERS A COMBINATION OF RELATIVELY COMPACT DIMENSIONS, HIGHER GROUND CLEARANCE, SUV-INSPIRED STYLING, PRACTICALITY, AND AN INCREASINGLY RICH SET OF FEATURES. THEIR POPULARITY SUGGESTS THAT CONSUMERS ARE NOT SIMPLY LOOKING FOR AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION; THEY ARE ALSO CONSIDERING DESIGN, LIFESTYLE, TECHNOLOGY, PERCEIVED SAFETY, AND VERSATILITY.

THIS STUDY THEREFORE EXPLORES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHANGING DIGITAL CAR-BUYING JOURNEY AND DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIA'S PASSENGER VEHICLE MARKET. IT FOCUSES SPECIFICALLY ON HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING AND WHETHER THE CHANGING PREFERENCES VISIBLE IN DIGITAL CONVERSATIONS CORRESPOND WITH CHANGES IN THE COUNTRY'S TOP-SELLING PASSENGER VEHICLES.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

- To analyse how social media platforms influence consumers during the pre-purchase decision-making process for passenger vehicles.
- To identify the types of digital content, including user-generated content, expert reviews, ownership experiences, and short-form videos, that have the greatest influence on consumer trust and purchase intention.
- To examine changes in India's passenger vehicle sales and the composition of the top five best-selling models between 2021 and 2026.
- To explore the relationship between digital consumer behaviour and changes in vehicle preferences and market performance.
- To understand how the growing influence of social media is changing the roles of automobile manufacturers, dealerships, influencers, and existing vehicle owners in the car-buying process.

3. Statement of the Problem

The traditional car-buying process was largely controlled by manufacturers and dealerships, with customers depending heavily on sales representatives and physical showroom visits for information. The rapid growth of digital media has changed this balance.

The major problems examined in this study are:

- Shift in information control: Consumers are no longer dependent on dealerships for basic product information. Mobile internet and social media provide access to specifications, reviews, ownership experiences, safety information, and pricing before a customer enters a showroom.
- Changing marketing priorities: Automobile manufacturers continue to invest substantially in traditional advertising, while consumers increasingly turn to independent reviewers, vehicle owners, influencers, and online communities for opinions they consider more authentic.

- Changing consumer preferences: The rapid growth of SUVs, particularly compact and micro-SUVs, alongside the changing performance of traditional hatchbacks, indicates that consumer preferences are evolving quickly.
- Difficulty in predicting demand: As consumers are exposed to new products, technologies, trends, and opinions through digital platforms, their expectations can change rapidly. This creates challenges for manufacturers and dealerships when planning marketing strategies, production, and inventory.
- Need for an integrated retail strategy: The growing gap between digital research and physical purchasing means that manufacturers and dealerships need to connect their online communication with the actual showroom and ownership experience.

4. Research Gap

Although a considerable amount of research has examined digital marketing and online consumer behaviour, several areas remain relatively underexplored in the Indian automobile context.

1. Limited focus on the later stages of the purchase funnel

Much of the existing research considers social media primarily as a tool for creating awareness and generating interest. Less attention has been given to its influence during the later stages of the decision-making process, when consumers compare specific models and move closer to making an actual purchase.

2. Limited connection between digital behaviour and market outcomes

Many studies depend on surveys that capture consumer attitudes and perceptions. There is comparatively less research that attempts to connect these digital behaviours with longer-term vehicle sales and market performance.

3. Changing nature of automotive content

The way consumers obtain information has changed considerably. Earlier online automotive discussions were often centred around written reviews and forums. Today, visual formats such as YouTube reviews, Instagram Reels, Shorts, and other short-form videos play a much larger role. The effect of this transition on high-involvement purchases such as automobiles deserves further examination.

4. Indian market-specific evidence

India's passenger vehicle market has its own characteristics, including strong price sensitivity, diverse consumer preferences, growing demand for SUVs, and a large network of traditional dealerships. More research is needed to understand how these characteristics interact with the increasing influence of social media.

5. Research Methodology

The study follows a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design. The research is divided into two broad phases.

Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis

The first phase focuses on the analysis of passenger vehicle sales and registration data between 2021 and 2026. The purpose is to identify changes in the country's best-selling models and examine broader shifts in consumer preferences.

