

## **Driving Innovation: A Case Study on Overcoming Challenges in the Automotive Industry's Electric Vehicle Revolution of the 2010s**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The transition to electric vehicles (EVs) in the early 2010s marked a pivotal moment in the automotive industry, driven by environmental imperatives and technological advancement. Despite growing interest, the industry faced significant challenges including high battery costs, limited infrastructure, range anxiety, and consumer skepticism. This study aims to analyze how leading automakers such as Tesla, Nissan, and General Motors overcame these barriers to advance the EV revolution. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research synthesizes secondary data from academic literature, industry reports, and historical documents to explore strategies related to innovation, policy, and business models. The findings show that Tesla's investment in battery technology and Supercharger infrastructure, Nissan's affordable EV offerings, and GM's hybrid transition strategies collectively addressed both technical and market constraints. Government incentives further accelerated adoption. These efforts led to increased public trust, reduced EV production costs, and expanded charging networks, setting the foundation for EVs as a viable mainstream option. The study implies that the integration of innovation, regulatory support, and new business models is crucial to driving sustainable transformation. These insights offer a blueprint for future EV development and adoption, particularly in emerging markets.

**Keywords:** Electric Vehicles, Innovation Strategy, Automotive Industry, Charging Infrastructure, Sustainability

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past century, technological and industrial revolutions have shaped the automotive industry, each bringing significant advancements (Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2021). According to Muratori et al. (2021), one of the most important breakthroughs in recent years is the widespread adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). The shift from conventional gasoline engines to electric propulsion represents a significant transformation in the powering of cars (Altenburg, 2014). Various factors have driven this change, including the growing demand for sustainable alternatives, technological advancements, increased environmental awareness, and new policy regulations (Wu & Tham, 2023). The rise of electric vehicles represents the most groundbreaking business innovation in the automotive sector in the 21st century (Chhatwal, 2024).

The early 2010s marked a pivotal turning point in the industry, as the movement toward electric vehicles gained significant momentum (Sanguesa et al., 2021). The convergence of several trends, such as increasing environmental responsibility, consumer demand for greener or environmentally friendly options, rapid technological progress, and regulatory changes

aimed at promoting sustainable practices, not only drove this transformation but also contributed significantly (Rezaei & Peng, 2024). A key milestone in this transformation was the launch of the Tesla Model S in 2012, which demonstrated that electric cars could be both practical and highly desirable, offering excellent performance, safety, and cutting-edge features (Palmié et al., 2024).

During this transformative period, companies like Tesla, Nissan, and General Motors played crucial roles in reshaping the industry's landscape (Hogan, 2011). These companies overcame technical challenges, introduced new business models, expanded charging infrastructure, and initiated public awareness campaigns to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) (Qadir et al., 2024). Tesla's growth as the largest and most valuable EV company highlights the broad impact of its innovations, which extend beyond the automotive industry and influence global trends in sustainable energy (Qin, 2022). Tesla has become synonymous with electric mobility, inspiring advancements across sectors. For example, Dutch company Port Liner has labelled its autonomous electric barges as "Tesla Ships," underscoring Tesla's brand influence on the electrification movement Alvesson & Sveningsson (2015); Levchenko & Yanchuk (2024).

This case study examines the challenges faced by the automotive industry in the early 2010s, the strategic solutions implemented by automakers, and the long-term impact of this transformation on the industry's continued evolution (Le et al., 2023).

The transition from conventional vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs) during the early 2010s posed significant challenges for the global automotive industry. While environmental awareness, consumer demand for green technology, and policy support pushed this innovation, major barriers such as high battery costs, limited charging infrastructure, range anxiety, and consumer skepticism delayed adoption. The critical issue is how leading automakers overcame these multifaceted challenges to catalyze the EV revolution and reframe the mobility landscape.

As climate change accelerates and fossil fuel reserves dwindle, the urgency to develop sustainable transportation alternatives has become a global priority. The automotive industry is a major contributor to carbon emissions, and transitioning to EVs is no longer optional but essential to achieve environmental targets such as net-zero emissions. Understanding how early adopters addressed innovation obstacles is crucial for guiding current and future policy and industry responses.

