



European Master in Business Studies



The marketing communication of automotive companies in the transitional stage towards full electromobility

Student:
Jessica Burmann

Supervisor:
Alexander Hartmann

Abstract

Title: The marketing communication of automotive companies in the transitional stage towards full electromobility.

Background: The automotive industry can currently be positioned in the beginning of a transitional stage from vehicles with an internal combustion engine towards complete electromobility. In this stage, automotive manufacturers are envisioning a sustainable future achieved by sustainable business practices. Unlike many other sustainable products, however, it is noticeable that the marketing communication of electric cars often times does not primarily focus on the sustainability aspect but rather on innovation and performance of the vehicle.

Aim: The study aims at understanding the reasons why automotive manufacturers decided to only secondarily highlight environmental aspects in their marketing communication strategy even though an electric vehicle is considered an eco-friendly product.

Methodology: To obtain professional information, a qualitative study will be conducted using semi-structured in-depth interviews with experts in the automotive industry. The results will be analyzed using the software MAXQDA.

Contribution: The aim of this study is to better understand the automotive sector and the marketing communication for sustainable and environmentally friendly products in general. Major findings of the study and discovered strategies can potentially also be applied to other industries in which sustainability plays a major role.

Keywords: Electromobility, marketing communication, sustainability.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
List of abbreviations	3
List of tables	3
List of figures	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1. Context	4
1.2. Problem statement, gaps and research questions.....	5
2. Theoretical Framing	7
2.1. Reasons for sustainable development of automotive manufacturers	7
2.1.1. Governmental pressures	7
2.1.2. Social Pressures.....	7
2.1.3. Business Reasons	8
2.2. Role of marketing communication on customer decision making	9
2.2.1. Decision-making process when adopting an electric vehicle.....	9
2.2.2. Role of marketing communication.....	10
2.3. Propositions	11
2.4. Literature Review	15
3. Methodology	18
3.1. Research design.....	18
3.2. Application context and sample description	18
3.3. Data collection and analysis	19
4. Contribution	20
5. Thesis chapter overview	21
6. Plan of work	22
7. References	23

List of abbreviations

ICE = Internal combustion engine

BEV = Battery electric vehicle

List of tables

Table 1: Plan of work.	22
-----------------------------	----

List of figures

Figure 1: Suggested touchpoints for promoting EV purchases in Switzerland incorporated into the respective stages of the generated conceptual framework of the vehicle purchase process.....	10
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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

Air pollution has been identified as a major concern for environment and health. In 2017, it can be associated as a key reason for five million deaths, representing 9% of total deaths that year. In Europe, 25% of greenhouse gas emissions are generated by transportation, leading to the fact that 90% of the population in cities are facing detrimental air pollution on a regular basis. This is mainly caused by conventional vehicles which represent 95% of all vehicles in Europe (Pietrzak & Pietrzak, 2020).

In response to increasing pollution and risks for the environment and the population, in December 2015 the Paris climate conference took place. During this conference a global action plan was developed which aims to significantly reduce the environmental impact by slowing down global warming to a maximum of 2 degrees Celsius, ideally 1.5 degrees Celsius, by 2100. The action plan was signed by over 195 countries which all agreed on a reduction of emissions to achieve this goal. The first large economy to create a specific strategy to contribute to this goal was the European Union which declares a 40% reduction of its domestic greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2030 in comparison to 1990. By 2050 it even decided to become climate neutral, which implies the achievement of net zero greenhouse gas emissions (Liobikienė & Butkus, 2017).

Based on the new regulations implemented by the governments and an increased social interest in environmental protection and a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, many industries and individual companies adapted their internal processes and goals. One of the industries that also responded to this goal is the automotive sector. As previously explained, transportation is responsible for a significantly large amount of emissions generated and harming the environment. This is majorly caused by vehicles composed of an internal combustion engine (ICE) which require gasoline or diesel to operate. To avoid emissions released during the driving process, many automotive manufacturers across the world have decided to switch towards zero emission vehicles which are mostly composed and powered by batteries, so called battery electric vehicles (BEV). Electromobility has been therefore identified as the key solution to combat negative environmental effects caused by individual transportation and is therefore considered as the future of the automotive industry (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt e.V., 2018).