The analysis will consider factors such as:

- Annual sales and registration volumes
- Changes in the top-five rankings
- Growth or decline of individual models
- Performance of hatchbacks, sedans, SUVs, and other major vehicle categories
- Changes in market share where reliable data is available

This quantitative analysis provides the market-level foundation for the study.

Phase 2: Qualitative Digital Analysis

The second phase examines consumer discussions and automotive content available on social media and online automotive communities. YouTube, Instagram, and relevant automotive forums are considered important sources because they contain reviews, comments, ownership experiences, comparisons, and discussions between prospective and existing vehicle owners.

The qualitative analysis will focus on recurring themes such as:

- Safety

- Fuel efficiency
- Design and styling
- Features and technology
- Price and value for money
- Ownership costs
- Reliability
- Brand reputation
- SUV preference
- Peer recommendations
- Influencer credibility

Sentiment and thematic analysis will be used to identify common patterns in consumer discussions and understand which factors appear most frequently in purchase-related conversations.

5.1. Data Collection

Primary Data

Primary data will be collected through structured surveys of consumers who purchased new passenger vehicles during the 2021–2026 period. The survey will examine the sources of information consumers used before purchasing their vehicles and the level of trust they placed in different digital platforms.

The survey will include areas such as:

- Social media usage during vehicle research
- Platforms used most frequently
- Influence of YouTube and Instagram content
- Importance of customer reviews and ownership experiences
- Influence of automotive influencers
- Impact of online safety and fuel-efficiency information
- Relationship between online research and the final purchase decision

Primary Digital Data

Digital data will be collected from publicly available automotive content and user interactions, subject to platform policies and data-access limitations. Engagement indicators such as views, comments, likes, shares, and discussion themes may be examined to understand which types of automotive content generate stronger consumer engagement.

Rather than treating engagement alone as evidence of purchasing behaviour, the study will use these indicators alongside survey responses and market data to identify broader patterns.

Secondary Industry Data

Secondary data will be obtained from established automotive industry sources, including the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) and the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA), along with other reliable industry reports and publicly available registration or sales datasets. Where possible, the study will distinguish between wholesale sales, retail sales, and vehicle registrations, since these measures can produce different rankings and should not be treated as interchangeable.

6. Significance of the Study

For Automobile Manufacturers

The findings can help automobile manufacturers understand where consumers are obtaining information and which forms of digital content influence their perceptions of a vehicle. This can support more effective allocation of marketing resources across traditional and digital channels.

The study may also help manufacturers recognise the importance of independent reviews, customer experiences, and online discussions in shaping brand perception. In an environment where consumers can easily compare competing products, simply communicating product features may no longer be sufficient; manufacturers also need to build credibility and trust.

For Dealership Networks

The findings can help dealerships adapt to an increasingly informed customer. A prospective buyer may already know the vehicle's specifications, competing models, expected price range, and common ownership concerns before entering the showroom.

This means that dealerships may need to move away from an information-heavy sales approach and place greater emphasis on transparent pricing, personalised assistance, test-drive experiences,

finance options, and efficient after-sales support. The future of automotive retail is therefore likely to be increasingly "phygital", combining digital discovery with physical experience.

For Consumers

The study highlights how social media has increased consumers' access to information. Buyers can now compare multiple vehicles and learn from the experiences of other owners before making a significant financial commitment.

At the same time, greater access to information also creates a new challenge: not every online review or recommendation is independent or reliable. Consumers therefore need to distinguish between genuine user experiences, sponsored content, influencer opinions, and manufacturer-led communication.

For Academic Research

The study contributes to the growing body of research on digital consumer behaviour by examining social media in the context of a high-involvement purchase such as an automobile. It also attempts to connect consumer-level digital behaviour with broader market trends and vehicle sales.

By bringing together social media behaviour, consumer decision-making, and automotive sales data, the research aims to provide a more complete understanding of how digitalisation is influencing India's changing automobile market.

7. Limitations of the Study

1. **Limited Sample Size:** The survey sample may not fully represent the diverse population of car buyers across India.
2. **Regional Differences:** Car-buying preferences can vary significantly between urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, which may not be equally represented in the study.
3. **Self-Reported Responses:** Survey responses depend on participants' personal opinions and recollection, which may sometimes differ from their actual purchasing behaviour.
4. **Difficulty Measuring Social Media Influence:** Likes, views, comments, and shares do not necessarily translate directly into actual car purchases, making the influence of social media difficult to measure precisely.
5. **Changing Social Media Trends:** Social media platforms, algorithms, and content formats change rapidly, so the findings may not remain applicable over a longer period.
6. **Influence of Other Factors:** Car purchases are also affected by price, income, fuel costs, financing, safety, brand reputation, and economic conditions, making it difficult to isolate the exact impact of social media.