Moreover, the EV market is expected to dominate transportation in the coming decades. However, many emerging economies still face the same barriers the pioneers faced a decade ago. Documenting and learning from past strategic innovations provides valuable insight for countries and companies now entering the electric mobility race, helping avoid earlier pitfalls and accelerate transformation.

Sanguesa et al. (2021) provided a broad overview of EV technologies and their limitations, while Muratori et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of policy and R&D investments in facilitating industry change. Both studies acknowledged the complexity of the shift but lacked in-depth examples of firm-level innovation.

Levchenko & Yanchuk (2024) explored Tesla's competitiveness and innovation strategy, highlighting its brand positioning and infrastructure investment. However, their research focused mostly on corporate image and less on systemic market transformation.

Alanazi (2023) examined consumer behavior and adoption barriers such as price and infrastructure. While insightful, the study lacked historical analysis and failed to integrate policy, technology, and business strategy in a unified framework. This creates a gap in understanding the interplay between innovation and market evolution.

Although extensive literature exists on electric vehicle adoption and environmental policy, few studies provide a multi-dimensional analysis of how firms overcame the combined technological, economic, and behavioral challenges during the foundational phase of EV development. There is limited integration of technological, strategic, and policy-based solutions from a historical, real-time perspective.

This study provides a holistic, retrospective analysis of the early 2010s EV revolution, focusing on how key automakers like Tesla, Nissan, and GM tackled innovation bottlenecks. Unlike prior studies, it integrates consumer behavior, battery advancements, business models, and government incentives into a single strategic narrative. By doing so, it bridges firm-level decision-making with systemic industry shifts.

The objective of this study is to explore how leading automotive companies in the early 2010s identified, addressed, and overcame challenges in transitioning to electric mobility. It seeks to analyze the strategic interplay of technology, infrastructure, business models, and regulatory frameworks that enabled the successful early adoption and mainstreaming of electric vehicles.

This research offers valuable insights for policymakers, corporate strategists, and technology developers involved in sustainable transportation. It serves as a historical blueprint for innovation management and can guide new entrants and governments in scaling electric vehicle initiatives more effectively. By learning from early pioneers, stakeholders can design more resilient and adaptive innovation strategies moving forward.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative case study method to analyze the innovation strategies employed by automotive companies—primarily Tesla, Nissan, and General Motors—during the early 2010s electric vehicle (EV) revolution. The case study approach is appropriate as it allows the researcher to investigate complex real-life phenomena through in-depth contextual analysis. By focusing on multiple companies and their specific responses to technological, market, and regulatory challenges, the research provides a holistic understanding of how these firms drove innovation in a transforming industry.

Data was collected and synthesized through an extensive literature review of academic articles, industry reports, historical documents, and company records. The study analyzes how automakers identified and responded to issues such as high production costs, limited charging infrastructure, and consumer skepticism. The method also incorporates retrospective analysis to highlight patterns in innovation, strategy, and impact. By adopting this approach, the research not only documents historical developments but also draws strategic insights relevant to current and future transitions in sustainable transportation.

## **RESULTH AND DISCUSSION**

### **Period of Innovation: Early 2010s - The Rise of Electric Vehicles**

In recent years, the global automotive industry has made significant strides toward environmentally sustainable modes of transportation, driven by the urgent need to mitigate global warming and reduce dependence on fossil fuels (Qadir et al., 2024). The early 2010s

marked a pivotal shift with the rise of electric vehicle (EV) innovation, which began reshaping consumer perceptions and industry standards (Qadir et al., 2024). Tesla, Nissan, and General Motors were instrumental in mainstreaming EVs, each contributing distinct advancements to the market.

