Gen Z on the Move: Exploring EV Brand Perception of Ather Energy and Ola Electric in India's Emerging Mobility Market

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Abstract

India's drive to electric vehicles (EVs) is growing rapidly due to environmental standards, subsidies offered by the government, and technology innovations in the two-wheeler market. Among the potential consumers, Gen Z (1996-2012) is a notably technologically savvy, economical, and environmentally mindful population that is best suited to contribute to the landscape of sustainable mobility in the near future. To explore how two renowned EV brands, Ather Energy and Ola Electric, align their approaches to branding standards and perspectives to appeal to Gen Z consumers. By the use of secondary data sources from reports, journal articles, social media promotion, media reviews etc., the study examines the way each brand resonates with Gen Z in four distinct dimensions, like brand positioning, technological factors, accessibility, and engagement with consumers. Ather Energy represents a premium and innovation-driven brand to early users, whereas Ola Electric uses a competitive pricing strategy with mass marketing using digital marketing strategies for the extensive outreach and to bring in more young consumers. Though the approaches are different, their outreach is for Gen Z ideals like technological integration and sustainability. As per the findings of the study, it reveals that when businesses satisfy Gen Z's expectations for innovation, tech functionality, social importance, and brand consumer compliance, is at its highest. the evolving India's transition towards eco-conscious mobility. The study's conclusion addresses the implications of India's evolving transition towards eco-conscious mobility for EV branding, policy exchanges, and strategies targeting young demographics.

Key Words: *Electric vehicle (EV), Environmentally friendly, Technological advancement, Sustainable, Gen Z.*

1. Introduction

The world is transforming dramatically owing to the significant environmental problems consisting of greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, which are compelling governments, organisations, and individuals to shift to more environmentally friendly and cleaner energy sources (Shiney Chib et al., 2025; Fabio L. Santana Stork, 2022). This transition is primarily driven by the automobile sector, which enormously contributes to airborne pollutants and the emissions of greenhouse gases (Khurana, A et al., 2020). Electric vehicles have emerged as a key response to resolve this, as they can help with improved quality of air in the urban cities, cut down fossil fuels, and mitigate the CO2 emissions; all of them have an advantageous influence on the ecosystem and the human well-being (Langbroek, J. H. M. et al., 2016). Innovations in battery storage technology and an equal need for environmentally sound mobility are contributing to the swift expansion of the global EV market (Sharmila Rao S et al., 2024; Das, P. K., & Bhat, M. Y. 2022). Given India's quick urbanisation and steadily increasing population, the introduction of electric vehicles is a vital strategic prerequisite to address the nation's energy stability and environmental issues (Kanujiya, P. K., 2024). India constitutes one of the globe's major carbon dioxide emitters, and several of its largest cities are identified as the most polluted in the world (Kumar, R., et al., 2020; Tarei, P. K., et al., 2021). In order to acknowledge this, the Government of India (GOI) has demonstrated a profound dedication to carbon neutrality, more specifically by signing the Paris Agreement for reduction in carbon intensity of GDP by 33-35% by 2030 (Kumar, R., et al., 2020; Bhat, F. A., et al., 2022). Electric vehicle acceptance was promoted by the initiatives featuring the Faster Adoption & Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME),

Production Linked Initiatives (PLI Scheme), ACC Battery Storage, and Battery Swapping Policy. Furthermore, the Zero Pollution Mobility campaign and shoonya (NITI Aayog, Government of India 2023) encouraged organizations to use electric vehicles for travel and shipment, which reduced emission levels and avoided petroleum (Simon, A. E., et al., 2024; Kumar, R., et al., 2020). Despite the prevalent of these efforts, there are numerous barriers to the broader adoption of EVs in India, including high upfront costs, a lack of adequate electrical infrastructure for charging, range anxiety, an expectation of uncertainty of battery longevity, and comparatively modest purchasing power among customers (Tarei, P. K. et al., 2021). For speeding up the adoption of EVs, it is important to comprehend the customer viewpoints (Langbroek, J. H. M., et al., 2016; Kanujiya, P. K., et al., 2024). Gen Z represents a significant percentage of potential consumers, making this population particularly valuable due to their greater knowledge and understanding of sustainability concerns and technological advances. They exhibit a clear preference for EVs that reflect factors like perceived convenience, subjective norms, recurring rewards, and purchase benefits (Fabio L. Santana Stork 2022). This study aims to provide a broad perspective of how branding and products of the renowned Indian EV manufacturers, Ather Energy and Ola Electric, affect Gen Z consumers. The objective is to provide an extensive understanding of the factors determining the future development of the EV industry in India, specifically with regard to the younger population.

2. Literature Review

Langbroek, J. H. M., et al., (2016) with the aim of finding whether policy incentives influence the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), this research analyses the literature while incorporating sociopsychological factors. The study integrates the Protection Motivation Theory to understand how behavioural changes across different phases impact people. By considering these intricate variables, the research seeks to offer insights into how users respond to EV advertising strategies.

