

## THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF AUTOMOBILE BRAND PREFERENCES\*

SOREN T. ANDERSON<sup>†</sup>

RYAN KELLOGG<sup>‡</sup>

ASHLEY LANGER<sup>§</sup>

JAMES M. SALLEE<sup>¶</sup>

We document a strong correlation in the brand of automobile chosen by parents and their adult children, using data from the *Panel Study of Income Dynamics*. This correlation could represent transmission of brand preferences across generations, or it could result from correlation in family characteristics that determine brand choice. We present a variety of empirical specifications that lend support to the former interpretation and to a mechanism that relies at least in part on state dependence. We then discuss implications of intergenerational brand preference transmission for automakers' product-line strategies and for the strategic pricing of vehicles to different age groups.

### I. INTRODUCTION

IN THIS PAPER, WE EMPIRICALLY INVESTIGATE the intergenerational transmission of preferences for automobile brands (e.g., Ford or GM) and explore the implications of our results for the automobile market. Our investigation makes use of the *Panel Study of Income Dynamics* (PSID), which is unique in that it follows multiple households within the same family over time. In

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<sup>†</sup>Authors' affiliations: Department of Economics, Michigan State University, Marshall Adams Hall, East Lansing, Michigan, U.S.A.

*e-mail:* [sta@msu.edu](mailto:sta@msu.edu)

<sup>‡</sup>Department of Economics, University of Michigan, Lorch Hall, Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.

*e-mail:* [kellogr@umich.edu](mailto:kellogr@umich.edu)

<sup>§</sup>Department of Economics, University of Arizona, McClelland Hall, Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A.

*e-mail:* [alanger@email.arizona.edu](mailto:alanger@email.arizona.edu)

<sup>¶</sup>Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of California at Berkeley, Giannini Hall, Berkeley, California, U.S.A.

*e-mail:* [sallee@berkeley.edu](mailto:sallee@berkeley.edu)

particular, it surveys adult children who grew up in a PSID household but have since left and formed their own households. In several recent waves, the PSID has included questions about automobile ownership. Using these data, we find strong correlations in automobile choices across generations within a family. Specifically, a child whose parent has recently purchased a given brand is 39% more likely to choose that same brand (a 5.6 percentage-point increase on a base of 14.3%) than a demographically similar child whose parent did not choose that brand. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to document this correlation. A central challenge of our paper is to distinguish empirically the mechanisms that potentially underlie this observed correlation, with a focus on identifying brand preference transmission.

We define brand preference somewhat broadly as a situation in which a consumer prefers one automobile brand over another, holding constant major vehicle attributes (such as size and performance) and consumer characteristics (including demographics and geography).<sup>1</sup> This definition allows intergenerational brand preference transmission to be driven by either *intergenerational state dependence* or *direct brand preference inheritance*. In intergenerational state dependence, the brand choices of parents influence their children's preferences (and therefore choices) because children have contact with their parents' vehicles and develop tastes for minor design details or nostalgic childhood associations with a brand, or because parental ownership generates information about performance and reliability that is conveyed to children. In direct brand preference inheritance, the brand preferences of parents influence their children's preferences (and therefore choices) independently of parental brand choices. For instance, parents might tell their children about their long-term affinity for a brand, or parents might learn about a brand from friends or advertisements and then convey this information to their children prior to purchasing the brand themselves. Since either mechanism can create cross-household correlation in brand choices, separate identification of these two mechanisms in our data is difficult. We do find, however, that the correlation between the brand choices of parents and the subsequent choices of their children is stronger for vehicles that were purchased while the children still lived at home and were therefore more exposed to the vehicle. This evidence suggests that intergenerational state dependence is at least one of the mechanisms driving the correlations we observe.

Intergenerational correlation in brand choices could also arise from familial correlations of demographic or geographic factors that determine brand choice. Demographics predict brand choice because consumers with different demographics will prefer different bundles of attributes, and each brand offers a different set of attribute bundles in its products. For

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between attributes and brands can be blurry, as we discuss below.

example, wealthier households will be more likely to purchase high-end European brands, while larger households will be more likely to choose brands that offer minivans. Similarly, geographic factors, such as terrain or proximity to dealers and repair shops, will also favor certain brands. To identify intergenerational brand preference transmission, we require that the unobservable characteristics (apart from brand preference itself) that influence the brand choices of parents be uncorrelated with the unobservable characteristics that influence the brand choices of children. This identification problem is challenging because, in general, we expect parents and children to share many characteristics, such as wealth, political beliefs, and geographic location, that plausibly influence brand choice.

We attempt to insulate our estimates from the mundane brand choice correlations that are driven by these similarities in four ways. First, we demonstrate that controlling for the rich set of demographic factors available in the PSID has little effect on our estimated brand choice correlations. Second, we show that correlations remain strong when fine geographic controls, which should capture supply factors and consumer sorting, are introduced non-parametrically. Third, we repeat our analyses for a pair of firms—GM and Ford—that offer sets of products such that, for almost any model sold by one firm, a vehicle with a very similar bundle of attributes is available from the other firm. Both brands are also traditional U.S. manufacturers with unionized workforces and similar dealership networks. It is therefore difficult to find demographic factors that would explain households' choices between these two brands (indeed, we will show that the observed characteristics in the PSID have essentially no power to explain households' choices between Ford and GM), so that the brand choice correlations we observe in this subsample can be more credibly attributed to brand preference transmission. Fourth, and finally, we show that young adults are particularly influenced by vehicles that were purchased by their parents while they were still living at home. This systematic variation in brand choice correlations is consistent with brand preference transmission—and intergenerational state dependence in particular—rather than mere correlation of characteristics.

Intergenerational brand preference transmission has several implications for automakers' strategies. Such transmission enhances the advantage that brand loyalty gives to incumbent firms because young consumers—who would otherwise be free of loyalty to any firm—arrive at the new car market with preferences inherited from their parents. Furthermore, under the state dependence mechanism, automakers gain loyalty among a future generation of customers when they sell cars to parents, which puts downward pressure on the prices of vehicles targeted to parents. Finally, it is widely believed in the industry that a brand's entry-level vehicles increase firm profits in part by 'leading' young consumers to purchase more expensive models from the same firm later in life. In the presence of

intergenerational transmission, targeting expensive models to older consumers will also increase profits in the entry-level market by endowing young consumers with brand loyalty, generating a closed loop of benefits to vertical product differentiation.

We discuss these implications further in the body of the paper, and we flesh out the potential implications for pricing behavior more fully in the Appendix on the Journal's website, where we derive and calibrate a simple model of two firms competing in two market segments for overlapping generations of old and young consumers. This model shows that when older consumers prefer the brand they chose while young but children do not inherit any such preference from their parents, then firms will 'invest' in brand loyalty by offering lower prices to young consumers and will 'harvest' this loyalty by charging high prices to older consumers. When consumers inherit a preference for the brand their parents chose, however, then equilibrium prices charged to older consumers fall as firms compete for loyalty among the next generation of consumers. Meanwhile, prices for young consumers rise, as firms take advantage of this loyalty.

Our analysis relates to several existing literatures. First, our research adds to the evidence on endogenous preference formation from several recent studies on tastes for food (Birch [1999], Logan and Rhode [2010], Atkin [2013]), female labor supply (Fernández *et al.* [2004]), packaged goods (Bronnenberg *et al.* [2012]), and preferences for redistribution (Luttmer and Singhal [2011]) that suggest that tastes and preferences may be determined by prior behavior and experience. Second, previous work has studied brand loyalty in the automobile market (Mannering and Winston [1985, 1991], Train and Winston [2007]). While these papers document within-household brand loyalty, the automobile literature has, to the best of our knowledge, not previously documented intergenerational correlation in brand choice.

Third, our paper relates to the broader literature that studies the magnitude and implications of within-household brand loyalty (sometimes referred to as switching costs) and brand preference persistence. A number of papers, such as Klemperer [1987], Dubé *et al.* [2009], Doganoglu [2010], and Somaini and Einav [2013], focus on the implications of brand loyalty for equilibrium prices, while others focus on empirically documenting the strength of brand loyalty and brand preferences, typically examining markets for consumer packaged goods (Bronnenberg *et al.* [2009], Dubé *et al.* [2010], Bronnenberg *et al.* [2012]). Relative to consumer packaged goods, automobiles are much larger expenses, they are purchased less frequently, and the product offerings are more heterogeneous. Brand loyalty in the automobile sector typically involves individuals purchasing quite different products that share a brand label, whereas the literature on packaged goods is better characterized as repeat purchases of the same item. For small purchases, brand loyalty may be understood as a heuristic

to aid in quick decision-making, which is likely quite different from the role that brands play in purchasing an automobile.