Nissan's launch of the affordable Leaf in 2010 aimed to appeal to a broad demographic, making it a popular option among urban residents seeking a practical, environmentally friendly alternative to gasoline-powered vehicles (Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., 2010). In 2012, Tesla introduced the Model S, a luxury EV with a 300-miles range that garnered widespread acclaim for its advanced safety features and autopilot capabilities, setting new benchmarks in both the electric and luxury vehicle markets (Tesla, 2024). General Motors also entered the market in 2012 with the Chevrolet Volt, a plug-in hybrid that combined electric power with a gasoline engine, addressing range anxiety and appealing to consumers who were hesitant to fully commit to electric vehicles (Pyper, 2018). These early innovations demonstrate the industry's commitment to addressing emerging environmental and consumer demands, ultimately catalyzing more widespread EV adoption (Alanazi, 2023).

### **Challenges Faced by the Automotive Industry**

Despite the progress, several complex challenges remained. The automotive industry had to address both technological and market-related barriers to fully realize the potential of EVs.

#### **1. Consumer Resistance and Range Anxiety**

Range anxiety, a significant barrier to electric vehicle (EV) adoption, arose from consumers' fear that their vehicles might run out of power without access to a nearby charging station. In a 2011 McKinsey & Company survey, Fischer (2024) noted that only a limited number of charging stations were available in major cities across the United States, parts of Europe, and select areas in Asia, with charging times averaging several hours. Additionally, more than 60% of surveyed consumers cited range limitations as a primary reason for avoiding EVs.

Companies like Tesla responded to range concerns by introducing high-capacity batteries in the Model S, offering up to 300-miles of range. The launch of Tesla's Supercharger network in 2012 further addressed these issues by providing fast-charging options along key travel routes (Tesla, 2021). This strategic move not only strengthened Tesla's brand but also pushed other automakers and governments to prioritize investments in EV infrastructure (Li et al., 2024).

#### **2. High Production Costs and Price Premiums**

Battery costs were a major challenge in the early 2010s. Lithium-ion batteries were both expensive and complex to manufacture, often making up nearly 40% of an electric vehicle's cost (Zhao, 2022). According to a Bloomberg (2022), the cost of batteries averaged around \$1,000 per kWh in 2010, which made electric vehicles significantly more expensive than their gasoline counterparts.

To lower these costs, Tesla made significant investments in Gigafactories, which optimized battery production and reduced per-unit costs through economies of scale (Susanto & Ellitan, 2024). By 2016, Tesla's battery costs had dropped to approximately \$190 per kWh, making electric vehicles more affordable for a broader consumer base (Voelcker, 2016). Other automakers, such as General Motors (GM), also formed partnerships with battery producers to reduce costs and make EVs more accessible to mainstream markets (General Motors, 2024).

These innovations not only made electric vehicles more affordable but also represented a shift toward more sustainable production methods.

Over the years, the prices of electric vehicles (EVs) have evolved due to advancements in technology, economies of scale, and enhanced manufacturing processes. In the early years, EVs were costly due to the novelty of the technology and limited availability (Le, 2023). For instance, the 2010 Nissan Leaf started at about \$32,780 for the base model (Clayton, 2010). Similarly, the 2012 Chevrolet Volt, a plug-in hybrid with an electric range before switching to gasoline, was priced around \$41,000 (Clayton, 2010). Meanwhile, the 2012 Tesla Model S had a significantly higher starting price of about \$57,400 (Oremus, 2012).

By 2024, the prices of these models have changed dramatically due to improvements in battery technology, larger production volumes, and increased market competition. The Nissan Leaf's price has dropped to around \$28,140 for the base model (Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., 2024), offering better affordability and increased range. While Chevrolet has discontinued the Volt, its successor, the Chevrolet Bolt EV, now retails for about \$26,000 (Seifert, 2023). On the other hand, Tesla's Model S has seen a price increase, with the starting price now around \$72,990, and the Model S Plaid priced at \$87,990, reflecting Tesla's strategy as a premium electric vehicle manufacturer (Almerini, 2024).

