

Final Project

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Final Project

Overview

Tesla, Inc., an American electric vehicle (EV) and clean energy company, is renowned for its innovative approach in the automotive industry. Tesla, Inc. was founded in 2003 by a group of engineers who wanted to prove that people did not need to compromise to drive electric – that electric vehicles can be better, quicker, and more fun to drive than gasoline cars (Bredenfeld et al., 2020). Today, Tesla builds all-electric vehicles and infinitely scalable clean energy generation and storage products. Tesla believes the faster the world stops relying on fossil fuels and moves towards a zero-emission future, the better.

Tesla's mission is to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy. This mission drives the company's strategy and decision-making, from vehicle design and manufacturing to energy solutions. As of 2021, Tesla has solidified its market position as a leader in electric vehicles (EVs) and clean energy products with a global presence (Boesch, 2023). It operates multiple manufacturing facilities, including the Gigafactories in the U.S., Shanghai, and Berlin, drastically increasing Tesla's production capabilities.

Current Issues or Problems

Manufacturing Scale and Supply Chain Stability

Despite its revolutionary approach and success, Tesla faces several challenges that impact its operations and growth prospects. One of the most pressing issues is its struggle with manufacturing scale and supply chain stability (Purwidyantri & Prabowo, 2023). The rapid scaling of production volumes has led to frequent production bottlenecks, especially evident during the launches of new models like the Model 3 and Model Y. Another significant challenge

is the global shortage of semiconductors and other critical components, which has stalled production lines and delayed deliveries.

Safety and Reliability

Additionally, Tesla has faced scrutiny over the safety and reliability of its Autopilot system, with several incidents attracting media attention and regulatory review (Bredenfeld et al., 2020). These issues could undermine consumer trust and affect sales, posing a significant problem that needs addressing through strategic initiatives and enhancements in technology and safety features.

Market Competition and Pricing Pressure

Tesla, Inc. faces increasing competition from established automotive giants and new electric vehicle (EV) entrants (Purwidyantri & Prabowo, 2023). Companies like Volkswagen and Ford and newcomers like Rivian and Lucid Motors are ramping up their EV offerings, including models that compete directly with Tesla's product line in terms of price, range, and technology. This intensified competition pressures Tesla to maintain its market lead and innovation edge, particularly in markets where automotive players are backed by substantial government support and long-standing brand loyalty (Le & Ho, 2021).

Moreover, as competitors begin to offer more affordable EV options, Tesla may experience pricing pressure, forcing them to reconsider their pricing strategies to retain market share. The challenge here lies in balancing cost leadership and premium branding without compromising profitability and long-term growth while continuing to invest heavily in R&D and global expansion (Boesch, 2023). Strategic adjustments in pricing could impact Tesla's margins, primarily as they aim to make EVs more accessible to a broader audience.

Environmental and Regulatory Challenges

Tesla's aggressive expansion strategy also confronts significant environmental and regulatory hurdles (WU et al., 2020). The company's manufacturing facilities, particularly those in foreign markets, face strict environmental regulations concerning their production processes and the materials used in manufacturing batteries and other components. Compliance with these regulations can be costly and time-consuming, potentially slowing Tesla's operations and affecting its production efficiency.

Additionally, Tesla's commitment to sustainability is continuously tested by the need to source ethically mined raw materials, particularly cobalt, and lithium, which are essential for battery production but are often linked to environmental degradation and ethical concerns regarding mining practices (Jorgenson et al., 2023).

Intellectual Property and Technological Secrecy

Another challenge Tesla faces is protecting its intellectual property (IP) amidst a rapidly evolving and highly competitive technological landscape. As Tesla innovates, it must also guard against IP theft or espionage, particularly in international markets where IP protection may not be as robust (Kumari & Bhat, 2021). The automotive industry's shift towards software-driven vehicles makes Tesla's proprietary technology, especially its Full Self-Driving (FSD) software, a prime target for competitors seeking to fast-track their technology development through reverse engineering or illicit means.