An example of a company adapting its standards based on the Paris Agreement is the largest German automotive group Volkswagen AG. The group has set the target of increasing the number of BEV's in its fleet from currently six to over 50 by 2025. While reducing the amount of ICE vehicles in its portfolio until the production is eventually stopped, the company increases the amount of BEV's

and ensures that all its vehicles as well as production processes will be fully CO₂-neutral by the year 2050. (Volkswagen AG, 2021). Similar targets can also be observed at further international automotive manufactures such as Toyota Motor Corporation, Daimler AG and the BMW Group. (Daimler AG, 2019), (Toyota Motor Corporation, 2020), (BMW Group, 2019).

In many markets, electric vehicles have started to be sold and automotive manufacturers are using different marketing campaigns to allow an adaptation to the products (Kley et al., 2011). Based on personal observations, however, it is significantly noticeable that throughout the years the main message of automotive manufacturers when advertising electric vehicles has significantly changed. Specific changes will be explained in the following chapters.

1.2. Problem statement, gaps and research questions

As previously explained, the automotive industry can currently be positioned in the beginning of a transitional stage from ICE vehicles to BEV's. Throughout the first stages of this transition, however, it is noticeable that the marketing communication of automotive manufacturers has significantly changed.

Previous studies have primarily focused on technological factors related to the adaptation of electromobility such as the performance of electric vehicles, availability of charging stations, as well as the question if sufficient energy supply can be provided (Chowdhury et al., 2019). Further studies have analyzed the decision-making process of customers (Shim et al., 2018) and cultural influences on the adaptation of disruptive (Obal, 2017) and new technologies (ÖZbilen, 2017), as well as eco-friendly products (Chwialkowska et al., 2020).

Researchers have also identified a gap occurring during the purchase decision-making process of environmentally-friendly products between pro-environmental concern and actual pro-environmental action, which needs to be mitigated (Chwialkowska et al., 2020). It has also been identified that the marketing strategy of companies varies based on the product's position in the product life cycle (Fang, 2013).

All these aspects should be taken into consideration when creating a marketing communication campaign, however, it does not explicitly explain the changes observed in the automotive industry. There are no studies specifically pointing out why it seems like automotive manufacturers have decided to change the main message of their marketing communication when it comes to targeting electric vehicles. While the main focus of advertisements used to be the environmental benefit of electric vehicles, today it can be observed that other factors such as innovation and performance of the vehicles seem to be primarily important. Based on research on this topic, there has not been a

study before explaining why a sustainable product has not been primarily advertised using its eco-friendly characteristics.

The aim of this study is therefore to find an answer to the research aim of why it seems like automotive manufacturers are not explicitly targeting electric vehicles as a sustainable and eco-friendly product. In order to understand this question, it will be analyzed if there are any general trends or theories which can explain this. Moreover, it will be evaluated if these possible trends can also be applied to other industries and to what extent sustainable communication can be beneficial to a company.

2. Theoretical Framing

2.1. Reasons for sustainable development of automotive manufacturers

In the following section, three reasons why automotive manufacturers decided to follow a sustainable approach will be pointed out, followed by the role of marketing communication on the decision-making process. Afterwards the propositions why the marketing communication departments of carmakers seem to only secondarily point out sustainable factors when designing marketing advertisements and further communication will be discussed.

2.1.1. Governmental pressures

In response to higher environmental concerns and the increase of pollution and risks for the environment, the above-mentioned Paris Agreement was signed by 195 countries in 2015. Ever since these countries agreed on the common reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, many countries have imposed new regulations on industries, companies and individuals to achieve environmental goals. These goals include among others lower energy consumption, reduction of water use and reduction of waste by increased recycling practices (Liobikienė & Butkus, 2017).

The European Union is a region with many automotive manufacturers, Germany being the country with the highest number of carmakers, followed by France, Italy and Spain (Erdogan et al., 2021). Based on the Paris Agreement, the EU has decided to significantly reduce its greenhouse gas emissions until the year 2050 by a minimum of 80% compared to the value reached in 1990 (European Commission, 2021). The automotive industry, however, can be considered as a significantly energy consuming and therefore polluting industry, not only during its production process but also throughout the lifetime of the product (Giampieri et al., 2020).

