

EVALUATION OF VOLKSWAGEN GROUP'S MARKETING ACTIVITIES



Qian Liu 2304600

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UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID

Executive Summary

This report aims to provide a critical evaluation of Volkswagen Group's marketing activities. There is a particular focus on the company's marketing strategies, including the placement of marketing resources, market environment analysis, STP strategy, communication strategy, and strategic change management. The evaluation will be measured against key criteria such as differentiation, gaining competitive advantage, retaining customer loyalty, effective use of market resources and so on. The results of PESTEL and SWOT analyses can help the organisation to identify its external and internal environments that may affect its internal decision-making and help it to better understand the state of the industry market in which it operates. Recommendations which Volkswagen Group should adopt in the future will be provided in the end of this report.

This report was supported by a range of literature to include journals, printed publications and online articles. As the author of the report, a level of personal knowledge has been applied.

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1. Introduction

The goal of a business is to generate profits by selling products and services. To achieve this, organisations need to undertake a range of marketing activities and strategies to encourage people to buy (and continue buying) their products and services (Red & Yellow Ltd., 2022). According to Kotler (2012), "Marketing is the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures, and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential." Any enterprise, including a car dealership, needs to carry out effective marketing to make profits successfully, which is inseparable from the development of appropriate marketing strategies as well as timely evaluation and change of marketing strategies as the market develops. This process includes market analysis, objectives setting, strategy selection and implementation, action planning, as well as control and evaluation, which emphasises a systematic and comprehensive approach in developing a marketing plan to ensure that the business is able to respond flexibly to changes in the marketplace and stay ahead of the competition. This report chooses Volkswagen Group, a leader in the automotive industry, as the research object, and proposes feasible suggestions to help it achieve long-term development by critically evaluating its market strategies and performance.

1.1 Organisational Background

Volkswagen Group is a globally recognised automobile manufacturing company headquartered in Wolfsburg, Germany. It is one of the largest car manufacturers in the world with 12 brands including Audi, Bentley, Bugatti, Ducati, Lamborghini, Man, Porsche, Scania, Seat, Skoda, Volkswagen and Volkswagen commercial vehicles (Volkswagen Group, 2023). These brands cover a wide range of vehicle types from economy cars to luxury cars, sports cars and SUVs. The company operates in four market segments, including passenger cars, commercial vehicles, financial services, and power engineering (Yahoo Finance, 2024). Being committed to providing consumers around the world with vehicles that meet the needs of each location, Volkswagen Group has an extensive production and sales network worldwide. The organisation has always been active in providing its customers with cutting-edge technology, exclusive design and the best quality products in almost all automotive segments, and all of these have helped it win the trust of consumers worldwide.

2. Marketing Strategy

Volkswagen Group's marketing strategy is one of the keys to its success in the global automotive market as it is largely tailored to the company's market positioning. Specifically, the company has driven its brand development by investing extensive human, material and financial resources in brand marketing, market research, product positioning, marketing communication, customer relationship management and marketing analyses as well as adopting proactive change management initiatives.

Advertising: Volkswagen Group focuses on placing advertisements on various media channels, including TV, newspapers, Internet, outdoor advertisements and so on to increase its brand awareness and product exposure.

Public Relations: Volkswagen Group's PR team shapes and maintains the company's image by communicating with the media, industry organisations and consumers. The team regularly organises PR activities such as press conferences, media test drives and professional forums to increase the company's influence and visibility in the industry.

Promotions: With the aim of attracting potential consumers, boosting sales and increasing market share, Volkswagen Group regularly conducts promotional activities, such as cash discounts, zero-interest loans and free maintenance, in accordance with market conditions and sales targets.

