Research on Tesla's Marketing Strategy in the Greater China Market

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Abstact

Tesla, as a pioneering enterprise in the global electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing sector, has garnered significant attention for its expansion in the Greater China market. The dynamics of its market presence not only reflect its strategic positioning and performance growth but also, to some extent, shape the development trajectory of the entire EV industry in the Greater China region. This course paper provides an in-depth analysis of Tesla's marketing strategies within the Greater China market. Through a combination of research methods, including literature review, case studies, and market analysis, the paper thoroughly examines Tesla's current marketing landscape in this region. It identifies key success factors such as innovative product design concepts and a distinctive brand image that have effectively attracted a substantial consumer base in Greater China. Additionally, the paper addresses the challenges and obstacles Tesla encounters in this market. Building on these insights, it systematically evaluates various aspects of Tesla's marketing framework, including promotional team development, product promotion strategies, distribution channel optimization, and pricing strategies tailored to specific areas within the Greater China region.

Keywords

Tesla, Greater China market, Marketing strategy, Brand image, Competitive environment

Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy, the continuous improvement of people's living standards, and the deepening of global low-carbon development strategies, the Chinese new energy vehicle market has emerged as a core battlefield for global automobile brands, witnessing explosive growth and increasingly fierce competition. As a pioneering enterprise in the global electric vehicle manufacturing sector, Tesla officially entered the Chinese market in 2014 and has since achieved remarkable milestones - from the steady expansion of sales volume in the early stages to the deepening of localized production with the Shanghai Gigafactory as the core, and the continuous improvement of its charging infrastructure network. These achievements have not only solidified Tesla's market position but also made it a key player influencing the development trajectory of China's new energy vehicle industry [1].

However, Tesla's development in China is accompanied by multiple challenges. On one hand, the market competition is intensifying: Traditional automobile giants are accelerating their transformation to new energy, and domestic new car-making forces are rising rapidly, competing fiercely with Tesla in product technology, price range, and user experience. On the other hand, policy adjustments, changes in consumer demand, and rising requirements for after-sales service also pose constant tests. For example, fluctuations in new energy vehicle subsidy policies, consumers' growing attention to product safety and intelligent experience, and the uneven regional demand for automobiles all require Tesla to continuously optimize its marketing strategies [2].

Therefore, in-depth research on Tesla's marketing strategy in the Chinese market is of great practical significance. It not only helps to clarify the key factors behind Tesla's success, such as its brand positioning and innovative sales models but also identifies the existing problems in its promotion, channels, and pricing strategies. This research can provide valuable references for both international brands entering the Chinese market and domestic new energy vehicle enterprises, and also offer insights for the healthy development of the entire industry.

Tesla's background in the Chinese market

Since Tesla officially entered the Chinese market in 2014, it has gradually promoted the sales layout of its electric vehicles. According to relevant sales data, from 2014 to 2019, Tesla's sales in China showed an increasing trend year by year, with Tesla's sales from 2014 to 2019 being 3,000 units, 5,000 units, 11,000 units, 17,000 units, 44,700 units and 40,500 units respectively. At this stage, Tesla's sales in the Chinese market continued to rise, and its brand influence was also expanding.

Entering 2020, Tesla's sales in China have further increased and successfully gained a foothold in the Chinese market. According to Tesla's official financial report, by the end of 2020, Tesla has a solid market position in the Chinese market. It is worth mentioning that during the sales of Tesla products in China, it helped consumers achieve about 5 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emission reduction, making positive contributions to promoting the global sustainable energy transition. In 2021, Tesla's sales performance in the Chinese market remained strong. According to statistics, in the first quarter of that year, Tesla's export sales in China reached 91,900 units, and domestic sales were 137,400 units. This achievement fully demonstrates Tesla's continued influence in the Chinese market. Although the braking system of Tesla Model 3 has been questioned in the Chinese market, from the perspective of the global market, Model 3 ranked first with sales of 365,200 units in 2020, which further confirms the strong competitiveness of Tesla's products in the global market, especially in the Chinese market [3].