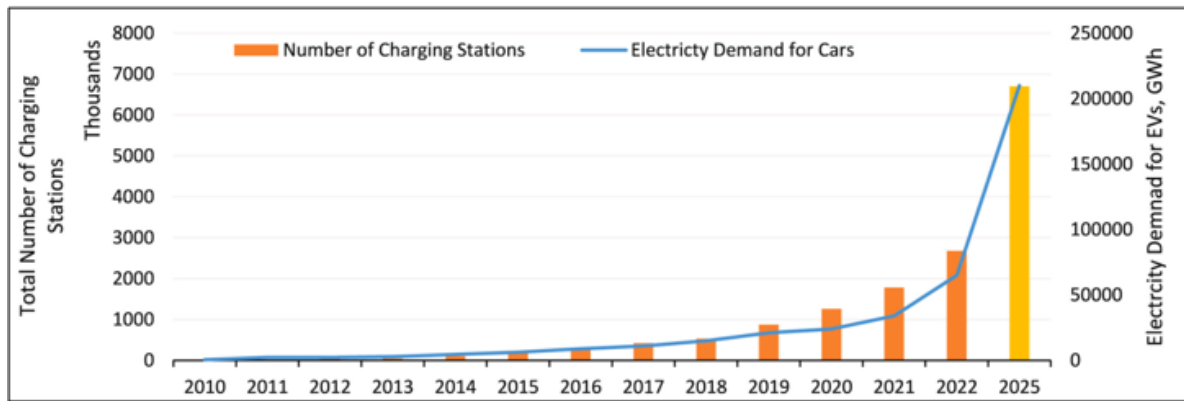
The reduction in prices for early EV models like the Nissan Leaf and Chevrolet Bolt highlights the impact of increased production capacity and technological improvements, making electric vehicles more affordable and accessible to a wider range of consumers.

### **3. Limited Charging Infrastructure**

Growing concerns about the greenhouse effect and air pollution have prompted a global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by shifting away from traditional vehicles. At the same time, governments worldwide are addressing energy shortages. This awareness has accelerated the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) (Qadir et al., 2024; Wang & Azam, 2024). However, the high cost of EVs and the lack of infrastructure present significant challenges to widespread adoption, making government support essential in driving growth within the EV industry (Freitag et al., 2021).

A major barrier to EV adoption remains the limited availability of reliable charging infrastructure, especially in rural and suburban areas. While gas stations are abundant, charging stations are relatively scarce and mainly concentrated in urban centers Aslani & Alesheikh (2011); Krishna (2021). For instance, in 2012, the United States had only around 13,000 public charging stations compared to over 150,000 gas stations, creating a substantial obstacle for long-distance travel (Burra et al., 2024).

To address these challenges, Tesla invested in its proprietary Supercharger network, enabling long-distance EV travel and strengthening its market position (Olorunfemi, 2024). Concurrently, governments worldwide have encouraged public and private sector investments in charging networks (Patil, 2024). In Europe, the European Union supported the development of extensive EV infrastructure, aiming to equip all major highways with charging stations by 2020. These efforts have established a robust charging network, making EV ownership more convenient and supporting the growing EV market (Szumska, 2023).



**Figure 1.** Charging Station and Electricity Demand For Cars Increment Over The Years

*Note.* Adapted from “Navigating the complex realities of electric vehicle adoption: A comprehensive study of government strategies, policies, and incentives,” by S. A. Qadir et al., 2024, *Environmental Science & Research*, 101379 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2024.101379>).

#### 4. Battery Efficiency and Durability

To achieve carbon neutrality in the transport sector, battery technologies currently face critical challenges, including energy density, rapid charging capabilities, safety, recycling, and the reuse of materials (Kang et al., 2023). While electric vehicles (EVs) are gradually replacing gasoline vehicles, the increasing demand for batteries poses a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of EVs (W. Liu et al., 2022).

Early concerns focused on battery efficiency and durability, as EV batteries have exhibited performance degradation after a few years of use, resulting in reduced range and overall efficiency (Kłos & Sierpiński, 2023). For instance, early owners of the Nissan Leaf experienced battery degradation that impacted range, raising questions about resale value and long-term viability (Evans, 2022).

