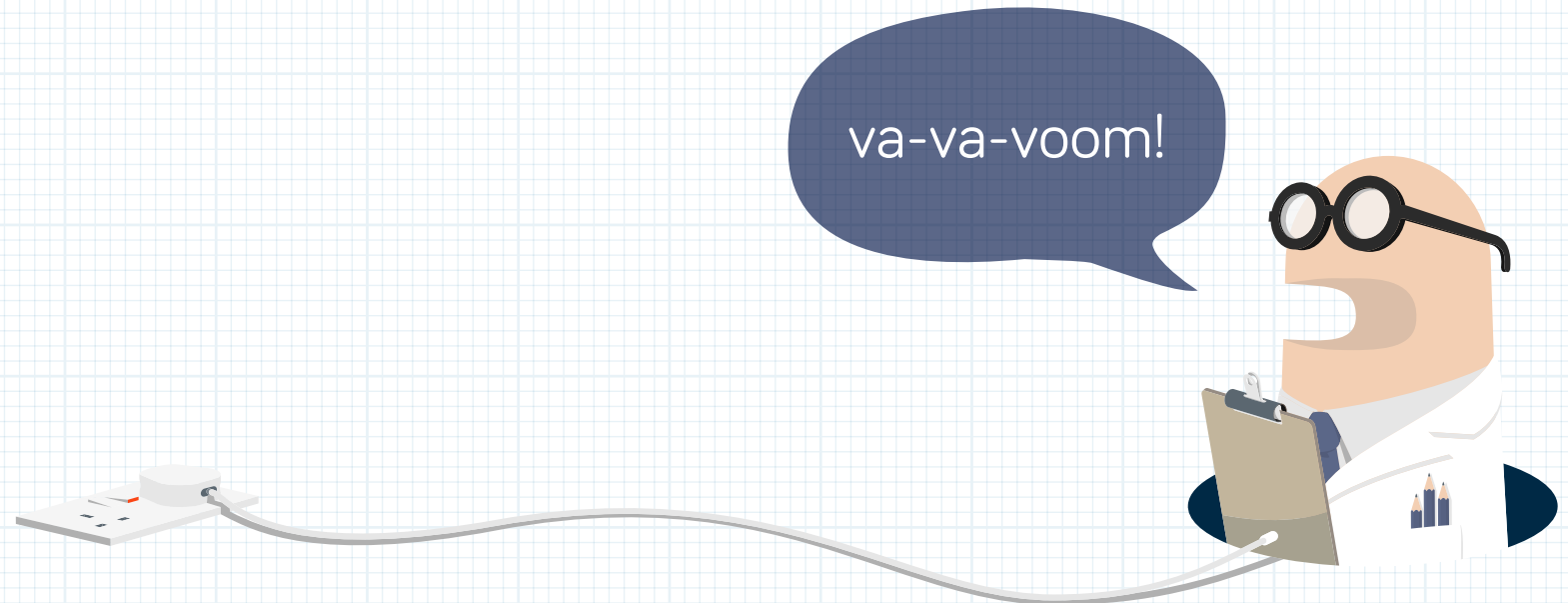


Brandwatch Report/ Automotive /2012



Social Media and the Automotive Sector

A report into online consumer behaviour regarding the automotive sector, its leading brands and the key issues surrounding them.



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The Automotive Sector /2012

Why read this...

“ ***I’m a big fan of Brandwatch, both the product and the way they go about things as a company.*** ”

I always make sure to read the content they publish as they really know their stuff when it comes to all things social media.

Whether it’s analysis of social media data around a particular industry or event or a best-practice guide on how to get the most from social – their material is always full of useful insights, so it’s well worth checking out. ”

Rich Kemp, LateRooms.com

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Introduction/

Different industries and sectors are increasingly realising the opportunities that social media monitoring presents, and the automotive sector is no exception.

Car enthusiasts and casual buyers alike are taking to social media to discuss their **questions, issues, wants and experiences**, and auto companies have started to explore the potential of **monitoring** this chat and how it can help them.

This study aims to provide insight into what social media means for the automotive industry, including **how its buyers behave online** and what its businesses can do to capitalise on this.

Scott Monty, Head of Social Media at **Ford**:

"We're interested in finding the tools that capture the metrics that are important to different groups. [...] Based on that, we're able to determine if we need to help a customer with an issue, inform a follower about some new technology, or give feedback to our product development teams based on trends and data we're seeing surfaced."

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Key Insights/

In order to analyse automotive conversation on social media, we used Brandwatch to gather conversation about 48 major car brands across the social web. We then focused on two specific areas in order to demonstrate the deeper insights available from thorough social media analysis – in this case, the role of price and value within purchasing conversation, and discussion about eco cars.