By 2024, Tesla will still maintain a rapid development momentum in the Chinese market. According to the latest data, as of October 2024, Tesla's Shanghai Gigafactory delivered 675,000 vehicles in the first three quarters, accounting for more than half of Tesla's global deliveries in the first three quarters. This significant growth is not only due to Tesla's continuous innovations, such as the significant improvement in range and intelligent driver assistance systems of new models, but also inseparable from the continuous improvement of its charging infrastructure network in China. As of May 2024, Tesla has opened more than 1,950 Supercharger stations in Chinese mainland, and the number of Superchargers has exceeded 11,500, covering all provincial capitals and municipalities directly under the Central Government, effectively alleviating consumers' "mileage anxiety" [4]. At the same time, Tesla's brand influence in the Chinese market continues to expand. By holding various test drive activities and owner exchange activities, Tesla has further shortened the distance with consumers and enhanced the brand's reputation and consumer loyalty. In addition, Tesla's localized production in China is also deepening. The production capacity of its Shanghai Gigafactory continues to increase, not only meeting the needs of the domestic market, but also exporting many products to Europe, Asia and other regions, becoming a key part of Tesla's global production layout [5].

Tesla car brand marketing strategy in China

Market positioning and target audience

Tesla has successfully shaped the brand image of high-end electric vehicles in the Chinese market with its precise and unique market positioning, clearly targeting the target audience in the mid-to high-end consumer group. This positioning is not only an accurate grasp of market demand, but also a successful integration of technology, environmental protection and luxury value. First, Tesla has successfully attracted mid-to-high-end consumers who have a high pursuit of quality life through exquisite craftsmanship and unique appearance in product design. Electric vehicles are no longer just an eco-friendly choice, but a symbol of a luxurious lifestyle. Through attention to detail and innovative design, Tesla products reflect high quality and modernity in both exterior and interior, appealing to taste-conscious consumers.

Second, Tesla has won over consumers who pursue a sense of technology and environmental protection by introducing advanced electric vehicle technology and keeping up with the trend of technological innovation. Tesla's electric vehicles' high-performance battery technology, intelligent driving systems and other technological elements make it a technological pioneer among mid-to-high-end consumers, further enhancing the brand's attractiveness among its target audience. In addition, Tesla organically combines the concept of environmental protection with product characteristics to form a unique brand selling point. Consumers in the Chinese market are gradually paying more attention to environmental protection and sustainable development,

and Tesla has successfully attracted mid-to-high-end consumers who pay attention to environmental protection and sustainability by providing zero-emission electric vehicle products [6].

Establishing brand image

Tesla's outstanding performance in the Chinese market stems first from its continuous breakthroughs in product strength. With excellent power performance, breakthrough design language and advanced environmental protection technology, the brand has quickly won the recognition of Chinese consumers. Tesla models such as Model S, Model X and Model 3 have achieved remarkable sales results in the Chinese market, making Tesla a high-end electric vehicle brand in the minds of Chinese consumers. At the policy level, Tesla actively carries out strategic cooperation with Chinese government departments and deeply participates in the discussion and implementation of new energy vehicle industry policies. By establishing a gigafactory in Shanghai to achieve localized production, it not only significantly reduces operating costs, but also greatly improves market response speed. At the same time, the brand fully demonstrated its technology accumulation and innovation achievements in the field of electric mobility by participating in government-led industry forums and exhibitions. This government-enterprise cooperation model not only enhances brand influence, but also provides an important reference for the healthy development of China's new energy vehicle industry. Tesla's practical experience provides a valuable industry development model for China's local electric vehicle companies, and also contributes to the practical basis for government departments to improve the industrial policy system.