Customer Relationship Management: Volkswagen Group attaches great importance to customer relationship management. It understands customer needs and feedback by building customer databases as well as collecting and analysing customer information. Through the use of CRM system, the company keeps close contact with customers, provides personalised service and care, as well as improves customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Online and offline activities: In order to strengthen interaction and experience with consumers, Volkswagen Group often organises various activities online and offline. Online activities include online exhibitions, interactive games and customised model design, while offline activities include car shows, test-drive experiences and owner clubs. All these activities are helpful to enhance brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Besides, the company also increases its brand exposure by sponsoring sporting events and cultural activities. Take its partnership with the 2018 FIFA World Cup as an example, as the official partner of the World Cup, Volkswagen Group carried out extensive branding and marketing activities during the tournament. Through providing a fleet of vehicles to transport teams, and offering free rides for fans attending matches, the company promoted its brand to a wider

audience. Meanwhile, Volkswagen Group also expanded its brand exposure during the World Cup through social media, outdoor advertisements and brand displays in venues. The cooperation with some famous football stars and teams for co-branding activities and promotions also enhanced the company's brand recognition and influence (Maxwell, 2022). In addition to these marketing inputs and activities, Volkswagen Group also optimises marketing strategies and activities through data analysis to enhance marketing effectiveness. In summary, this all-round marketing investment helps to increase the company's competitiveness and influence in the market.

2.1 Market Environment

2.1.1 PESTEL Analysis

PESTEL analysis focuses on the macroenvironment and it helps organisations to identify external issues that may affect internal decision making by analysing all the macro-factors that affect the industry and the business. By analysing the impact of these issues the organisation can evaluate the existing strategies and develop better plans.

Political Factors

Government policies: Government policies have a significant impact on Volkswagen Group's sales and profits since governments worldwide often guide and adjust the automobile market by means of tax policies, subsidy policies and trade policies. For example, in recent years, more countries are encouraging the purchase of environmentally friendly vehicles by granting subsidies and tax breaks for car purchases, which is a good opportunity for Volkswagen Group to increase its market share of electric vehicles. Additionally, trade policies, tariffs and trade agreements may also affect the company's production and sales. For instance, countries like India impose high tariffs on imported cars, increasing the competitive pressure on the Group in these markets.

International relations: As a global brand, changes in international relations can have a significant impact on Volkswagen Group. Firstly, it is affected by the relationship between Germany and other countries. Good relations lead to direct trade and fewer restrictions while strained relations can lead to trade sanctions or restrictions. At the same time, conflicts and contradictions between countries can also influence the company's global markets. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, for example, has forced the company to relocate more production

from Europe to China, North America and Latin America in response to supply chain problems caused by the war in Ukraine (Volkswagen Group, 2023).

Economic Factors

Exchange rate fluctuations: Since Volkswagen Group is a multinational company, exchange rate fluctuations can have a direct impact on the company's import and export operations and cross-border supply chain. For example, the company may face increased costs when the currency of its main market depreciates. In addition, exchange rate fluctuations can affect the company's export competitiveness and product pricing strategies.

Energy Prices: Fluctuations in energy prices also have an impact on Volkswagen Group's product costs and sales. Rising oil prices may lead to higher fuel prices, which may reduce consumer demand for traditional fuel vehicles. In this case, the demand for new energy vehicles may increase, so the company need to adjust its product portfolio in a timely manner to adapt to market changes. On the contrary, lower oil prices will stimulate consumers to buy cars, which is a good opportunity for Volkswagen Group to increase sales.

Social Factors

Changes in perceptions and lifestyles: Changes in perceptions and lifestyles affect costumers' car buying needs. With the increasing emphasis on health and safety, people are demanding higher levels of safety from their vehicles, which Volkswagen Group must incorporate into its vehicle design to remain competitive. At the same time, changes in lifestyles could also affect people's choice of vehicle. For instance, the growing interest in outdoor activities and the fact that more and more people are choosing to travel by car may increase the demand for SUVs.

Demographics: Changes in demographics also affect Volkswagen Group's market demand. As the global population ages, the demand for customised and more comfortable cars is likely to increase. Furthermore, consumers of different age groups have different preferences in car purchasing, for example, young people prefer individual and cost-effective cars, while middle-aged people prefer practical and comfortable cars. This requires Volkswagen Group to develop marketing strategies according to different demographics.

