



The

Big Five



Crimson Hexagon

A social media analysis of the top auto brands in the US

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Introduction

There's no denying that Americans love their cars — but how do they feel about individual brands? We analyzed the social media conversation around cars to learn what consumers are saying about the five top-selling auto brands in the US:



NISSAN

In this report, we analyze the consumer conversations around those five brands and answer questions like:

- Which carmaker is viewed the most favorably by consumers?
- What are the different audiences for each car brand?
- Which features and characteristics are most associated with each brand?

Methodology

To understand the branded auto conversation in the US, we analyzed Crimson Hexagon's library of more than one trillion social media posts to find all conversations about the top auto brands in the US. We selected the five brands to include in our study based on a [third-party source](#) ranking the top-selling brands in the US in 2016.

With the brands selected, we analyzed tens of millions of conversations between 2010 and 2016 across the major social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, as well as popular car-focused forums.

The Big Five

Analyzing the top-selling car brands in the US through social media

Before we get into the particulars of the branded auto conversation on social — who's doing the talking, where they're doing it, and what they're saying — let's zoom out and look at the most fundamental aspect of the conversation: **what are the major car brands and how do they compare?**

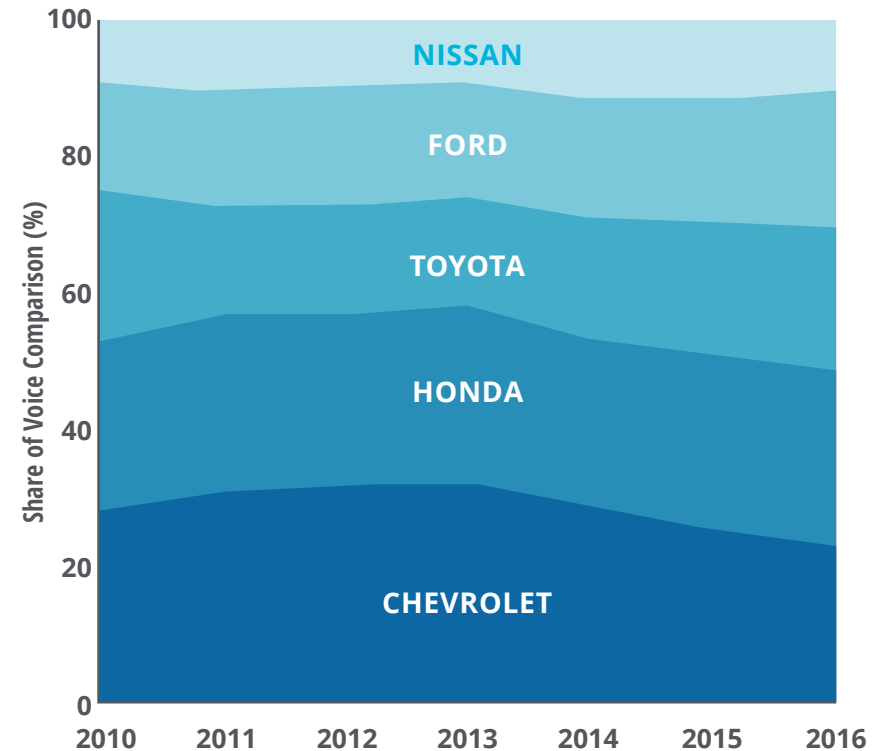
To start our analysis, we used data from the Automotive News Data Center to identify the five best-selling car brands in the US in 2016. Those brands, starting with the best selling, were:

- 1 Ford (2,487,487 units sold)
- 2 Toyota (2,118,402 units sold)
- 3 Chevrolet (2,096,510 units sold)
- 4 Honda (1,476,582 units sold)
- 5 Nissan (1,426,130 units sold)

But our goal in this report goes beyond simply looking at which brands sell the most cars in the US — it's to use social media as an unsolicited, massive database of consumer conversations about the top auto brands. Which brands do they talk about most? How has conversation volume about the major brands changed over time?