Moreover, Tesla's open-source philosophy, which sometimes involves sharing its patents, although intended to spur broader industry innovation, could inadvertently aid competitors in developing parallel technologies without the associated R&D costs (WU et al., n.d.). Balancing technological openness with strategic IP protection remains a complex issue for Tesla,

necessitating a nuanced approach to collaboration, patenting strategies, and participation in global markets with varying degrees of IP enforcement.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognized for innovation and sustainability in the electric vehicle market. ● Leading-edge electric powertrain and software capabilities. ● Controls the entire customer experience, enhancing satisfaction and operational efficiency. ● Gigafactories enable large-scale production and control over critical battery manufacturing.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issues with quality control and customer service due to rapid expansion. ● High vehicle costs limit accessibility to mid to high-income customers. ● Reliance on CEO Elon Musk's persona sometimes causes market volatility.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased governmental support and consumer demand for electric vehicles. ● Potential growth in emerging markets like India and Eastern Europe. ● Opportunities in battery technology and energy storage to maintain industry leadership. ● Potential for collaborations enhancing autonomous driving technology and vehicle software.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Growing number of competitors in the electric vehicle market, both from startups and established manufacturers. ● Challenges in international markets affecting compliance and operations. ● Impacts of economic downturns and fluctuating raw material costs, particularly lithium, on profitability and pricing strategies.

Strengths

Tesla, Inc. stands out in the electric vehicle (EV) industry primarily due to its distinct strengths that have positioned it as a leader in innovation and sustainability. These strengths differentiate Tesla from its competitors and contribute significantly to its brand loyalty and market growth. Below is a detailed exploration of these key strengths:

Recognized for Innovation and Sustainability in the Electric Vehicle Market. Tesla is synonymous with innovation in the electric vehicle sector. This recognition is primarily due to its commitment to pushing the boundaries of what electric cars can achieve. Unlike traditional automakers, Tesla started with a clean slate, focusing solely on electric power, allowing it to leapfrog the incremental improvements that legacy automakers made on internal combustion engine vehicles. Tesla's approach involves integrating cutting-edge technology and renewable energy solutions, making its vehicles highly efficient and environmentally friendly (Bredenfeld et al., 2020).

Leading-edge Electric Powertrain and Software Capabilities. Tesla's technological superiority is evident in its advanced electric powertrain and sophisticated software systems (Le & Ho, 2021). The powertrain, which includes the battery, motor, and drivetrain, is designed and manufactured in-house, allowing Tesla to optimize performance and efficiency beyond what many competitors can achieve. Additionally, Tesla's vehicles are equipped with high-performance software that supports over-the-air updates, adding new features and improving existing functionalities without needing physical service center visits.

Controls the Entire Customer Experience, Enhancing Satisfaction and Operational Efficiency. Tesla's control over the entire customer experience, from research and design to sales and after-sales service, sets it apart in the automotive industry. By selling vehicles directly to consumers through company-owned showrooms and online platforms, Tesla bypasses traditional dealership networks (Boesch, 2023). Furthermore, this approach allows Tesla to gather direct customer feedback, which it can quickly implement into future designs and updates, enhancing customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Gigafactories Enable Large-Scale Production and Control Over Critical Battery Manufacturing. Tesla's investment in its Gigafactories is a strategic move that supports its scale-up efforts and control over the production of critical components, particularly batteries. These massive facilities produce vehicles and focus on battery production and innovation (Saxena & Vibhandik, 2021). By controlling battery manufacturing, Tesla ensures the supply of these crucial components, reduces production costs through economies of scale, and secures its supply chain against external disruptions. The Gigafactories are designed to be powered by renewable energy sources, further aligning with Tesla's sustainability goals and reducing operational costs over time (WU et al., 2020).