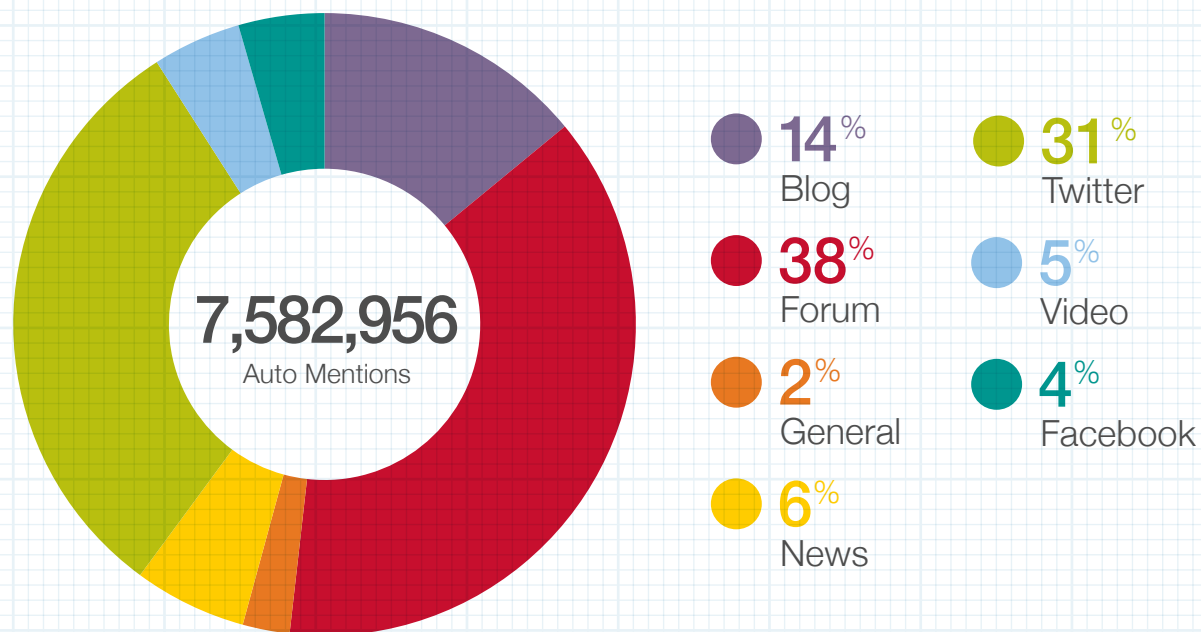
This analysis revealed the following key insights:

- **Forums** are the most common platform for automotive conversation
- **High profile tweeters** can increase credibility for brands
- **Initial cost** proved to be a more common reason for **not purchasing** a particular brand
- **Electric** cars are the most talked about type of **eco** car
- Conversation about eco cars is divided, but **positive overall**

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Conversation Analysis/

Consumers prefer to discuss cars in depth, making forums the most common platform for auto conversation



Our comprehensive query captured over **7.5 million mentions of the 48 brands included**, in the **six months** from Nov '11 – May '12.

Unusually, conversation was spread relatively equally across a wide number of page types, as shown in the chart.

With most industries, brands and topics, online discussion takes place primarily on Twitter, due to the ease, speed and general popularity of the platform. But for auto conversation, **forums accounted for the largest share (38%)**, revealing that consumers require more than 140 characters to discuss cars, and prefer more in depth conversation.

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Conversation Analysis/ cont...

Top forums for automotive conversation are generally car-specific

Top forums for auto conversation.

Site Name	Mentions	Description	Monthly Visitors
answers.yahoo.com	46,984	Q&A Site	410 Million
forums.bimmerforums.com	35,906	BMW Forum	680,000
www.pistonheads.co.uk	33,385	Auto Forum	350,000
www.pistonheads.com	33,341	Auto Forum	4.6 Million
forums.vwvortex.com	29,280	Volkswagen Forum	1 Million

Auto-related conversation on **Yahoo! Answers** was, as to be expected from the nature of the site, related to a **wide variety of topics**, from choosing cars and where to buy, to indirect topics such as using a car to commute, installing iPod docks or discussions about petrol prices.

Conversation on **Bimmerforums**, a site for BMW enthusiasts, is, naturally, **more focused**. Users of the site are fairly active, with hundreds of different discussions taking place at any time. Conversation primarily involved BMWs but were varied in topic – such as buying and selling advice, customisation, ‘dream cars’ and so on.

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Forum/ Answers.yahoo.com

How much would it cost on average to fill up ur tank of gas on a 4 person, 2010 Hyundai Sonata? Thanks! ?



Forum/ bimmerforums.com

How much do powered heated sport seats usually go for? And how much can I expect to get for my heated powered nonsport seats.

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Conversation Analysis/ cont...

Pistonheads is an important forum for the automotive sector

Pistonheads – a dedicated forum for auto **enthusiasts** – has a large and active community, with many users, who are clearly **enthusiasts**, taking part regularly in forum discussions, alongside more casual users.

The forum attracts over **3.2 million visitors per month**. Conversation on the site is about a wide range of brands and vehicles, in comparison to a brand-specific site such as Bimmerforums.

Discussions cover a large range of different car-related topics, including general discussions as well as advice-seeking, but are usually **quite technical** – users have an extensive knowledge of cars and often have strong opinions about specific brands or models. **Images of cars** are also often shared and discussed.