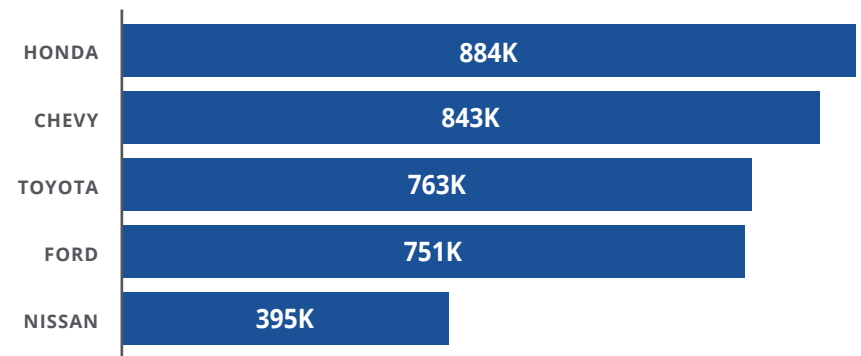
So to start, let's look at the share of voice among the five best-selling brands between 2010 and 2016.

US Car Brands Share of Voice Trend



And when we zoom in just on 2016, we get this breakdown of the conversation among the top five car brands:

US Auto Brands Total Discussion Volume in 2016



Talking Shop

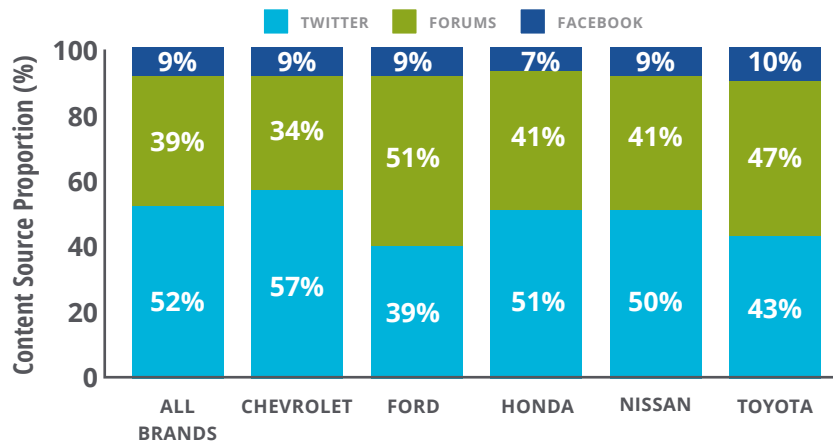
Where consumers discuss cars online

Social media is an important venue for consumers to talk about cars — whether it's a vehicle they own, hope to buy, or just have an interest in. But where do these conversations take place? Which platforms do consumers most often use to carry out this conversation?

The first, and perhaps most interesting, answer is forums. Our analysis revealed that forums are an incredibly popular venue for conversations about the major car brands, just behind Twitter and far ahead of Facebook.

All told, almost 40% of social conversations about the major car brands take place on forums.

US Auto Brands Content Sources



The data makes it clear that forums are popular places for auto-focused conversations, but not all of the top brands are discussed on the same forums (although Reddit is in the top two for all five).

Top Forum Sites by Post Volume in 2016

| | | | |
|--------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| CHEVY | corvetteforum.com | reddit.com | 67-72chevytrucks.com |
| FORD | reddit.com | ford-trucks.com | f150forum.com |
| HONDA | reddit.com | pakwheels.com | thumpertalk.com |
| NISSAN | reddit.com | 4chan.org | bobistheoilguy.com |
| TOYOTA | reddit.com | pakwheels.com | priuschat.com |

Here are the top three forum sites by post volume in 2016 for each of the top five car brands.

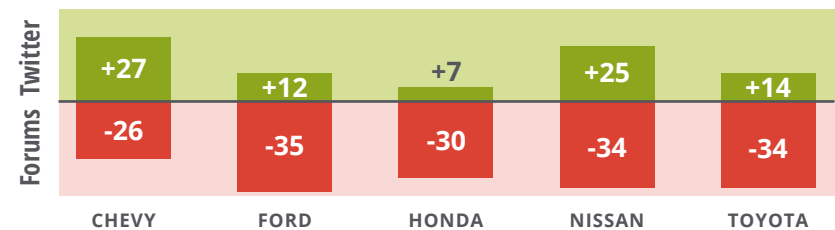
Aside from Reddit and Pakwheels.com, each of the forums is specific to a particular brand. Whereas the major social networks — like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram — are catchalls for consumer conversations about almost everything, auto-specific forums are one-track discussions: individual brands (sometimes even individual models) have their own conversation channels.

