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# Why do people choose their car colours?

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## Abstract

Successful colour forecasting enables companies to provide suitable products to the right customers. Generation Y are significant customers in vehicle markets. Understanding relevant factors on young customers are essential for companies and can help them fine-tune their products' colour for specific demographic groups. However, consumer preference for colour could depend on various factors, including trends, age, gender, income and more. In the automotive industry, automotive exterior colour is a critical decision. The choice may be more considered because the consumer will likely be living with that colour for many years daily. Despite this, few studies have investigated the factors that drive customer selection of automotive colours. Thirty-three participants from generation Y were invited to take an online survey designed to get their ideas on various factors that can influence their car colour decision. Personal preference and ease of maintenance are two main aspects of their automotive colour selection. This study looks into the effects of relevant factors on the colour of cars. It can encourage more research in the field of colour forecasting in the automotive industry.

**Keywords:** *automotive colour, colour forecasting, generation Y, car purchase intention*

## INTRODUCTION

Colour can affect purchasing behaviours; effective colour forecasting enables companies to provide products with suitable colours for customers at the right time (Diane and Cassidy 2005). Colour information in the fashion industry changes quite rapidly and there are many different independent colour forecasting agencies (e.g., Pantone and WGSN) in addition to forecasters working within manufacturing and retail organisations. By contrast, colour forecasting in the automotive industry is more limited. Only a few paint companies deliver automotive colour forecasting reports each year, including BASF, Axalta and PGG. Nevertheless, practical colour information is economically important to enable automotive companies to produce successful products.

Customers may take longer to decide about the exterior colour of automotive than with other products. This is because some purchases have very limited use (e.g., fast fashion) and/or are less expensive so that consumers can afford to take more risk. On the other hand, consumers live daily with their choice of automotive exterior colour for many years. Exterior colour could also affect future resale values.

Despite this, few studies have investigated the factors that drive customer selection of automotive colours specifically. Personality is one of the most frequently cited elements influencing car colour choice (Andrews et al. 2006; Dwivedi 2015). Emotion-colour correlation plays a role as well (Powers and Power 2006; Zhang et al. 2020). King (2003) summarised correlations between personality and automotive colour selections. In the UK, for example, red is more likely to be chosen by creative drivers, yellow car drivers are more likely to be energetic, whilst pink vehicle drivers are more likely to be victims of road rage than drivers of other colours. Automotive colour selection may also be influenced by geography and social movements (Oliver and Lee 2010; Jun and Bo 2012; Kowang et al. 2018). Factors like price and brand (Kowang et al. 2018), how customers perceive themselves (Oliver and Lee 2010), colour appropriateness for particular vehicle types (Hanss et al. 2012) and patriotism (Mustafa et al. 2020) have all been suggested to influence automotive colour selection.

The majority of studies on the influence of factors on automotive colour selections concentrate on the general population. Few studies have looked into the intentions of young customers when it comes

to purchasing a vehicle (Mustafa et al. 2020). In today's automotive industry, Generation Y is the most prominent customer demographic (Dewalska-Opitek 2017). Compared to other demographic groups, generation Y customers are more willing to accept new technology and trends. Because of technological advancements, they now have access to internet information, and the opinions of other consumers may affect their colour choices (Weiler 2004). New graduates and young customers from generation Y act differently on their values, attitudes and vehicle purchased behaviours (Dewalska-Opitek 2017).

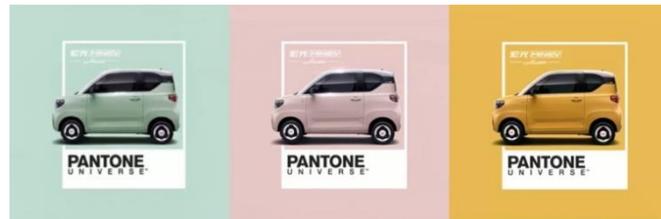


Figure 1: Images of Wuling Mini EV Macaroon collection.