Weaknesses

Tesla, Inc., despite its remarkable success and industry-leading innovations, faces specific operational and strategic challenges that can be categorized as critical weaknesses. These weaknesses can affect its growth trajectory and market reputation if not adequately addressed. Below is a detailed exploration of these weaknesses:

Issues with Quality Control and Customer Service Due to Rapid Expansion. Tesla's rapid expansion and aggressive production targets have sometimes come at the cost of quality control. As the company pushes to increase production volumes, particularly with the introduction of models intended for a broader market, there have been numerous reports of quality issues. These range from minor cosmetic problems to more significant mechanical failures that could affect the safety and functionality of the vehicles. Such quality issues can erode consumer trust and brand reputation, crucial for customer retention and attracting new buyers (Jorgenson et al., 2023). Additionally, Tesla's customer service has struggled to keep pace with its growth. Expanding its customer base has led to longer response times and delays in

service provisions, such as repairs and maintenance. These service delays are compounded by a still limited physical presence in terms of service centers compared to more established automotive brands.

High Vehicle Costs Limit Accessibility to Mid to High-Income Customers. Despite efforts to make electric vehicles more affordable, Tesla's cars remain priced at a premium, restricting their accessibility primarily to mid to high-income individuals. While the lower-end Model 3 has attempted to address this issue, the cost is still prohibitive for many consumers, especially in markets outside North America and Europe, where economic conditions differ (Le & Ho, 2021). This limitation in market accessibility restricts Tesla's ability to fully penetrate the global car market, particularly in developing regions with higher price sensitivity. The high cost reflects Tesla's advanced technology and features and the substantial research and development costs the company continues to incur.

Reliance on CEO Elon Musk's Persona Sometimes Causes Market Volatility. Tesla is inextricably linked with its charismatic and often controversial CEO, Elon Musk. While Musk's vision and innovative thinking have been central to Tesla's success, his public statements and behavior on social media platforms have sometimes led to significant market volatility. His tweets have affected stock prices and have even attracted scrutiny from regulatory bodies like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). It ties the company's fortunes too closely to the actions and public perceptions of one person rather than the institutional strength of the company as a whole (Bredenfeld et al., 2020)

Opportunities

Tesla, Inc. operates in a dynamic environment that presents several promising opportunities that can be leveraged to maintain and enhance its market leadership, especially in

the electric vehicle (EV) and clean energy sectors. Here are detailed explorations of these opportunities:

Increased Governmental Support and Consumer Demand for Electric Vehicles.

Governments worldwide are increasingly pushing for reductions in carbon emissions, which has led to the promotion of electric vehicles through incentives such as tax rebates, grants, and subsidies, as well as support for charging infrastructure development. This regulatory push, growing consumer awareness, and preference for environmentally friendly products has significantly increased the demand for EVs (Bredenfeld et al., 2020). As a leading innovator in this space, Tesla stands to benefit immensely from these trends.

Potential Growth in Emerging Markets like India and Eastern Europe. Emerging markets represent a vast opportunity for Tesla, owing to their large populations and rapidly growing economies. Countries like India and those in Eastern Europe are seeing increasing middle-class affluence, which translates into higher consumer spending power. While these markets pose challenges, including price sensitivity and infrastructure issues, they offer substantial room for growth through tailored offerings and localized strategies (Le & Ho, 2021). For Tesla, entering these markets could mean adapting its models to suit local preferences and conditions, potentially collaborating with local firms for better market penetration, and leveraging government policies aimed at adopting clean energy technologies.

Opportunities in Battery Technology and Energy Storage to Maintain Industry Leadership. Tesla has always been at the forefront of battery technology, central to the EV value proposition. The ongoing advancements in battery technology — such as improvements in energy density, longevity, and reduction in charging time — allow Tesla to enhance its vehicles' performance and cost-effectiveness. The energy storage market is also expanding as the world

increasingly shifts towards renewable energy sources. Tesla's energy storage solutions, like the Powerwall and Powerpack, are well-positioned to capitalize on this trend. Innovating and scaling these technologies can help Tesla maintain its leadership and generate new revenue streams (Kumari & Bhat, 2021).