Rezvani, Z., et al., (2015) the study reveals the adoption and usage of EVs by consumers, with a specific focus on plug-in EVs such as Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs), Plug-in Hybrid EVs (PHEVs), and Extended-Range Electric Vehicles (E-REVs). Owing to a greater part of user assumptions, EV purchase rates are still low despite their environmental benefits. By categorizing them into technical concerns such as range anxiety and performance, cost factors such as high upfront costs and maintenance savings, and contextual factors like charging infrastructure and supportive legislation, the paper identifies the significant hurdles to consumer use. It also discusses normative theories like the Value-Belief-Norm Theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Rational Choice Theory, and the ideas of self-identity, lifestyle, and innovation diffusion that are integrated in EV adoption. However, the adoption is influenced by factors such as perceived benefits and environmental concerns.

Bhat, F. A., Verma, M., & Verma, A. (2022) based on the existing literature, contribute to the significant portion for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the automobile sector. Despite the financial and non-financial incentives available, the adoption of EVs remains insufficient, notably in countries like India. Multiple studies show how consumers determine which products to buy and often adopt the Technology Acceptance Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Original cost of ownership, range of driving, and evolving infrastructure are a few constraints to adopting EVs. Others include consumer personality attributes like curiosity and inventiveness, social perception, and environmental concerns. Thus, this study addresses the lack of research in the developing countries and the limited number of studies examining the influence of consumer values in EV adoption.

Kumar, R., Jha, A., et al., (2020) the study on EV adoption addresses worldwide developments in addition to India's recent challenges. EVs have become a growing trend across the globe due to increasing pollutants and a greater concentration on sustainable energy sources. Leveraging regulatory measures, enticements, and advancement of infrastructure encompassing the idea of a sharing economy, the countries promoting the use of EVs include China, the US, and Norway. The EV industry in India is growing up despite substantial obstacles consisting of high purchase costs, lack of facilities for charging, concerns regarding range, inadequate battery technology, reliance on imports, and the rigidity of an existing hydrocarbon economy. In spite of government initiatives like FAME II, a shared mobility business model might be more efficient for India's early EV adoption phases due to financial limitations and the nation's widespread use of public transportation.

3. Research Gap

With India's fast move to electric vehicles, it is necessary for the businesses seeking an enduring position in the marketplace to learn the attitudes and expectations of Generation Z (born between 1996-2012), which is the most essential demographic in the evolving landscape of sustainable transportation owing to their strong technological bonds, growing environmental awareness, and rising purchasing power. While prior studies have recognised that young consumers can drive the adoption of electric vehicles, most of these studies treated this age group as single entity or focused on general market trends. Keeping this in view, it is vital to investigate within the framework of the Indian EV market which is defined by policy-driven growth, cost sensitivity, and infrastructure barriers. The factors include the distinct brand expectations, adopting motivations, and behavioural patterns of Gen Z. The current and relevant inquiry into how Gen Z views two important domestic EV brands, Ather Energy and Ola Electric. Ola's aggressive mass-market and digital expansion, whereas Ather's premium and performance-driven branding. This research enhances our knowledge of brand-consumer compliance in a high-growth and high-stake market by thorough consideration of whether Gen Z responds to these strategies. This study advances India's higher purpose of inclusive mobility, technological innovations, and sustainability in the environment.

4. Research Objectives

1. To examine how Ather Energy and Ola Electric position their electric vehicle brands to attract Gen Z consumers in Indian EV market.
2. To identify and analyse Gen Z consumers' perceptions, motivations and perceived barriers related to Ather Energy and Ola Electric.

5. Research Methodology

The study incorporates a qualitative case study approach to explore and understand the brand positioning strategies of Ola Electric and Ather Energy. The study is based on the secondary data, gathered from various sources such as official brand websites, previous research articles, academic journal articles, industry reports, and online media articles.