Forum/ pistonheads.com

I'm looking at a Mazda 3 MPS but have been slightly put off by owners clubs going on about smokey turbos and faulty VVT pulleys :/



Forum/ pistonheads.com

I stood and stared at my V8 engine yesterday, there is loads of room for 2 Turbo Chargers. Sleeve it down to a 4.4, fit low compression pistons which will bring down the omissions, but up the horsepower to an easy 540 -550BHP.

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Conversation Analysis/ cont...

High profile tweeters can increase credibility for brands

Twitter conversation accounted for **31%** of total auto conversation.

Tweets from consumers varied in topic but tended to be about specific models – often comments on **new releases** or about **their own (current and future) vehicles**.

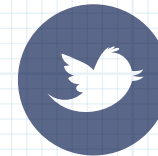
The most prominent tweeters – those with the most followers – discussing cars in the month of April tended to be **celebrities and news accounts**, who mentioned specific cars once or twice during the month.

This brand recognition from such high profile stars and news accounts with so many followers can help **create awareness and credibility** for those brands.

For example, the tweet shown from singer **Jessie J** was **retweeted 360 times, favoured by 163 users** and potentially seen by up to over **5 million followers**.

Similarly, CNN's tweet (shown) was **retweeted 200 times** and potentially seen by over **8 million followers**.

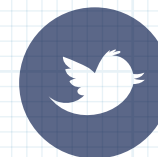
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Twitter/ @jessiej

At rehearsals for the Mercedes show. The cars are NICE!

(360 Retweets)



Twitter/ @cnnbrk

Chrysler says March was its best car sales month in four years.
on.cnn.com/HJc7GN

(200 Retweets)

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Conversation Analysis/ cont...

16% of auto conversation concerned purchasing

Using automated categorisation by identifying keywords used in purchasing conversation, Brandwatch calculated that 16% of the total auto conversation we found (1.2 million mentions) regarded purchasing a vehicle. The **vast majority (58%) of this purchasing conversation took place on forums**, with a further 16% featuring on blogs. The forums where the most purchasing conversation took place mirror those for auto conversation in general, though Pistonheads is this time second most common.

Pulling out the **most frequently used words and phrases** within conversation reveals the common topics and themes of chat, as shown in the cloud.

We can see that, perhaps unsurprisingly, **'test drive' is a commonly used phrase within purchasing conversation**, demonstrating that this is an important step in the car buying process for many consumers. SUVs were also mentioned often.