8. Factors Influencing the Buying Behaviour of Cars

Car-buying behaviour is influenced by several factors that shape the consumer's decision throughout the purchase journey. These factors can broadly be grouped into digital and social influences, financial considerations, vehicle design and features, and ownership-related concerns.

Digital and Social Influence

Video Walkarounds:

YouTube reviews and vehicle walkaround videos allow potential buyers to examine a car's design, features, interiors, and driving experience before visiting a showroom. For many consumers, this has become an important part of the initial research process.

Peer Testimonials:

Instagram Reels and other social media posts featuring real ownership experiences can influence consumer confidence. Buyers often find experiences shared by other owners useful because they provide a perspective that may differ from official manufacturer advertising.

Forum Credibility:

Automotive forums and online communities provide a space where owners discuss issues related to reliability, maintenance, fuel economy, and long-term ownership. Such discussions can help prospective buyers identify both the strengths and weaknesses of a vehicle.

Influencer Endorsements:

Automotive and lifestyle influencers can influence how consumers perceive a particular vehicle. When a car is presented as part of a certain lifestyle, it can affect the way potential buyers view the vehicle's image, practicality, and status.

Financial and Economic Factors

On-Road Pricing:

The final on-road price is often more important to buyers than the advertised ex-showroom price. Insurance, registration charges, taxes, and other costs can significantly affect the final purchasing decision.

Financing Options:

Loan interest rates and flexible repayment options can make a vehicle more affordable for consumers. Financing can also influence buyers who are considering moving to a higher-priced model.

Resale Value:

Expected resale value is another important consideration, particularly for buyers who plan to replace their vehicle after a few years. Models with strong demand in the used-car market may be viewed as safer financial choices.

Fuel Efficiency:

For consumers who use their cars regularly for commuting, fuel economy remains an important factor. Real-world mileage reported by existing owners can therefore influence the choice between competing models.

Product Design and Features

Safety Ratings:

Safety has become an increasingly important consideration in car purchases. Crash-test results and safety features can influence how consumers compare different vehicles.

Road Stance:

Higher ground clearance and a more commanding seating position have contributed to the growing popularity of SUVs and SUV-inspired vehicles. These characteristics are particularly appealing to buyers who want a combination of practicality and road presence.

Cabin Technology:

Features such as touchscreen infotainment systems, wireless charging, digital instrument clusters, and connected features have become increasingly common. Such features can be particularly attractive to younger and technology-oriented buyers.

Connected Car Technology:

Features such as remote vehicle functions, location tracking, and smartphone-based controls can add convenience and may influence consumers who are willing to pay more for technology-enabled vehicles.

Ownership and Maintenance

Service Network:

A wide and accessible service network can give buyers greater confidence about owning a vehicle over the long term. Consumers are often more comfortable choosing brands that have service facilities available in their city or region.

Spare Parts:

The availability and cost of spare parts can affect the overall ownership experience. Easily available and reasonably priced parts can reduce concerns about maintenance expenses.

Warranty Periods:

Longer warranty coverage can provide buyers with additional protection against unexpected repair costs and can increase confidence when purchasing a new vehicle.

9. Meaning of Social Media

Social media refers to digital platforms that allow people to communicate, share information, create content, and interact with online communities. Unlike traditional forms of media such as television, newspapers, and radio, social media allows communication to take place in multiple directions.

Users can create and share photographs, videos, reviews, opinions, and other forms of content while also responding to the content created by others. Likes, comments, shares, and discussions have become important parts of this interaction.

For consumers, social media has therefore become more than a source of entertainment. It has developed into a space where people research products, exchange experiences, ask questions, and seek recommendations from others with similar interests.

10. History of Social Media

The Foundations: Late 1990s

The development of social media can be traced back to early platforms such as SixDegrees.com, which was launched in 1997. The platform introduced features such as personal profiles and friend connections.

Although internet access was still limited during this period and most users relied on slower dial-up connections, these early platforms demonstrated that people were interested in creating online versions of their existing social networks.