Expanding market coverage

Tesla's leading edge in the Chinese market is inseparable from its systematic channel layout. By establishing a modern production base in the Yangtze River Delta region, the brand has significantly improved product supply efficiency and service quality. Since its commissioning, the Shanghai Gigafactory has successfully achieved mass production of a number of main models, effectively meeting the growing market demand. The planning and construction of the Nanjing production base will further optimize the production capacity layout and shorten the product delivery cycle. In terms of infrastructure, Tesla has built a wide range of charging service networks, and its charging stations have been extended to major urban agglomerations and transportation arteries across the country. In order to improve the charging experience for users, the brand has also launched diversified solutions, including home charging devices and charging equipment for commercial places, to fully meet the needs of different usage scenarios. This perfect production, sales and service system not only greatly improves the market penetration rate of the brand, but also provides Chinese consumers with a more convenient electric travel experience.

Strengthening online sales

Tesla has innovatively adopted an online-centered sales model in the Chinese market. Through the official e-commerce platform, consumers can complete the whole process from product understanding to final purchase, and this disintermediate sales system significantly improves transaction efficiency [7]. First, the direct selling model establishes a direct communication channel between the brand and consumers. Users can obtain product parameters, make personalized configurations and understand the latest preferential policies through the digital platform at any time, completely breaking through the time and space limitations of the traditional sales model.

Second, this digital sales system fully reflects the service advantages of the Internet era. After integrating online payment and instant customer service system, the entire car purchase process can be completed online, which not only greatly shortens the transaction cycle, but also provides transparent and efficient service experience. From a cost perspective, the online direct sales model effectively reduces the intermediate cost of the channel and makes product pricing more competitive in the market. This direct-to-consumer sales method can return more value to users than the additional costs that may be incurred by traditional distribution systems.

Problems with Tesla's current marketing strategy

Problems in the promotion strategy

When it comes to promotion, Tesla's new energy vehicles mainly adopt more traditional strategies.

These include advertising in newspapers, inviting celebrity spokespersons, and sponsoring reality shows.

Such publicity methods effectively enhance the influence of the Tesla brand. In addition, exhibition promotion is also another major promotion strategy of Tesla, Tesla will participate in many related exhibitions at home and abroad every year. Consumers can experience Tesla's new energy vehicles on the spot, and their understanding of new energy will be one step deeper. Although these promotion strategies have achieved some results, they still have some shortcomings.

(1) Failure to grasp the key opportunity of promotion

In the previous survey, we can learn that in the question "When may you buy new energy vehicles", most respondents chose to reduce the price of cars. It can be seen that price is still an important factor in determining sales. For Tesla, although its decision-making level has different market strategy considerations at different stages, the market is generally concerned about its price adjustment dynamics. In a highly competitive market environment, some consumers are often more price-sensitive and will pay attention to products that implement price reduction strategies. When the market situation changes, if the price strategy is not adjusted in time, market opportunities may be missed. For example, when the industry is facing a slowdown in terminal demand, if Tesla does not take timely promotional measures such as price reductions like some other car companies, it may put itself at a disadvantage in market competition. When other companies have cut prices, if Tesla follows promotional measures such as price cuts, it will lose the prerequisites for competing for the market. During this period, the demand for cars is fixed, and those who reduce prices first can be the first to win orders, while the latter may face a squeeze in market share.

(2) Lack of novelty in promotion methods

In the advertising method, on the one hand, to help consumers better accept the product, Tesla's main promotion methods are more traditional advertising and professional exhibitions. It also allows customers to try the vehicle for free, enabling them to experience intuitive driving performance, so as to gain brand awareness and sales in the international market, and achieve the purpose of promoting the brand through user word-of-mouth. It can be found that Tesla is currently mainly using a more traditional single promotion strategy offline, Tesla is more focused on R&D and innovation, and has not carried out in-depth research on promotion methods, which makes the company's existing promotion strategy cognition more conservative. And these promotional methods are not so applicable in the current Internet era, because most of Tesla's user group is young people, they are more inclined to obtain information resources from major self-media platforms through the Internet and other means, and online promotional activities are more widely disseminated than offline activities, not easy to be restricted by location, have more audiences, and can be known by more users, so Tesla's more traditional offline promotions cannot achieve good results in today's era.