Given this, you might expect that automotive forums are full of excited enthusiasts sharing news and reviews of their favorite brands. This turns out to not be the case. Our analysis showed that, on the whole, auto **conversations in forums are more negative** than their broader social media counterparts.

Gas tank half empty

When we used Crimson Hexagon to categorize the posts about the major car brands based on sentiment, we found that forum conversations are appreciably more negative than car conversations on other social media platforms. Whatever the reason, consumers appear to head to forums when they want to discuss a disappointing aspect of their vehicles. Each of the top five car brands had a net negative sentiment of at least -20 on forums.

US Auto Brands Sentiment Ratio Index (2016)



Conversely, the conversations on Twitter surrounding those brands was net positive for each brand.

These topics were not only common in forums. Throughout the online conversation about car brands, these three issues came up again and again. On the next page are some examples from social media platforms and forums related to those three categories.



What Consumers Look For in a New (or Used) Car

[READ BLOG](#)

Car Service

Warranties

Warranties are another topic often mentioned on social in a negative context, as consumers complain that warranties are not comprehensive enough and should cover more basic car problems, especially for newer vehicles.



700 miles over the warranty and the KNOWN issue won't be covered. Shame on you @Ford. Time to buy another brand vehicle.

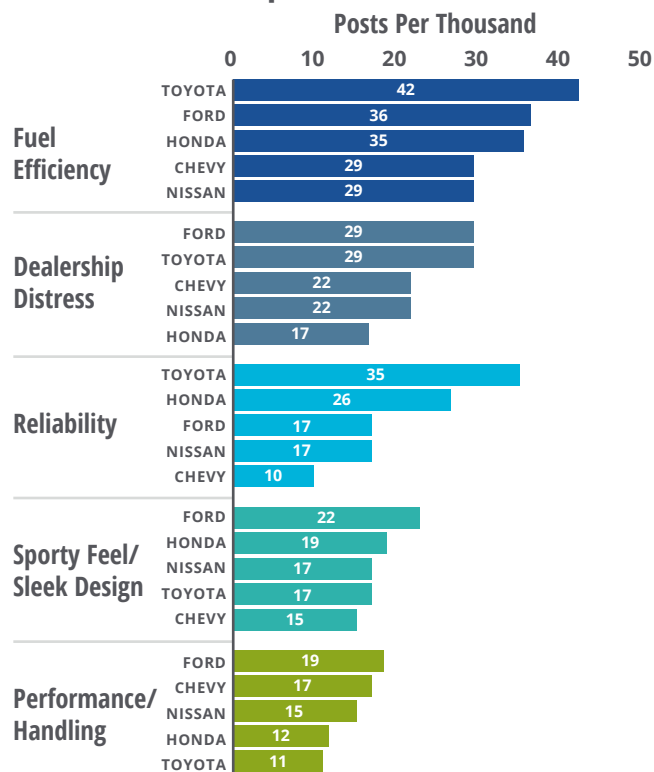
What Do Consumers Talk About When They Talk About Car Brands?

Auditing the major car-related topics on social

When we analyzed the entire online branded auto conversation, we found five broad topics that came up again and again for each car brand in the study: **Fuel efficiency, reliability, dealership experiences, car aesthetics, and performance.**

Of course, these topics are not equally common across all of the major brands. For example, dealership issues were most frequent in conversations about Ford and Toyota. Toyota “wins” the fuel efficiency and reliability discussions, while Ford and Honda are most commonly mentioned in conjunction with sporty and stylish aesthetics. Ford and Chevrolet are the top discussed brands in terms of performance handling.

Most Discussed Topics of US Auto Brands (2016)



Top Conversation Topics

Fuel Efficiency

We want a safe, reliable, fuel-efficient car. We have \$5,000 saved for this purpose. We are thinking of a Honda Accord or a Toyota Corolla or Camry.
-Auto Forum

Just bought a hybrid Toyota Camry and I couldn't be happier! It's great on gas and the design is so sleek. The fuel economy is great!
-Auto Forum

Reliability

Honda and Toyota are great for being such reliable car makers.
-Reddit

RaquelSiebxxx
@RaquelSiebxxx
@Lezfriend thanks hun!! love it so far!! another Toyota! they're so reliable!!