Based on this information, governmental pressures can be determined as a significant reason why automotive manufacturers are more and more required to follow sustainable business practices and to focus on environmentally friendly products.

2.1.2. Social Pressures

Thanks to higher levels of education and an increased concern for the environment, customers and society as a whole are having continuously higher expectations towards companies. They require higher engagement in corporate social responsibility as well as environmental actions (Rodriguez et al., 2002). Besides requiring eco-friendly actions from enterprises, customers themselves are also paying much more attention to their own consumption and have become more and more careful when

making a purchase decision. Despite country specific differences, the international interest for green products has been increasing throughout the previous years (de Chiara, 2015).

Another factor leading to this trend are technological advances and the related increased use of social media platforms. With social media platforms, users are able to communicate information significantly fast and common interests as well as values can be shared among different groups. Since this way information can be easily spread, the overall environmental awareness has considerably increased leading also to an increased consumption of eco-friendly products (Sogari et al., 2017). Social media has also helped increasing a feeling of community among its users supporting each other and their environmental consumption, leading to a stronger bond and feeling of self-esteem when consuming these products (Guesalaga, 2016), (White & Sintov, 2017).

In regards to the automotive industry, social pressures have led towards more eco-friendly business practices and a quicker implementation of electromobility (Wellbrock et al., 2020).

2.1.3. Business Reasons

Besides the above-mentioned reasons for a shift towards electromobility, it should be mentioned as well that there are business reasons why such a shift can actually be essential to the automotive industry. Since the last century, automotive manufacturers have been trying to identify alternative ways for transportation besides fossil fuels in form of gasoline. It has been known for quite some time that oil is a scarce resource which will most likely be over by the middle of the 21st century, (Honnerly & Moriarty, 2004). For automotive manufacturers producing vehicles with an ICE, a complete transition towards an alternative source of power can therefore be considered as inevitable. Without such a transition, existing automotive manufactures would most likely not exist anymore after the petroleum supplies are over.

Besides the necessity of change towards an alternative source of energy, companies following sustainable business practices are also able to benefit from financial advantages in the long run. Thanks to a reduction of energy as well as water consumption, sustainable companies are supposed to benefit from financial savings. This is also related to the fact that less consumption will generate less waste and therefore lower costs towards recycling (Nidumolu et al., 2013). Further cost advantages can also be observed when examining the taxation regulations of companies following sustainable business practices. In certain countries there can be considerable cost advantages as well as subsidies. In Germany for example, the automotive industry has received 969 million euros from 2007 to 2017 for research and development purposes (Deutscher Bundestag, 2017).

As a result of these financial benefits, companies which operate in an environmentally friendly way can turn out to be more profitable and can therefore generate competitive advantages.

2.2. Role of marketing communication on customer decision making

After having explained the reasons why many automotive manufacturers have been transitioning towards the production of electric vehicles, in the following the role of marketing communication on the customer decision making process when purchasing a vehicle will be explained.

2.2.1. Decision-making process when adopting an electric vehicle

The figure below illustrates the decision-making process as well as some touchpoints that a customer deals with when adopting a new vehicle.

In a traditional decision-making process, the customer will experience the following five steps: Problem or recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and finally the post-purchase behavior. The process starts with the “need recognition”. In this stage, the customer realizes that he or she is in need of something, in this specific case a new vehicle. In this stage the customer considers many different car options. The following stage is the “information search”. In this stage the customer has an increased level of attention and searches for information of how to satisfy his need. He will search from different sources of information such as the internet to obtain as much knowledge as possible about the product he is potentially buying. Further sources can be family, friends, coworkers and the reflection about previous experience with the brand, if there was any. Due to an increased interest, the customer narrows the search down to around five different car options. The next stage is the “evaluation of alternatives”. This is the stage in which the customer reviews the different alternatives that he has identified to fulfill his need and defines the most relevant criteria which will facilitate his choice. For a specific car purchase this means that the customer will most likely go to some car dealerships to receive further information, clarify questions and possibly test drive some of the different models that he or she is interested in. After this stage, the customer has narrowed down his options and will most likely have to decide between two models. After further reflection, the consumer finds the model that best matches his expectations and he will continue the decision-making process and eventually purchase the product. The transition between purchase decision and actual purchase can take longer based on different factors such as the durability of the product and the perceived risk that the customer is taking by acquiring the product. In the last step of the decision-making process, the post-purchase phase, the customer will evaluate to what extent the product meets his satisfaction and fulfills his expectations ((Stankevich, 2017), (Plananska, 2020)).

