

## **Important factors affecting customers in buying Japanese vehicles in New Zealand: A case study**

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### **Abstract**

Just like many developed countries, car ownership in New Zealand (NZ) is an important determinant of household travel behavior. New Zealanders like buying used cars (mainly direct import from Japan) due to their affordability and reputation of good condition of the Japanese car. It has been mentioned for many years that Chinese ethnic group is not only one of the largest immigrants in NZ but also one of the most attractive customer groups in NZ market. This research aims to identify what are the NZ Chinese customers' preferences and perceptions in purchasing Japanese used vehicles and how the used car dealers in NZ can successfully attract and convince their Chinese customers to purchase from them.

Based on the survey results, Chinese customers agreed that price, fuel efficiency as well as style and appearance are all the important factors when they decide which Japanese vehicles to buy. Other than that, used car dealers with good reputation as well as friends and family recommendations are also some of the important factors for Chinese customers in helping them to select the right seller to purchase their Japanese used vehicles.

**Keywords:** Chinese migrants in New Zealand; Japanese used car; used car dealer in New Zealand; customer perception; automobile industry

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Just like many developed countries, car ownership in New Zealand (NZ) is an important determinant of household travel behavior. New Zealanders like buying used cars (mainly direct import from Japan) due to their affordability and reputation of good condition of the Japanese car. It has been mentioned for many years that Chinese ethnic group is not only one of the largest immigrants in NZ but also one of the most attractive customer groups in NZ market. This research aims to identify what are the NZ Chinese customers' preferences and perceptions in purchasing Japanese used vehicles and how the used car dealers in NZ can successfully attract and convince their Chinese customers to purchase from them.

Based on the survey results, Chinese customers agreed that price, fuel efficiency as well as style and appearance are all the important factors when they decide which Japanese vehicles to buy. Other than that, used car dealers with good reputation as well as friends and family recommendations are also some of the important factors for Chinese customers in helping them to select the right seller to purchase their Japanese used vehicles.

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## **1. Introduction**

In today's fragmented and increasingly turbulent markets, competitions and the rapidly changing customer values continuously force marketers to offer superior values which hope to turn potential customers into paying customers. For automobile industry, the major challenge is the uncertainty of global markets. According to Hirsh, Kakkar, Singh and Wilk (2015), not only the vehicle sales of 2014 in Europe is much weaker as compared with the previous years, sales have also plunged in Russia and South America by 25% and 15% respectively. Even for the world's largest vehicle market China, the sales has been slowed since 2014 (Hirsh et al., 2015).

Decision makers in the automobile industry have realized for long time that they must be able to build a close relationships with their potential customers in-order to encourage them to buy their products (Stöckle, 2014). However, there is no single strategy which is best for auto seller to quickly turn any potential customers into paying customers (Ho, 2012). In order to successfully convert any potential customers into a long term asset, marketer must first seek to fully understand their potential customers' needs and wants (Grewal & Levy, 2013).

The main objectives of this research are firstly to find out what are the New Zealand (NZ) Chinese customers' preferences and perceptions in purchasing Japanese used vehicles. Secondly, how the used car dealers in NZ can successfully attract and convince their customers, in particular the Chinese customers to purchase from them.

## **2. Car ownership in New Zealand**

Just like many developed countries, car ownership in NZ is an important determinant of household travel behavior (Americans Leads the World in Car Ownership, 2007; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Car ownership is also closely related to the number of households and the number of people in the household (Leibling, 2008). Research shows that NZ is one of the highest car ownership in the pacific-region since 2007 (Fisher, 2012). A recent survey conducted by Nielsen claimed that New Zealanders tend to own a motorcar due to “Love of Driving” (Used Vehicles in Demand for New Zealand Consumers, 2014). In particular, New Zealanders like buying used cars (mainly direct import from Japan) due to their affordability and reputation of good condition of the Japanese car (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

In 2012, NZ imported 173,000 motorcars and majority of them came from Japan. Of the 173,000 imported vehicles, 42% of them were used (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). According to a new study by Nielsen, three quarters of residents in NZ currently own a car and 52% of New Zealanders who were participated in the 2013 Global Survey of Automotive claimed that they plan to buy a new or used car in the next two years (Used Vehicles in Demand for New Zealand Consumers, 2014). Due to the high demand of both new and used vehicles in the country, marketers in the automobile industry tend to spend more money in advertising every year. For instance, automobile industry online advertising expenditure in NZ was more than \$2.7 million (USD) in 2011 (Keall, 2012).