Dealership Experiences

Patrice
@pdw901
@NissanDealerUSA Drexel Hill Nissan dealership is the worst business I've ever had the displeasure of dealing with. Truly dishonest.

Car Aesthetics

Purp Drank Coalition
@PhlashDark
@SyncroTrace It's definitely evolved into a nicer car these days. If you're looking for something more fun: Ford Fiesta ST.

Also tried a Toyota Corolla with CVT. OK car, if you consider a car as an appliance in the same league as a fridge. Does its job fine, but doesn't give you any pleasure. -5post.com

Performance

I'm not asking for a sports sedan to run with a bmw m3, but at the same time it would be nice if Toyota not Lexus, but Toyota offered something a bit more sporty. Perhaps an upgraded Camry would be nice. Toyota you have reliability down, now give me a car more fun to drive!
-toyotanation.com

The Competitive Landscape

How the top auto brands stack up on social

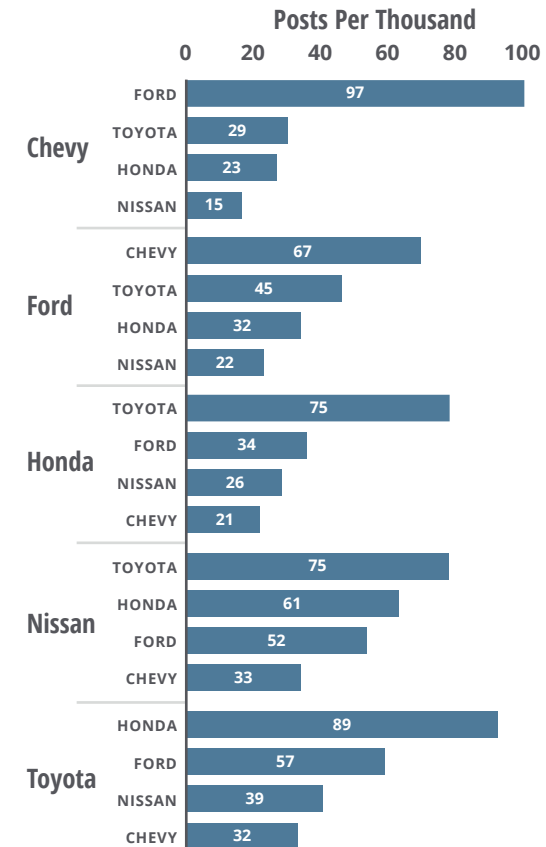
Knowing which topics most often pertain to specific car brands is useful for understanding how consumers differentiate the top brands, but it misses an important piece of the puzzle: Car brands are often discussed on social together.

This is not surprising. When consumers decide which make or model to buy, they typically do so in conjunction with other brands. As a result, most carmakers have a brand or brands that come up routinely in their conversations.

When we used Crimson Hexagon to analyze the conversations around the top five brands, we found that certain brands have common conversation partners. Chevrolet and Ford, for example, are most often mentioned together. (In fact, almost one in every ten posts that mentions Chevrolet also mentions Ford.) Likewise, Honda and Toyota are frequent bedfellows.

This helps us see which carmakers are viewed as complementary — those that are often joined in consumers' minds. But even within these related brands and models, there are some important differences. By comparing the audiences and related interests of specific brands and models we can get a clearer picture of how they resonate with different types of consumers.

US Competitor Discussion Volume (2016)



Insights into Action

What's the Difference Between a Civic Owner and Corolla Owner?