Finally, our work has parallels in the extensive peer effects and social interactions literatures (Manski [1993, 2000]). Whereas much of this literature studies how individuals are influenced by the aggregate behavior and characteristics of a reference group, we focus on how parents and children are influenced by the choices and preferences of a small number of individual family members. Of course, peer effects in automobile purchasing likely extend beyond the family to friends, neighbors, and co-workers. We view parent-to-child preference transmission as a particularly important case of this broader set of peer effects because: (a) parent-child pairs are often more easily identified in data than many other relationships; (b) parent-child relationships have been shown (often using PSID data) to be particularly important for many other economic variables such as income and education (Solon [1992, 1999], Black and Devereux [2011]); and (c) our data indicate that parent-to-child transmission is more powerful than that for other within-family links, such as sibling-to-sibling.

The balance of the paper is structured as follows. In Section II we present a framework for interpreting cross-household correlations in brand choices. We then describe our data in Section III, and we report our empirical results regarding correlations in brand choice across generations in Section IV. Section V discusses the implications of intergenerational brand preference transmission for automobile markets. Section VI concludes.

## II. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF INTERGENERATIONAL VEHICLE CHOICE

In this section, we present a simple model of household vehicle choice that clarifies possible mechanisms by which choices may be correlated across families and the empirical challenges of separately identifying them. We begin by noting that the distinction between vehicle brands—on which we focus in this paper—and vehicle attributes is blurry. It is tempting to define a brand as something that is independent of all vehicle attributes, as if, for instance, Ford and GM vehicles were identical apart from the logo stamped on the grill. In practice, vehicles of different brands will differ in ‘minor’ features, including trim style, dashboard layouts, and perceived reliability, even for cars that share identical measurable characteristics such as size, power, and cargo space. We define a brand in a way that encompasses these ‘minor’ characteristics so that a brand preference might be derived from, for example, a preference to have the dashboard controls laid out in a particular way. In contrast, when we speak of preferences for attributes, we refer specifically to major vehicle characteristics, such as class, horsepower, size, and fuel economy. We believe that making this distinction between brands and attributes, thusly defined, is useful because the transmission of

preferences for brands has a different set of implications than does the transmission of preferences for attributes. The former is primarily relevant for automakers' pricing, marketing, and product line strategies, while the latter is additionally relevant for public policies aimed at addressing the externalities of vehicle use.

Consider a household  $i$  in family  $f$  that purchases vehicle  $j$  at time  $t$ . Let the utility that household  $i$  derives from this purchase be denoted by:

$$(1) \quad U_{ifjt} = g(D_{ifjt}, X_j; \beta) + \theta_{ifjt},$$

where  $D_{ifjt}$  denotes a vector of observed and unobserved demographic and location-specific characteristics of household  $i$ , such as income, education, climate, and terrain. These characteristics interact with  $X_j$ , which denotes the attributes (including brand) of vehicle  $j$ , through the function  $g(\cdot)$  and parameter vector  $\beta$ . This interaction allows observable and unobservable characteristics of households and their locations to influence vehicle choice in a variety of ways. For example, rural households may tend to choose pickup trucks, wealthy households may tend to purchase large SUV's, pro-union households may tend to purchase U.S. brands, and households living close to a Ford dealership may tend to purchase Fords. Finally,  $\theta_{ifjt}$  denotes a preference for vehicle  $j$  that is unrelated to demographic or location-specific factors. We focus on influences from other family members as determinants of  $\theta_{ifjt}$ , but other factors may exist, such as exposure to advertisements, prior driving experiences, idiosyncratic tastes (e.g., for a particular color or trim), or vehicle market conditions at the time of purchase.

Intergenerational brand preference transmission is expressed in our model as a correlation in  $\theta_{ifjt}$  across households within families, which leads to correlation in vehicle brand choices. Cross-household correlation in  $\theta_{ifjt}$  could stem from intergenerational state dependence, whereby parental choices influence child preferences. For example, if a child's parents purchased a string of GM vehicles, then that child may have nostalgic feelings for GM, a taste for the unique features of GM's design (e.g., the layout of the instrument panel or the feel of the seats), superior information about GM's performance and reliability, or simply a 'comfort level' with the brand. Alternatively, correlation in  $\theta_{ifjt}$  could arise from *direct inheritance* of preferences from parent to child in a way that is not mediated by brand choice itself. For instance, parents might have a belief that Fords have a better-looking trim than do GM's and instill this belief in their children during their childhood. Direct preference inheritance can also occur later in life. For example, parents might be exposed to a positive review of Ford and tell their children about what they read. This mechanism may ultimately lead to a correlation of parents' and children's choices, but it does not operate through state dependence or experience.

Correlations in households' vehicle choices may also arise through cross-household correlations in  $D_{ijt}$ . It is natural to expect such correlations to exist; Solon [1992], for example, documents strong intergenerational correlation of income. If households with high incomes are more likely to purchase SUV's and European luxury brands, then this correlation in income across generations will lead to correlations in vehicle choices across generations. Thus, a fundamental empirical challenge of our work is to identify vehicle choice correlations that arise from preference transmission (due to either intergenerational state dependence or direct preference inheritance) separately from those that arise from similarities in demographic and geographic characteristics. This identification is important because it is only the former set of channels that is relevant for the strategic implications we consider.

Identification of the 'true' transmission of vehicle preferences from parents to children is most clear when there is exogenous variation that causes the parents to purchase a new vehicle brand, conditional on the parents' and children's demographics. For example, the parents' purchase of a Ford may have been driven by a nationwide promotional campaign that coincided with the month in which they wanted to buy a new car, or perhaps the weather was particularly nice when the parents test-drove the Ford but stormy when they test-drove the GM.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, we would identify the transmission of vehicle preferences from parents to children using an instrumental variable for factors such as these that shift the choices or preferences of parents but not their children. However, all of our attempts in this direction have been substantially underpowered given our modest sample size.<sup>3</sup> We therefore employ several alternative approaches. First, we leverage the wealth of demographic and location information within the PSID dataset to control directly for potential confounding factors. Despite being able to use a rich set of covariates (including census tract fixed effects), one might nonetheless be concerned that influential unobserved factors remain. For instance, if a family is pro-union, all of that family's households might have a preference for U.S. brands. Thus, we also investigate a subset of the data for which correlated unobserved factors are unlikely to be important: choices between Ford and GM. Both of these

<sup>2</sup> These two examples are consistent with the intergenerational state dependence mechanism. Examples consistent with direct brand preference inheritance include the parents' reading a positive review of Ford (and then telling their child about the review) or being exposed to idiosyncratic good news about Ford (e.g., Ford vehicles win auto races watched by the parents).

<sup>3</sup> The most obvious instrumental variable is the U.S. market share of the parents' chosen brand at the time of the parents' purchase. However, in an IV version of the regression corresponding to column 2 of Table II, the first-stage F-statistic for this instrument is only 7.06, and the estimated coefficient on parents' brand is  $-0.127$  with a standard error of 0.344. This result compares to an OLS coefficient of 0.093 and standard error of 0.008, as reported below.

automakers produce a wide range of models with similar attributes and are 'iconic' U.S.-based firms, so that it is difficult to imagine demographic characteristics that would drive the choice between one brand or the other. That is, if demographic factors cause an individual to prefer the particular bundle of attributes offered in one of the models made by Ford, it is nearly certain that there is a counterpart made by GM that offers a very similar set of attributes available in the market. Thus, our identifying assumption—that the omitted factors driving the child's brand choice (apart from brand preference itself) are idiosyncratic and not correlated with the unobserved factors driving the parents' brand choice, conditional on observed demographics and location—is more plausible than in the full sample of all brands. While a powerful, valid instrument would obviously be optimal for identification, we believe that this subsample approach brings us close to the ideal setting in which idiosyncratic factors push parents towards one brand rather than another.

An even more challenging empirical problem is the separate identification of the extent to which brand preference transmission is driven by state dependence or direct preference inheritance. This distinction is important when considering implications of brand preference transmission for firms' pricing strategies. If only direct preference inheritance is at play, then lowering prices to boost market share among parents will not affect their children's future demand for a brand, whereas the opposite is true if state dependence is at work. This identification problem is similar to one common in the marketing literature, in which one observes a series of brand choices by a single household and then tries to determine whether that household's choices are state-dependent or whether they simply reflect a serially-correlated preference for a particular brand (see, for example, Dubé *et al.* [2010]). Ideally, we would solve this problem using an instrumental variable, such as vehicle prices, that affects parents' brand choices but not their preferences. However, this strategy is severely under-powered in our setting.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we adopt the alternative strategy of studying systematic patterns in brand choice correlations that speak differentially to state dependence versus preference inheritance. In particular, Sub-section IV(iv) studies whether the observed choice correlations are stronger when households have a relatively high level of exposure to the choices of their parents. This systematic variation would be consistent with state dependence but not direct preference inheritance. Moreover, it serves as an additional opportunity to help rule out the possibility that the observed choice correlations are simply an artifact of correlated demographics between parents and children.

