An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

September 25, 2018

The Detroit Colour Council - Performance Colors in Motion

Linda Gerhardt, PhD, FESD
General Motors Company, Warren MI
Color expresses personal taste & individuality

Vehicle purchase represents second most expensive purchase

Purchase decisions are based on a number of factors, including

- Type of vehicle
  - Sedan, SUV, Truck, etc.
- Brand
  - GM, Ford, Toyota, VW, etc.
- Color
Focus of today’s presentation:
- Automotive paint color preference across the decades
- Automotive preference of the newest generation of potential car buyers: The i-Generation
Focus of today’s presentation:

- Automotive paint color preference across the decades
- Automotive preference of the newest generation of potential car buyers: The i-Generation
How has the automotive paint color palette changed over the decades and across generations based on:

- Economic issues?
- National mood?
- Consumer tastes?
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

- All 1914-1926 Ford Model T’s were Black
  - Inexpensive Color
  - Dried Fastest
  - Allowed for Production time of 90 minutes
  - Allowed Ford to offer Relatively Affordable Transportation to the Masses

“You can have any color you want, as long as it’s black.”
—Henry Ford
First decades of the 1900’s...
Darker Colors
Four Primary Choices
(Not just Black!)
- Black
- Gray
- Red
- Green
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ The 1920’s
  ● Economic boom
  ● The “Roaring Twenties”
  ● Demand for automobiles increased

◆ Color to reflect personal taste
  ● Ford Models:
    ▪ Black until competition drove change
  ● Lower priced brands (Chevrolet):
    ▪ Maroons, Blues, and Greens
  ● More expensive brands (Buick, Cadillac, Packard):
    ▪ Creams and Tans
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

The 1930’s
- Economic downturn following 1929 Stock Market crash
- Great Depression
- Many smaller manufacturers closed

Color selection expanded
- Different shades of red, green, and blue available
- Brighter colors offered
- Less focus on cream and tan

1932 Cadillac 452B Madame X Imperial

1939 Cadillac Series 90

1933 Ford
The 1940’s
- Change in automobile industry as America mobilized for war
- During America’s involvement in WWII, production stopped completely

Color selection before WWII
- Black favored
- Stark and conservative styling
- Lacked excessive embellishment like chrome and ornamentation
The 1950’s
- Focus on design returned
- Vehicles reflected adventure and fashion with lots of chrome

Color selection increased
- Brighter colors
- Many shades of blue, red, green, and gold
- 2-tones offered with body and roof painted different colors
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ The 1960’s
  ● Interest in performance vehicles increased
  ● Use of two-tone paint declined later in the decade

◆ Color selection increased
  ● Traditional vehicles continued to be offered in color palette of the 1950’s
  ● Sporty cars offered in brighter shades of red, green, and blue
  ● Bright yellow, orange, and violet appeared on the scene
The 1970’s
- Vehicles became more compact and fuel-efficient due to an energy crisis
- Increased emphasis on environmental issues

Color selection more subdued
- Earth tones were popular
- Shades of olive green, brown, tan, and cream were a part of the color palette
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ The 1980’s
  ● More traditional colors were popular, including black & red
  ● The minivan was introduced
  ● Two-tones and faux wood were also popular

◆ The 1990’s
  ● The SUV was introduced
  ● There was again increased emphasis on environmental issues
  ● Shades of green were popular, as well as blue/greens and two-tones
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ The Mid-1990s through the Mid-2010’s

- Color popularity has changed over the years
- Over the past decade, 4 colors have remained on top
  - White
  - Silver
  - Black
  - Gray

The 5 most popular car colors, by year

Source: Axalta
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

- **Today:** Slight variation based on Region / Country & North American Segments
- **Top colors remain**
  - White
  - Silver
  - Black
  - Gray
Focus of today’s presentation:
- Automotive paint color preference across the decades
- **Automotive preference of the newest generation of potential car buyers: The i-Generation**
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ WHAT? – Some Background...

- The FOCUS Conference sponsored by DSCT (Detroit Society for Coatings Technology) has been held for 43 years each spring to bring together the automotive coatings industry for networking and learning.
- The presentation agenda includes topics from industry experts on a number of relevant topics from formulating to application to quality.
- Poster sessions are also held with presentations by local universities (i.e., U of M and EMU).
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ WHY? – A New Initiative...

- Automotive color preference has been tracked for generations and is well understood.
- The automotive color preference of the i-Gen (born after ~1995) is not as well understood.
- A new initiative was added to the FOCUS 2018 to raise awareness of Metro Detroit high school students to the Paint Coatings industry and career opportunities as they start their college planning.
WHERE? - An Inner City High School...

- The decision was made to target an urban high school.
- Cass Technical High School, an inner city high school in Detroit, was selected.
- The school is an examination college prep high school that is part of the Detroit Public School District.
WHEN? – Timing was Tight...