In recent years, the automotive market has grown rapidly in China. Cars are now much more affordable, even for young consumers, than even one or two decades ago. Along with the advancement of automobile engines and performance, aesthetics strongly influences consumer purchase intent (Kumar and Sarkar 2016). Exterior colour will undoubtedly influence a consumer's choice of purchase (Jun and Bo 2012). As a result, automotive companies have shown a growing interest in colour trends in marketing. For instance, China's leading automotive company Wuling launched a new series called Mini EV Macaroon in 2021 (see Figure 1), with colour forecasting agency Pantone. Avocado green, lemon yellow and white peach pink were chosen for their new microcars— with similar colours to those in the Pantone 'Colour of the year' report (Gijsenij et al. 2021).

This study investigates automotive colour preferences of Chinese generation Y customers to enable companies to better understand China's Generation Y's purchasing patterns.

## **METHODS**

A total of 33 Chinese participants born between 1980 to 1995 completed an online survey. The survey was designed to identify factors that might influence young consumers' decisions on automotive colour selections and aimed to measure attitudes towards colour trends for automotive exterior colours.

The research focuses on the aesthetics of a vehicle, which includes the shape and automotive colours. Participants were asked about their preferences for their first (the first car they purchased or intend to purchase) and second (meaning the car they would like to buy in the future) cars as well as some general preference questions such as attitude towards automotive colour trends. The rationale for asking about first and second cars was that the second car is more aspirational and the first car is more practical since the second car could be a car that the consumer cannot currently afford but would aspire to own.

## **FINDINGS**

Young consumers have different vehicle type preferences between their first car and second car (see Figure 2). Although SUV was the most frequent choice for the first vehicle selections, the choice of the second car was less clear but with some shift towards 4WD and Coupe vehicles.

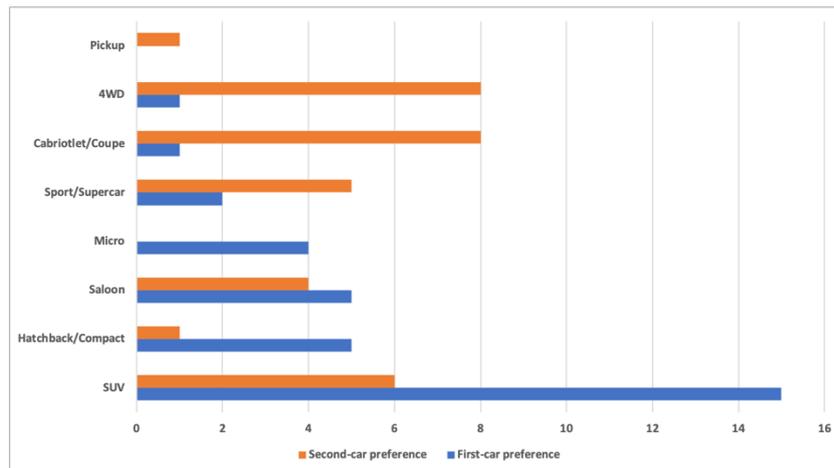


Figure 2: Respondent preferences on car type for their first car and second car.

When asked about colour preferences, there was a strong preference for black (when asked about the first car) but a relative increase towards colours such as red for the second car (Figure 3). As various colours suit different types of vehicles (Hanss et al. 2012), understanding whether customers are buying their first or second car may help better understand the colour preferences of consumers.

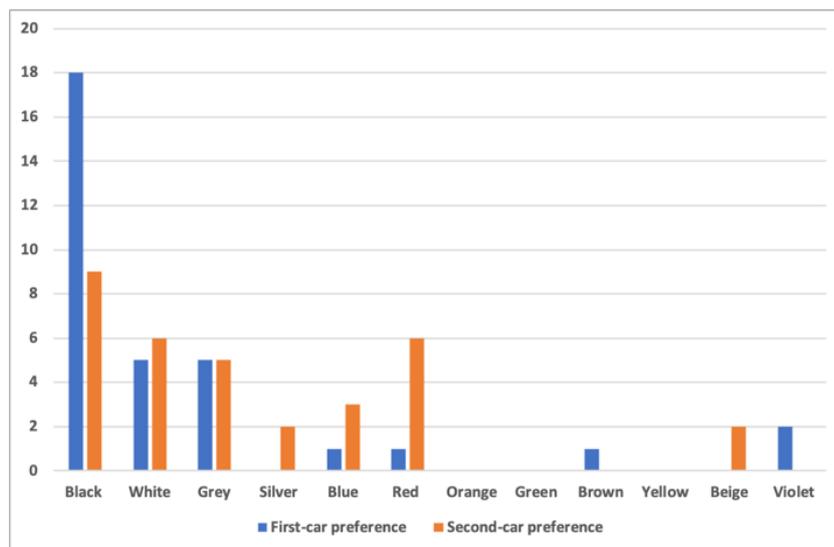


Figure 3: Respondent preferences on automotive exterior colour for their first car and second car.