In response to these issues, manufacturers have introduced extended warranties on EV batteries to provide consumers with assurance regarding long-term reliability. Tesla, for example, incorporated battery cooling technology into its Model S to enhance battery life and improve performance over time (Li et al., 2024). Additionally, significant investments in research and development (R&D) have been directed toward creating longer-lasting and more efficient batteries, which are now becoming industry standards. These advancements have bolstered consumer confidence in the long-term sustainability of EVs (Chavan et al., 2024).

#### Solutions Implemented by the Automotive Industry

Automakers took decisive action to overcome these obstacles, each contributing to solutions that drove EV adoption.

##### 1. Advancements in Battery Technology

The electric vehicle (EV) revolution is primarily driven by substantial technological advancements, particularly in battery technology (Brown & White, 2017). To address challenges related to battery performance and cost, major industry leaders such as Tesla and Nissan have made significant investments to advance lithium-ion battery technology (Chavan et al., 2024). For example, Tesla initiated its Gigafactory project to lower production costs and

collaborated with Panasonic to increase battery efficiency, resulting in more effective lithium-ion cells (Panasonic Group, 2013). These efforts, alongside broader technological developments, have led to a sharp reduction in battery costs, reaching \$156 per kWh by 2019, a milestone that has significantly contributed to making EVs more accessible (BloombergNEF, 2019).

Meanwhile, Nissan has also played a vital role in the evolution of battery technology by optimizing battery chemistry to extend the range of its Leaf model and reduce degradation over time (C. Li et al., 2024; X. Li et al., 2024). Additionally, with ongoing research into solid-state batteries, the industry is moving toward developing batteries with extended lifespans and faster charging capabilities, further enhancing the performance and attractiveness of electric vehicles (Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., 2024).

## **2. Expansion of Charging Infrastructure**

The growth of electric vehicles (EVs) relies heavily on accessible charging infrastructure. Strategically located public charging stations in shopping malls, parking lots, and along highways enhance convenience and reduce range anxiety for EV owners (Kłos & Sierpiński, 2023). Additionally, advanced solutions that optimize charging times and provide real-time station availability further improve the user experience (Das et al., 2019).

Tesla's early development of the Supercharger network set a benchmark, demonstrating how proprietary infrastructure can foster brand loyalty by enabling reliable long-distance travel (Tesla, 2012). By 2014, Tesla had installed over 300 Supercharger stations across the United States, allowing drivers to travel between major cities without concerns about charging availability (The Guardian, 2014).

Public initiatives have also supported this infrastructure expansion. For example, the United States Department of Energy partnered with ChargePoint and Blink Charging to install thousands of public charging stations, enhancing accessibility (GLOBE NEWSWIRE, 2024). In Europe, the European Green Deal allocated billions for EV infrastructure to lower carbon emissions (Conzade et al., 2022), while cities like Guangzhou in China have repurposed former energy storage sites as EV charging stations, simplifying access to charging (Yukun & Jun, 2024).