## **3. Chinese migrants in New Zealand**

New Zealand’s population reached an estimated 4.4 million in 2013 (Immigration NZ Knowledgebase, n.d.) mainly assisted by growth in immigration. As mentioned in the 2013 Census report, NZ has more ethnicities than other countries in the world and Chinese is one of the largest ethnic groups in New Zealand (MacPherson, 2013). The population of Chinese New Zealanders is 171,000 which is about 4.0% of the population of NZ (Manning, 2013). Majority of the Chinese migrants in NZ are from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Ho, 2003).

The first batch of Chinese (mainly goldminers) arrived in NZ in the 1850s. Since then, Chinese immigrants have fast become part of the NZ society (Chinese History and Family History, n.d.). For nearly a decade, Chinese New Zealanders are well known as one of the best-educated groups in NZ, with 24.7% having bachelor’s degrees or higher, compared with the NZ national average of 14.2%. (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). Also, Chinese from mainland China has become the largest source of immigrants moving to NZ since 2013 (Boehler, 2014). Many of the Chinese migrants in NZ are classified as “Rich Chinese”. One of the main reasons for the wealthy Chinese to immigrate to NZ is because of concerns over pollution in China (Kilgallon, 2014).

It has been mentioned above that Chinese ethnic group is one of the largest immigrants in this multi-cultural country. Moreover, they are also one of the biggest customers in NZ market. In-order to increase market share and profits within the serve market, marketers in NZ should spend more resources developing attractive products and superior value as perceived by this important group of customers.

#### **4. Marketing to the new migrants**

New Zealand is one of the world's least-crowded countries which have a diverse multicultural population of over 4 million people (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.). New migrants from different nationalities (ethnic groups) arrive in New Zealand are likely to have a limited knowledge of the marketplace. Hence, combined with possible communication difficulties, constrained decision making may result when selecting both products and suppliers (Pires & Stanton, 2000).

Marketers wishing to attract the ethnic minority groups to buy from them should review the basic premises of their marketing plans to take account for the growing market pluralism and the multi-ethnic reality of the modern society (Nwankwo & Lindrige, 1998). For the past years, some of the NZ businesses have offered extra supports or services to assist their customers who English are not their first language. For example, Telecom New Zealand has an Asian Customer Care Centre dedicated to their Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and Korean customers during normal office hours (Pio & Kwan, 2006). However, more supports and services are needed from marketers for the new migrants in NZ in order to turn these new and potential customers into paying customers.

While extensive researches have been conducted on the telecommunication industry in the NZ context (refer to the article of Pio & Kwan, 2006) to identify different marketing strategies to better reach the Chinese customers, there is no similar investigation being done for the automobile industry in NZ. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap by looking at Chinese customers' preferences when purchasing Japanese used vehicles in NZ. Information retrieved from this research can be used by the Japanese used car dealers to develop the right strategies to better approach their Chinese customers.

#### **5. Case study – Precision Enterprises Limited**

Precision Enterprises Limited (also known as Precision Autos by most of the locals) is a well-established New Zealander owned car Dealer Company. As a specialist of Japanese cars importer for over ten years, Precision Autos always commits to the quality of the vehicles that they offer to their customers. Located in Henderson (a western suburb of Auckland, NZ), the car yard of Precision Autos offers an extensive selection of Japanese used cars in different models which meet every budget and needs (Precision Autos, n.d.).

As a country that have experienced a large amount of immigration, the diversity of New Zealand's cultural, ethnic and linguistic is easy to be found. In order to sustain within the serve market, managers of Precision Autos understand that they must constantly look for new customer segments in Auckland. Due to the increasing numbers of new migrants from different ethnic groups, the managers have recently recruited sales executives from different nationalities which hope to capture these untapped segments. Precision Autos believes that through their newly employed sales executives, they can now dedicate to their Chinese and Indian customers on top of the English speaking customers.

In order to better serve their Chinese customers, the authors of this research article were invited by Precision Autos to conduct a study which aims to look into Chinese customers' preferences and perceptions of purchasing Japanese used vehicles in NZ.