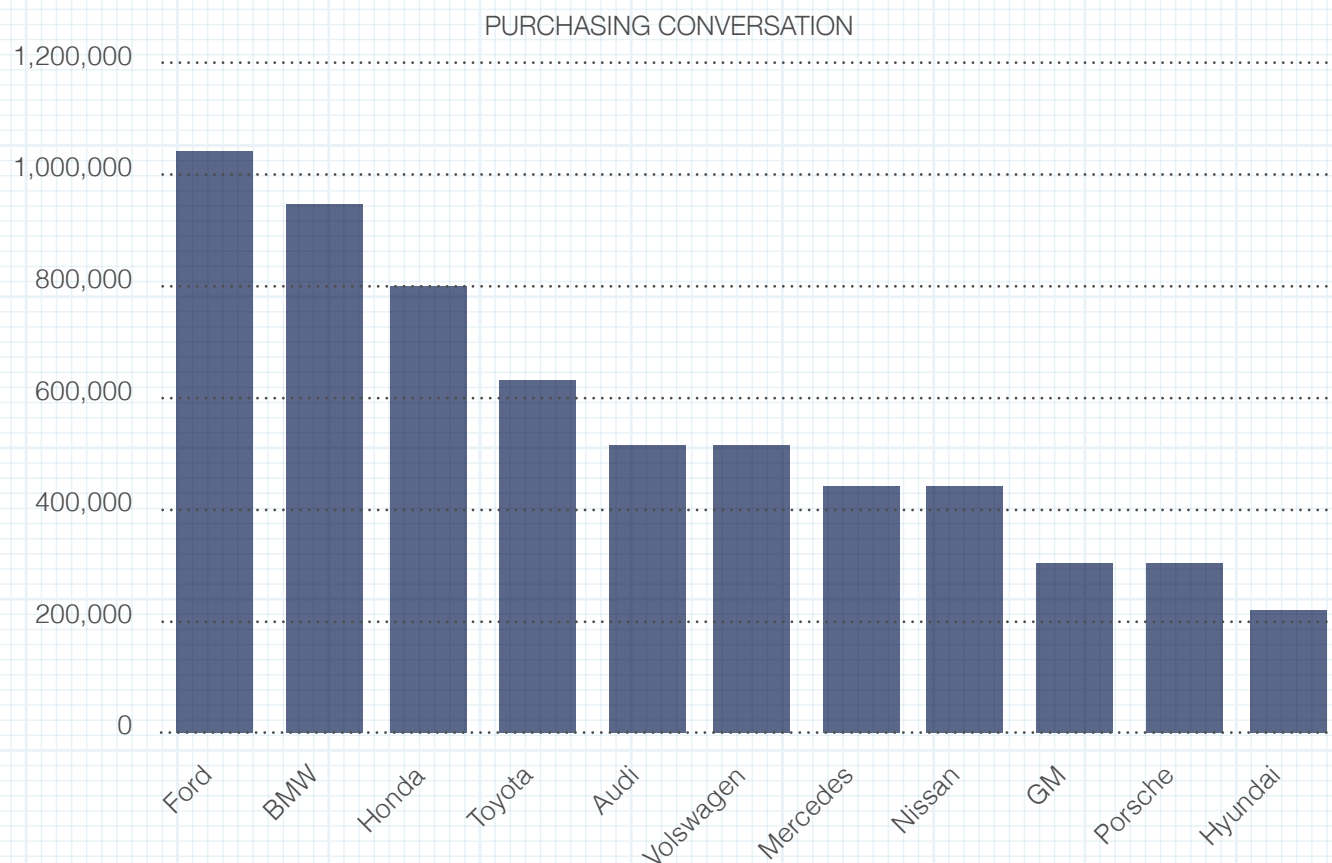


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Conversation Analysis/ cont...

Ford and BMW were the most mentioned brands within purchasing conversation



The chart below shows conversation volumes for the **ten most talked about car brands within purchasing conversation**, from the 48 included within the original query.

The share of conversation for each brand is **remarkably similar when we do the same for total auto conversation**, suggesting that purchasing conversation accounts for a similar percentage of conversation for each brand.

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Case Study 1/ Price and value

Buying a new car is, for most, a significant purchase. Therefore the price and perceived value of different brands is an important aspect in buying decisions.

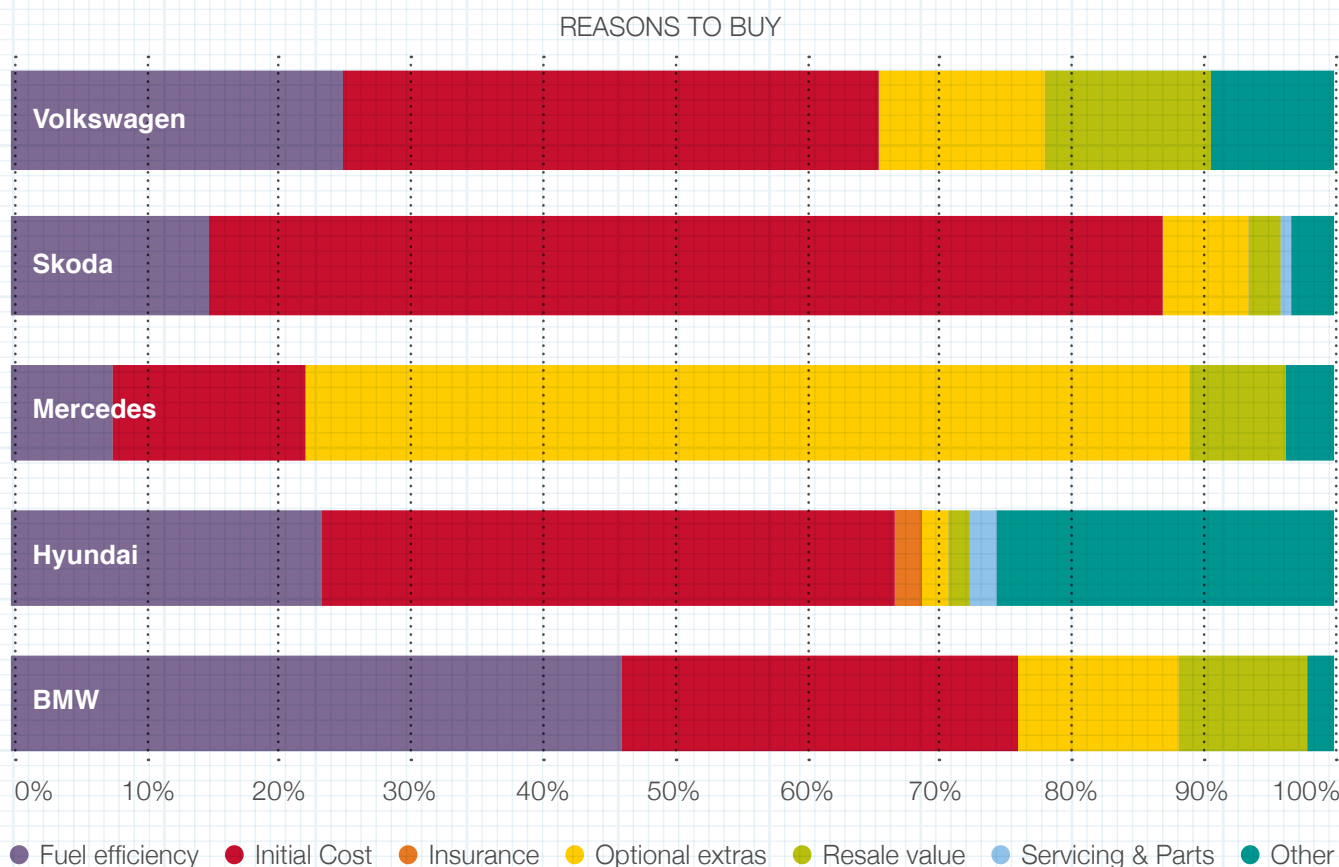
We delved into the data to take a closer look at purchasing conversation on UK forums specifically surrounding five auto brands – **BMW, Hyundai, Mercedes, Skoda** and **Volkswagen**.