Potential for Collaborations Enhancing Autonomous Driving Technology and Vehicle Software. Tesla's autonomous driving technology and vehicle software development stand as a critical differentiator in the automotive market. Collaborations with tech companies, research institutions, and startups could accelerate Tesla's advancements in these areas. Partnerships can provide access to cutting-edge AI capabilities, additional data, and innovative technologies, which are critical for evolving Tesla's Autopilot and Full Self-Driving features (Bredenfeld et al., 2020). These collaborations bolster Tesla's technological capabilities and enhance its competitive edge by integrating diverse expertise and insights into its products.

Threats

As a leading figure in the electric vehicle (EV) industry, it faces several external threats that could impact its market position and operational efficiency. Understanding these threats is crucial for strategizing effective countermeasures. Here are detailed explorations of these potential threats:

Growing Number of Competitors in the Electric Vehicle Market. The electric vehicle market is becoming increasingly crowded as startups and established automotive manufacturers intensify their efforts in EV production. Major global automakers like Volkswagen, BMW, and Ford are investing heavily in electric mobility, driven by tightening emissions regulations and growing consumer demand for sustainable transportation (WU et al., 2020). These companies bring substantial financial resources, extensive manufacturing capabilities, and strong dealer

networks, significantly challenging Tesla's current market dominance. New entrants like Rivian and Lucid Motors also introduce innovative technologies and gain attention, further saturating the market.

Challenges in International Markets Affecting Compliance and Operations. Tesla's global expansion exposes it to complex regulatory environments across different countries. Each market has its own set of rules concerning vehicle safety, environmental standards, and consumer protection, which can vary widely and change frequently. Compliance with these regulations can be costly and time-consuming, potentially delaying product launches and adding operational burdens (Bhardwaj et al., 2020). For instance, Tesla has faced challenges in markets like China and Europe, where regulations are stringent and often subject to rapid shifts. Navigating these regulatory landscapes requires Tesla to adapt its business practices and product features, which can strain resources and affect overall business agility.

Impacts of Economic Downturns and Fluctuating Raw Material Costs. Tesla's profitability and pricing strategies are vulnerable to broader economic conditions and fluctuations in the costs of raw materials, particularly lithium, which is a critical component of EV batteries. Economic downturns can reduce consumer spending power and suppress demand for high-value items like new cars, impacting Tesla's sales volumes and revenue. Simultaneously, the increasing demand for EVs and energy storage solutions has increased lithium competition, driving up prices (Boesch, 2023). These fluctuations can squeeze Tesla's margins, primarily as it works to make its vehicles more affordable to a broader audience. Managing these cost pressures while maintaining affordable consumer pricing and profitable operations presents a significant challenge.

Synthesizing Results

The synthesis of Tesla's SWOT analysis portrays a dynamic company poised for continued innovation and market expansion yet facing significant challenges that could impede its progress. With its established strengths and emerging opportunities, Tesla is well-equipped to refine its strategic approach and solidify its EV market leadership (WU et al., 2020). However, it must diligently manage its weaknesses and threats to maintain this trajectory.

Tesla's strengths, including its reputation for innovation and sustainability, advanced electric powertrain technology, direct customer sales model, and control over battery manufacturing through its Gigafactories, provide a solid foundation (Saxena & Vibhandik, 2021). These strengths differentiate Tesla from competitors and give it a competitive edge in brand loyalty and technological advancement. By leveraging these strengths, Tesla can continue to lead in EV innovation and sustainability efforts.

On the opportunities front, increased governmental support for EVs, rising consumer demand, potential expansion into emerging markets, and advancements in battery technology present significant growth avenues. These opportunities are timely as the global shift towards sustainability becomes more pronounced and consumers increasingly favor environmentally friendly products (Saxena & Vibhandik, 2021). For instance, tapping into emerging markets like India and Eastern Europe offers vast potential customer bases that are gradually opening up to EV technology due to changing regulations and growing economic capacities.