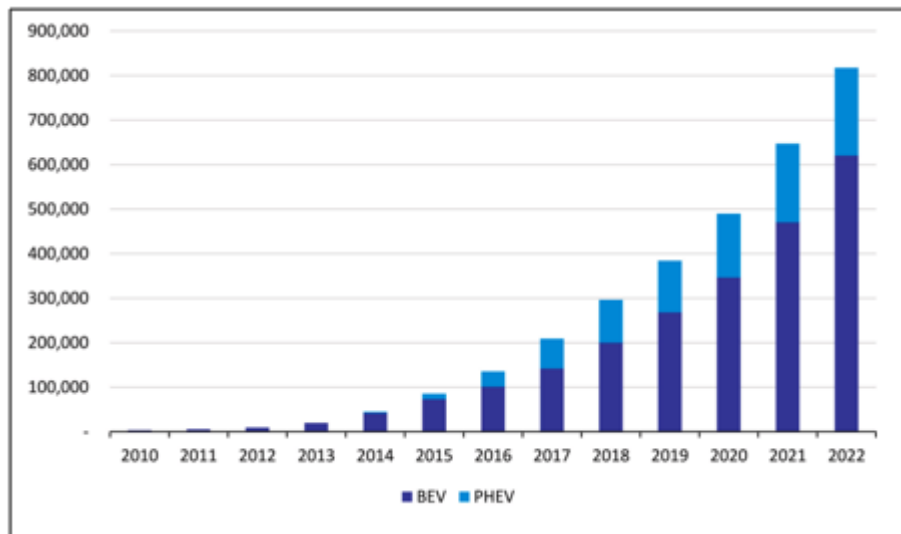
Looking forward, Tesla's expansion into rural areas will further support long-distance travel, and its partnership with Ford to adopt Tesla's North American Charging Standard (NACS) for 2025 models illustrates a growing trend toward shared infrastructure, offering more options for EV users (Ford, 2023). These innovations are essential in overcoming early adoption challenges, fostering brand loyalty, and integrating EVs into the mainstream automotive market, marking a significant phase in the industry's evolution (Levchenko & Yanchuk, 2024).

## **GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND INCENTIVES**

Government incentives and regulatory reforms play a crucial role in accelerating electric vehicle (EV) adoption by making them more attractive, affordable, and cost-efficient for consumers (Qadir et al., 2024). Programs, including tax credits, subsidies, and preferential HOV lane access, reduce the initial cost of EVs, enhancing their competitiveness against traditional vehicles over time (Qadir et al., 2024).

To support EV adoption further, property owners and businesses receive incentives to install charging stations, expanding the charging infrastructure and improving accessibility for EV owners (Qadir et al., 2024). Additionally, upgrading the electrical grid is essential to manage increased demand, particularly during peak hours. Strategic investments in charging (Csere, 2012). Infrastructure by both governments and the private sector ensure enhanced convenience and availability for the public (Zamanov, 2023).

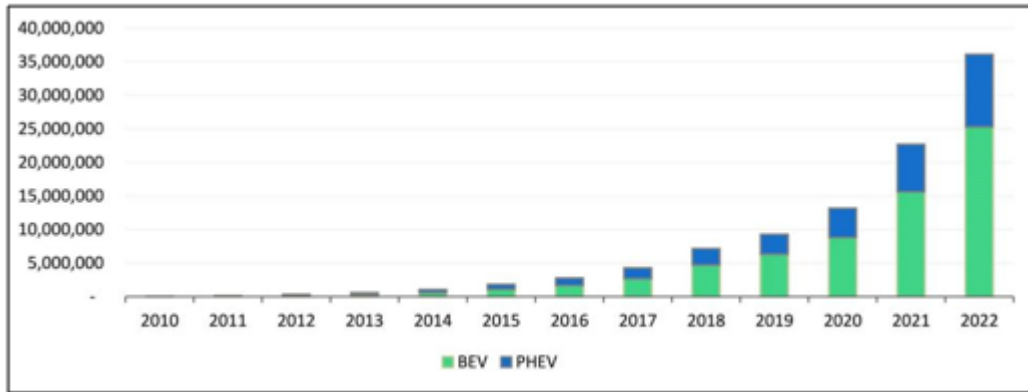
Global examples, including the United States, Norway, and China, underscore the impact of these incentives. In the United States, federal tax credits up to \$7,500, supplemented by state rebates, have reduced EV costs for consumers (Shepardson, 2024). Norway’s incentives, such as toll exemptions, free parking, and dedicated EV lanes, have led to one of the highest EV adoption rates globally (Bjerkan et al., 2021). In China, initiatives like Beijing’s Electric Vehicle Purchase Subsidy Fund, along with local subsidies, further reduce EV costs (Li et al., 2024). These policies, coupled with emissions regulations, have encouraged automakers to prioritize EV development, aligning affordability with environmental goals and accelerating EV adoption worldwide (Qadir et al., 2024).