<sup>4</sup> Clearly, if the market share instrument discussed above fails to yield sufficient power, a price instrument will fail as well because price effects operate through market shares. Moreover, to the extent that price changes are driven by demand shocks, this instrument may not cleanly separate state dependence from preference inheritance.



Finally, we note that when we study correlations between children's and parents' purchases, it may be that the child is influencing the parent rather than the other way around. While some of our specifications will explicitly include child-to-parent (and, more broadly, relative-to-relative) transmission in the estimated correlations, for the most part we attempt to focus on parent-to-child preference transmission by studying cases in which the parents' purchase preceded their child's. These cases—particularly when we include lagged child's purchases in the regression in Section IV(iii)—isolate the transmission direction for the state dependence mechanism though not necessarily for the direct preference inheritance mechanism.

### III. DATA

Our data on vehicle ownership come from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). In 1968, the PSID surveyed a nationally representative sample of households, and since then it has asked them a battery of economic and demographic questions every year until 1997 and every two years thereafter. The PSID collects information on everyone who lives in a PSID household, but it also follows members of the original PSID sample households and their children whenever they join or create a new household. As a result, the survey now collects information on many households that are members of the same extended family.

The PSID began collecting information on vehicles in 1999. Respondents report the total number of vehicles that they own or lease and additional detailed information on up to three vehicles, including vehicle make, model, and vintage, as well as the date of purchase, purchase price, and whether the vehicle was a gift. These data are available from surveys conducted in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011. To the best of our knowledge, the PSID is unique in providing such information for families in the United States.

Our primary focus is on how parental vehicle brand choices correlate with the choices of their adult children. Accordingly, our baseline sample is limited to adult heads of household (or spouses) who purchase a car in the sample and for whom we can identify a parent who owned a vehicle prior to their child's vehicle purchase. We identify 4,338 unique adult children matched to 2,587 unique parents. The difference between the number of parents and children is due to the fact that there are many siblings in our sample.<sup>5</sup>

Table I shows sample means for both children and parents in this sample. Adult children are on average 36 years old, whereas parents are 59. Adult children have higher household income, one more year of education (13.5

<sup>5</sup> In our analysis, we cluster standard errors on the original 1968 PSID family in all regressions to allow for correlated errors across relatives.

TABLE I  
VARIABLE MEANS AND SAMPLE SIZES IN PSID

	Adult children	Parents
Age (years)	36.0	59.4
Years of education	13.5	12.5
Annual family income (\$)	78,758	61,171
Number of people in household	3.1	2.3
Number of vehicles owned	2.3	2.1
Number of unique individuals	4,388	2,587
		Matched Pairs
Number of unique child vehicle choices matched to parent choice		16,054
Total number of parent to child vehicle matches		17,268

as opposed to 12.5), and larger household sizes, which accords with the likelihood that they have young children that are still living at home. We observe 16,054 unique vehicle purchases by these 4,388 adult children. Excluded from this sample are vehicles that were received as gifts and vehicles that are likely to have been within-family cross-household sales.<sup>6</sup> In cases where parents are separated, but both are present in the PSID and both have a prior vehicle purchase available, we match the child's vehicle choice with data from both parents.<sup>7</sup> There are 1,214 such cases, which gives us 17,268 parent-child vehicle pairs in our main estimation sample.

#### IV. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF INTERGENERATIONAL BRAND PREFERENCE TRANSMISSION

In this section, we develop and estimate a linear probability model (LPM) of the relationship between brand choices of children and the choices of their parents, as well as other covariates. We employ an LPM rather than a structural discrete choice model because it is more forgiving of the extensive geographic and time fixed effects that we use in our estimation, though this comes at the cost of not being able to interpret our coefficient estimates as parameters of a utility function.

To operationalize our brand choice data in the LPM framework, we first categorize all vehicle choices as being one of seven 'brands:' GM, Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, other Asian, and European. Grouping smaller

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, we drop a child's vehicle purchase if the parent household owned the same make, model, and model-year in the previous survey wave and subsequently no longer owns the vehicle following the child's purchase.

<sup>7</sup> In these cases we weight each vehicle-parent pair by half so that choices that appear twice in our data are weighted equally to those that appear once. The results are quite similar when we limit our analysis to only the purchases of the mothers of adult children, regardless of whether they live with the children's father.

Asian automakers and European manufacturers together ensures that each brand is chosen frequently enough to yield meaningful estimates in a linear probability framework (these brand definitions imply that all choice probabilities lie in the 4%–33% range in the raw data).<sup>8</sup>

We build a linear probability model with multiple choice possibilities by stacking a set of binary linear probability models for each of our seven brands. To motivate our approach, we first consider a linear probability model for a single brand. Our hypothesis is that parental ownership of a given brand will make a child more likely to choose that brand. For example, to test this hypothesis for Ford we could run a linear probability model in which the dependent variable is coded as one if the child was observed to choose a Ford. In addition to controls for the child's demographics and parents' demographics, our regressor of interest would be a dummy variable for the parents' brand choice, which could be coded as 1 if the parents' most recent vehicle purchased prior to the child's purchase was a Ford. The one-brand estimation equation would be:

$$(2) \quad Ford_{ift} = \gamma \cdot Ford_{pft} + \mathbf{X}_{ift}' \beta + \mathbf{X}_{pft}' \delta + \alpha_t + \varepsilon_{ift},$$

where  $Ford_{ift}$  is coded as 1 if child  $i$  of family  $f$  at time  $t$  chose a Ford,  $Ford_{pft}$  is coded as 1 if parent  $p$ 's most recent choice before  $t$  was a Ford,  $\alpha_t$  is a period-specific constant to capture Ford's average market share in each period,  $\mathbf{X}_{ift}$  are the child's observable demographic characteristics, and  $\mathbf{X}_{pft}$  are those of the parents. In this regression of 'Ford against the field,' all observations in our data are included.

Instead of running seven separate one-brand linear probability models, we stack them and run pooled OLS. For each of our seven brands, we create an observation for each observed choice situation (each car purchase) in which the dependent variable is coded as 1 if the brand is chosen and zero otherwise. We do this for all seven brands and stack the data, which generates a final data set that has seven times the number of observations as our original data set that included one observation per choice.<sup>9</sup> The primary independent variable of interest is whether the parents' most

<sup>8</sup> In order to test whether the correlation across generations is coming from a correlated preference for brand (e.g., Ford) or sub-brand (e.g., Ford, Lincoln, or Mercury), we have run subsets of our regressions with 41 sub-brands instead of the 7 brands, interacting our control variables with all 41 sub-brands. In general, we find that both the overall brand and the sub-brand of the parent have a statistically significant correlation with the sub-brand chosen by the adult child.

<sup>9</sup> Our procedure can also be described as expanding each observed choice as follows. For each vehicle purchase by every individual in our data, we expand the original data sample to include seven lines of data. The first is for the brand that was chosen by the individual, and this line has the dependent variable coded as one. The other six are observations with a zero dependent variable, one for each of the six brands not chosen.

recent purchase was of the given brand, although we explore alternative specifications below.<sup>10</sup>

We interact all of our regressors with brand dummies, thereby allowing observed demographic and geographic factors to affect the choice probability of each brand differently. Thus, all covariates are denoted with a  $j$  subscript or interacted with a coefficient vector of length  $j$ . The one restriction that we impose is that the effect of the parents' past brand choice is common across brands.<sup>11</sup> Thus, instead of seven dummy variables for parental brands, there is only one dummy variable coded as 1 when the most recent parental choice matches the brand represented in the corresponding row of data for the child. For each child's purchase, exactly 1 of 7 observations will have the parental dummy variable coded as 1.<sup>12</sup>

This leads us to the following estimation equation:

$$(3) \quad b_{ifjt} = \gamma \cdot 1(b_{pft} = b_{ifjt}) + \mathbf{X}_{ift}' \beta_j + \mathbf{X}_{pft}' \delta_j + \alpha_{jt} + \varepsilon_{ifjt},$$

where the dependent variable,  $b_{ifjt}$ , is a dummy coded as 1 if child  $i$  of family  $f$  chose brand  $j$  in choice  $t$ . The independent variable of primary interest is a dummy variable that indicates whether the parents' most recent prior purchase is of that same brand:  $1(b_{pft} = b_{ifjt})$ .

