

Cars Are a Status Symbol for Many Young People



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New Continental Mobility Study shows that more than half of younger people in Germany see cars as a prestige item

- Technological advances in cars such as automated driving, large displays and AI voice control are highly popular
- Philipp von Hirschheydt, member of the Executive Board responsible for the Automotive group sector:

The response to new technologies in cars varies greatly between generations and also between countries. That's why we aim to provide customized solutions – market-specific, tailor-made and modular

- Still skepticism toward all-electric vehicles; much higher approval for hybrid solutions
- Concerns remain regarding the affordability of personal mobility
- Strong interest in sustainable car tires

Hanover, Germany, October 29, 2024. The majority (54 percent) of younger drivers in Germany (up to the age of 34) see cars as a status symbol. This is a key finding of the representative mobility study conducted in August 2024 by market research institute infas on behalf of Continental in Germany, China, France, Japan and the USA. In Germany, 1,000 people aged 18 and over were surveyed about their mobility needs. According to a study commissioned by HORIZONT in 2017, for example, only 25 percent of younger respondents viewed cars as a status symbol.

Overall, 84 percent of car owners in Germany, regardless of age, believe that it is important to own a car. For almost 90 percent, having a car is essential for shopping and running other errands. The majority of young people in Germany are particularly enthusiastic about

technological advances in cars. They look forward to the benefits self-driving cars will offer in terms of being able to read, play video games or work (51 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds). In addition to autonomous driving, artificial intelligence (AI) in the form of digital voice assistants is very popular with this group. There is a similar level of approval in the four other countries surveyed in the study.

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says Philipp von Hirschheydt, Continental Executive Board member responsible for the Automotive group sector, commenting on the survey findings.

The findings of the study also reveal the current status of the trend toward lower-emission mobility worldwide. Particularly striking is that acceptance of fully electric cars remains low. In Germany, only 3 percent of all car owners have an electric vehicle. However, just over a third of respondents who do not yet own an electric vehicle believe their next car will be fully electric (39 percent, compared with 34 percent in 2022). By contrast, hybrid drives are highly popular across all countries. In Germany (48 percent) and the USA (47 percent), nearly half of respondents who do not own an electric car can imagine their next vehicle being a hybrid with a combustion engine and an electric motor. In China, that figure rises to almost nine out of 10 respondents (86 percent). This means that hybrid cars could increasingly bridge the gap to e-mobility and give it a renewed boost. With a share of 68 percent, younger people in Germany aged between 25 and 34 are particularly interested in electric cars – also compared with their international peers.

Generations Y and Z admit that cars are a status symbol

On the one hand, younger people up to the age of 34 in Germany do not feel that attached to cars. For them, more than for older respondents, it is one of many means of transportation available. On the other hand, generation Y and Z drivers born in the 1990s and later have a clear emotional connection to their cars: for more than half of 18 to 34-year-olds (54 percent) in Germany, cars are regarded as a status symbol – twice the share among respondents aged 45 and

over. People aged between 18 and 34, particularly those living in large cities, see cars as a prestige item (67 percent). In small towns and rural areas, the approval rate is around 49 percent. This view of the car is accompanied by growing expectations. Of the 25 to 34-year-olds surveyed, for example, 51 percent believe that cars of the future should not only be a safe means of transportation, but also a place to relax and work.

Technological advances in cars attract interest and bring benefits into focus

Younger people in Germany also have a positive attitude toward highly automated and autonomous driving, with around two-thirds (65 percent) of 18 to 34-year-olds seeing this as a useful development. Among older respondents aged 55 and over, 39 percent share this view. Around two-thirds of younger people up to the age of 34 also believe that state-of-the-art technologies should be mandatory in newly registered cars in order to make traffic even safer – a viewpoint that signals approval of the EU directive requiring certain advanced driver assistance systems in new cars, which has been in force since July 2024.

Another future technology that is particularly popular with younger people is AI assistants in cars. Almost three-quarters of respondents (74 percent) between the ages of 18 and 34 would welcome an AI voice as a service that, like a virtual travel companion, provides useful information about sights and restaurants along the route, finds the nearest gas or charging station, searches for free parking spaces or even compiles personal messages.

Younger people in particular have changing expectations of cars. These are closely linked to pioneering technologies such as automated driving, which deliver new user experiences,” explains Philipp von Hirschheydt, adding, “At Continental, we’re already equipping cars with AI. Together with our partner Google Cloud, we have developed a virtual companion for drivers. We are particularly proud to be one of the first automotive suppliers worldwide to integrate Google Cloud applications directly into our vehicle computers.

Automated driving, AI and large displays compared internationally

The comparison between countries reveals a widespread openness to

highly automated and autonomous driving in Asia across all age groups. In China, nine out of 10 respondents (90 percent) view the relevant technologies as a useful development, while in Japan, almost three-quarters (72 percent) share this sentiment. In France (60 percent) and the USA (56 percent), more than half of those surveyed have a positive attitude. In Germany, around one in two respondents (49 percent) feel the same. An AI-powered virtual travel companion is particularly popular in China, where nine out of 10 respondents (91 percent) say they would like to have such a service. In the USA (66 percent) and Japan (63 percent), around two-thirds express this wish, while in France (58 percent) and Germany (57 percent) more than half would be happy to have the technology.