**Figure 2.** Growth of the EV Fleet in Norway Between 2010 and 2022

*Note.* Adapted from “Navigating the complex realities of electric vehicle adoption: A comprehensive study of government strategies, policies, and incentives,” by S. A. Qadir et al., 2024, *Environmental Science & Research*, 101379

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2024.101379>.



**Figure 3.** *Growth in the Global Number of Electric Vehicle Users*

*Note.* Adapted from “Navigating the complex realities of electric vehicle adoption: A comprehensive study of government strategies, policies, and incentives,” by S. A. Qadir et al., 2024, *Environmental Science & Research*, 101379

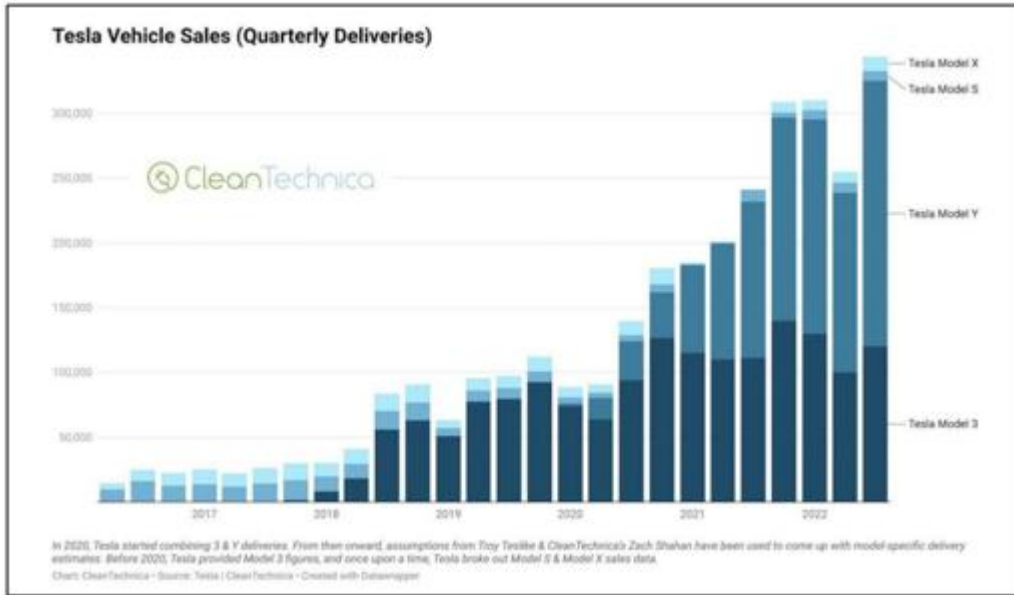
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2024.101379>.

#### 4. Innovative Business Models and Direct Sales

Tesla has championed a direct-to-consumer sales model that bypasses traditional dealerships, allowing for direct customer engagement, feedback collection, and ongoing vehicle improvement through over-the-air software updates (Asuncion et al., 2023). This approach enables Tesla to adjust prices, introduce new features, and foster customer loyalty without relying on intermediaries (J. Liu, 2022). By offering a more personalized and dynamic purchasing experience, Tesla’s model has proven highly effective and has influenced other automakers. Inspired by Tesla’s success, Ford and Volkswagen began exploring online electric vehicle sales channels in 2020, indicating a shift towards direct sales methods aligned with modern consumer preferences (Furr & Dyer, 2020).