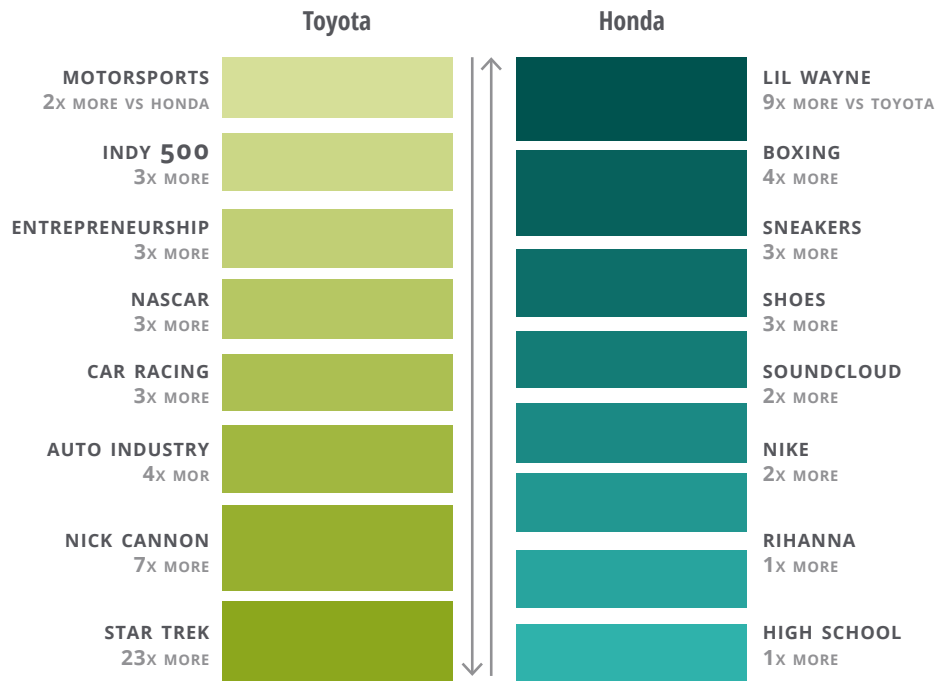
[READ BLOG](#)

What does a ____ owner look like?

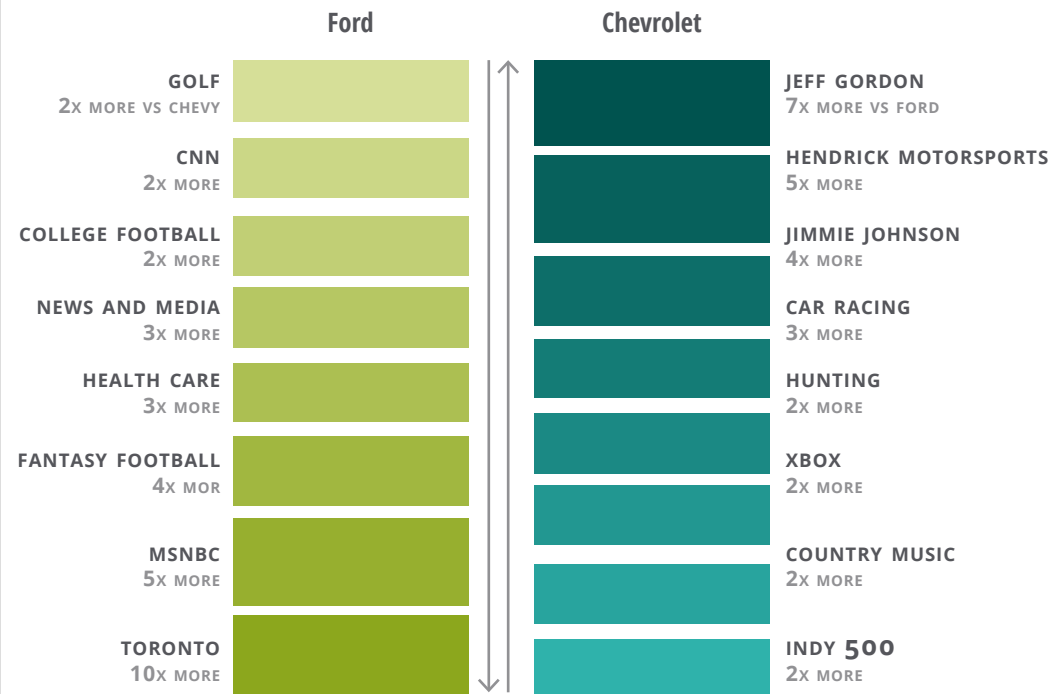
What makes someone who talks about Honda different from someone who talks about Toyota? What about Ford vs. Chevy? These brands might seem similar on the surface, but when we analyze and compare their audiences, we can find some important distinctions that can help brands better understand what makes them unique in the marketplace.