On the other hand, the advertising content broadcast by Tesla on TV is often a macro-overall promotion of the Tesla brand, and there are little specific introduction and sales information for specific products, so that although it can improve the popularity of the brand to a certain extent. It cannot allow consumers to have a deeper understanding of the company's products, so that the product publicity effect is greatly reduced [8,9].

In the promotional activities, Tesla's promotional activities are mainly in the form of preferential prices or gifts, which are more traditional promotional methods used by many car companies, which cannot meet their value needs for consumers and are difficult to achieve consumer resonance. Therefore, if Tesla wants to get more attention, it should also design some more creative and novel promotions based on the interests and hobbies of the current mainstream consumer groups, such as launching free test drive activities, to better attract the attention of consumers.

Problems with channel strategy

Marketing channels, also known as sales channels, refer to a way to convey products from manufacturers to customers. In the field of automobiles, the main marketing channels adopted by many automobile manufacturers usually include dealer channels, online e-commerce self-media platform channels and offline channels such as 4S stores and supermarkets. Analyzing Tesla's channel strategy, it can be found that it has problems such as high cost, small number and immaturity of marketing channels.

(1) High channel cost

Unlike other traditional car companies, Tesla is firmly based on its own innovative concepts and clear market

positioning, relying less on traditional dealer channels and instead focusing on creating high-end exclusive experience centers. These centers not only fulfill the most basic vehicle sales functions but also serve as dedicated platforms to showcase. Tesla's unique brand culture and cutting-edge technology, providing a truly unique experience for both Tesla car users and potential users. The layout of the Tesla Experience Center is rich and diverse, in addition to the car showroom, it is also equipped with a technology display area, user exchange area, etc. In addition to the rich and diverse facilities, the location of the Tesla Experience Center is also carefully selected. Take the Tesla Experience Center in Beijing as an example, it is in a prosperous area, the annual rent per square meter of the location is not cheap, and the experience center area is large, so the annual rent and overall daily expenses are not a small amount. As for the relevant statistical time, Tesla has a certain number of experience centers across the country, and most of them are in the center of the city, and a large amount of rent and operation and maintenance costs have greatly increased Tesla's channel costs.

(2) The quantity of channels is small and the quality is low.

When consumers choose a car brand, in addition to the brand value and car performance, after-sales maintenance service is also an important deciding factor in deciding whether to buy. For Tesla Motors, it is not yet fully mature in the construction of after-sales service channels. On the one hand, the number of Tesla Motors' current maintenance service centers is relatively small, and they are mainly concentrated in some first-tier cities, and in some remote cities have not yet established a complete maintenance center layout, consumers may have concerns about maintenance. In addition, unlike traditional automobile maintenance, the core technology of the new energy automobile industry is "three electrics", once the vehicle fails and needs to be repaired, then the technical requirements for the maintenance master are very high, but at present, the number of qualified after-sales service personnel in Tesla is limited, and the maintenance personnel may face tight deployment in some areas.

On the other hand, from the perspective of quality, Tesla's parts and power system have their own unique technical system, so when it needs to be replaced, it may be necessary to rely on the Tesla original factory for replacement or return to the factory for repair, and this maintenance method will greatly increase the maintenance cycle, resulting in slow maintenance progress, low efficiency, and poor after-sales service experience for customers.

(3) Online channels need to be developed.

In terms of online channels, Tesla has an active official social media account and user community, new users can join the community to share their Tesla new energy vehicle purchase sharing and car experience, and can also put forward various development prospects and improvement suggestions for Tesla's new energy vehicles, and potential consumers with car purchase intentions can also join the community to gain an in-depth understanding of Tesla's new energy vehicles, and have the opportunity to have one-on-one online communication with users who have purchased cars.