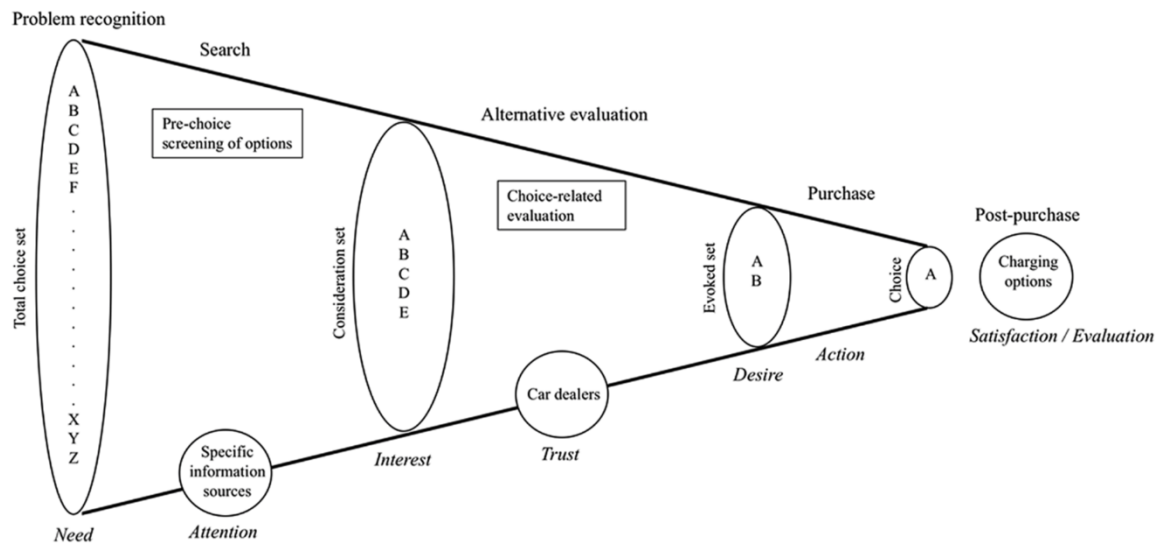


Figure 1: Suggested touchpoints for promoting EV purchases in Switzerland incorporated into the respective stages of the generated conceptual framework of the vehicle purchase process. Source: (Plananska, 2020)

2.2.2. Role of marketing communication

Marketing communication is defined as any type of communication that a company generates with its target customers. This can occur through different channels which can be among others print media, TV, radio, social media and email (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). Marketing communication can be considered as essential in different phases of the customer decision-making process; especially in the first stage, the need or problem recognition. In this stage the role of marketing is to understand if the customer has a current problem which needs to be addressed and solved making use of the company's product, or if there is a so called "inactive problem" that the company can point out. In the event of an inactive problem, the role of marketing is to generate an emotional imbalance in the customer's mind between his current versus his desired situation, which can be filled consuming the company's product or service ((Stankevich, 2017), (Mihart, 2012)).

By identifying important interests of customers and properly addressing them, companies are able to connect to the customers on an emotional level and create positive feelings towards the product or the brand which can continue throughout the entire purchase-decision process. A good performing marketing communication can therefore create a competitive advantage for the company because it can influence the alternative evaluation as well as final purchase-decision stage by providing the customer with important information which facilitates the comparison between the product and other competing brands (Mihart, 2012).

Based on the marketing communication of a company, the customer can develop a certain expectation towards the products regarding its quality, price and performance. These expectations can positively affect the purchase decision; however, it should also be taken into consideration that this expectation will be evaluated in the post-purchase decision (Mihart, 2012).

Marketing communication can also increase overall knowledge about the product which can facilitate the purchase-decision process. Studies have identified that prior knowledge about a product influences the decision-making process in the areas of information search and information processing. For this reason, groups with low product knowledge follow a more detailed and precise decision-making process compared to groups which already have previous product knowledge. Low prior knowledge therefore extends the decision-making process. (Karimi et al., 2015). It is assumed that prior knowledge increases trust and therefore shortens the decision-making process by reducing the search for alternatives.