The Social Awakening: Early 2000s

Platforms such as Friendster and Myspace helped make online social networking more popular. Users could create profiles, share photographs, customise their pages, and interact with people from different parts of the world.

This period marked a shift from the relatively basic websites of the earlier internet toward more interactive and personal online spaces. Social media also began influencing popular culture, music discovery, and how young people expressed themselves online.

The Growth of Major Platforms: Mid-2000s

The launch of LinkedIn in 2003, Facebook in 2004, and YouTube in 2005 played an important role in the development of modern social media.

Facebook made regular social interaction easier through features such as the News Feed, while YouTube allowed ordinary users to create and share videos with a global audience. These platforms helped establish social media as an important part of everyday internet use.

The Mobile-First Shift: 2010s

The rapid growth of smartphones changed the way people used social media. Platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat placed greater emphasis on photographs, short videos, stories, and other visual content.

Users no longer needed to depend on desktop computers to participate in online communities. Social media became something people could access throughout the day, making communication faster and more immediate.

This development also contributed to the growth of the creator economy and the increasing importance of visual content.

11. Evolving Nature of Social Media in the Present Scenario

Short-Form Video

Short-form videos such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts have become an important way of consuming information and entertainment. Their short and visual format makes it possible for users to understand a product or idea within a few seconds.

For the automotive industry, this provides an opportunity to showcase exterior design, interiors, features, sounds, and driving experiences in a format that is easy to consume and share.

Social Media as a Search Tool

Consumers increasingly use social media platforms to find opinions and experiences related to products. Instead of relying only on traditional search engines or company websites, users may look at Instagram posts, YouTube videos, Reddit discussions, or automotive communities.

For someone researching a car, these platforms can provide practical information from owners and reviewers. This can include fuel economy, comfort, reliability, service experiences, and common problems.

AI-Driven Personalisation

Social media platforms increasingly use recommendation systems to determine what content users see. The content shown to a person can be influenced by factors such as viewing behaviour, searches, likes, and interactions.

For example, a person who regularly watches videos about compact SUVs may begin to receive more content about similar vehicles, comparisons, and reviews. This can encourage further research and increase exposure to competing models.

Social Commerce and Digital Automotive Retail

Social media is increasingly connecting product discovery with purchasing activities. In many industries, consumers can discover a product, read reviews, interact with creators, and make a purchase without leaving the platform.

Automobile purchases are different because the final transaction still involves physical processes such as documentation, registration, financing, and vehicle delivery. However, many parts of the buying journey can now begin online. Consumers can research models, contact dealers, schedule test drives, and in some cases make reservation payments digitally.

Decentralisation and Micro-Communities

Alongside large social media platforms, smaller online communities have become important sources of information. WhatsApp groups, Telegram communities, Discord servers, and dedicated automotive forums allow vehicle owners to communicate directly with one another.

These communities can be particularly useful for understanding long-term ownership issues. Owners may discuss actual fuel economy, service expenses, reliability, spare parts, and problems that may not be highlighted in official product communication.

12. The Impact of Social Media on Car-Buying Behaviour

Social media can influence car-buying behaviour at different stages of the consumer decision-making process.

Awareness and Discovery

Short-form videos on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube can introduce consumers to vehicles they may not have previously considered. A visually appealing video showing a new model, its design, interior, or features can create initial interest.

This is particularly relevant to automobiles because a car is not purchased only for its functional purpose. Design, appearance, lifestyle appeal, and emotional connection can also influence consumer preferences.

Social media therefore allows manufacturers, reviewers, and creators to introduce vehicles to potential buyers well before they visit a dealership.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Trust

Electronic word-of-mouth has become an important part of the modern car-buying process. Consumers can easily access opinions from vehicle owners, automotive reviewers, and online communities.

Real-world experiences can sometimes carry more weight than traditional advertisements because they provide information from the user's perspective. For example, a buyer may be more interested in an owner's actual fuel economy or service experience than the mileage figure mentioned in an advertisement.

At the same time, consumers should recognise that not all online content is completely independent. Sponsored reviews, promotional partnerships, and influencer collaborations can also affect the information available online.

Shortening the Consideration Period

Social media has made it possible for consumers to gather a large amount of information in a relatively short period.

Previously, a potential buyer might have visited several dealerships, collected brochures, spoken to salespeople, and consulted friends or mechanics before making a shortlist. Today, much of this initial comparison can be completed online.