There is broad agreement across all countries on the ideal size of a car display for infotainment content. Most people prefer larger displays, with 90 percent of respondents in China favoring this option. In Germany (81 percent), France (79 percent) and the USA (80 percent), eight out of 10 respondents would like their navigation, vehicle data and music to be shown on large screens. In Japan, the figure is more than two-thirds (69 percent). However, preferences differ significantly when it comes to technological details. While the majority of respondents in Japan (79 percent) and more than half in Germany (57 percent) prefer a simpler display on car screens, a slight majority in the USA (58 percent) favor more colors. By contrast, many features are popular in China (69 percent). In Japan (70 percent), the majority prefer a more straightforward digital design, while in Germany, around half feel the same way (55 percent). There are also differences between countries when it comes to the question of whether a display should be controlled by voice or manually: voice control is particularly popular in Japan (67 percent), more than half are in favor of it in China (59 percent), while the number is significantly lower in Germany (43 percent). In the USA, just over half (55 percent) also prefer to operate a display manually.

Renaissance of the hybrid drive

The study shows that hybrid drivers in Germany have an above-average interest in all-electric mobility – a strong indication that hybrid cars can play a key role as a bridging technology for the transition to fully electric drives. For example, 43 percent of respondents who currently use a vehicle with a combined combustion engine and electric motor say that their next car will definitely be an all-electric

vehicle. Those who drive a gasoline or diesel vehicle are significantly less open to such a switch (12 and 19 percent respectively). In addition, a clear majority (58 percent) of hybrid drivers would be willing to buy an electric car without a government subsidy. The data suggests that hybrid vehicles are boosting people's confidence in e-mobility and may help reduce any reservations about fully electric vehicles. One group with significant future potential for this development is the 48 percent of respondents who do not drive an electric or hybrid car and for whom an all-electric car is not currently an option, but who are considering a hybrid as their next car.

Varying degrees of interest in electric cars

The shift to electric mobility is under pressure in Germany, where sales of all-electric cars are faltering. According to the latest figures of the Continental study, electric cars represent a significant share (10 percent) of the overall passenger-car fleet in China, while only 3 percent of respondents in Germany drive an all-electric car and 91 percent a car with a combustion engine (China: 80 percent). There is potential for higher sales of electric cars in Germany, particularly among those aged 18 to 34. In this age group, around two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents believe it is certain or likely that their next car will be fully electric – a trend that gradually diminishes in older generations. A look at age-dependent attitudes toward electric mobility reveals that, like many other technological developments, e-mobility is more appealing to younger drivers than older ones. They are more willing to forgo subsidies: 50 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds would consider buying an electric car without government assistance. However, the willingness to fully finance an electric vehicle decreases significantly among those aged 45 and older.

Trade-off between sustainable and affordable mobility

The fact that two-thirds of respondents in Germany link the purchase of an electric car to a government subsidy is an expression of their concerns about being unable to finance an electric car on their own. In Germany, 71 percent of respondents worry that mobility will no longer be affordable due to rising energy prices. In the 2022 Mobility Study, 73 percent of people in Germany expressed their concerns about the affordability of mobility.

65 percent of respondents fear that they will not be able to afford an electric car in the near future and 56 percent are worried that driving

could soon become too expensive for them. As a result, a clear majority (80 percent) expect policymakers to create the framework conditions to ensure that driving remains affordable. At the same time, they believe driving should be made more sustainable in the most cost-neutral way possible. Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of respondents think that the cost of environmentally friendly cars needs to fall. Regulatory interventions such as a speed limit of 130 km/h on highways are met with acceptance (62 percent), provided they do not lead to price increases. Younger respondents are less price-sensitive. They are much more prepared to pay a premium for environmentally friendly cars, especially if they are completely carbon-neutral in production and operation (40 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds compared with 13 percent of 45 to 54-year-olds).

Sustainable tire solutions are welcomed across the board

The fact that sustainability is an important concern for people with cars is also demonstrated by their attitude to tires. According to the study, almost eight out of 10 drivers in Germany (84 percent) who also value tire recycling consider it important that their tires contain an increasing share of environmentally friendly materials. When purchasing tires, younger people (61 percent of 25 to 34-year-olds) are more concerned than older people about what happens to the tires at the end of their service life. Furthermore, 44 percent of car owners in Germany would be willing to pay a premium for tires made from a higher share of renewable and sustainable materials. Here again, this willingness is most pronounced among 25 to 34-year-olds (65 percent).

Study provides internationally comparable findings on many mobility topics

For the Mobility Study 2024, infas was commissioned by Continental in August 2024 to survey a total of around 5,000 people aged 18 and over in Germany, China, France, Japan and the USA about their mobility habits and attitudes to a variety of mobility issues. In each country, the respective sample is representative of the population; for China, it is representative of the urban population. The aim of the Continental Mobility Study, now in its eighth edition since 2011, is to provide an international comparison of people's attitudes toward current and future developments in mobility and their personal usage habits. The range of topics covered in this year's study included

automated driving, user experience, AI in cars, sustainable mobility concepts, mobility in urban areas, the affordability of mobility and attitudes toward government regulation in the mobility sector.

Here you will find more in-depth insights into selected key findings of the Continental Mobility Study 2024.

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