- The new high school initiative was proposed in late fall 2017.
- A meeting was set up with Cass Tech leadership in January 2018.
- Students worked on the project in March and April 2018.
- A student poster was completed in April 2018 and presented at the May 2018 conference.
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

WHO? – College-Bound Seniors...

- Three technically-focused seniors volunteered to work on the project.
- In addition to learning about the coatings industry, they were also compensated with funds that can be used to further their educations beyond high school.
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

◆ HOW? – A Color Preference Survey...

- Challenge and Plan:
  - Determine if the color preferences of a survey group based on age or gender matched the color they would prefer on a vehicle.
  - Use a set of trend panels provided by an automotive coatings supplier to survey a group that includes a cross section of the student body.

- 2 Sets of 48 panels
  - Flat panels
  - Curved Panels

- 3 Groupings per Set
  - 16 ‘Gen Next’ Colors
  - 16 ‘Gen Here & Now’ Colors
  - 16 Gen Lux Colors
HOW? – A Color Preference Survey...

Methods:
- The color standard panels were labeled randomly & survey sheets were developed.
- The survey was conducted in the dining commons area of the school.
- ~300 students, as well as some faculty and other adults, provided input on color preference.
- Results were tabulated and graphs were created.
**HOW? – A Color Preference Survey...**

- **Methods:**
  - Indicate whether you are over 18 or under 18 years of age.
  - Indicate your gender.
  - Which color do you prefer?
  - Which color(s) would you prefer on
    - A Sedan?
    - A Sports Car?
    - An SUV?
    - A Truck?
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation

**Color Preference Survey: RESULTS**

- i-Gen female students liked the PINK PLUM & LIGHT AQUA colors from the ‘GEN Next’ grouping.
- i-Gen male students liked ROYAL BLUE METALLIC & DEEP RED METALLIC from the ‘GEN Next’ and the ‘Gen Lux’ groupings, respectively.
Color Preference Survey: RESULTS

- On sedans, SUVs and trucks, however, both i-Gen female students and i-Gen male students preferred shades of BLACK & DARK GRAY.
- For sports cars, i-Gen female students preferred RED and i-Gen male students preferred METALLIC ORANGE.
- Results for those over 18 were inconclusive.
Color Preference Survey: CONCLUSIONS

- Overall, the results of the study showed that for the i-Gen student survey participants, the colors they preferred did not match the colors they would want on a vehicle.
- For overall color preference and for the sports car category, color standards matched with the younger generation ‘Next GEN’ grouping (bright and vibrant colors).
- For the sedan, SUV & truck categories, the color preference came from the ‘Here & Now GEN’ (middle) grouping (calm & more saturated colors).
An Automotive Color Preference Survey: The i-Generation
A Study Conducted by Nayah Daniel, Amari Morgan, and Thomas LoPiccolo
Cass Technical High School, Detroit Public Schools Community District

DEFINING THE CHALLENGE:
• The automotive color preference of the i-Gen (born after 1995) is not as well understood as for other generations.
• The objective of this study was to determine if the color preferences of a survey group based on age or gender matched the color they would prefer on a vehicle.
• Color standards used for the study were a set of trend panels provided by Axalta and the survey group included a cross section of the student body from an inner city examination high school in Detroit.

METHODS:
• The color standard panels were labeled according to generational groupings [A=Younger, B=Middle, C=Older].
• Survey sheets were developed and the color preference survey was announced.
• The survey was conducted in the dining commons area of Cass Technical High School over a period of 2 days.
• ~300 students, as well as some faculty and other adults, provided input on color preference.
• Results were tabulated and graphs were created.

CONCLUSIONS:
• Overall, the results of the study showed that for the i-Gen survey participants, the colors they preferred did not match the colors they would want on a vehicle.
• For overall color preference and for the sports car category, color standards matched with the younger generational grouping (bright and vibrant colors).
• For the sedan, SUV, and truck categories, the color preference came from the middle generational grouping (calm and more saturated colors).

COLOR PREFERENCE: OVERALL

RESULTS:
• i-Gen females liked the pink plum and light aqua colors from the younger generational grouping.
• i-Gen males liked royal blue metallic & deep red metallic from the younger generational grouping and the older generational grouping, respectively.
• On sedans, SUVs and trucks, however, both i-Gen females and males preferred shades of black and dark gray.
• For sports cars, i-Gen females preferred red and i-Gen males preferred metallic orange.
• Results for those over 18 were inconclusive.

RESULTS OF SURVEY QUESTIONS:

SEDAN:

SPORTS CAR:

SUV:

TRUCK:

References & Acknowledgements:
Lisa Phillips, Principal; Velma Snow, Assistant Principal; Karl Balke, Educator; Dr. Linda Gerhardt, GM Industry Liaison; Axalta (Color Standards)