

2026 Cox Automotive GfK-NIQ Content Influence Study



AI Is Changing Auto Shopping.

Content Still Wins the Decision.

Today's shoppers have more information, more ways to find it and more vehicles to consider. But more options don't always make the decision easier. Shoppers still need confidence before they choose.

The 2026 Cox Automotive GfK-NIQ Content Influence Study reveals how consumers move from discovery to decision and what content matters most when choosing a vehicle.

AI Is Reshaping Vehicle Discovery

More shoppers are using AI to discover vehicles, compare options and answer questions during the shopping process.

61% 40%

trust AI-generated content

are more likely to engage with AI-recommended content than content found on their own



AI plays its biggest role during discovery, but trusted content becomes increasingly important as shoppers move toward a final decision.

More Options, Less Certainty

Most shoppers begin without a specific vehicle in mind. Their challenge isn't finding information. It's figuring out which vehicle fits their budget and needs.

78% 76% 45%

start shopping undecided

are likely to trust interactive content

say payment calculators and cost-of-ownership tools help build confidence

Cost-of-ownership calculators and monthly payment calculators rank as the most influential affordability tools.

Trust Shapes the Shortlist

When shoppers are deciding which vehicle is right for them, facts alone are not enough. Reviews, expert advice, ratings and comparisons help them narrow their choices and feel more confident.



Most Influential Content on Vehicle Choice

48%

Consumer Reviews



47%

Expert Video Reviews



46%

Expert Test-Drive Videos



45%

Expert Ratings & Awards



42%

Vehicle Comparisons



Video Turns Research into Reality

Once shoppers narrow their options, they want to see how a vehicle performs, compares and fits real life. Video helps shoppers see what owning the vehicle might actually be like and gives them a reason to learn more.

80% 77%

prefer video when learning about vehicles

take action* after viewing an automotive video

*Actions include looking up vehicle information, visiting or contacting a dealership and researching financing or lease offers.



At the Decision Point, Proof Matters

As shoppers move closer to purchase, the question shifts from "Which vehicle should I consider?" to "What gives me confidence I am making the right choice?"

Even amid affordability concerns, trusted awards and expert ratings can matter more than discounts when shoppers are making a final decision.

86% 55%

say awards and accolades are important when evaluating a vehicle

say awards influence their decision more than special pricing



TAKEAWAY

AI is changing how shoppers discover vehicles, but confidence still drives the final decision.

Consumers enter the market undecided, increasingly turning to AI to explore their options. As they move through consideration, affordability tools, expert guidance, reviews, comparisons and video help reduce uncertainty and build confidence. By the time they're ready to purchase, trusted proof points such as ratings, reviews and awards often matter more than promotional offers.

What Marketers Should Do

- ☐ Build content AI can discover and recommend
- ☐ Use video to bring ownership to life
- ☐ Make affordability easier to understand
- ☐ Reinforce decisions with reviews, ratings and awards
- ☐ Help shoppers compare options with confidence

About the Study

The 2026 Cox Automotive GfK-NIQ Content Influence Study surveyed 2,303 new-vehicle consumers, including recent buyers, in-market shoppers and near-market shoppers, to understand how content influences vehicle discovery, consideration and purchase decisions. Fieldwork was conducted in April 2026. Findings reflect self-reported consumer attitudes and behaviors.