However, Tesla's weaknesses, such as issues with quality control, high vehicle costs, and heavy reliance on CEO Elon Musk's persona, could undermine these strengths and opportunities if not addressed. The company's rapid expansion has occasionally compromised product quality and customer service, impacting customer satisfaction and brand reputation. Furthermore, the

premium pricing of Tesla's models limits their market to mid to high-income consumers, potentially restricting broader market penetration in price-sensitive regions.

To effectively harness its strengths and capitalize on opportunities, Tesla must implement strategic interventions to address these weaknesses. Enhancing quality control processes is essential to reduce manufacturing defects and improve overall customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by investing in more robust quality assurance measures and perhaps slowing down production to ensure higher quality standards are met (Kumari & Bhat, 2021). Additionally, expanding the charging infrastructure will support Tesla's growing customer base and help alleviate one of the significant barriers to EV adoption, thus expanding its market.

The threats posed by increasing competition, regulatory challenges in international markets, and the impacts of economic downturns and raw material costs also require careful management. Tesla needs to stay agile in a market that is becoming increasingly crowded with traditional automakers and new entrants. Developing more cost-effective manufacturing techniques and potentially broadening its product range to include lower-cost models could help Tesla appeal to a broader audience and combat competitive pressures (Jorgenson et al., 2023).

While Tesla has formidable strengths and substantial opportunities, its ability to continue thriving depends significantly on how it addresses its internal weaknesses and external threats. Strategic investments in quality control, customer service, market expansion, and technology development are crucial. By doing so, Tesla can fortify its market position, enhance customer trust, and continue driving the transition toward sustainable transportation. This comprehensive approach will help mitigate existing challenges and position Tesla to leverage future opportunities effectively.

Improvements and Solutions

To ensure the continued growth and innovation of Tesla, Inc., it is critical to implement a range of strategic improvements and solutions that directly address the weaknesses and threats identified in the SWOT analysis. By doing so, Tesla can enhance its operational efficiency, market reach, and customer satisfaction while maintaining its leadership position in the electric vehicle industry.

Addressing Semiconductor Shortages

The global semiconductor shortage has significantly impacted Tesla's production capabilities, leading to delays and increased costs. To mitigate this issue, Tesla could explore strategic partnerships or joint ventures with semiconductor manufacturers to secure a more reliable supply chain. Investing in chip production, either independently or through partnerships, would stabilize supply and give Tesla greater control over the technology and customization of the chips used in its vehicles (WU et al., 2020).

Enhancing Autopilot and Full Self-Driving (FSD) Technologies

Tesla's Autopilot and FSD technologies are central to its brand identity and appeal; however, they have also attracted significant scrutiny regarding safety and reliability. Improving public perception through transparent communication about the capabilities and limitations of these systems is crucial. Tesla should continue to invest in robust safety measures, including more comprehensive real-world testing and data collection, to enhance system accuracy and reliability.

Reducing Vehicle Costs

The high cost of Tesla's vehicles limits their accessibility to a broader audience. To address this, Tesla could innovate in its manufacturing processes and materials. Implementing more efficient production techniques, such as advanced automation and optimized logistics,

could reduce labor costs and manufacturing time (Kristensen & Kristensen, 2022). Additionally, investing in research for cheaper, more sustainable materials for batteries and other components could decrease manufacturing costs. Offering a range of models at different price points, including more budget-friendly options, would allow Tesla to attract a broader customer base and compete more effectively in global markets.

Expanding Global Market Presence

Tesla's potential growth in emerging markets like India and Eastern Europe presents an opportunity to increase its global footprint. Tailoring vehicles to meet these markets' specific needs and preferences, such as smaller, more affordable models, could drive sales. Establishing local manufacturing facilities or partnerships in these regions could also reduce shipping costs and tariffs, making Tesla's vehicles more competitive (Boesch, 2023).