For example, when we compare the other interests of consumers who discuss Honda on social with those who talk about Toyota we uncover some interesting findings. Honda fans, for example, are 9x more likely to discuss Lil Wayne than Toyota fans. Toyota fans, on the other hand, appear to be more interested in motorsports: they are 3x more likely to talk about NASCAR, the Indianapolis 500, and car racing.

Toyota vs Honda Affinities



Ford vs Chevrolet Affinities



Analyzing the audiences of Ford and Chevrolet tell a slightly different but related story. Ford fans are more likely to be interested in traditional sports and news, while Chevrolet fans are much more interested in auto sports and racecar drivers.

The Social Audience of Major US Auto Brands

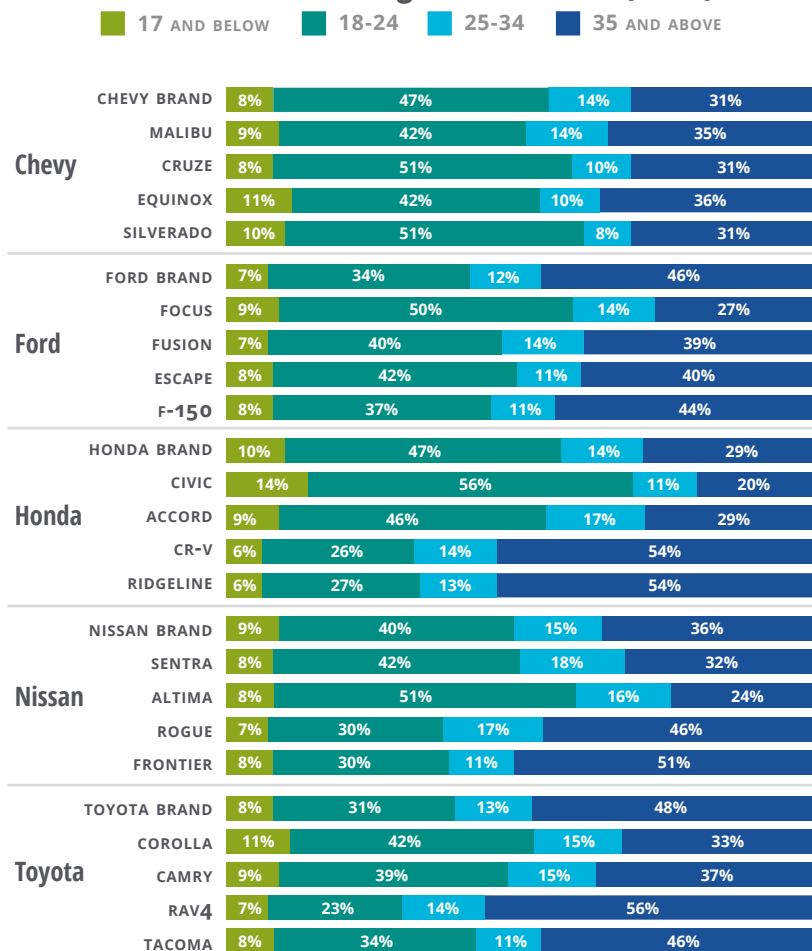
What are the demographics for the top car brands?

Analyzing the different interests among individual auto brand audiences is only a small part of the overall picture. It is also important to get a bird's eye view: What are the demographics of the overall auto audience? What type of consumers buy one model over another?

Age breakdown for major auto makes and models

Most of the auto conversation is confined to two age buckets: 18-24 and 35+. Interestingly, though, the age breakdown for each brand varies by model. Nearly 60% of the audience for the Ford Focus is under 25, for example, while only 45% of people talking about the F-150 fall into that age range. For Honda, it's even more stark — 70% of the Civic conversation is carried out by people under 25, while just 32% of the CR-V conversation is in the same bucket.