2.3. Propositions

The following propositions are based on the research question which aims at identifying the reasons why automotive manufacturers are primarily addressing factors such as performance and innovation and only secondarily sustainability aspects in their marketing communication advertisements. Based on the findings in the theoretical framing, customers are more and more interested in sustainable product and have been increasing pressures towards the automotive industry. Nevertheless, it is not clear why carmakers decided not to primarily address environmental benefits in their marketing communication.

P1: Eco-friendliness might not be a sufficient reason for a large group of customers to make a purchase decision.

Based on research, the purchase decision of sustainable products can be influenced by different factors which need to be taken into consideration. Besides being influenced by the prior knowledge about the product and previous experience with the brand (Karimi et al., 2015), self-esteem is another important factor that can have a significant impact on the decision-making process when adopting an environmentally-friendly product such as an electric vehicle. Self-esteem can be achieved through green self-identity or the social status which is represented by purchasing an eco-friendly product (White & Sintov, 2017).

Besides pointing out that the interest for electric vehicles has been increasing since the society is becoming more and more concerned about the environment, many studies have been highlighting that eco-friendliness turned into a recognized lifestyle. According to studies, certain members of the society will judge individuals based on the car that they drive, therefore the purchase and consumption

of environmentally-friendly products can lead to an improvement of someone's status in society (Musonera & Mercer, 2019). With the intention of improving this status by being perceived as an innovator or as wealthy, it is observed that individuals with higher income are more willing to invest higher sums of money on resource-efficient cars ((White & Sintov, 2017), (Musonera & Mercer, 2019)).

In addition to social status, green self-identity has been identified as the key motivator for the adaptation of an electric vehicle. Customers' interest towards the purchase is related to their ethical beliefs and their moral obligations towards following an environmentally friendly mindset. By fulfilling their ethical obligations and following an eco-friendly lifestyle, customers develop the feeling of identity and experience increased self-esteem. This increase of self-esteem is even higher when consumption is being executed in a public environment, as it is the case for cars (Barbarossa et al., 2015).

Based on this information, the proposition is that a sustainable message alone might not be a sufficient factor for automotive manufacturers to attract enough customers. By however combining environmental factors with performance and innovative aspects of the electric vehicle, car makers might attract a larger number of potential customers leading to higher sales than advertising sustainability alone.

P2: Automotive manufacturers want to reduce perceived risk of consumers related to new innovation

In order to explain this proposition, first of all, the product life cycle theory will be taken into consideration.

The product life cycle theory differentiates between four cycles that a product goes through from its initial stage, the so called "introduction" until the "decline" is reached and the product gets eventually eliminated from the company's portfolio. In the introduction stage sales are still significantly low and the company experiences very low profits or even a loss (Fang, 2013). This is also related to the significantly high marketing and promotional costs which are supposed to attract innovators and early adopters. Innovators are the first target group during this stage because they are high risk takers and have an interest in creating uniqueness rather than consuming mass products. The adaptation of new technology is an expression of social class. Besides also being risk-takers, early adopters seek leadership and are therefore interested in buying new products, however, they are known for putting more effort into the purchase than innovators (Plötz et al., 2014).

The following stage is the growth stage. In this stage the sales have significantly increased and more people are aware of the product, leading to the fact that early adopters and early majority are

being targeted (Fang, 2013). Compared to the early adopters, the early majority is not a risk taker. They examine the opinion of the early adopters and make a purchase decision after analyzing advantages and disadvantages of adapting a product (Plötz et al., 2014). During the maturity state the demand has saturated and standardized products are being produced in form of mass production (Fang, 2013). In this stage the late majority will purchase the product. They are significantly skeptical about the purchase of new technologies, but since the great majority of the society already adapted it, the perceived risk is minimized (Fang, 2013). The final stage of the product life cycle is the “decline”. In this stage the demand for the product is considerably reduced and sales have decreased to a minimum until the company decides to remove this product from its portfolio (Plötz et al., 2014).

