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Car Buying Split Nearly Even Between Planned and Unplanned Purchases

ConsumerInsight's Say-Do Gap analysis finds purchase-intenders convert at a much higher rate, but buyers without prior intent account for nearly the same market scale—especially in used cars.

(The Say-Do Gap Series: Part 2)

- Car purchases are split evenly: half are driven by 'prior plans,' and half by 'sudden needs.'
- Although intenders are 3.6 times more likely to buy than non-intenders, the overall market size for both groups is nearly identical.
- The new-car market is largely driven by prior planning (57%), whereas the used-car market is dominated by spontaneous purchases (61%).
- The realization rate for a preferred brand (62%) significantly surpasses the overall car purchase realization rate (21%).

SEOUL, South Korea – May 11, 2026 – ConsumerInsight today released the second report in its “The Say-Do Gap” series, based on more than 25 years of large-scale automotive consumer research covering about 100,000 consumers annually. The new analysis follows consumers who said in 2024 whether they intended to buy a car within one year and compares those statements with actual purchase behavior observed in the following year.

The main finding: roughly half of car buyers had not expressed purchase intent one year earlier. In other words, “planned purchases” and “unplanned purchases” were nearly equal in market scale, showing that an analysis focused only on consumers who say they intend to buy cannot fully explain the real automotive market.

Planned and Unplanned Buyers Represent Nearly Equal Market Share

The study tracked 31,852 respondents who participated in ConsumerInsight's 2024 and 2025 Annual Automobile Syndicated Study. Among them, 2,852 respondents, or 9.0%, actually bought a car within one year [Table 1]. Purchase-intenders were far more likely to buy: 20.6% of those who had expressed one-year purchase intent followed through, compared with 5.6% of those who had not. Even so, because the non-intender group was much larger, planned purchases represented 4.6% of all tracked respondents and unplanned purchases 4.4%, nearly the same size.

[Table 1] Analysis of Actual Purchase Behavior by 1-Year Purchase Intention ***Base: '24-'25 Continuous Respondents (N=31,852)***

Category	Share of Total (%)
With Purchase Intention	**22.4**
└Actually Purchased (Planned Purchase)	4.6
└Did Not Purchase	17.8
Without Purchase Intention	**77.6**
└ Actually Purchased	4.4
└Did Not Purchase	73.2
Total Actual Buyers	**9.0**

The results highlight the Say-Do Gap—the difference between what consumers say they plan to do and what they actually do. For a high-priced, high-involvement product such as an automobile, the fact that nearly half of actual purchases came from consumers without prior intent suggests that non-intenders are also an important customer pool. Understanding what triggers sudden purchase needs will be a key research task.

In the 2024 survey, 22.4% of respondents said they intended to buy a car within one year, less than half the previously reported 52% who said they planned to buy within two years [Table 2]. Among one-year purchase-intenders, new cars were strongly preferred: 66% considered only a new car, 28% considered both new and used cars, and 3% considered only a used car.

[Table 2] Detailed Analysis of Actual Buyers by Purchase Type ***Base : Actual buyers within 1 Year (N = 2,852)***

Buyer Segment	Share of Total Buyers (%)	Share Within Group (%)
Planned Buyers	**51.4**	100
└Purchased New Car	39.5	76.8
└Purchased Used Car	11.9	23.2
Unplanned Buyers	**48.6**	**100**

New Cars Are Planned Purchases; Used Cars Are Strongly Situation-Driven

Among planned buyers, 76.8% bought a new car, equivalent to 3.5% of all tracked respondents. Within planned buyers who bought a new car, 62.1% bought the brand they had originally preferred, and 36.4% bought the preferred model [Table 3]. This indicates that brand preference management remains important even when the broader purchase-intention signal is imperfect.

[Table 3] In-depth Analysis of Brand & Model Choice (Planned New-Car Buyers) ***Base : Consumers who planned and purchased a new car (N=1,127)***

Choice Outcome	Share of Planned New-Car Buyers (%)
Purchased Preferred Brand	**62.1**
└Of which, purchased the exact Preferred Model	36.4
Purchased Alternative Brand	**37.9**

The difference between new-car and used-car markets was especially clear. Among actual new-car buyers, 57% had already planned to buy a year earlier. Among actual used-car buyers, only 39% had planned to buy, meaning 61% were unplanned buyers. Consumers who had considered only a new car one year earlier mostly stayed with that choice: 92% ultimately bought a new car. By contrast, those who had considered both new and used cars split almost evenly in actual purchase, with 49% buying new and 51% buying used

Strategic Implications: Planning Status and Car Type Both Matter

These patterns suggest that the new-car market is driven more by advance planning and longer consideration, while the used-car market is more situation-responsive, influenced by price, available inventory, timing and life changes at the moment of purchase. ConsumerInsight said future automotive sales strategies should account for both purchase-plan status and whether the target is a new-car or used-car buyer.

ConsumerInsight is building an automotive consumer behavior prediction model based on its accumulated automotive survey data and is testing its applicability to the real market. Future analysis in the Say-Do Gap series will examine how consumers' originally considered brand, vehicle class and powertrain change by the final purchase stage, including shifts in SUV, EV and imported-car markets.

Notes

- Sample and method basis: The analysis tracked 31,852 respondents who participated in both the 2024 and 2025 ConsumerInsight annual auto surveys, comparing their 2024 one-year purchase intention with actual purchase behavior over the following year. The figure base is licensed drivers who own a car or have a purchase plan. (ConsumerInsight 2024–2025 Annual Automobile Syndicated Study)

- Definition of planned and unplanned purchase: A planned purchase means the buyer had reported one-year purchase intention in 2024. An unplanned, or non-planned, purchase means the buyer had not reported such intention but still bought within the tracked year. (ConsumerInsight Say-Do Gap analysis)

- Percentage-base caution: The 9.0% actual purchase rate, 4.6% planned-purchase share and 4.4% unplanned-purchase share are shares of all 31,852 tracked respondents. The 20.6% and 5.6% figures are within-group conversion rates for intenders and non-intenders, respectively. (ConsumerInsight Say-Do Gap analysis)

- Brand/model base: The 62.1% preferred-brand and 36.4% preferred-model figures are based on planned buyers who bought a new car, n=1,127. The model figure is not an additional component to be added to the brand figure. (ConsumerInsight Say-Do Gap analysis)

Methodology

ConsumerInsight has conducted its Annual Automobile Syndicated Study every July since 2001 among about 100,000 automotive consumers. This release analyzes 31,852 continuous respondents from the 2024 and 2025 surveys, comparing stated one-year purchase intention in 2024 with actual vehicle purchase behavior over the following year.

About ConsumerInsight

ConsumerInsight is a leading South Korean market research firm specializing in automotive and telecommunications data analytics. With over 25 years of accumulated consumer data and a robust annual syndicated study of 100,000 respondents, ConsumerInsight provides unparalleled insights into consumer behavior, market trends, and industry benchmarks.

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