Our hypothesis is that the  $\gamma$  coefficient will be positive; that is, children are more likely to purchase a given brand if their parents have purchased that brand in the recent past. We control for both child characteristics  $X_{ift}$  and parents' characteristics  $X_{pft}$ , which enter with brand-specific coefficient vectors,  $\beta_j$  and  $\delta_j$ , that we estimate by interacting child and parent characteristics with brand dummies. Finally, we allow for brand-by-month of purchase fixed effects,  $\alpha_{jt}$  to capture overall market shares, leaving  $\varepsilon_{ifjt}$  as the error term.

<sup>10</sup> In Section IV(iii) below, we include additional lags of the parents' choices. In Section IV(iv), we expand the dataset so that each child's purchase is matched to all of the parents' prior purchases, not just the most recent purchase. We have also experimented with an independent variable measuring the share of parents' vehicles from a specific brand, as well as with matching child and parent vehicles one-to-one based on the order in which the vehicles are listed in the survey. In all cases, our qualitative results are quite similar.

<sup>11</sup> By using the linear probability model, we do not impose a restriction that predicted values must be between zero and one, nor do we require that the sum of the predicted values across the seven brands must equal one for each choice situation. We have checked our predicted values for our baseline specifications, and we find that the vast majority of predicted values are between zero and one, and those that deviate are very small negative numbers. Similarly, the sum of the predicted values across the seven brands for each choice situation are tightly distributed around 1.

<sup>12</sup> Year of purchase is recorded for all but a handful of very old cars, which we dropped. Month of purchase is missing for 37% of all child and 31% of all parent purchases, however, including all purchases in the 2009 and 2011 waves. In establishing whether a parent's vehicle was purchased before a child's vehicle, we treat these observations conservatively by coding parent purchase months as December and child purchase months as January.

This setup expands each observed brand choice into seven observations. Thus, our final dataset has a grouped structure with seven observations per brand choice, multiple brand choices per child, and multiple children per nuclear and extended family. The randomized cross-sectional sampling of the original 1968 PSID families implies that our model's errors are independent across extended families, but we need to worry about potential dependence within families. Thus, we cluster all standard error calculations at the level of the 1968 PSID family. This clustering prevents our expansion to seven lines of data for each brand choice from unduly shrinking the standard errors. In addition, clustering in this way ensures that our standard errors are fully robust to the mechanical correlation in the residuals between the seven observations that represent a single choice (e.g., since a child that chooses a Ford by definition does not choose a GM), the correlation in each individual's brand choices across choice situations, and the correlation across siblings, cousins, and other extended family members. We also weight each observation using PSID-provided sampling weights so that the original PSID households on which our sample is based can be interpreted as representing the U.S. population at the time of the original survey.

We do not allow for an outside good, which would be interpreted as the option to not purchase a vehicle at all. Inclusion of an outside good is standard in discrete choice modeling, but here we are interested in knowing whether or not a child, conditional on purchasing a vehicle, decides to buy a brand that is the same as the one owned by members of his or her family. Inclusion of an outside good would conflate correlations in choice that determine whether or not individuals purchase vehicles with correlations in the brand chosen when purchasing a vehicle, which are distinct phenomena.

#### IV(i). *Baseline Results*

We begin by showing simple correlations in order to demonstrate the strength of the intra-family relationship and then demonstrate how the correlation is affected by various controls. We focus here and in Section IV(ii) on separating intergenerational brand preference transmission from choice correlation driven by demographic or geographic factors. Section IV(iii) then studies whether the choice correlations are caused by short-run or long-run mechanisms, and in Section IV(iv) we attempt to distinguish between the intergenerational state dependence and direct brand preference inheritance mechanisms.

Table II presents coefficient estimates of  $\gamma$  from equation 3, which regresses the brand chosen by the child on a dummy for whether or not the parents' most recent purchase is the same brand. The estimate in column 1, which includes only month-of-purchase by brand fixed effects that control

TABLE II  
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BRAND CHOICE AND PARENTS' BRAND CHOICE

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Child's Brand						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Parents' brand = child's brand	0.096 (0.008)	0.088 (0.008)	0.077 (0.007)	0.075 (0.007)	0.056 (0.007)	0.050 (0.012)	0.038 (0.013)
Month of purchase fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's state fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' state fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's county fixed effects	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's census tract fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Number of choices	17,268	17,268	17,268	17,268	17,268	6,937	6,937
R <sup>2</sup>	0.085	0.096	0.113	0.119	0.216	0.280	0.416

*Notes:* Standard errors clustered by 1968 PSID family are in parentheses. Each column is a linear probability model where each individual-year-vehicle choice enters the data 7 times, once for each brand (GM, Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, other Asian, and European). Child's and parents' demographics include age, education, income, gender, number of children in household, and family size. All control variables are interacted with 7 dummies, one for each brand. Columns 6 and 7 limit the sample to households living in census tracts that contain more than one PSID family.

for the overall share of each brand during each period, indicates that a child is 9.6 percentage points more likely to choose the brand that her parents chose. There are seven brands in our choice set, so the probability that the average brand is selected is 0.143. Thus, our estimate implies that a child whose parents chose a particular brand is 67% more likely to choose that brand than another child whose parents chose differently.<sup>13</sup>

This is a remarkably strong relationship, but it may reflect not only the intergenerational transmission of brand preference that we are interested in, but also familial correlations in demographic and location-specific factors that cause related households to demand similar attributes in vehicles, in turn causing a correlation in brand choice.

As a first step toward addressing this issue, we introduce progressively richer controls in columns 2 through 7 of Table II and examine how the coefficient estimates change. In column 2 we add demographic controls (including family income, age, sex, education, number of kids in the household, and household size) for the child's household and the parents' household.<sup>14</sup> The addition of these controls lowers the estimated coefficient from

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned above, we have also experimented with the same specification using 41 sub-brands (e.g., Ford, Lincoln and Mercury instead of just Ford) and find that both the overall brand and the sub-brand of parents are correlated with the child's sub-brand choice.

<sup>14</sup> Each of these characteristics is interacted with a dummy for each brand, which is a flexible analog to the traditional approach in the automobile demand literature of interacting vehicle attributes with buyer characteristics. We additionally experimented with a large assortment of additional financial controls from the PSID, such as amounts spent on vacations, eating out, health insurance, clothes, and a variety of other expenditures and found that these did not affect the estimates substantially.

0.096 to 0.088. While the modest impact of these controls on the estimated coefficient is encouraging, the regression's  $R^2$  also changes only slightly, from 0.085 to 0.096. Following the logic of Altonji *et al.* [2005], the fact that this modest increase in explained variation yields a measurable drop in the estimated coefficient raises the possibility that, if unobserved demographic factors that affect children's brand choices are as correlated with parents' choices as are the observed demographic factors, then these unobservables may explain much of the observed brand choice correlation. We further address this issue in Section IV(ii) where we focus on two brands—Ford and GM—that have very similar attributes so that choices between them are therefore unlikely to be affected by correlated demographic factors.

The remaining columns of Table II address common geographic factors that might lead to choice correlation. Column 3 adds state-by-brand fixed effects, which control for differences in market shares and location-specific factors that vary by state. Column 4 adds analogous fixed effects for parents. These fixed effects cause the estimated coefficient to fall from 0.088 to 0.075.

Geographic factors, such as dealer location, local prices, weather and terrain, may vary significantly within some states. In column 5 we add county-by-brand fixed effects for the child's county of residence, which is intuitively a small enough geographic area to control for most omitted factors that we have in mind. County fixed effects lower the point estimate to 0.056, which is approximately 58% of the magnitude of the raw correlation and still highly significant, both statistically and economically. This estimate implies that parental ownership boosts the conditional probability that a child buys a given brand by 39%.

We interpret the difference across columns in the estimated effects as evidence that some location-specific factors are both important in determining brand choice and correlated across family members (who tend to live in similar places). Weather, terrain, urbanization and culture are important determinants of the demand for attributes, which are different on average across brands. Even conditional on demand, there may be a different availability of brands across geographic areas due to the location of dealerships. In our view, most of these differences should be captured by county-level fixed effects, so column 5 is our preferred specification.

Nonetheless, we can push further and include fixed effects for each census tract (a unit of approximately 2,500 to 8,000 people) in the sample to address very fine-scale local factors (local repair shops, for example). We are able to include these fixed effects because the original PSID sample design drew stratified samples from particular geographic areas. The legacy of that original sample design is that PSID households are still more geographically clustered than would be the case for a random sample of households. That said, a large number of census tracts in our sample hold only one PSID family, so to use census tract fixed effects we must first

restrict the sample to tracts in which we observe multiple families.<sup>15</sup> Column 6 re-estimates the model with county level fixed effects on this subsample, and column 7 estimates a model with census tract fixed effects. Even when including these effects, our coefficient of interest is economically and statistically significant. The census tract fixed effects are powerful, increasing the  $R^2$  from 0.280 to 0.416 and further lowering the point estimate between columns 6 and 7 (though the coefficients are still comfortably within each other's confidence intervals).<sup>16</sup> Even with these very fine geographic controls, the point estimate suggests that parental ownership increases the conditional probability that a child purchases a particular brand by nearly 27%.