As just explained, the further the product is implemented in the market, the lower is the perceived risk that the consumer takes when making a purchase decision. The highest risk can be observed in the introduction stage since the product has not been tested by many customers before. Marketing communication managers in the automotive industry might therefore decide to communicate an electric vehicle not as sustainable innovation, but making it seem like the product has been existing for some time already in order to reduce the perceived risks that customers take when buying a new car. By excessively highlighting environmental benefits of the car and pointing out differences to ordinary ICE cars, consumers might be afraid of obtaining the product.

P3: Automotive manufacturers are facing time pressure so they want to achieve accelerated implementation

Related to the previously discussed steps of the product life cycle, the implementation of a product into the market can sometimes take some time. Especially the introduction stage requires patience and financial investment. The faster the companies therefore achieve the growth stage, the faster they start enjoying financial profits with the sales of their innovation (Fang, 2013).

Besides time pressure related to financial aspects, there might also be time pressures due to governmental regulations to achieve the required targets which were previously discussed (Liobikienė & Butkus, 2017). Due to these time pressures, automotive manufacturers might be required to implement electric vehicles in the market faster. In order to achieve a quicker implementation of the product, they might decide to use a similar approach to the one discussed in the last proposition: marketing communication managers might decide to communicate electric vehicles as if they were already in a more advanced stage of the product life cycle in order to make the potential customer familiar with the product and to reduce the purchase decision-making process.

P4: Environmental benefits are not sufficient to create a competitive advantage

The following proposition is related to the fact that electromobility is becoming more and more important throughout the past couple of years and many automotive manufacturers have recently introduced electric models or will be doing so soon. Even though electromobility is a disruptive technology, electric vehicles seem to slightly become popular and known among consumers, leading to the fact that the sustainable factor alone might not be sufficient to draw customer's attention. Factors such as the battery size and the cars' can be considered as indicators for its performance and might therefore play an important role for customers when making a purchase decision (Scharrer, 2020). Increasing competition might therefore be the reason why advertisements of electric vehicles seem to only secondarily point out environmental and sustainability aspects of the car, but rather focus on performance and design of the vehicle.

P5: Environmentally friendly products can be considered as expensive

According to previous studies, customers perceive environmentally friendly products as automatically more expensive than products which are not environmentally friendly alternatives (de Chiara, 2015). One of the reasons why automotive manufacturers do not want to explicitly focus on sustainability and eco-friendly aspects could therefore be that they do not want to scare their potential leads. As explained earlier, the overall goal of automotive manufacturers and society is to achieve a total reorganization of the automotive sector towards complete zero-free emission. In order to achieve this goal, automotive manufacturers will target electric vehicles to the overall population and not only to high-income customers. For this reason, car manufacturers might have decided to avoid any type of perceived overpricing of their products in order to support quick adaptation of their product towards the overall society.

2.4. Literature Review

Title	Author	Year	Contribution
The effect of prior knowledge and decision-making style on the online purchase decision-making process: A typology of consumer shopping behaviour	Karimi, S., Papamichail, K. N., & Holland, C. P.	2015	<p>Prior knowledge about a product influences the decision-making process in the areas of information search and processing. Groups with low product knowledge follow a more detailed and precise decision-making process compared to groups which already have previous product knowledge.</p> <p>→ This study was chosen because marketing communication can have a positive impact on prior knowledge and it shows that the communication that the customer receives from the company can have a considerable impact on his decision-making process.</p>
A self-identity based model of electric car adoption intention: A cross-cultural comparative study	Barbarossa, C., Beckmann, S. C., de Pelsmacker, P., Moons, I., & Gwozdz, W.	2015	<p>The study assumes that the attitude and intention of customers towards purchasing an electric vehicle is influence by their green self-identity.</p> <p>→ The study shows that many customers buying electric vehicles follow a green self-identity. This information can be considered as important for the study because it underlines the research question why automotive manufacturers decide not to mention eco-friendly benefits of electric cars as the most important aspect of their marketing communication.</p>
Electric Car Brand Positioning in the Automotive Industry: Recommendations for Sustainable and Innovative Marketing	Musonera, E., & Mercer, C. C.	2019	<p>The interest for electric vehicles has been increasing since people are becoming more and more concerned about the environment. The study points out that being eco-friendly turned into a recognized lifestyle.</p> <p>→ Since customers are becoming more and more concerned about the environment, this study also supports the research question and makes the marketing communication strategy of automotive manufacturers unclear.</p>