## 6. Methodology

Quantitative survey was the method selected for this research. In order to make sure that the responses were gathered in a standardized way, an online questionnaire survey was used in this exploratory research. The researchers were confident that large amounts of information could be collected from a large number of participants in a short period of time in a relatively cost effective way by completing the survey online. The survey focused on questions directly related to factors which will influence customers in making decision for their next purchase of a Japanese used car as well as how their choice of the car dealer company.

After setting up all the questions, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese edition and was uploaded to an online survey website “So Jump” (<http://www.sojump.com>), the largest and most popular Chinese online survey website that is freely available for any researchers who wish to conduct their survey via the internet. A web link to the online survey was then emailed to 219 Chinese customers who had previously purchased their Japanese built vehicles from Precision Autos. This email also included a cover letter that explained what the survey was, why they should take it, and how to participate. The survey was implemented during February 2 to March 1, 2015.

## 7. Findings and discussions

A total of 100 respondents have completed the online survey. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: 1. *demographics questions*; 2. *factors for choosing a Japanese used car and* 3. *factors of deciding car dealer choice*.

### 7.1. Demographic profile of Chinese customers

Demographic questions asked respondents to state their gender, age group and income level. The result showed that gender of respondents was evenly distributed, with 53% indicated for male and 47% female. There were five age groups which include: ‘16 - 26’, ‘27 - 36’, ‘37 - 46’, ‘47 - 56’, ‘57 - 66’, each accounted for 24%, 49%, 16%, 8%, 3%, respectively (see Table 1). Majority of the respondents earned no more than \$60,000 NZ dollars per annum, with ‘\$40,000 - \$60,000’ ranked at the top with a proportion of 38%, followed by ‘under \$40,000’ with 34% (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Age group and income level*

Age	Number	Percentage	Income Level	Number	Percentage
16 - 26	24	24 %	Below \$40,000	34	34 %
27 - 36	49	49 %	\$40000 - \$60,000	38	38 %
37 - 46	16	16 %	\$60000 - \$100,000	13	13 %
47 - 56	8	8 %	Above \$100,000	15	15 %
57 and above	3	3 %	Total in NZD	100	100 %
Total	100	100 %			

## 7.2. Factors for choosing Japanese used cars and deciding car dealer

Respondents were then asked to indicate their level of perceptions with the statements shown in table 2. The first group of statements were answered using 5-point Likert Scale. They were asked to determine what deciding factors when choosing a Japanese used car.

The second group of statements were dichotomous questions focused on influential factors when choosing a car dealer.

Table 2: *Factors of choosing a Japanese used car and deciding car dealer*

<b>Statements regarding the important factors of choosing a Japanese used car</b>	<b>Five-point Likert Scale</b>	
What is your willingness to purchase a second hand car?	1 = Very interested 5 = Very uninterested	
Among second hand cars, what do you think of Japanese cars?	1 = Very good 5 = Very poor	
What do you think of the importance of the accelerating performance of a second hand car?	1 = Very important 5 = Not at all important	
What do you think of the importance of fuel consumption of a second hand car?		
What do you think of the importance of the style and appearance of a second hand car?		
What do you think of the importance of the comfort of a second hand car?		
What do you think of the importance of the additional functionalities of a second hand car?		
What do you think of the importance of price when you purchasing a second hand car?		
What do you think of the importance of the maintenance cost when you purchase a second hand car?		
<b>Statements regarding car dealer choice</b>		<b>Dichotomous Questions</b>
When choosing a used car dealer, reputation of the dealer is very important.	1 = Yes 2 = No	
When choosing a used car dealer, consulting with friends and family (word-of-mouth) is very important.		
When choosing a used car dealer, previous transaction (experience) is very important.		
When choosing a used car dealer, speaking/dealing with a Chinese staff is very important.		

## 7.3. Relationship between gender and 9 factors

Table 3 shows the relationship between gender and the nine factors. The total mean score of 'willingness to purchase a used car' is 1.93 (with male respondents of 2.06 and female respondents of 1.79). It explains that gender is the main determinant in term of willingness

for purchasing a Japanese used car. When comparing respondents' gender and general opinion (or perception) of Japanese used car, majority of the respondents (mean score of 2.09 for male respondents and 2.06 for female respondents) believe that overall, Japanese cars are reliable.