Technological Factors

Electric and hybrid technologies: Over the years, electric vehicle technology has matured and many advanced technologies have been adopted to increase range and reduce costs. Many automotive companies, including Volkswagen Group, have adopted electric vehicle technology, hybrid technology and innovative fuel alternatives such as hydrogen fuel cells in order to cater for more sustainable modes of transportation. As the Volkswagen Group is not

currently well positioned in the field of new energy vehicles, it still needs to invest more and upgrade these technologies to remain its competitive in the marketplace (Volkswagen Group, 2023).

Digital Transformation: With the advent of the digital era, the digital transformation of enterprises has become a major trend. Volkswagen Group needs to closely integrate technology with its business, which involves the application of data analytics and big data, the use of cloud computing and artificial intelligence, digital production and supply chain management. Through digital transformation, the corporation can improve production efficiency, provide personalised products and services, as well as explore new business models.

Automation Technology: The use of automation technology in the automotive industry has become a trend. As technology continues to advance, automakers and technology companies are actively exploring and developing a variety of automation technologies to improve the performance, safety and convenience of vehicles. These technologies include autonomous driving technologies, intelligent transport systems, connected vehicle technologies, intelligent driver assistance systems and smart manufacturing technologies. Many of Volkswagen Group's competitors have invested heavily in automation technologies to improve their competitiveness, so does Volkswagen Group.

Ecological Factors

Increased environmental awareness: As global concern for the environment continues to grow, so does consumer demand for environmentally friendly products and services.

Volkswagen Group needs to focus on consumers' environmental awareness and promote the application and innovation of green vehicle technologies. As of now, its electric vehicle product line and the development of eco-friendly solutions can meet consumer demand for environmentally friendly drives and enhance competitiveness.

Energy use: Widespread concerns about socio-environmental issues has forced many automotive companies to change the type of energy used in their road transport vehicles towards more significant alternative and more sustainable sources of energy. It is a good opportunity for Volkswagen Group to reduce its environmental impact and save on energy costs through switching to renewable energy.

Legal Factors

Volkswagen Group is required to comply with the regulations and standards set by the governments of various countries, including automobile safety standards, emission standards, product quality standards and so on. These regulations and standards have specific

requirements on product safety, environmental impact and consumer rights during the manufacturing and sales of automobiles. Volkswagen Group needs to ensure that its products and services comply with these regulations and standards to avoid liability for violations of the law and reputational risk.

2.1.2 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a scientific method of analysis used to determine the company's own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, so as to organically combine the company's strategy with the company's internal resources and external environment. A comprehensive, systematic and accurate study of Volkswagen Group's situation will reveal the company's shortcomings and potential, so as to help it formulate appropriate development strategies and plans for the future.

Strength

Brand awareness: As a globally renowned automobile manufacturer, Volkswagen Group's brand is widely influential and recognised around the world. This influence comes from its insistence on product quality and design, as well as its long-term accumulation in the market.

Consumers tend to give priority to brands with good reputation and recognition when choosing cars, thus bringing the company a stable source of customers and market share.

Wide range of product lines: Volkswagen Group offers a diversified line of automobiles globally, covering different market segments such as small cars, medium-sized cars, SUVs, luxury cars and so on. This extensive product line helps to meet the needs of different consumers and expand market share.

Production capacity: Volkswagen Group has a large production scale and advanced production lines, with strong production capacity, which enables it to quickly respond to market demand, quickly adjust production plans and ensure the stability of product supply.

Globally, the company has formed a highly efficient supply chain system through the establishment of multiple production bases and co-operation projects, which further enhances production efficiency and cost control ability. This production capacity provides the Group with a strong backing in the fierce market competition.