<p>You are what you drive: Environmentalist and social innovator symbolism drives electric vehicle adoption intentions.</p>	<p>White, L. V., & Sintov, N. D.</p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>Based on this study, there are two main reasons for the adaptation of electric vehicles. One of them is the willingness of being perceived as social innovator and the other one is environmental self-identity.</p> <p>→ This study explains the reasons for customers to adopt an electric vehicle. It is important to support the proposition that ecological communication alone might not be enough to create a competitive advantage and attract a larger group of consumers.</p>
<p>Impact of Integrated Marketing Communication on Consumer Behaviour: Effects on Consumer Decision – Making Process.</p>	<p>Mihart, C.</p>	<p>2012</p>	<p>Marketing communication can positively influence the customer decision-making process. If it is done in a smart way it can create a competitive advantage for the company.</p> <p>→ This study was chosen because it underlines the importance of marketing communication for a firm and therefore shows the importance of this research study.</p>
<p>Eco-labeled Products: Trend or Tools for Sustainability Strategies?</p>	<p>De Chiara, A.</p>	<p>2015</p>	<p>The use of eco-labels can improve the perception of customers towards the brand if the communication is structured and transparent.</p> <p>→ By explaining the importance of eco-friendly products, once again, it emphasized that environmental factors play an important role in marketing communication. It further supports the research question and highlights the importance of the study.</p>
<p>Why sustainability is now the key driver of innovation.</p>	<p>Nidumolu, R., Prahalad, C., & Rangaswami, M.</p>	<p>2013</p>	<p>Companies following sustainable business practices will have financial benefits and a competitive advantage.</p> <p>→ This study emphasized the financial benefits of companies that follow a sustainable approach. It is relevant to the study because following a more sustainable marketing communication approach could bring financial benefits also to automotive manufacturers.</p>

<p>Millennial Generation and Environmental Sustainability: The Role of Social Media in the Consumer Purchasing Behavior for Wine.</p>	<p>Sogari, G., Pucci, T., Aquilani, B., & Zanni, L.</p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>Social media use has increased the interest for environmental and sustainable business practices and has therefore increased pressures towards companies.</p> <p>→ Even though this study focusses on the consumer purchase behavior for wine, the key information is that social media is giving customers more and more power over companies. Since the pressure towards greener business practices has been increasing, this study underlines again the importance of following an eco-friendlier marketing communication approach.</p>
<p>Electromobility Enters the Decisive Phase</p>	<p>Scharrer, O.</p>	<p>2020</p>	<p>The battery power of electric vehicles, indicating its range, is becoming more and more important.</p> <p>→ The study can support the proposition that being eco-friendly by itself is not enough for consumers; they require high performance vehicles. This could justify the marketing advertisements where performance seems to play an important role.</p>
<p>Touchpoints for electric mobility: Investigating the purchase process for promoting sales of electric vehicles in Switzerland.</p>	<p>Plananska, J.</p>	<p>2020</p>	<p>The study gives detailed explanation into the purchasing process of an electric vehicle from the point of view of a customer and the different touchpoints between company and customer.</p> <p>→ This study can be considered as considerably important because it explains the customer purchase decision journey in detail and can help to identify where marketing communication can play an essential role during the purchasing process.</p>

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The chosen research to identify the reasons why carmakers are not primarily pointing out environmental benefits of electric cars even though it would align with their missions and visions is a qualitative study carried out in form of semi-structured in-depth interviews. Qualitative studies allow the researcher to reach out to specific experts in the investigated field and can therefore provide professional knowledge and expertise that cannot be provided when conducting a research with a large number of participants. The advantage is supposed to be that the researcher is able to limit the study to more relevant and specific information by being flexible and asking open questions, as well as adapting the conversation based on the answers given by the interviewee. This will allow the researcher to acquire specific and detailed information which can be relevant to solve the research question.

3.2. Application context and sample description

The context of this study is to analyze why it seems like carmakers are not primarily pointing out environmental benefits of electric cars even though it would align with their missions and visions. Instead, advertisements are rather addressing performance and innovational aspects of the cars. In order to receive clear and specific information, the interviews will be addressed to individuals working for multinational companies in the automotive field in the areas of Marketing and communication.