By categorising a sample of mentions according to reasons for and against purchasing each of these brands, **we can compare how the price and value of each is perceived** by consumers.

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Case Study 1/ cont...

Initial cost is one of many factors in purchasing decisions



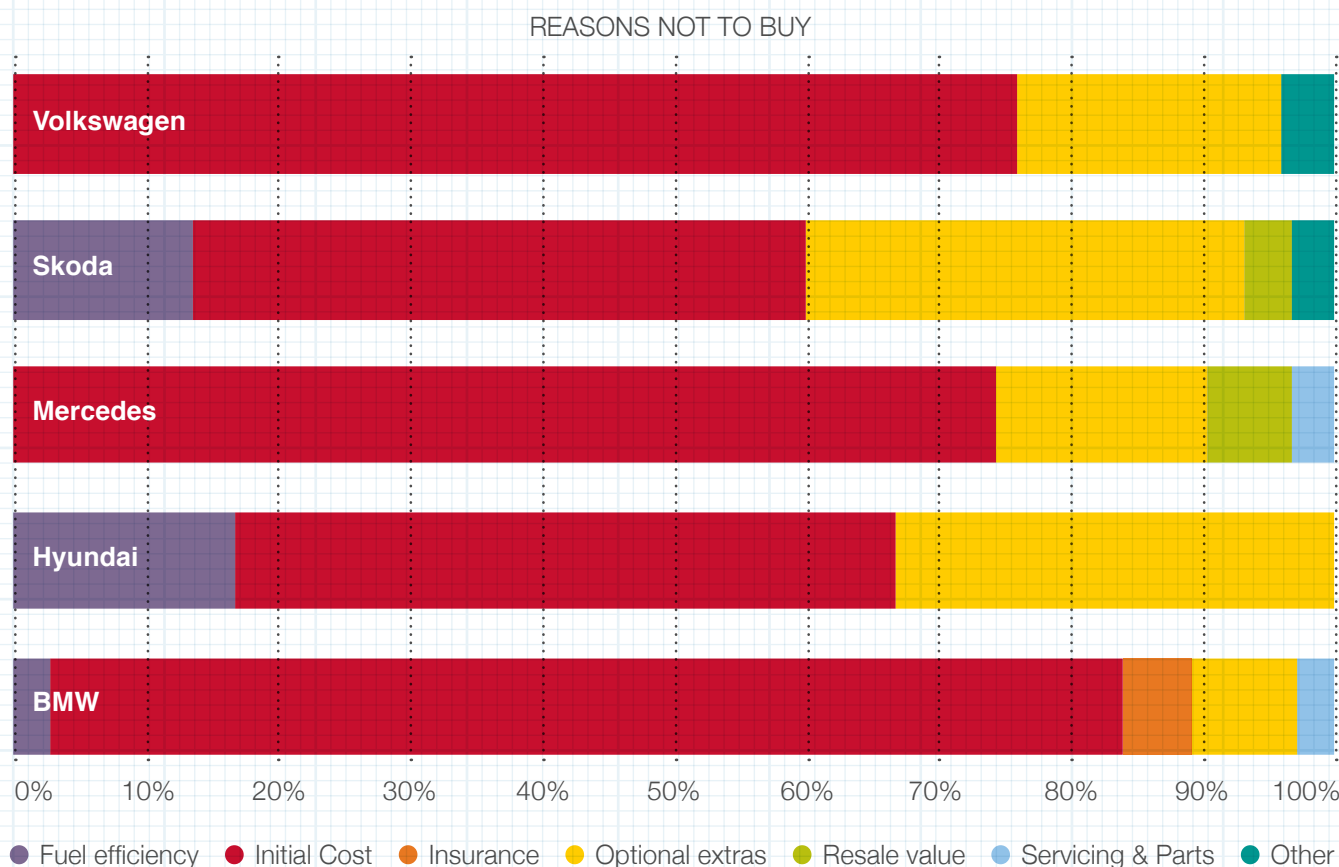
Positive reasons for purchasing decisions are varied, but **initial price is cited as a reason for purchasing a Skoda much more often** than for the other brands. Conversation discussing Skoda purchasing tended to point towards the quality of the brand, and its relatively low price in comparison to similar brands, particularly Volkswagen.

Mercedes was the brand with the least discussion about initial cost as a reason for purchasing, with optional extras such as CD changers and speed limiters more commonly discussed.

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Case Study 1/ cont...

Initial cost proved to be a more common reason for *not* purchasing a specific brand



Initial cost was more often a reason **not to buy a specific auto brand**, though less so for Hyundai and Skoda. BMW experienced the most discussion of price as a reason for not purchasing, followed by Volkswagen.