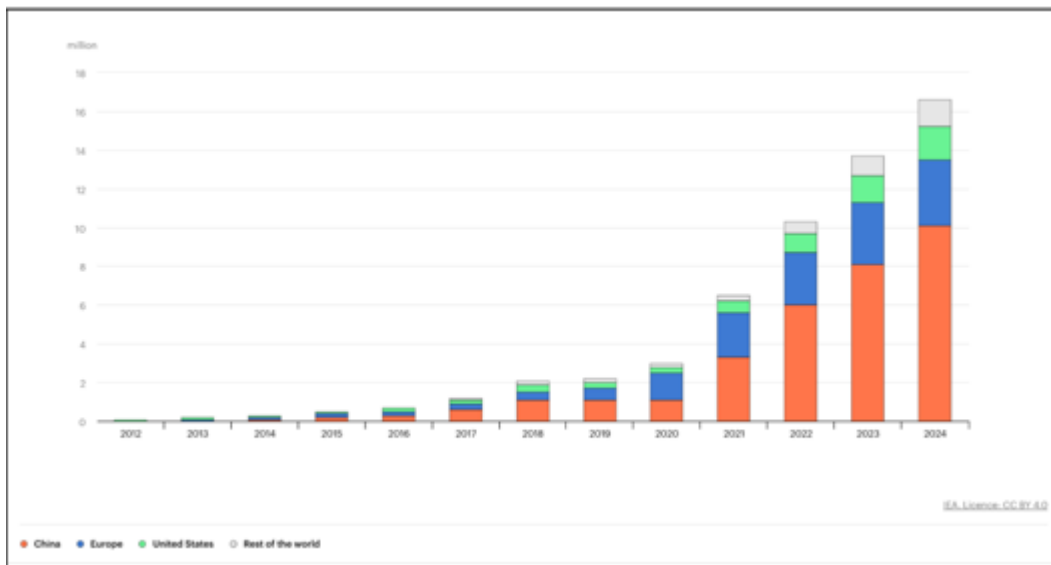
Furthermore, the direct sales model complements Tesla’s strong brand identity, which emphasizes advanced technology, innovation, and durability. Tesla’s brand resonates with a customer base that values luxury and modern aesthetics, reflected in its minimalist and futuristic designs that distinguish it from competitors (Asuncion et al., 2023). The recent launch of the Cybertruck in 2023, with its angular, unconventional design crafted from ultra-durable stainless steel, attracted significant public attention and reinforced Tesla’s image as a leader in both style and functionality within the electric vehicle market (Levchenko & Yanchuk, 2024).

Tesla’s pioneering business model, combined with its distinctive brand and design philosophy, has transformed the consumer car-buying experience, setting a new standard that many traditional automakers are now adopting.



**Figure 4.** Tesla Vehicle Sales, 2017-2022

*Note.* Adapted from “Benefits and Effects of Tesla’s Direct-to-Customer Sales Model,” by J. Asuncion et al., 2023, *Proceedings of the 6th European Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management*, Lisbon, Portugal, July 18-20, 2023, IEOM Society International (<https://ieomsociety.org/proceedings/2023lisbon/471.pdf>).



**Figure 5.** Electric Car Sales, 2012-2024

*Note.* From *Electric car sales, 2012-2024*, by IEA, 2024 (<https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/electric-car-sales-2012-2024>). Copyright 2024 by 4.0.

## CONCLUSION

The early 2010s marked a pivotal shift in the automotive industry as electric vehicles (EVs) emerged as a sustainable alternative to internal combustion engines, with major players like Tesla, Nissan, and General Motors driving innovation in battery technology, charging

infrastructure, and new business models. Key challenges such as range anxiety, high battery costs, and limited charging networks were addressed through the development of long-range batteries, strategic investments in Gigafactories, and the expansion of global charging stations supported by government incentives. Tesla's direct-to-consumer model also revolutionized sales practices and improved customer engagement. These collective advancements laid the groundwork for EVs to become a mainstream, eco-friendly mode of transport. Looking ahead, future innovations may involve exploring hydrogen fuel cells, solid-state batteries, solar-powered vehicle integration, and autonomous battery-swapping stations to further enhance efficiency and adaptability. As EV technologies continue to evolve, future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies on the environmental and economic impact of these next-generation technologies, assess consumer readiness for alternative energy vehicles, and explore the regulatory implications of emerging innovations to ensure the automotive industry remains resilient and future-ready.

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