By interviewing individuals in the automotive sector, the different reasons for the choice of marketing communication can be understood. The information obtained is supposed to facilitate the understanding of internal organizational processes and the way that automotive manufacturers perceive their products and customers' preferences. Besides the above-mentioned fields, managers of car dealerships will be contacted. By interviewing dealerships, the customers' needs as well as preferences and concerns can be further understood and the study will be able to discover if the above-mentioned motivations of "green identity" as well as "social status" are in fact the main motivators for the adoption of an electric vehicle.

In order to obtain a broad understanding of the above-mentioned questions as well as to gain specific and detailed information, the goal of this study is to reach a sample size of around eight individuals from different fields within the automotive industry. Based on the length of the interviews as well as the relevance of the information obtained, the sample size can be adjusted and increased if necessary.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The interviewees will be primarily contacted through professional social media websites such as LinkedIn. Moreover, thanks to personal connections, some of the interviewees will also be contacted personally due to previous practical experiences within the automotive sector. In order to structure the interview, broad questions will be defined which are supposed to give information that is relevant to answer the research questions. Based on the complexity of the answers, further questions will be asked in order to obtain specific information, especially if there are significant differences between the answers obtained from previous interviews or the information obtained during the theoretical framing.

Due to geographical distance as well as the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the interviews will be held online using softwares with video function such as Zoom or Skype. After successful execution of the interviews, the conversation will be transcribed and analyzed. In order to analyze the interviews, they will be coded and grouped into different categories as well as subcategories. During this process the software MAXQDA will be used. The results from the analysis will then be interpreted and compared to the results of previous studies and the assumptions made during the theoretical framing. Based on the results, conclusions as well as relevant recommendations for the automotive industry will be pointed out.

4. Contribution

Thanks to this study, it will be further understood why an environmental product like an electric vehicle is sometimes not explicitly defined by sustainability factors in marketing communication. By understanding the reasons for this approach followed by automotive manufacturers, the marketing advertisements can be analyzed and it can be evaluated if there are further aspects that need to be taken into consideration when delivering a message to potential customers.

As a contribution to previous studies defining a gap between pro-environmental concern and pro-environmental behavior, the study intends to define ways for companies targeting a sustainable product to mitigate this gap and to allow better marketing approaches to customers. Thanks to the conversation with experts in the field of marketing, who are responsible for the implementation of electric vehicles, ways can be defined to understand the reasons for these gaps and solutions can be evaluated to mitigate them. By finding a way to mitigate this gap, not only automotive manufacturers but also marketers in different industries who are trying to launch an environmentally friendly product can apply the knowledge to their own business and avoid mistakes during the implementation.

Thanks to conversations with individuals working closely with the final customer, customer preferences, beliefs, and expectations towards electric vehicles can be discovered which will help the automotive industry to adjust their strategies and therefore avoid costs in possibly inefficient marketing campaigns which might not fulfill the customers' expectations.

5. Thesis chapter overview

Abstract

List of abbreviations

List of figures

List of tables

1. Introduction: Background, Problem statement, gaps, research questions

2. Theoretical Framing

2.1. Reasons for sustainable development of automotive manufacturers

2.1.1. Governmental pressures

2.1.2. Social Pressures

2.1.3. Business Reasons

2.2. Role of marketing communication on customer decision making

2.2.1. Decision-making process when adopting an electric vehicle

2.3. Propositions

2.4. Literature Review

2.5. Literature review

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

3.2. Data collection

3.3. Data analysis

4. Discussion and limitations

5. Appendix

6. References

6. Plan of work

Table 1: Plan of work. Own source.

Workplan- EMBS Master Thesis																			
ACTIVITES		September				October				November				December				January	
		36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	1
Reading	Topic Definition																		
	Research Literature																		
	Reding Literature																		
Methodology	Research Definition																		
	Interview Design																		
	Interview Approval																		
	Gathering Contacts																		
Writing	Interviewing																		
	Coding																		
	Analysis of the results																		
	Finalization																		
	Review																		
Presentation	Presentation																		
	Topic Proposal																		
	Expose																		
	Delivery																		
	Defense																		

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