Our baseline regressions focus on parental choices determining child choices, which we believe to be the strongest intrafamily channel of brand preference transmission. We can, however, configure our data to examine the relationship that prior purchases by any family member have to subsequent choices by their relatives. To do so, we take every vehicle choice observed in the data and match it to the most recent purchase made by every other related household in the dataset (including parents, children, siblings, cousins, etc.). We then include all of these bilateral relationships in one regression, down-weighting vehicles that are matched to multiple family members' vehicles so that they have equal influence on the estimate as those that have only one match. This alternative construction expands our sample size considerably and delivers more precise, but modestly smaller effects. For example, the all-family matched analog of column 1 from Table II produces a coefficient (standard error) estimate of 0.068 (0.005), and the county fixed effects analog to column 5 produces an estimate of 0.030 (0.004). These results are consistent with our intuition that parent-to-child influences are particularly strong, but it also suggests that broader family network effects have influence.

#### IV(ii). *Estimates Limited to Similar Brands*

The principal concern with our baseline regressions is that demographic or location-specific characteristics of children and parents will be correlated and that these characteristics drive demand for vehicle attributes that are correlated with brand. While we believe that controlling for county and census tract fixed effects adequately addresses location-specific

<sup>15</sup> If we do not restrict the sample in this way, the main coefficient is then primarily identified from within-family variation in brand choice over time rather than cross-family variation. This identifying variation largely excludes long-term effects from the estimate so that it cannot be compared to the estimates in columns 1 through 5 (see Section IV(iii) for a fuller discussion of long-run versus short-run effects).

<sup>16</sup> When we restrict our attention to similar brands in Section IV(ii), this decrease in the point estimate is substantially mitigated.



confounders, the possibility remains that our estimates are contaminated by demographic confounders, even after controlling for observables. For example, individuals who work in construction occupations may be more likely to have children who work in construction, and both the parents and children may therefore prefer light trucks to passenger cars. Because GM's fleet is more heavily tilted toward light trucks than is Honda's, both the parents and children will then be more likely to buy a GM, even in the absence of any brand preference transmission.

Here, we address this issue by isolating the choice set to two brands that are very similar: Ford and GM. Ford and GM are both full-line, U.S.-based automakers that compete directly in every vehicle segment.<sup>17</sup> Because their vehicle lineups are so similar, conditional on local supply, we expect that random, idiosyncratic variation will largely drive the choice between Ford and GM in the absence of brand preference. We therefore anticipate that intrafamily brand choice correlations would be quite weak in the absence of intrafamily brand preference transmission when we limit our sample to children who choose either a Ford or a GM. That is, the unobserved demographic variables that are likely to be correlated between parents and children are unlikely to drive the choice between these two brands.

Table III repeats the specifications in Table II for a subset of choices limited to Ford and GM. Specifically, we keep all instances in which a child chose either a Ford or GM, which accounts for about 54% of our original sample.<sup>18</sup> As in the full sample, the results are all positive, statistically significant, and economically large, corroborating our baseline results and casting doubt on the possibility that the correlation in brand choice across households is due entirely to demographic confounders. Notably, the estimated coefficient hardly changes going from column 1 to column 2 (it actually increases slightly) as the demographic controls are added, which was not the case in the 'all brands' specification from Table II. This result comports with the intuition that demographic factors are unlikely to influence the choice between Ford and GM. Moreover, if our 'headline' demographic variables are not correlated with the choice between Ford and GM, it seems unlikely that unobserved factors would be correlated either. It is also worthwhile to note that when the county fixed effects are replaced with

<sup>17</sup> Popular perception holds that Ford and GM are similar brands. We have confirmed this empirically using a measure of 'distance' between brands that borrows from Langer and Miller [2013], who calculate the distance between pairs of vehicles in attribute space based on vehicle segment, price, number of passengers, wheelbase, fuel economy, and horsepower for GM, Ford, Toyota and Chrysler. Using their metric, we have confirmed that Ford and GM vehicles are on average substantially closer to each other than they are to Toyota or Chrysler.

<sup>18</sup> We do not restrict the sample based on whether the parents chose Ford or GM. We do, however, add an additional control variable for whether the parents' choice was one of these two brands. This control helps ensure that the sum of the child's choice probabilities for the two brands is close to one.

TABLE III  
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BRAND CHOICE AND PARENTS' BRAND CHOICE AMONG  
THOSE OWNING A FORD OR GM

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Child's Brand						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Parents' brand = child's brand	0.135 (0.021)	0.137 (0.021)	0.115 (0.019)	0.111 (0.019)	0.084 (0.019)	0.070 (0.030)	0.065 (0.034)
Month of purchase fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's state fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' state fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's county fixed effects	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's census tract fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Number of choices	9,355	9,355	9,355	9,355	9,355	3,587	3,587
R <sup>2</sup>	0.074	0.076	0.100	0.113	0.268	0.307	0.452

Notes: Standard errors clustered by 1968 PSID family are in parentheses. Sample is limited to the cases where the child chose Ford or GM. Each column is a linear probability model where each individual-year-vehicle choice enters the data 7 times, once for each brand (GM, Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, other Asian, and European). Child's and parents' demographics include age, education, income, gender, number of children in household, and family size. All control variables are interacted with 7 dummies, one for each brand. Columns 6 and 7 limit the sample to households living in census tracts that contain more than one PSID family.

census tract fixed effects going from column 6 to column 7, the estimated coefficient hardly changes despite a substantial increase in  $R^2$ , suggesting that county-level effects are sufficient to control for local factors affecting brand choice.<sup>19</sup>

The magnitudes of the coefficients are somewhat larger in the subsample in Table III than in the full sample in Table II. Nonetheless, parents' brand choice has a slightly smaller percentage effect on child's choice probabilities in the restricted sample because the baseline choice probabilities are higher. In the full sample, the market share for Ford is 22%, while that for GM is 33%. In the subsample, the corresponding figures are 39% for Ford and 61% for GM. Thus, the coefficient of 0.084 in column 5 of Table III (the county fixed effect specification in the restricted sample) implies that a child whose parents' most recent prior purchase was the same brand boosts the probability of purchase by 22% for Ford and 14% for GM, whereas the analogous coefficient in Table II (the full sample) represents a 25% effect for Ford and 17% for GM. This difference is intuitive given that Ford and GM are generally close substitutes.

Toyota and Honda are also similar brands. They both produce a full range of sedans and fuel efficient SUV's, though Honda produces only a

<sup>19</sup> As an additional test for local confounders, we have estimated the Ford/GM specification using a subsample in which the child lives in a different state than the parents (including demographics and state fixed effects in the specification, for both child and parent). The point estimate of  $\gamma$  from this subsample is 0.139, which is actually larger than the estimate of 0.111 from column 4 of Table III.

TABLE IV  
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BRAND CHOICE AND PARENTS' BRAND CHOICE AMONG  
THOSE OWNING A HONDA OR TOYOTA

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Child's Brand						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Parents' brand = child's brand	0.228 (0.066)	0.233 (0.066)	0.265 (0.063)	0.269 (0.065)	0.314 (0.071)	0.500 (0.353)	0.549 (0.511)
Month of purchase fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's state fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' state fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's county fixed effects	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's census tract fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Number of choices	2,327	2,327	2,327	2,327	2,327	352	352
R <sup>2</sup>	0.116	0.126	0.160	0.200	0.469	0.826	0.909

Notes: Standard errors clustered by 1968 PSID family are in parentheses. Sample is limited to the cases where the child chose Honda or Toyota. Each column is a linear probability model where each individual-year-vehicle choice enters the data 7 times, once for each brand (GM, Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, other Asian, and European). Child's and parents' demographics include age, education, income, gender, number of children in household, and family size. All control variables are interacted with 7 dummies, one for each brand. Columns 6 and 7 limit the sample to households living in census tracts that contain more than one PSID family.

limited set of pickup trucks. Table IV shows results from the same set of specifications for the sample of observations limited to children who purchased either a Honda or a Toyota, excluding all pickup trucks. The estimated effects in this subsample are even larger; the county fixed effects specification in column 5 (our preferred specification) indicates that having a parent who owns a Honda or Toyota increases the probability that a child chooses that brand by 63%.<sup>20</sup> Honda and Toyota have a smaller market share than Ford and GM, which leaves us with a smaller sample size and larger standard errors. Nevertheless, our estimates are statistically significant at any conventional level except when we limit the sample to those who live in a census tract common to another PSID family in our sample (columns 6 and 7), at which point we lose power.