US Auto Brands Age Distribution (2016)



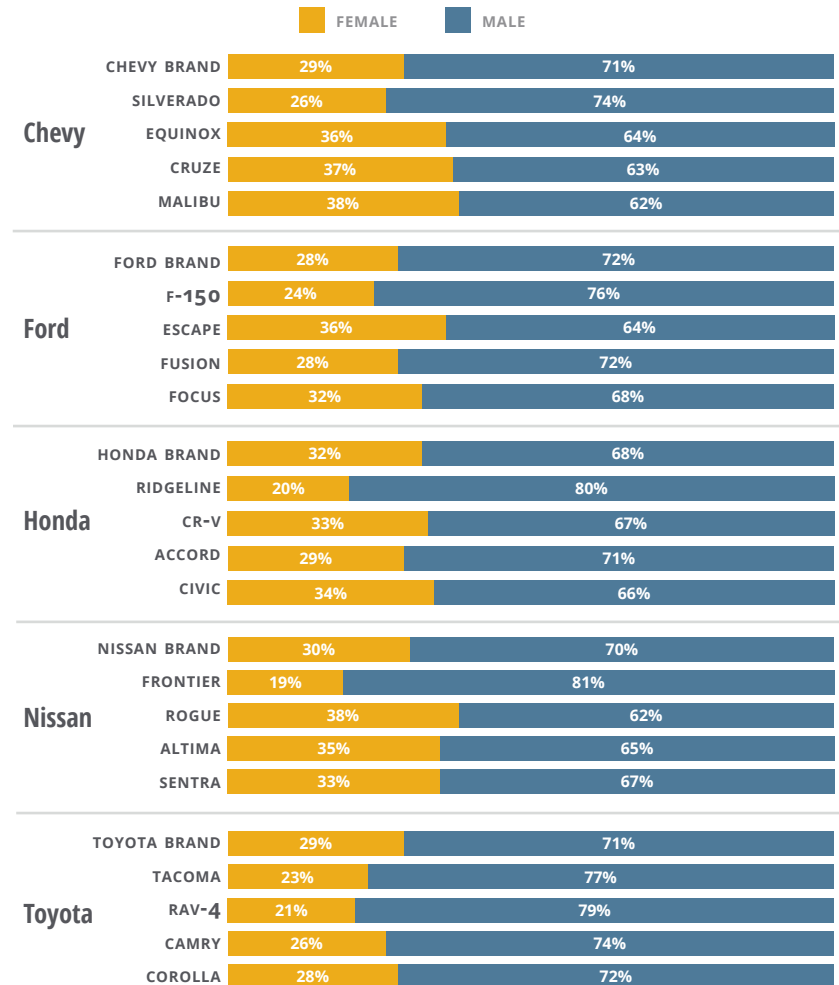
Gender breakdown for major auto makes and models

Analyzing the gender mix for the major brands and their individual models tells a slightly simpler story. Although there is some variation by model, all of the top 5 brands have mostly male audiences. In fact, Honda has the most evenly split audience in terms of gender, and is still 70% male.

Within the brands, though, there is some variation. The models that elicit the most conversation from women are: Nissan Rogue, Chevy Malibu, and Chevy Cruze.

On the other end of the spectrum, the conversations most dominated by men are around: Nissan Frontier, Honda Ridgeline, and Ford F-150.

US Auto Brands Gender Distribution in 2016



Conclusion

For something as important to Americans as cars, it's no surprise that there is such a high volume of conversation about the topic. What is surprising is how varied and nuanced the conversation is. Whether consumers are looking for a new car, sharing stories about their existing one, or simply talking about their favorite brands, social media is full of car talk.

For obvious reasons, these conversations are incredibly valuable for companies in the auto industry — especially the branded discussion. Knowing what consumers think about Ford, for example, as compared to GM, is important, not just for those two brands but for many companies throughout the industry.

As the auto industry continues to evolve, it becomes increasingly important for brands to keep up with changing consumer sentiment. Which brands do consumers equate with eco-friendliness? Which carmakers are known for selling long-lasting, durable vehicles? How does the audience of one brand compare to the audience of another?

These are obviously important questions for auto brands to consider, but they're also notoriously difficult to answer. Luckily social media offers a real-time window into the mind of consumers. As this report showed, there is a great deal to be gained from analyzing the social media conversation surrounding car brands.

As the auto industry continues to change, consumer conversations will only become more important. With modern automakers threatening to disrupt the industry, and industry stalwarts drastically changing course to keep up with new trends, consumer conversations can help us understand the impact of these events in real time.



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