Sustainable Resource Management

As Tesla scales its production, sustainable management of critical raw materials, especially those used in batteries, becomes increasingly important. Tesla could expand its recycling programs and invest in technology to recover materials from used batteries, reducing reliance on mining and lowering environmental impact. Collaborating with global suppliers who adhere to ethical and environmental standards can further ensure sustainability in Tesla's supply chain.

Diversification of Product Offerings

Expanding beyond vehicles into other energy solutions, such as solar panels and commercial energy storage systems, can diversify Tesla's revenue streams and reduce the financial risks associated with its automotive segment (Jorgenson et al., 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Tesla, Inc. stands at a pivotal juncture where aligning its strengths with emerging opportunities can propel its industry leadership forward. However, addressing its pronounced weaknesses and mitigating external threats is crucial for sustaining its competitive edge. Strategic investments in semiconductor partnerships and chip production are essential to stabilizing the supply chain while enhancing safety and transparency around Autopilot technologies, which can bolster public trust and regulatory compliance. Moreover, adopting innovative manufacturing techniques and exploring cost-effective materials will enable Tesla to broaden its market reach by making its vehicles more accessible to diverse consumer segments, especially in emerging markets.

Further, Tesla's proactive engagement in sustainable practices and ethical sourcing will reinforce its commitment to environmental stewardship, which is crucial for its brand reputation. Diversifying its product line into other energy solutions presents additional revenue streams and reduces reliance on the automotive sector. By systematically implementing these improvements and solutions, Tesla can overcome its current challenges and leverage its core competencies to achieve greater market penetration and financial stability, continuing to lead the transition toward a more sustainable automotive future.

Reflective Essay

Reflecting on the QSO 489 Capstone in Operations Management course has been an enriching and enlightening experience, particularly as we navigated through the complexities of our project centered on Tesla, Inc. This reflective essay serves as an opportunity to critically assess our strategies and the overall progress of the project while integrating the instructor's feedback and the peer interactions that have shaped our approach.

Our project's primary focus was to analyze Tesla's strategic operations and identify areas for improvement within its expansive and innovative environment. From the outset, the endeavor was ambitious, seeking to not only understand Tesla's current operational strategies but also to suggest feasible enhancements. A significant aspect of our project was the SWOT analysis, which provided a structured insight into Tesla's internal and external environments. It highlighted Tesla's robust innovation capabilities and the challenges it faces due to rapid expansion and intense market competition.

Throughout the course, several successes punctuated our journey. Our ability to effectively utilize Tesla's strengths, such as its market-leading position in innovation and its revolutionary gigafactories, to propose strategic improvements was particularly rewarding. These strengths provided a solid foundation for our recommendations, which included enhancing quality control measures and expanding global market presence.

However, the project was not without its challenges. One notable difficulty was addressing the intricate issues related to Tesla's supply chain and production bottlenecks, exacerbated by external factors like the global semiconductor shortage. These challenges were complex, requiring a deep understanding of international supply chain dynamics and strategic resource management.

Incorporating feedback from our instructor was pivotal. The feedback emphasized the need for a more nuanced approach to Tesla's market expansion strategies, especially in emerging markets. Based on this, we adjusted our proposals to focus more on localized consumer needs and potential partnerships in these regions, aiming for a more tailored and sustainable entry strategy.

The reflective insights gained from this capstone project are profound. Academically, it has deepened my understanding of strategic operations management, especially in how it applies to high-tech companies operating on a global scale. Personally, it has enhanced my analytical thinking and problem-solving skills, particularly in dealing with complex, real-world business scenarios.

This capstone experience has been instrumental in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application, providing a comprehensive understanding of the nuances involved in managing and strategizing within a leading tech company. The ongoing process of learning from feedback and peer discussions has not only refined our project but also prepared us for future professional challenges in the field of operations management.

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