It can be found that Tesla's online user community is relatively well-designed, but it can reflect that Tesla makes full use of the "Internet+" and "big data application" channels, and there are only these official communities. On other Internet platforms, such as the popular Douyin, BiliBili and other self-media platforms, Tesla's number of fan followers and related video popularity are slightly lower than those of many traditional established companies, such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW, etc., and it is also weaker than other competitors in the field of new energy vehicles. In fact, Tesla, as a leading company in the field of new energy vehicles, already has superior resource advantages to obtain traffic from other platforms, but Tesla has not made full use of these high-quality resources, resulting in online channels not playing their due role [10].

Problems with the price strategy

(1) High-cost constraints

The first is the high cost of R&D and manufacturing. In order to maintain its technological leadership in the field of new energy vehicles, Tesla not only invests huge funds in the research and development of automotive functions, but also pursues high quality and adheres to high standards in materials and processes in product production. For example, Tesla continues to invest huge R&D expenses in battery technology, autonomous driving technology, etc., and constantly carries out

iterative upgrades of technology. In order to improve the comfort and safety of the vehicle, Tesla is also not stingy in the selection of body materials and interior configuration, using high-quality materials and advanced technology. These have continued to increase Tesla's manufacturing costs, becoming an important support for Tesla to build a high-end and technology brand image, but Tesla's huge cost is also facing certain pressure in terms of cost control for the scale of delivery volume at different stages.

The second is the high cost of service. Some Tesla models are more expensive, taking high-end models such as Model S and Model X as examples, which can cost hundreds of thousands or even millions of yuan. At the same time, Tesla has launched a series of value-added services in order to provide consumers with more convenient and high-quality after-sales service. For example, Tesla's after-sales service covers vehicle maintenance, repair, software upgrades and other aspects, and provides door-to-door pick-up and delivery services to facilitate vehicle maintenance for car owners. If the owner purchases the relevant service package, he can also enjoy more discounts and convenience. Although these intimate services have improved the user experience and become an important driving force for Tesla's word-of-mouth communication, helping Tesla keep more value-added service opportunities and maintenance profits after sales in its own business system, it has also greatly increased service costs. For high-tier cities with high user density, the operating conditions may still be basically balanced, and once they reach the low-tier areas with low user density, the revenue of this part of the service system may not be enough to cover the cost of personnel and operations.

Finally, the cost of charging and infrastructure construction is too high. Tesla is committed to building a global supercharging network to solve the charging problem of new energy vehicles. Tesla Superchargers are an infrastructure that uses fast charging technology to quickly recharge vehicles. Compared with traditional charging methods, Tesla Superchargers have faster charged speeds, which can replenish a large amount of power to the vehicle in a short period of time, greatly reducing the charging waiting time, which has also become one of the advantages of Tesla cars in terms of range and charging convenience. However, rolling out the service requires the construction of many Superchargers, which is costly. On the one hand, the construction of supercharging stations requires a large amount of investment in land purchase, equipment procurement, installation and commissioning, etc. On the other hand, the current layout of Tesla's Supercharger needs to be further optimized, and in some remote areas or areas with low user density, the utilization rate of charging stations is not high, resulting in poor operation of most stations and falling into the dilemma of making ends meet [11,12].

(2) High price strategy restricts market expansion

As far as the new energy vehicles under the Tesla brand are concerned, the current main model series include Model S (luxury electric car), Model X (luxury electric SUV), Model 3 (mid-size electric car) and Model Y (medium-sized electric SUV). The price positioning of these models is relatively high, taking Model S and Model X as examples, their prices are mainly in the range of hundreds of thousands to millions of yuan. The price of Model 3 and Model Y is relatively affordable, but the overall price is still higher than that of some low-end new energy vehicle brands. Tesla's pricing strategy is mainly aimed at the mid-to-high-end consumer market, and the scope of radiation user groups will be greatly limited, making it difficult to popularize to the low-end consumer market. At the same time, although the price range of different Tesla models is different, the overall pricing strategy makes some models overlap in price, which will make consumers use different models of the same brand as the selection and comparison object in the selection process, intensify the internal competition between products of the same brand, which is not conducive to the sales of enterprise products.