The next question in the survey asked respondents to indicate the importance of the accelerating performance of a Japanese used car. Only the male respondents (with the mean score of 2.11) claimed that acceleration was one of the important factors when considering which car to purchase. As for questions regarding the importance of the fuel consumption, appearance, drive comfort, functionalities (extra features), price and cost of future maintenance, majority of the respondents believed that they were all the important factors (with the total mean score of not more than 1.5 as shown in Table 3) when considering buying a used vehicle from Japan.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on gender and 9 factors

Gender		Willingness to Purchase	Opinion of Japanese Car	Acceleration	Fuel Consumption	Appearance	Drive Comfort	Functionalities	Price	Future Maintenance
Male	Mean	2.06	2.09	2.11	1.74	1.74	1.68	1.66	1.43	1.28
	N	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Std. Deviation	1.365	1.404	1.396	1.112	1.077	.872	.979	.797	.632
Female	Mean	1.79	2.06	3.43	1.70	1.68	1.49	1.70	1.68	1.57
	N	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	.931	1.309	1.298	1.112	.958	.655	1.082	.980	.744
Total	Mean	1.93	2.08	2.73	1.72	1.71	1.59	1.68	1.55	1.42
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Std. Deviation	1.183	1.353	1.496	1.111	1.018	.780	1.024	.892	.699

#### 7.4. Relationship between age group and 9 factors

The relationship between age group and the nine factors is available in Table 4. Respondents who are 57 years old and above (with the mean score of 1.33) are more willing to purchase a Japanese used car as compared with other age groups. All the respondents see the rest of the factors are 'important' or 'very important' for them when considering buying a Japanese used car (with the total mean scores of fuel consumption is 1.72, appearance is 1.71, drive comfort is 1.59, functionalities is 1.68, price is 1.55 and cost for future maintenance is 1.42 respectively).

Respondents between 16 to 46 years old (across three age groups) claimed that acceleration is one of the important factors when considering which car to purchase where those who are 47 years old and older (across two age groups) do not see it as an important factor. Finally, respondents from all age groups (with total mean score of 2.08) believe that overall, Japanese cars are consider reliable.

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation on age group and 9 factors

Age Group		Willingness to Purchase	Opinion of Japanese Car	Acceleration	Fuel Consumption	Appearance	Drive Comfort	Functionalities	Price	Future Maintenance
16-26	Mean	1.79	2.04	2.71	1.50	1.63	1.75	1.88	1.54	1.63
	N	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
	Std. Deviation	1.215	1.429	1.459	.978	.770	.794	1.116	.833	.770
27-36	Mean	1.90	1.94	2.41	1.71	1.71	1.53	1.55	1.45	1.37
	N	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49
	Std. Deviation	1.177	1.265	1.457	1.155	1.061	.649	1.001	.709	.668
37-46	Mean	2.38	2.63	2.31	2.13	2.00	1.63	1.81	2.00	1.50
	N	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
	Std. Deviation	1.258	1.544	.946	1.310	1.366	.806	1.167	1.461	.816
47-56	Mean	1.88	2.13	4.88	1.63	1.50	1.63	1.75	1.50	1.13
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
	Std. Deviation	1.126	1.356	.354	.744	.756	1.408	.707	.535	.354



57 and above	Mean	1.33	1.67	4.67	1.67	1.33	1.00	1.33	1.00	1.00
	N	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Std. Deviation	.577	1.155	.577	1.155	.577	.000	.577	.000	.000
Total	Mean	1.93	2.08	2.73	1.72	1.71	1.59	1.68	1.55	1.42
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Std. Deviation	1.183	1.353	1.496	1.111	1.018	.780	1.024	.892	.699

## 7.5. Relationship between income and 9 factors

In Table 5, respondents who earned no more than \$60,000 per year are more likely to consider a Japanese car. At the same time, these groups of respondents claimed that Japanese cars are consider reliable.

Other factors such as fuel consumption, appearance, drive comfort and functionalities are very important for many respondents while choosing a Japanese used car except for those who earned more than \$100,000 per annum. Lastly, cost of future maintenance is one of the most important factors for all the respondents (with the total mean score of 1.42).