When asked what features are important to them for their ‘dream’ car comfort and safety were strongly cited (Figure 4). Similar to other generations, safety is a priority although consumers may not be aware that dark-coloured cars are more likely to be involved in accidents than light-coloured cars (Ho et al. 2017). Quality and trendy are also concerns for generation Y consumers.



Figure 4: Word cloud of responses about important features in consumers' ideal car.

Figure 5 shows the colours that consumers associate with luxury and trendy cars. Over 70% of the consumers associated black with luxurious cars whereas for trendy cars there was more variability in the responses. Some of this variability might be related to individual consumer's ideas about what is a trendy car.

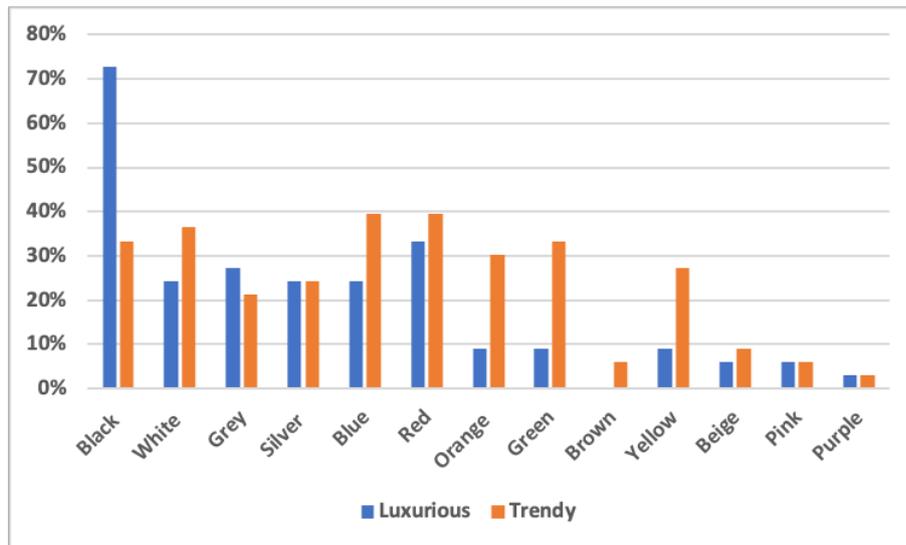


Figure 5: Colours that consumers associate with luxurious and trendy cars.

Over half of young consumers (58%) in the research mentioned the personal preference would affect their colour decision. Previous research supports the importance of personal preference in choosing colour for products (Lee, Westland, and Cheung 2018). Another distinctive aspect of automotive colour selections (58% of responses) is the ease of maintenance. One of the benefits of easy-to-care automotive colours could reduce cleaning efforts (darker coloured cars do not show dirt as easily light coloured ones). 18% of young consumers expressed concern about safety and other comments in their colour selections. Surprisingly, only a few consumers mentioned price factors in automotive colour selections.

## CONCLUSION

In terms of engines and performance, the automotive industry has advanced significantly in recent decades. As a result, car aesthetics have become an essential component in the purchase process. General factors such as age, region, income and resale prices appear to be insufficient predictors of consumer interests in car selections. However, the existing system with machine learning algorithms could help predict car purchased intention with general factors like price, customer reviews, resale price (Das Mou et al. 2021). Furthermore, with inspiration from the research, a better forecasting system could be designed to better fulfil young customers' needs.

Personal preference and ease of maintained are two dominant elements that influence Chinese Gen Y customers when choosing automotive colours. Balancing these two factors and methods to collect personal preference information for each customer still needs further exploration. However, the obvious shortcoming of this study is that the amount of data is small, which leads to a certain limitation. In addition, a more diverse group of participants could add in future research.

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