Sales channels: Volkswagen Group has a wide range of sales channels to reach consumers around the world. The company provides costumers with a convenient car-buying experience through various sales channels, such as directly-managed shops, dealerships, and online platforms. In addition, it focuses on innovation and optimisation of sales channels and continuously expands new sales channels and partners to expand its market share. This

diversified sales channel strategy enables Volkswagen Group's products to better penetrate various market segments and meet the needs of different consumers.

Weakness

Geographical dependence: Volkswagen Group's sales are concentrated in the European markets, particularly in Germany and Western European countries, which makes it very sensitive to economic conditions, market demand and policy changes in these markets. If there is a recession or political changes in these regions, its sales and profits could be significantly affected. Moreover, the company's market share in emerging markets is relatively low, so it still needs to increase its market expansion efforts.

Lack of electric vehicle market leadership: Although Volkswagen Group has increased its investment and R&D in electric vehicles, it still faces competitive challenges in terms of the electric vehicle market. Some competitors have already made significant progress in the field of electric vehicle technology and have introduced competitive products in the market. Therefore, the company needs to accelerate innovation and marketing in the electric vehicle sector to maintain its competitive advantage.

Opportunity

Application of smart connected technology: As the application of smart connected technology becomes more and more important in the automotive industry, Volkswagen Group can leverage its strengths and technological advantages in automotive manufacturing to develop smart driving technology, telematics applications and mobile mobility services in order to provide more innovative and intelligent automotive products and solutions.

The development of autonomous driving technology: Since autonomous driving technology is considered one of the significant development directions of the automotive industry in the future, Volkswagen Group can make use of its strong technical strength and R&D capabilities to actively invest in the field of autonomous driving technology and innovate on future travelling methods and business models. This will further consolidate the company's leading position in the global automotive market.

Threat

Intense market competition: The automobile industry is a highly competitive industry where Volkswagen Group faces intense competition from other global automobile manufacturers such as Toyota, Ford and General Motors. These competitors have strong brands, extensive product lines and market shares that may pose a threat to Volkswagen's sales, market share and profitability.

Geopolitical and trade uncertainty: Global trade frictions, political instability and geopolitical risks could negatively impact Volkswagen's globalised operations. For example, trade barriers, increased tariffs or escalating political tensions could affect the company's supply chain, sales and market share, increasing operational risk and uncertainty.

2.2 Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning in the Marketing Strategy of Volkswagen Group

Volkswagen Group has a wide audience that encompasses people of all ages and income levels. As a globally renowned automaker, it has an extensive product lineup ranging from small economy cars to luxury SUVs, to meet the needs of its diverse customers. Adopting a differentiated targeting strategy, the company provide specific products for different customer segments. For example, the Group's premium brands like Bentley, Porsche and Bugatti are aimed at the higher segment of society, while the passenger cars are targeted at the middle class who want to buy robust and safe cars at a reasonable price. However, the company's multi-brand strategy and common-parts strategy may weaken the Group's individual brands if there are overlaps in customer segments or product portfolios, so they are a mixed blessing for the Volkswagen Group (Volkswagen Group, 2023).

Volkswagen Group has adopted the mix of geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioral segmentation variables to define its target audience.

Geographic segmentation: The Group divides the market into different geographic regions, such as the European market, the Asian market, the North American market and so on, according to the economic development level, consumers' purchasing power and consumption habits of different regions. In different geographical regions, the economy formulates corresponding market strategies according to local market demand and competition.

Demographic segmentation: Volkswagen Group considers consumers' age, gender, income level, family status and other personal characteristics for market segmentation. For example, it develops youthful models for young people and models for families that are suitable for family travelling.

Psychographic segmentation: The Group also carries out market segmentation according to consumers' lifestyles, attitudes, values and other psychological factors. For instance, they provide cost-effective, affordable and reliable products for consumers who focus on material value; luxury and comfort products for consumers who focus on psychological value; and

new energy products for consumers who focus on environmental protection and sustainable development.

Behavioral segmentation: Through researching and analysing consumers' brand loyalty as well as their perceptions and attitudes towards different brands, Volkswagen Group divides its market into different brand loyalty segments, such as loyal customers, brand considerers and non-brand aware segments, to provide them with targeted products.