Consumers can watch multiple reviews, compare features, read owner comments, and investigate competing models before visiting a showroom. As a result, the dealership visit increasingly becomes an opportunity to confirm a decision that has already been partly formed online.

Differences Across Demographics

The influence of social media is not the same for every consumer. Age, digital literacy, location, income, and access to technology can affect how people use digital platforms during the car-buying process.

Younger urban consumers may pay greater attention to technology, connectivity, design, and online reviews. At the same time, social media and regional-language content have made automotive information more accessible to consumers outside major metropolitan areas.

YouTube creators and regional online communities can provide vehicle information in local languages, helping consumers in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities make more informed comparisons.

13. Changes in Top 5 Car Sales (2021–2026)

Over the past five years, India's passenger vehicle market has shown a noticeable change in consumer preferences. Traditional hatchbacks continue to have a strong presence, but SUVs, micro-SUVs, and multi-utility vehicles have gained considerable attention.

2021–2022: The Post-Pandemic Market

During 2021 and 2022, models such as the Maruti Suzuki Wagon R, Maruti Suzuki Swift, and Maruti Suzuki Dzire continued to record strong sales. At the same time, compact SUVs such as the Tata Nexon began gaining greater attention.

During the post-pandemic recovery period, affordability, fuel efficiency, reliability, and personal mobility were major considerations for many consumers. However, the growing popularity of models such as the Nexon indicated that buyers were increasingly interested in vehicles offering greater ground clearance and SUV-inspired design.

2023–2024: Growing Popularity of Micro-SUVs

The period from 2023 to 2024 saw further growth in the popularity of compact and micro-SUVs. The Tata Punch became particularly noticeable in the market by offering an SUV-inspired design in a relatively affordable price range.

The Hyundai Creta also continued to maintain a strong position in the mid-size SUV segment.

During this period, consumers increasingly looked for a combination of practicality, design, safety, and technology. Features such as larger infotainment screens, sunroofs, connected technology, and improved cabin equipment became important talking points in automotive discussions.

The success of the Tata Punch also demonstrated that SUV-inspired design was no longer restricted to higher-priced vehicles.

2025–2026: A More Diverse Market

By 2025–2026, the Indian passenger vehicle market had become more diverse. Practical For your 2021–2026 Indian passenger-vehicle study, you can structure it like this

Classification	Dominant / High-Selling Models	Key Consumer Appeal
Hatchback	Maruti Suzuki Wagon R, Maruti Suzuki Swift, Maruti Suzuki Baleno	Affordability, mileage, easy city driving, low maintenance
SUV / Micro-SUV	Tata Punch, Tata Nexon, Hyundai Creta, Maruti Suzuki Fronx	SUV styling, ground clearance, safety, features, road presence
MUV / MPV	Maruti Suzuki Ertiga	7-seat capacity, family use, practicality, running cost
Sedan	Maruti Suzuki Dzire	Fuel efficiency, boot space, affordability, fleet and family use
Compact Crossover	Maruti Suzuki Fronx	SUV-inspired styling with compact dimensions and urban practicality

14. Conclusion

Social media has changed the way consumers research and evaluate cars. Information that was once mainly available through dealerships, salespeople, brochures, and personal contacts can now be accessed through YouTube, Instagram, online forums, and owner communities.

This does not mean that dealerships have become irrelevant. Test drives, personal interaction, financing, documentation, delivery, and after-sales service remain important parts of the purchase process. However, the role of the dealership has changed because consumers often arrive with considerable knowledge and a shortlist of vehicles already in mind.

The changes in India's passenger vehicle market between 2021 and 2026 also point towards changing consumer preferences. Hatchbacks remain important, particularly among price- and efficiency-conscious buyers, but SUVs, micro-SUVs, crossovers, and MUVs have become increasingly attractive.

Social media has played a role in making these vehicles more visible and in allowing consumers to share experiences with a much larger audience. Features such as safety, fuel economy, technology, design, practicality, and ownership costs can now be discussed and compared publicly.

Overall, the modern car-buying process is best understood as a combination of digital research and physical experience. Consumers may discover a vehicle online, compare it with competing models through reviews and owner discussions, and then visit a dealership to confirm their choice through a test drive and personal evaluation.

For automobile manufacturers and dealerships, this means that digital communication is no longer simply an additional marketing activity. It has become an important part of the overall customer journey, and success increasingly depends on creating a consistent experience between what consumers see online and what they experience in the real world.

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