Conversation about **BMW's price** often refers to the brand making 'better' cars, but a feeling that they **may not be 'better' enough to justify the higher price.**

Other users compared Volkswagen to other models they had bought, stating that the **same spec on a VW would have been more expensive.**

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Case Study 2/ Eco Cars

Eco, or 'green', cars are a relatively new branch of the automotive sector, but are becoming increasingly popular.

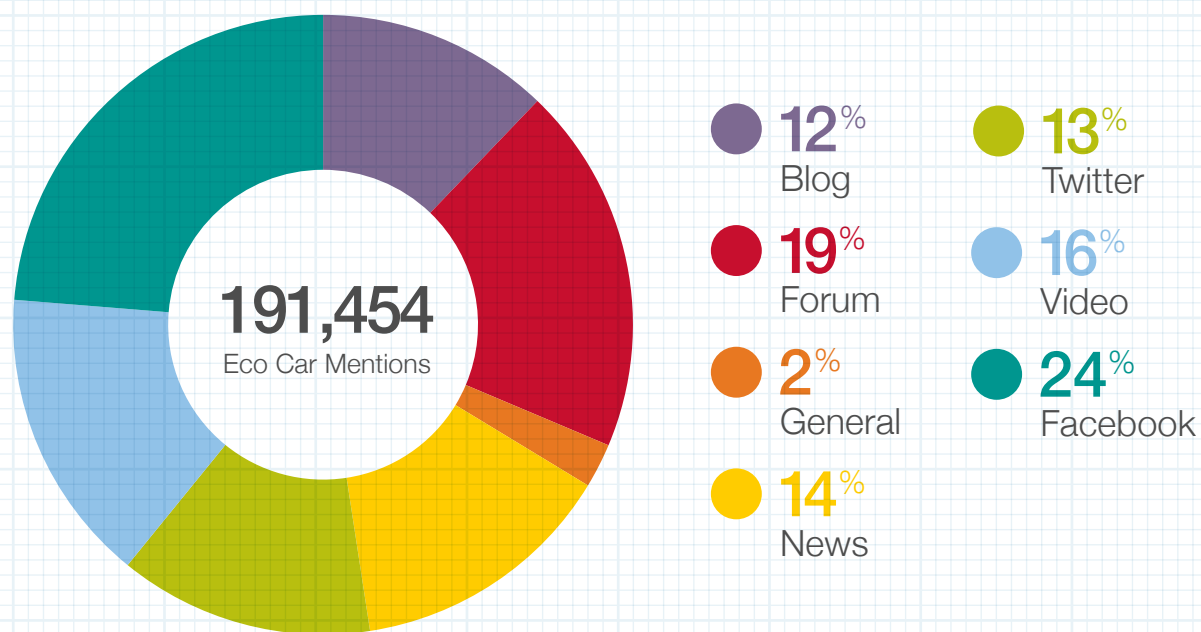
We tracked mentions of **'green' or eco cars**, and specific 'green' models, on social media, within English language conversation in the UK.

The data shows that in the year from May '11 – April '12, **eco cars were regularly discussed on social media**, on a wide range of platforms, reflecting the trend for all auto conversation.

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Case Study 2/ cont...

Eco car conversation was spread fairly evenly over different platforms



Facebook accounted for **24% of eco car conversation**. The most prominent Facebook author was the fan page for **V for Voltage** – a forum for electric vehicle discussion. The page posts comments from forum discussions about issues with electric cars, the majority of which were not interacted with fans, though **posts on the actual forum site often extend to hundreds of posts**.

Another frequent poster on Facebook was **Ecofriend**, which focuses on 'green living' and generally posts news articles from the ecofriend.com website (which receives 150,000 visitors per month).

Overall, authors on Facebook who posted most frequently tended to be pages dedicated to cars, or eco cars specifically. **Posts by these authors were usually links to news stories**, and were therefore neutral.

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Case Study 2/ cont...

Top tweeters for auto conversation.

Twitter User	No. of Tweets	No. of Followers	Account Type
@GreenCarWebsite	282	3,200	Green Car News
@MotorInfoNews	183	3,696	Motoring News and Reviews
@MTECGroup	183	996	Auto Suppliers
@antonyingram	172	980	Car Enthusiast
@newsmotoring	153	9,156	UK Motor News

In the UK, the **tweeters with the most followers** that discuss eco cars tend to be those associated with national newspapers and media, such as **The Economist**, **The Financial Times** and **The Guardian**. Several of these accounts are **tech-specific**, such as **@bbcclick** and **@guardiantech**.

On the other hand, those accounts that **tweeted most** frequently about eco cars were **generally car, or specifically green car, focused**. Again, these accounts tended to post links to news stories and relevant articles.

More often than not, Twitter conversation across the board linked to articles elsewhere, such as on news sites or blogs. The dominance of news and car specific Twitter accounts, along with the very focused forums, suggests that **eco cars are still very much the domain of experts** and auto **enthusiasts**, rather than being a big topic of conversation for the 'general' social media user.

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Case Study 2/ cont...

Pistonheads was again a prominent forum

Pistonheads, as for all auto conversation, was by far the most prominent forum for eco car conversation, **contributing 18% of all conversation found on forums**. Brandwatch found that there were over **5,000 mentions of eco car models** in the year from May '11 to April '12 on the site.