Positioning plays a crucial role in the marketing strategy of Volkswagen Group. By offering value, reliability, innovation, and sustainability to a wide range of consumers, the company attracts and retains extensive customers, differentiates itself from competitors, as well as maintains a strong market presence. Although the Group's product line is relatively long and covers many market segments, it lacks precise market positioning and differentiated competitive advantages. In order to better meet consumers' needs, the organisation needs to conduct more in-depth analyses and research on the market, clarify its own positioning and strengthen its differentiated competitive advantages.

2.3 Selection of Media

"The role of marketing communication is vital when planning strategies to broadcast a company's values, products, and activities " (Fill, 2013). Volkswagen Group focuses on diversification and integration when choosing media marketing channels. In addition to traditional advertising and public relations means, the company actively uses digital media and social media platforms for marketing activities. By cooperating with various media organisations, Volkswagen Group is able to integrate various marketing means such as advertisements, public relations and promotions to achieve all-round communication effects. Such diversified media marketing choices enable the organisation to better cover the target audience and improve marketing effects.

2.4 Changes in Management Strategies

Volkswagen Group has undergone a significant change in management strategies in recent years, particularly in response to the "Dieselgate" scandal in 2015. Here are some key changes and their effectiveness:

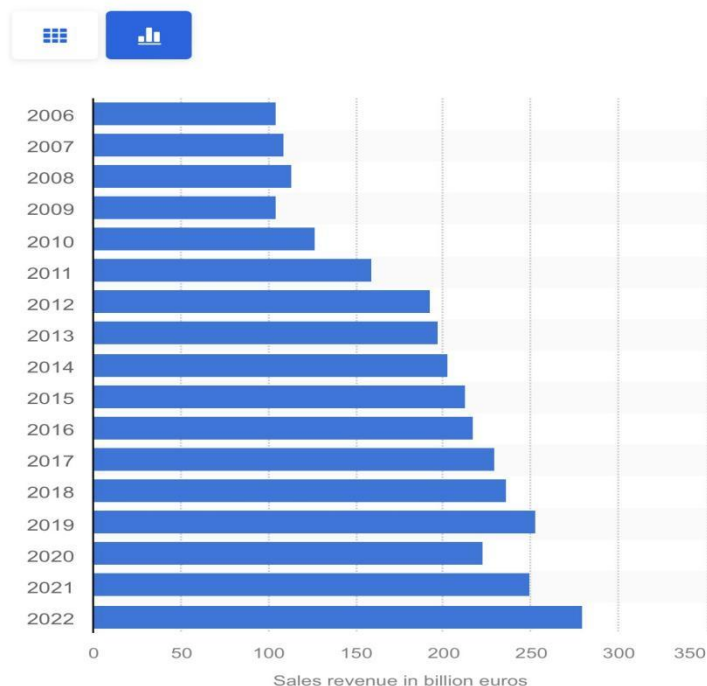
a. Leadership and Corporate Culture: Volkswagen Group attaches great importance to changing its leadership and corporate culture. A good testament to this is Herbert Diess, who took over as CEO in 2018 and focused on transforming the company's culture to prioritize transparency, integrity and compliance (Volkswagen Group, 2018). Although the

effectiveness of this approach is still being evaluated, it demonstrates Volkswagen Group's commitment to addressing the underlying issues that led to the scandal.

b. **Electrification and Sustainability:** Volkswagen Group has shifted its focus towards electrification and sustainability in response to changing market trends and increased environmental consciousness. The company has made significant investments in electric vehicle (EV) technologies, including launching its dedicated electric vehicle platform (MEB) and introducing various EV models. This strategic shift has been generally well-received by consumers and is considered a positive step towards a more sustainable future. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that the Volkswagen Group doesn't hold a leading position in the electric vehicle sector due to a lack of key technologies, so it still has a lot of work to do (Volkswagen Group, 2023).

c. **Product Portfolio and Market Positioning:** Volkswagen Group has been actively revamping its product portfolio to align with market demands and changing consumer preferences. This includes introducing new SUVs and crossovers to meet the growing demand in those segments. It has also continued to position itself as a brand that offers reliable, high-quality vehicles with a focus on German engineering. The effectiveness of these changes can be seen in the Group's strong market presence and sales performance.