6. Case Analysis

6.1. Ather Energy: Innovating the Electric Scooter Experience

The Young intellects Mr. Tarun Mehta and Mr. Swapnil Jain in 2013, established their baby brain in 2013, becoming India's fourth-largest EV two-wheeler manufacturing facility in Bengaluru as its headquarters. The vehicles range includes Ather Rizta, Ather 450, and 450 Apex. Ather Energy's functional and smart electric scooters have created a quiet buzz among consumers. With a Zenith for electric bikes that are intended for 125-300 cc fuel-powered bikes and an EL for a budget-friendly electric scooter, the company is creating these two new EV two-wheeler versions. Ather expects to have a 10% market share by 2030. Ather presently operates 239 Experience Centres, as well as nearly 2000 Ather Grid swift charging facilities in 175 towns in India as of October 31, 2024. Furthermore, it has collaborated with the Karnataka state government to construct 1,000 fast charging stations/facilities, which could promote purchasing and owning EVs, thus increasing the use of sustainable forms of mobility. The distinct brand identity of Ather was carefully chosen to appeal to the young, technologically adept urbanites. By focusing on renewable sources of energy, innovative engineering, and evolving in lifestyle. As an aspect of its strategy to promote long-term brand loyalty and trust, its "Experience Centres" are made to enable consumers with interest to engage intensely with the product. The biggest challenge confronted by Ather is its premium price and limited geographical reach. Cost-sensitive Gen Z are unable to afford it in the Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. Despite incentives, its high initial cost and scarce infrastructure for charging limit its broad appeal. Nevertheless, Ather remains an established brand among the early prospective customers and young, technology-savvy urbanites who value performance technology over affordability.

Source:

Forbes, Harichandan Arakali, Feb 8th 2018, https://www.forbesindia.com/article/30-under-30-2018/tarun-mehta-swapnil-jain-electrifying-scooters/49385/1
https://www.atherenergy.com/,
https://www.resconpartners.com/indias-electric-vehicle-revolution-powering-a-greener-future-with-key-players-and-bold-initiatives/

6.2. Ola Electric: Electrifying India's Two-Wheeler Market

Mr. Bhavish Aggarwal, the founder of Ola Electric, started the company with the idea to reduce the emission and fuel dependency of Ola's cabs and transition to mass electric transportation. Established in 2017, with its headquarters in Bengaluru. The product range includes Ola S1X Gen3, Ola S1 Z, Ola S1 Pro Gen 3, Ola Gig, etc. The Ola Electric has revolutionised India's electric two-wheeler scooter. In December 2024, it boosted its distribution network to 4,000 business locations covering all the pin codes in the country as a part of its newest initiatives. During this point in time, approximately 3,200 new stores featured service facilities, which enhanced after-sales assistance and encouraged the adoption of EVs. #Hyperservice campaign was launched for the broad service coverage in an effort to promote the widespread use of EVs, especially concentrating in rural areas. Furthermore, the company started an initiative on the EV service program to train more then 1,00,000 technicians throughout India and a network partnership program to recruit 10,000 partners for sales and service by the end of 2025. The two-wheelers are crucial for daily transit in Indian towns, and the accomplishment and growth of Ola Electric indicate the rising need for affordable and ecologically conscious mobility solutions in Indian cities. This rise in demand reflects people's growing desire for sustainable transportation options. Ola presented itself as a symbol of inclusive initiative, guaranteeing accessibility and quick installation of a potentially hyper charger networks across the country. Ola embraced digital platforms and an influencer marketing strategy to promote its products and target young consumers. Gen Z finds this platform unique for socially conscious consumers. Social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, are incorporated in advertising and influencer-sponsored promotions (Chib, S., 2025). Ola appeared to be ambitious yet affordable due to product launches that imitated tech reveal, such as Apple's. The EV scooters are driven by MoveOS, "futuristic tech, that covers ranging music and mood settings to predictive AI." (Bhat, F. A., et al., 2022). Style-conscious Gen Z users will find these scooters appealing due to their clean, streamlined appearance and vibrant colour options. Ola's rapid growth and overpromising, led to serious lapses in customer confidence and level of service. Few constraints and major concerns comprised delivery lags, after-sale service issues, and inconsistent product performance, which were all noted by the multiple users in the early stages. Regardless to this, ola was able to gain a substantial share of the market in spite of these shortcomings, and this is due to their aggressive pricing, entry-level design supply, and extensive infrastructure (Simon, A. E. et al., 2024). Ola's EV strategy reflects a mass-market methodology customized to India's socio-economic diversity. A few its ongoing challenges include reliability and customer support; however, Gen Z cannot overlook this enterprise due to immense scope and popularity. It resembles promises, the prospects, and concerns for EV disruption in India.

Source:

https://www.olaelectric.com/

https://www.resconpartners.com/indias-electric-vehicle-revolution-powering-a-greener-future-with-key-players-and-bold-initiatives/

7. Conclusion

This case study reveals that Gen Z consumers are becoming more influential towards the electric vehicle (EV) segment in India. The analysis of the brands, such as Ola Electric and Ather Energy, has significantly advanced their establishments as market leaders in the space of sustainability and innovation, although their strategies to engage Gen Z differ greatly. Ather's proficiency in technology segments targeted Gen Z consumers who value engineer excellence and premium tech-focused appeal. Whereas Ola Electric has disrupted the mass market by means of its proactive product introduction and promotions, digitally positioning it as an ideal brand for the Gen Z population in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. Brands need to be based on value-driven offerings with digital authenticity and functionality and establish trust to gain an edge over Gen Z consumers in the Indian EV market. Such actions will ultimately result in a stronger and greater-value bond between consumers in the era of sustainable mobility.

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