The most vocal forum contributor is **Xitup**, who has been a **member of the Pistonheads forum since 2007**. He regularly contributes to discussions about various different electric car models, often **defending electric cars**. Another member, **Martin84**, **often takes part in the same discussions** and expresses a similar viewpoint. These forum threads debating the pros and cons, and other associated issues of eco cars are a **useful source for listening** to potential and current owners and understanding the thoughts and issues associated with eco cars, which can in turn inform **future marketing moves**.



Forum/ Pistonheads.co.uk/ xitup

The main reason people don't like them is ignorance and fear of change. Backed up with healthy dose of that pathetic desire to show off how much of a hairy chested petrol head one is (when mostly driving something dull and diesel).



Forum/ Pistonheads.co.uk / martin84

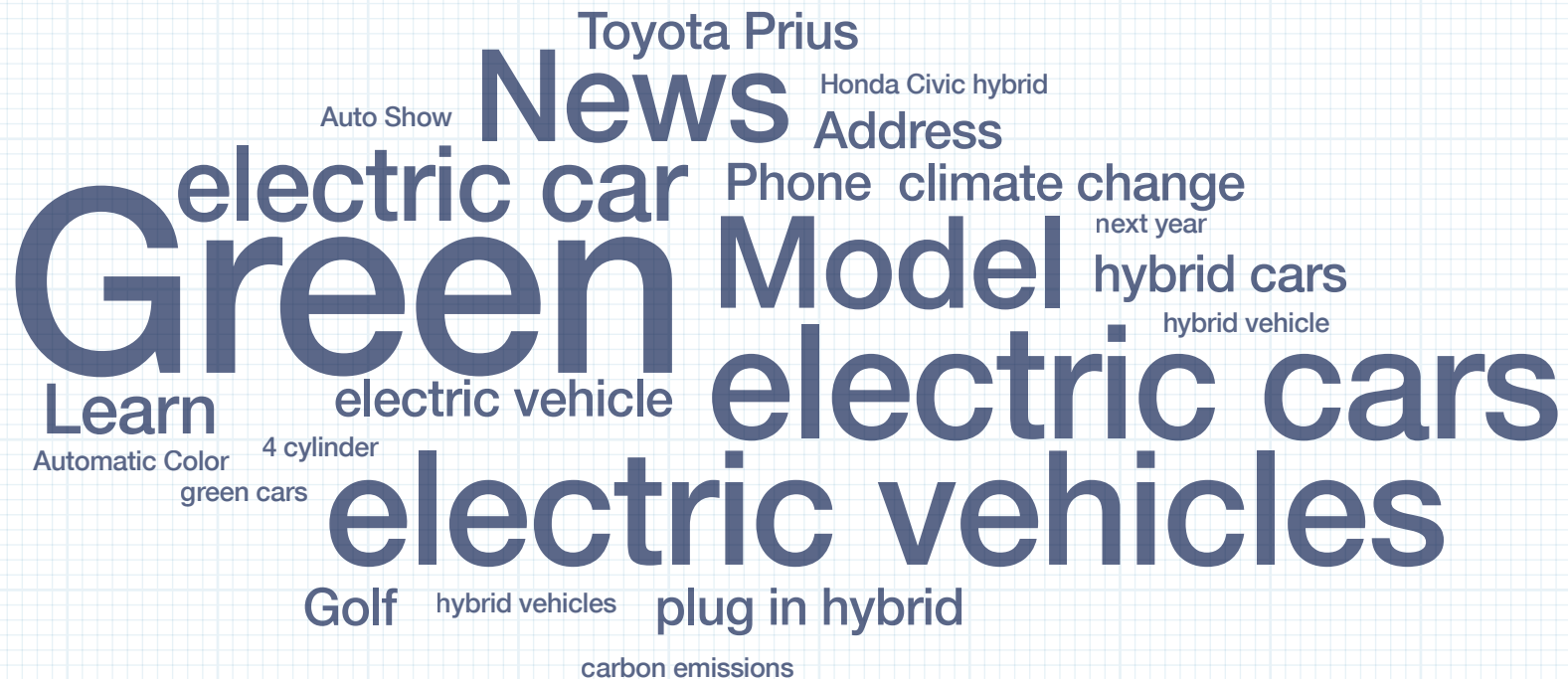
Most people who buy it buy it for mathematical reasons and people judge the Prius unfairly.

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Case Study 2/ cont...

Electric cars were the most discussed eco car type

Hybrids also featured heavily in the debate. The **Toyota Prius**, **VW Golf** and **Honda Civic** hybrid were models mentioned particularly often.