Volkswagen AG's sales revenue from FY 2006 to FY 2022
(in billion euros)



(Statista, 2023)

d. Digital Transformation: Volkswagen Group has recognized the importance of digital transformation and has invested in technologies like connectivity, autonomous driving, and artificial intelligence. This includes developing the "Volkswagen We" digital ecosystem and offering advanced features in their vehicles. This approach has been effective in improving the overall user experience and staying competitive in the rapidly evolving automotive industry.

Overall, the effectiveness of Volkswagen Group's change in management strategies can be seen in its gradual recovery from the "Dieselgate" scandal and its market performance in recent years. In 2017, the Volkswagen Group delivered a record 10.7 million vehicles globally, and its sales revenue increased by 6.2% year on year to 230.7 billion euros (Volkswagen Group, 2018). All these data clearly show the strength and success of these changes in management strategies. The organisation's focus on sustainability, electrification, and digital transformation has helped it regain consumer trust and maintain a strong presence in the automotive market. However, the long-term effectiveness of these strategies will depend on their successful implementation and the continued ability of Volkswagen Group to adapt to evolving market trends and consumer demands.

3. Conclusion

Although Volkswagen Group has achieved great success, there are still some shortcomings in its marketing strategy. One of the most important points is the company's inability to develop products according to needs and requirements, especially in terms of electric vehicles and digitalisation. Although Volkswagen Group has incorporated sustainability into its development strategy and has invested a lot in new energy vehicles, it does not master the core technology, especially batteries, which prevents the company from being in a favourable position in the field of electric vehicles. Secondly, the company has deficiencies in supply chain management. For instance, its management of suppliers is not close enough, leading to instability in suppliers' quality and delivery; in addition, its inventory management is not scientific enough, leading to inventory backlogs and wastage from time to time, which not only takes up the working capital of the enterprise, but also may lead to the expiry or waste of raw materials and parts, increasing the cost pressure of the enterprise; a more important point is that the company does not adequately control supply chain risks, resulting in insufficient stability of the supply chain. Problems in any part of the supply chain may affect the production and delivery of the whole vehicle and have an impact on the operation of the

enterprise. This is particularly evident in the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Thirdly, the company's multi-brand strategy may weaken the Group's individual brands if there are overlaps in customer segments or product portfolios. And its common parts strategy may reinforce this effect, as in some cases there are few substantive product differences between its sub-brands. To achieve further growth, the Volkswagen Group must address these shortcomings in a timely manner, keeping an eye on changes in the marketplace and reacting quickly.

4. Recommendations

Based on the shortcomings of Volkswagen Group's marketing strategy summarised above, a number of feasible suggestions are made below to help the company fill its gaps as well as enhance its market competitiveness, meet consumer needs, and achieve sustainable success.

- a. Focus on electric vehicles: Increase investment in R&D and production of electric vehicles especially batteries, and launch competitive electric models in an effort to be at the forefront of the electric vehicle segment.
- b. Optimising supply chain management: Ensure supplier quality and delivery stability by strengthening supplier development, evaluation and quality management. At the same time, establish close supplier co-operation to achieve win-win situation; Adopt scientific inventory management methods to optimise inventory management, such as real-time inventory monitoring and demand forecasting, to avoid inventory backlog and waste; Establish a sound supply chain risk assessment and response mechanism to provide timely early warning and response to potential risks in the supply chain. At the same time, strengthen the diversification of the supply chain and reduce dependence on a single supplier or mode of transport.
- c. Sharpening sub-brands identities and differentiation: Differentiate 12 brands by highlighting their unique selling points, such as performance, design and status symbols to reduced their overlap.

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