#### IV(iii). *Long-Run versus Short-Run Effects*

In this section, we examine the extent to which the brand choice correlations documented above are driven by long-run or short-run brand preference transmission. Both long-run and short-run transmission could be associated with the intergenerational state dependence mechanism or the direct preference inheritance mechanism. For instance, long-run transmission could derive from early childhood experience with a brand

<sup>20</sup> A 31.4 percentage point increase on an average market share of 50% is a 63% increase.

or from parents' repeated statements to a child that they believe one brand to be better or more reliable than another. Short-run transmission could come from information about parents' recent purchases or from parent-child discussions about recent reviews or advertisements for a particular brand.

We begin by studying how children's brand choices correlate with multiple previous choices of their parents, including both the most recent choices as well as earlier choices. To do so, we augment our baseline regression with indicator variables for whether the brand of each child's purchase matches the brand of the parents' lagged purchases.<sup>21</sup>

Ideally, we would like to use parents' complete life history of vehicle ownership to test how vehicles owned at different points in their children's lives influenced the children's subsequent choices. Unfortunately, we are limited to seven waves of data, which leaves us with relatively few car purchases for most families and a complete history for none. Thus, we are only able estimate and compare how children's brand choices correlate with the most recent versus somewhat less recent choices of their parents. If children's brand choices correlate more strongly with their parents' most recent choices, then short-run preference transmission is likely important. If less recent parent choices still have predictive power conditional on recent parent choices, then longer-run preference transmission is also likely important.<sup>22</sup>

When we add parents' lagged brand choices to the regression, we also add indicators for the children's own lagged brand choices. We do so for two reasons. First, in the presence of within-household state dependence, the lagged choices of a parent may continue to influence a child's current choice indirectly via the child's earlier brand purchase. Thus, to test whether lagged parent purchases have a direct long-run influence on child choices, we must control for the child's lagged purchases.

Second, these lags help, in part, to identify parent-to-child transmission separately from child-to-parent transmission. In particular, children's choices might have a short-run influence on the preferences of their parents—the state dependence mechanism from child to parent. If so, then this correlation could propagate via within-household state dependence to generate a longer-term correlation between recent child choices and lagged parent choices. Conditioning directly on the lagged choices of children

<sup>21</sup> Observations of lagged purchases are not available for all child's purchases. Rather than drop observations that are missing lags, we also include in our regressions interactions between the brand dummies and indicator variables (one for each lag in the regression) that equal one if the lag is missing.

<sup>22</sup> For reference, the average time elapsed between the child's purchase and the parents' lagged and second lagged purchases are 40 months and 65 months, respectively. Thus, even our limited specification is suggestive of effects that take place over several years.

TABLE V  
LONG-RUN AND SHORT-RUN CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BRAND CHOICE AND  
PARENTS' BRAND CHOICE

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Child's Brand					
	All brands			Ford and GM only		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parents' brand = child's brand	0.056 (0.007)	0.042 (0.006)	0.040 (0.006)	0.084 (0.019)	0.059 (0.017)	0.058 (0.016)
Lagged parents' brand = child's brand		0.044 (0.007)	0.040 (0.007)		0.080 (0.020)	0.075 (0.020)
2nd lagged parents' brand = child's brand			0.018 (0.008)			0.013 (0.024)
Lagged child's brand = child's brand		0.131 (0.007)	0.124 (0.007)		0.225 (0.020)	0.214 (0.019)
2nd lagged child's brand = child's brand			0.068 (0.007)			0.092 (0.023)
Month of purchase fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's state fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' state fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's county fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's census tract fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	No
Number of choices	17,268	17,268	17,268	9,355	9,355	9,355
R <sup>2</sup>	0.216	0.229	0.232	0.268	0.293	0.297

Notes: Standard errors clustered by 1968 PSID family are in parentheses. Each column is a linear probability model where each individual-year-vehicle choice enters once for each brand. Child's and parents' demographics include age, education, income, gender, number of children in household, and family size. All control variables are interacted with dummies for each brand.

helps protect against this concern.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, these lags do not address the possibility that children might influence their parents through the direct preference inheritance mechanism. For instance, a child might tell her parents about a recent blog post arguing that Fords are a great buy, leading both the parents and then the child to buy a Ford. In this case, child and parent choices will be correlated, even controlling for the child's lagged purchases.<sup>24</sup>

Table V reports linear probability model regressions that include indicators for parents' and children's lagged purchases. All regressions use our preferred specification with demographic controls and county fixed effects. Columns 1 through 3 use all seven brands and include, progressively, zero,

<sup>23</sup> Of course, child-to-parent state dependence could arise from more distant child's purchases than the second lag. We have also estimated specifications that include third and fourth lags of children's purchases and found that doing so has only a minor effect on the estimated coefficients. For instance, adding third and fourth own-lags to specification (3) of Table V below reduces the coefficient on the indicator for parents' brand = child's brand from 0.040 to only 0.038.

<sup>24</sup> We focus here on short-run preference transmission, since it seems unlikely that young children still living with their parents would be able to influence the longer-run brand preferences of their parents in this way.

one, and two lags of both the parents' and children's purchases; columns 4 through 6 repeat these specifications for the Ford and GM subsample. The results show little difference between the estimated coefficients on the parents' most recent and lagged choice. In the Ford and GM subsample, the lagged coefficient is actually larger than the most recent coefficient, though the two are not statistically distinct ( $p = 0.527$  in column 6). Parents own 2.1 vehicles on average (see table I), so the similarity of the most recent and first lagged brand choice of parents may reflect the fact that the two most recent purchases on average represent the parents' current fleet. The estimated coefficients on the parents' second lag are, however, substantially smaller than those on the parents' most recent purchase. This difference is statistically significant ( $p = 0.031$ ) for the all brands sample and marginally significant ( $p = 0.116$ ) for the Ford/GM subsample. The estimated coefficients on the parents' second lagged choices themselves are positive (and statistically significant in the all brands sample). Overall, these results suggest that both short-run and long-run preference transmission are at work.<sup>25</sup>

We next attempt to isolate the short-run mechanism by examining regression models that include a fixed effect for each child household. These fixed effects account for any household-level permanent brand preference so that the only source of identification comes from changes in parents' brand choices over time. For these regressions, we revert to our original specification that includes only the parents' most recent brand choice.

Results from the household fixed effects specification are given in Table VI, in which all columns include demographic controls. Column 1 includes all seven brands, while column 2 uses only the Ford and GM subsample to guard against time-varying unobservable demographic factors that may be correlated between child and parent. In both of these specifications, the estimated coefficient of interest is positive but statistically insignificant. To improve the estimates' precision, we expand the sample to include all bilateral relationships that are available in the data (that is, including siblings, uncles, cousins, etc. as discussed at the end of Section IV(i) above). When we use this expanded sample, the estimated correlation between children's choices and relatives' choices is positive and statistically

<sup>25</sup> We are limited in how many lags we can include by data availability. Another approach is to proxy for the parents' past purchases by including directly the market share of each brand in the parents' geographic region further back in time. We do not, however, have market share data at the subnational level for most years. We can construct market shares for 1990 at the level of the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) using the National Household Transportation Survey. When we include the 1990 market share of the brand in the parents' MSA as an additional control variable, we find that these market shares are positively correlated with child choice, but statistically imprecise.

TABLE VI  
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BRAND CHOICE AND RELATIVE'S BRAND CHOICE,  
INCLUDING HOUSEHOLD FIXED EFFECTS

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Child's Brand			
	Match to parents only		Match to all relatives	
	All brands (1)	Ford and GM (2)	All brands (3)	Ford and GM (4)
Relative's brand = child's brand	0.007 (0.009)	0.038 (0.028)	0.006 (0.002)	0.020 (0.007)
Month of purchase fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Relative's demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's state fixed effects	No	No	No	No
Relative's state fixed effects	No	No	No	No
Child's county fixed effects	No	No	No	No
Child's census tract fixed effects	No	No	No	No
Number of choices	17,268	9,355	126,893	71,775
R <sup>2</sup>	0.462	0.591	0.477	0.593

Notes: Standard errors clustered by 1968 PSID family are in parentheses. Each column is a linear probability model where each individual-year-vehicle choice enters once for each brand (GM, Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, other Asian, and European). Child's and Relative's demographics include age, education, income, gender, number of children in household, and family size. All control variables are interacted with dummies for each brand.

significant, as shown in columns 3 and 4 of Table VI.<sup>26</sup> While the magnitudes of these coefficients are small relative to those obtained without household fixed effects (the corresponding point estimates are 0.062 for column 3 and 0.102 for column 4, still using the 'all relatives' sample), they nonetheless provide evidence that brand preference transmission has a short-run component and is not entirely driven by childhood experiences.