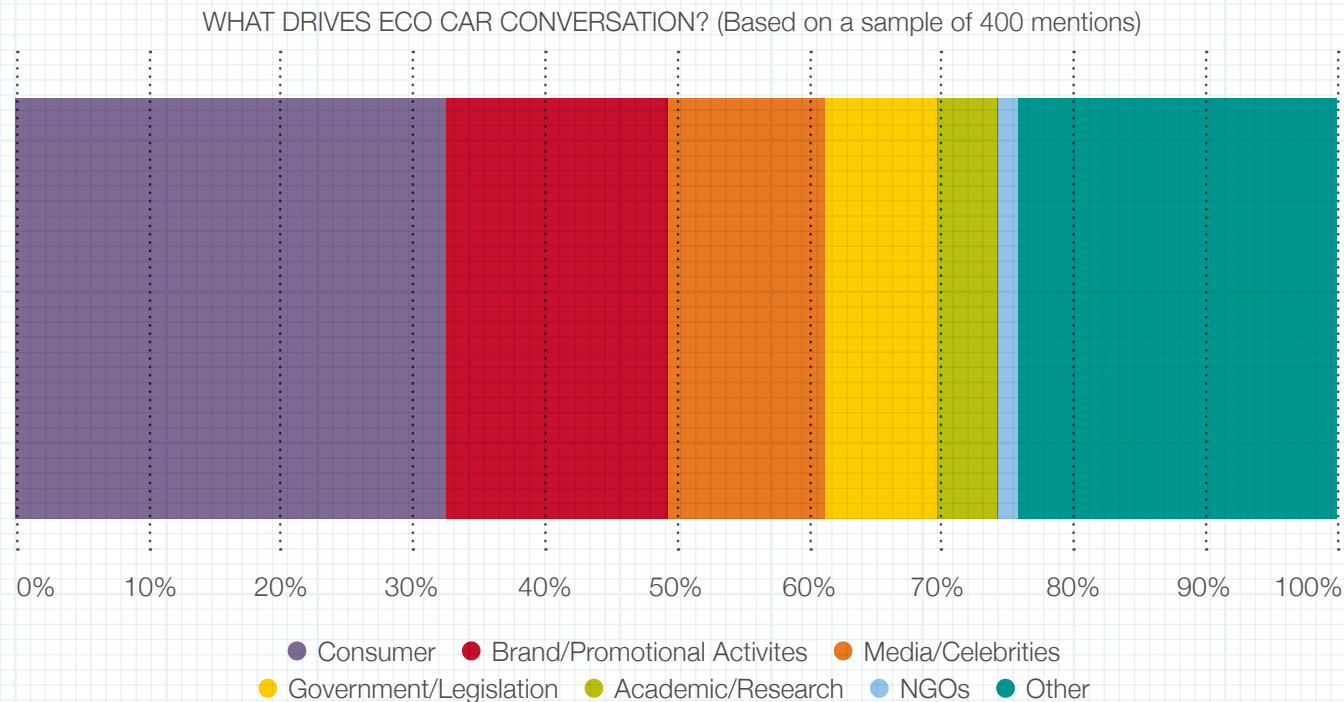


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Case Study 2/ cont...

Automotive conversation tends to be driven by consumers themselves, rather than brand activities



We also explored what drove conversation and categorised according to common themes, and found that it tended to be **consumers themselves** – including car enthusiasts – **who drove the conversation**.

Brand activities such as advertising and stories within the media also drove a significant proportion of discussion.

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Case Study 2/ cont...

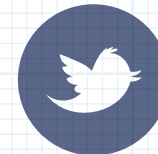
Opinion on eco cars was divided, though more often positive than negative

The majority of conversation about eco cars expressed no opinion either for or against them, though a **significant percentage (21%) was positive**. Much of this positive conversation took place on news sites and forums, and concerned innovation and progress in the technology of the cars, usually in relation to features on specific models. Improvements in the method of charging and the battery life were particularly praised.

Negative conversation (8%) also often concerned **charging and battery life**, demonstrating that this specific topic divides opinion and is still an issue with the cars.

Forum conversation particularly shows **strong opinions both for and against** eco cars. Those against level criticism at the battery range and charging time, as well as feeling **irritated by marketing and 'eco warriors'** claims about the 'greenness' of the cars.

Those who were **'for' eco cars often acknowledged and agreed with detractors** that the current battery issues – such as availability of charging points and the length of time needed to charge – along with the high purchase cost of eco cars meant that they were not yet suitable for most people.



Positive Post/

Make your turbine a fuelling station! Nissan LEAF gets an 80% charge in half-hour with three-phase, quick-charging. <http://bit.ly/tcyeID>

Twitter/ @green_gale



Negative Post/

I'd love an electric car, Teslas kick ass...but I usually have to park several hundred feet from my apartment... Can't run an extension cord across two streets and an avenue.

Facebook/ Kris Svendsen

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Thank you /

We hope this sector report has been useful in understanding auto conversation on social media. We work with clients within the automotive sector to provide them insights like these, plus more in depth and deeper analysis of the conversation they care about. Contact us to find out how we can help you fully utilise the power of social media monitoring.

/about Brandwatch

Brandwatch is one of the world's leading social media monitoring tools, with offices in the UK, US and Germany.

Innovative brands and agencies all over the world use Brandwatch for:

Research – Understanding the market

Sales – Identifying leads

Customer Service – Responding and engaging quickly

Marketing – Targeting new networks

Reputation Management – Limiting negativity and building on positivity

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