Table 5: Compare mean and standard deviation between income level and 9 factors

Age Group		Willingness to Purchase	Opinion of Japanese Car	Acceleration	Fuel Consumption	Appearance	Drive Comfort	Functionalities	Price	Future Maintenance
Below \$40K	Mean	1.79	1.59	2.41	1.32	1.41	1.56	1.53	1.41	1.32
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	Std. Deviation	1.095	1.184	1.459	.806	.743	.824	.992	.892	.638
\$40K - \$60K	Mean	1.61	1.95	2.71	1.76	1.63	1.55	1.53	1.53	1.42
	N	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
	Std. Deviation	.718	.985	1.431	.998	.819	.686	.687	.603	.642
\$60K - \$100K	Mean	2.15	2.69	3.23	1.85	1.77	1.31	1.54	1.15	1.38
	N	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	Std. Deviation	1.214	1.548	1.481	1.345	.832	.480	.877	.555	.650
Above \$100K	Mean	2.87	3.00	3.07	2.40	2.53	2.00	2.53	2.27	1.67
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
	Std. Deviation	1.767	1.773	1.710	1.454	1.642	1.000	1.506	1.335	.976
Total	Mean	1.93	2.08	2.73	1.72	1.71	1.59	1.68	1.55	1.42
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Std. Deviation	1.183	1.353	1.496	1.111	1.018	.780	1.024	.892	.699

## 7.6. Influential factors when choosing the ideal used car dealer

When respondents were asked to indicate whether dealer reputation was important for them while choosing the right seller, majority of the respondents (61%) claimed that dealer with good reputation is very important. Those who claimed that they would only buy from dealer with good reputation also explained that recommendations from friends and family (word-of-mouth) was an important factor in selecting which car dealer to use.

When respondents were asked whether previous transaction helped in making decision which seller to buy from, most of the respondents (83%) pointed out that previous transaction would not influence their choice of the car dealer. Finally, most of the respondents (80%) claimed that they do not care about whether the car dealer company has Chinese staff or not.

## 8. Recommendations

Based on the findings from the online surveys, the researchers are able to offer several suggestions that will help the Japanese used car dealers in NZ to encourage their Chinese customers to buy Japanese used cars.

Firstly, most of the respondents mentioned that price is one of the most important factor when purchasing a vehicle regardless of their gender, age group and income level. Hence, lowering the product price (such as implementing psychological pricing) can be a good start for the Japanese used car dealers to capture potential customers' attention.

Secondly, respondents also agreed that fuel efficient vehicle is what they want from the Japanese brand name. The used car dealers should perhaps put in more efforts to bring-in more fuel efficient Japanese cars (cars with smaller engine) to the NZ market if they wish to attract more Chinese customers. Style and appearance are other important factors for the respondents. The used car dealers should also consider importing the newest possible models which allow them to capture and create value for their potential customers.

Respondents also indicated that they are more comfortable dealing with car dealers who have good reputation and is highly recommended by friends and family. A few suggestions for the used car dealers to build brand awareness and bring in business successfully include rewarding existing customers for word-of-mouth (WOM) and consider advertise in the Chinese community new papers in NZ (which allow them to easily reach the targeted audience). Used car dealers can also lift their game by making their ads available in those major Chinese web portal in the country such as skykiwi.com (advertising cost tend to be less expensive as compared to the traditional media but can still reach out a large amount of targeted audience) .

## **7. Limitation, future research and conclusion**

A major limitation of this exploratory research is that customers from only one car dealer in the metropolitan area of Auckland are included. If the study involves respondents from various dealers nationwide, the results could have been more pertinent which can then be used by any used car dealers in NZ who are targeting the ethnic minority groups.

Qualitative method such as focus group interview should take place for future research as a complementary method to survey, as focus group interview can be used to explore and understand about Chinese customers' thoughts, ideas and behaviors towards the use of a particular car dealer and their perceptions on Japanese car in general. Other qualitative method such as in-depth interviews should also be considered, since in-depth interviews always produce very precise and specific answers as well as an exhaustive and varied knowledge about individual determined experiences, opinions and motives, which quantitative methods cannot encompass.

Determining what car to buy is an important decision, it usually requires a fair amount of research on the part of the customer. One of the greatest and inevitable challenges marketers face is to determine the most effective marketing strategies to capture their target audiences' attention. This research seeks to understand NZ Chinese customers' preferences in purchasing Japanese used vehicles. The findings of this research may provide both academic and practical implications. Given the numbers of Chinese migrants in NZ increase significantly in the past decades, understanding their preferences and behaviors are extremely important as it allows marketers within the automobile industry to effectively develop their marketing strategies which can be used to capture their customers and enhance their competitiveness.

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