IV(iv). *Tests for Intergenerational State Dependence*

In this section, we explore the extent to which we can distinguish intergenerational state dependence from direct preference inheritance. To do so, we use variation in the exposure of children to their parents' vehicles, under the logic that an increase in exposure should strengthen the state dependence mechanism but not the direct preference inheritance mechanism. Specifically, we study whether children are more strongly influenced by vehicles that their parents owned while they still lived with their parents, under the presumption that children were more likely to have direct exposure to such vehicles.

<sup>26</sup> We have also run the column 4 specification while including county fixed effects to account for households that move during the sample. The results are robust to these fixed effects: the estimated coefficient and standard error are 0.016 and 0.006, respectively. We have not run the column 3 specification with county fixed effects due to computer memory constraints.

For this analysis, we expand the sample by matching each child's choice to all observed choices by their parents that precede the child's choice, not just to the parents' most recent purchase. Thus, for each vehicle that a child purchased, there may be multiple observations in the regression sample, one for each parent purchase.<sup>27</sup> For each matched child and parent purchase, we then identify whether the parents' purchase was made while the child was still living in the parents' household. There are 16,115 such 'child at home' purchases made by parents in the data, out of 58,420 total parent purchases. On average, the children in this subsample are 16.9 years old while living at home when their parents buy a vehicle (standard deviation = 5.5 years) and 26.0 years old when they buy their own vehicle after having moved out (standard deviation = 4.6 years). The average age at which children matched to 'at home' cars move out of their parents' home is approximately 22.4 years old.<sup>28</sup>

Our primary variable of interest is an interaction between the indicator for whether the parents' brand choice matches the child's brand choice with an indicator for whether the parents' purchase occurred while the child was still at home. Our idea is that children will have had more exposure to a car that their parents owned if they lived with their parents during the ownership period. This interacted variable may also be capturing age effects, however, because children are on average younger during the time in which they live with their parents. If children are more impressionable while they are young, then our interaction term may be positive because of a correlation with age. We address this possibility by allowing the relationship between the parents' brand choice and the child's brand choice to vary flexibly with the child's age at the time of the parents' purchase. Age effects may be nonlinear, so we include interactions between whether the parents' brand choice matches the child's brand choice and polynomials up to a cubic in the child's age. Finally, our regression specification also accounts for decay in brand preference transmission over time by controlling for the length of time between the child's and parents' purchases (interacted with the child's brand = parents' brand indicator).

<sup>27</sup> To be clear, we do not add parents' past brand choices as lagged regressors, as we did in Section IV(iii) above. Instead, we create a separate observation for each child-parent match. We do so for two reasons. First, the number of available parent purchases varies substantially across child households. Second, this approach eases the interpretation of the interacted regressors discussed below. We re-weight the observations in this expanded sample such that every case of a child's vehicle choice receives equal weight, regardless of how many parent vehicles it was matched to; we then apply the PSID sampling weights. As before, we ultimately expand this sample according to the number of brands in our linear probability model framework.

<sup>28</sup> We do not know the exact date at which children moved out; we only know the survey date at which each child is observed in his/her own household. The average age at this observation is 23.4; we subtract one year under the assumption that move-out dates are uniformly distributed across the two years between surveys.



TABLE VII  
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CHILD'S BRAND CHOICE AND PARENTS' BRAND CHOICE  
INTERACTED WITH WHETHER CHILD WAS LIVING WITH PARENTS

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Child's Brand					
	All brands			Ford and GM only		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parents' brand = child's brand	0.0316 (0.0152)	0.0364 (0.0228)	0.0535 (0.0259)	0.0191 (0.0390)	-0.0342 (0.0727)	-0.0285 (0.0799)
(Parents' brand = child's brand) × child at home	0.0144 (0.0118)	0.0138 (0.0114)	0.0148 (0.0114)	0.0608 (0.0299)	0.0683 (0.0300)	0.0687 (0.0310)
(Parents' brand = child's brand) × child's age at purchase	4.52e-04 (4.86e-04)	1.05e-04 (1.52e-03)	-2.44e-03 (2.79e-03)	0.00144 (0.00130)	0.00540 (0.00507)	0.00453 (0.00907)
(Parents' brand = child's brand) × (child's age at purchase) <sup>2</sup>		5.69e-06 (2.64e-05)	1.08e-04 (1.09e-04)		-6.60e-05 (8.65e-05)	-3.05e-05 (3.67e-04)
(Parents' brand = child's brand) × (child's age at purchase) <sup>3</sup>			-1.20e-06 (1.34e-06)			-4.21e-07 (4.62e-06)
(Parents' brand = child's brand) × months since purchase	-2.94e-06 (2.98e-06)	-3.03e-06 (3.04e-06)	-3.39e-06 (3.31e-06)	-2.80e-06 (5.29e-06)	-1.79e-06 (5.06e-06)	-1.90e-06 (4.80e-06)
Month of purchase fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's state fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents' state fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's county fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Child's census tract fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	No
Number of choice pairs	58,420	58,420	58,420	31,078	31,078	31,078
R <sup>2</sup>	0.216	0.216	0.216	0.265	0.265	0.265

Notes: Standard errors clustered by 1968 PSID family are in parentheses. Each column is a linear probability model where each individual-year-vehicle choice enters once for each brand. Child's and parents' demographics include age, education, income, gender, number of children in household, and family size. All control variables are interacted with dummies for each brand.

Table VII reports linear probability model regressions that add these interacted regressors in the expanded set of child-parent matched vehicles. We use our preferred specification with demographic controls and county fixed effects in all regressions. Columns 1 through 3 use all seven brands and include progressively richer polynomials in the child's age at the time of the parents' purchase; columns 4 through 6 repeat these specifications for the Ford and GM subsample. Our focus is on the interaction between the brand choices of parents and whether or not the child lived at home when the vehicle was purchased (the second variable in Table VII). The estimated coefficient on this interaction term is positive in all specifications and is statistically significant in all three columns of the Ford and GM subsample, providing evidence that at least some of the intergenerational brand choice correlation is being driven by state dependence. Overall, this result is robust to increasing the richness of the age-at-purchase polynomial, and the

polynomial coefficients themselves are consistent with intergenerational brand choice correlation being stronger for older children.<sup>29</sup> This age effect reflects the possibility that once they have moved out of the house, older children are more attuned to vehicle brands than younger children (perhaps due to budget constraints early in adult life). Finally, the interaction between the parents' brand choice dummy and the time elapsed between the parents' and child's purchases is negative (though insignificant) in all specifications. This last result suggests that the influence of the parents' choice on the child's choice decays over time, consistent with the findings from the lag models studied in Section IV(iii).<sup>30</sup>

#### V. IMPLICATIONS OF BRAND PREFERENCE TRANSMISSION FOR THE VEHICLE MARKET

What might intergenerational brand preference transmission imply for firms' strategies and market outcomes in the automobile industry? Some implications are closely related to established findings in the literature regarding within-household brand attachment. For example, Bronnenberg *et al.* [2012] shows that state dependence in brand choice will strengthen incumbent firms by increasing barriers to entry and limiting the speed with which market shares may change over time. It is intuitive to expect that intergenerational preference transmission will exacerbate these effects by tying young consumers—who would otherwise be unattached to a brand and therefore open toward new entrants or smaller firms—to their parents' preferred brand. This mechanism might be important for generating entry barriers and explaining persistent brand shares in the automobile market, which is characterized by relatively infrequent purchases and a high degree of product differentiation that is strongly correlated with consumer age. In the absence of intergenerational state dependence, we might expect new entrants to have relatively little difficulty in penetrating

<sup>29</sup> Omitting age effects entirely reduces the estimate of the coefficient of interest by roughly one-third. This result occurs because the 'at home' effect is conflated with the effect of purchases occurring at a young age.