In order to more intuitively feel the product positioning of major car companies, this article selects Tesla and other new energy vehicle brands of the same level for comparison, as shown in Table 3. As shown, the models selected in the table are all the more popular and high-selling models of the brand. The guide price range of BYD Tang EV is 27.95-314,800 yuan, the guide price of Tesla Model Y is in the range of 26.66-36.39 (the price of different configurations and versions varies), the ideal ONE guide price is about 349,800 yuan, and the price range of some models of Xpeng P7 is also similar to that

of Tesla Model 3. It can be seen that compared with Tesla cars, the prices of some models with higher prices of other brands are relatively low, which is consistent with the perception of most consumers in the market that Tesla is priced higher, and on the other hand, it also confirms that Tesla is taking the route of high-end and technology brands.

Combined with the analysis of the actual market situation, although Tesla has its own unique brand strategy in positioning, the effect of long-term adherence to the high-price strategy will gradually weaken. On the one hand, with the influx of many new car-making forces and the efforts of traditional car companies in the field of new energy vehicles, the market competition is becoming increasingly fierce, and the continued high price will greatly weaken Tesla's competitive advantage in terms of price. On the other hand, Tesla has long adhered to the high-price strategy, and the delineation of the price of the car is relatively simple, which will lead to the series of product configurations not making differentiated distinctions according to the different needs of the target group, so that consumers who are not in the pricing range lose the opportunity to choose, greatly restrict market expansion, lose a large number of potential user groups, and are not conducive to the long-term development of enterprises.

Conclusion

Through an in-depth analysis of Tesla's marketing strategy in the Greater China market, this article reveals how Tesla has achieved remarkable success in China, the world's largest electric vehicle market, with its unique market positioning, innovative product design, precise brand image building, and flexible market strategy. Tesla has not only won the favor of consumers with high-quality, high-performance electric vehicle products, but also actively participated in the formulation and promotion of new energy vehicle policies through cooperation with the Chinese government and local enterprises, further consolidating its market position.

In the face of uncertainty in policies and regulations, intensified local competition, challenges in consumer trust and after-sales service, and bottlenecks in the construction and popularization of charging infrastructure, Tesla has shown strong adaptability and innovation. Through market segmentation and precise positioning of target audiences, Tesla has successfully promoted its products to mid-to-high-end consumer groups, and has enhanced the emotional connection between brands and consumers and enhanced market competitiveness through experiential marketing, online sales, brand cooperation and localization strategies.

In particular, in terms of marketing strategies for specific regions and products, Tesla has formulated differentiated marketing strategies for different consumer groups and regional characteristics by setting up a professional promotion team and implementing the two-wheel drive model of "scenario-based experience + precise subsidies".

Whether it is the midday fast charging plan for urban white-collar workers or the parent-child intelligent cockpit experience area for family users, it fully reflects Tesla's deep insight and accurate grasp of consumer needs. At the same time, by building a "data-driven + flexible subsidy" price system, Tesla can respond more flexibly to market changes, meet the needs of consumers in different regions, and further promote business development in the Greater China market.

Looking ahead, Tesla still faces many opportunities and challenges in the Greater China market. With the continuous maturity of the new energy vehicle market, and the increasing diversification of consumer demand, Tesla needs to continue maintaining its innovative spirit and market acumen. Continuously optimize its products and services, strengthen cooperation and exchanges with local enterprises, and jointly promote the prosperity and development of China's new energy vehicle industry. At the same time, Tesla should also actively respond to changes in policies and regulations and intensified market competition to ensure that it maintains its leading position in the fierce market competition and makes greater contributions to the development of the global electric vehicle industry.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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