<sup>30</sup> In investigating state dependence, we have also explored whether the intergenerational correlation in brand choice is weaker if the parents had a poor experience with a vehicle. To identify vehicles that were likely of poor quality, we used wholesale auction price data to estimate a depreciation rate for each vintage of each model and matched these depreciation rates to the parents' car choices. While our point estimates on the interaction of depreciation rates with parents' brand choice indicate that the intergenerational correlation is weaker for vehicles that proved to be of low quality, these regressions lack statistical power and we thus omit them from the paper. As an alternative approach, we simply interacted parents' brand choice with the length of time that the parents owned their vehicles; we imagine that parents would get rid of disappointing vehicles more quickly. While the intergenerational correlation is weaker for cars that parents held for shorter periods, this result does not necessarily indicate state dependence, for parents would also hold vehicles for shorter periods if the vehicles were a poor fit for the parents' underlying preferences.

the market for small, entry-level models targeted at young consumers by offering cars of similar price and quality as incumbents. Then, having built up their loyalty among this aging generation of consumers, such firms could more easily enter the market for larger, upscale models. In the presence of intergenerational preference transmission, however, new entrants will be forced to offer lower prices and higher quality for cars targeted at young consumers, which will act as a strong barrier to entry.

Our findings also relate to the literature on switching costs, which focuses on how state dependence in consumers' brand choices affects firms' profits in equilibrium (Klemperer [1987], Dubé *et al.* [2009], Somaini and Einav [2013]). Incorporating intergenerational state dependence into traditional switching cost models yields distinct implications in settings like the automobile industry in which firms offer multiple products targeted at consumers of different ages. To see the intuition, consider a simple overlapping generations model in which every consumer lives for two periods, buys two cars during his or her lifetime—one entry-level model while young and one upscale model while old—and has a child while old that becomes a young consumer in the next period. If consumers have state dependent brand preferences and do not pass these preferences on to their children, then this model resembles the one analyzed in Klemperer [1987], which establishes that firms will lower prices for young consumers to 'invest' in brand loyalty and then 'harvest' that loyalty among older consumers by charging higher prices.

Intergenerational state dependence disrupts this logic. When consumers inherit a preference for the car their parents chose, firms will have an incentive to lower prices on upscale models aimed at older consumers to invest in brand loyalty among the next generation of young consumers. Meanwhile, since young consumers enter the market with brand loyalty inherited from their parents, firms will have an incentive to harvest this loyalty by raising prices on entry-level models. Thus, relative to the model with no intergenerational state dependence, equilibrium prices for upscale cars should fall. Conversely, prices for entry-level cars should rise. In the extreme, if the dependence of children's preferences on their parents' choices is as strong as within-generation state dependence, then the overlapping generations become equivalent to an infinitely lived consumer with constant loyalty. In this case, the problem resembles the switching cost model of Dubé *et al.* [2009], in which firms balance harvesting and investing incentives in every period, and there is no economic distinction between young and old consumers.

In Appendix A on the Journal's website, we set up and solve a simple version of this model with two symmetric Bertrand-competing firms that sell cars to consumers who live two periods each, buying a different type of car each period. Consumers have logit demand with a brand switching cost

that we calibrate using our estimates from Section IV.<sup>31</sup> For simplicity, we assume that the young and old car markets have the same cost and demand parameters. When we allow for within-household but not intergenerational state dependence, the model reproduces the Klemperer [1987] style result that equilibrium prices are lower for cars targeted at young consumers than for cars targeted at older consumers. However, when intergenerational state dependence is as strong as within-household state dependence, the model is equivalent to that of Dubé *et al.* [2009], and equilibrium prices are equal for both types of cars. We also present an intermediate case between these two extremes. Consistent with the intuition above, prices for cars aimed at older consumers fall and prices for cars aimed at younger consumers rise in the presence of intergenerational state dependence.

In our calibrated examples, the net effect of state dependence on average prices and firm profits is negative. This result echoes a similar finding by Dubé *et al.* [2009] in consumer packaged goods markets: when switching costs are modest, their presence may cause prices and profits to decline because firms are never able fully to capitalize on their customers' brand loyalty as they constantly compete for the next generation of consumers.<sup>32</sup> This finding may also speak to the auto industry's apparent focus on sales volumes to the potential neglect of current profits. The industry media is filled with stories about market share, sales volumes, and conquest rates. Anecdotally, automakers are said to focus on hitting quarterly sales targets, deeply discounting or even selling some vehicles at a loss to meet these targets. It is natural for an economist to view such prioritization of sales volumes over profitability as a mistake. In the presence of strong brand preferences, however, firms face a tradeoff between current and future profits, potentially justifying this focus on volume. Moreover, transmission of brand preferences across generations limits the incentive to harvest brand preferences among older consumers, as doing so might jeopardize the loyalty of future generations.

Intergenerational brand preference transmission may influence not only how firms set prices for the goods that they sell, but also the set of products they choose to develop. Most automakers offer a wide range of vertically differentiated products. State dependence provides one rationale for such a strategy. The stronger are brand preferences, the more valuable it is to keep consumers within the brand as they move through their life cycle and demand different types of cars.<sup>33</sup> When households have state-dependent

<sup>31</sup> We also use within-household brand choice correlations that we discuss in Appendix B, which likewise appears on the Journal's website.

<sup>32</sup> Cabral [2009] further discusses why the investment incentive to lower prices is first-order while the harvesting incentive to raise prices is second-order.

<sup>33</sup> There are, of course, many other reasons why firms might offer a broad set of vertically differentiated goods apart from consumer brand preferences, including production economies of scope and the value of covering a wide range of consumers' attribute preferences.

brand preferences, producers have an incentive to develop entry-level offerings that will 'lead' consumers to their profitable upscale goods as they age. If brand preferences are transmitted between generations, however, then producers of entry-level models will also have an incentive to develop upscale product lines to 'lead' future generations to their entry-level products. The ability of upscale products to boost future sales of downmarket products may, for instance, help explain the relatively slow growth of Toyota and Honda in the 1980's, and Hyundai and Kia today, which offer mainly entry-level vehicles but do so at a low price given their high quality.

These considerations may also help explain the competition between Ford and GM early in the twentieth century. Ford initially succeeded by selling a single, affordable vehicle—the model T—and by driving down costs through economies of scale. Henry Ford had no interest in product differentiation and famously quipped of the Model T that 'any customer can have a car painted any colour [sic] that he wants so long as it is black.'<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, GM's strategy was to build a variety of cars to fit a range of lifestyles and income levels, embodied by the famous quote from Alfred Sloan that GM would sell 'a car for every purse and purpose.'<sup>35</sup> As cars first became affordable to the masses, brand loyalty would have been minimal because most consumers had not previously owned a car, nor had their parents owned a car. This limited the initial benefits to GM's approach.

Over time, however, strong within-household brand preference would have allowed GM to charge higher prices to consumers who 'graduated' to their upscale models. This would have given GM an extra incentive to cut prices on their entry-market cars, which were in competition with Ford's Model T, in order to gain future loyal upscale customers. Furthermore, having no upscale model would have also put Ford at a competitive disadvantage among the subsequent generation's entry-level consumers if intergenerational brand preference transmission was strong. That is, the children of consumers who had progressed to an upscale GM model would have inherited a preference for GM before they went to buy their first (entry-level) car. Thus, both within-household and intergenerational brand preference transmission may have been important in determining the ultimate success of GM's differentiated approach, which Ford itself later adopted.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Our analysis of PSID data suggests that automobile brand preferences may be passed through generations in ways that are important to the strategies

<sup>34</sup> The quote is from Henry Ford's 1922 autobiography *My Life and Work*. See: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/hnfrd10.txt>.

<sup>35</sup> This quote is taken from GM's 1924 report to shareholders.

of automobile producers. We document a strong correlation across generations in brand choice that remains strong even when limiting the analysis to similar brands and controlling for a rich set of demographic factors and fine geographic fixed effects, leading us to conclude that intrafamily correlations are likely not driven entirely by correlated demographic characteristics but rather reflect an important role for intergenerational brand preference transmission. Further, our finding that intergenerational choice correlation is stronger when children are directly exposed to their parents' vehicles suggests a role for intergenerational state dependence, in which actual experience with a vehicle is important for influencing brand choice across generations.

These results inform our understanding of endogenous preference formation, complementing recent work that has focused on the role of local tastes and geography in shaping consumers' preferences (Logan and Rhode [2010], Atkin [2013], Bronnenberg *et al.* [2012]). They may also inform automakers' pricing and product-line incentives. Intuition suggests, and our numerical simulations in the Appendix on the Journal's website confirm, that intergenerational state dependence curtails firms' ability to price discriminate across young and old consumers, since charging a high price to old consumers today reduces sales to young consumers tomorrow. That is, the 'invest in young consumers and harvest old consumers' strategy (Klemperer [1987]) is no longer optimal when parents' choices affect the preferences of their children. More broadly, intergenerational state dependence may also enhance firms' incentive to offer a broad range of products that appeal to consumers over their entire lifetime, thereby allowing multiple generations within a family to preserve their brand loyalty.

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#### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at <http://wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/ijoe> or via the Journal's website, <http://www.jindec.org>

Appendix A: Theory Model Details

Appendix B: Within-Household Brand Loyalty