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MARKETING STRATEGY FOR THE INDONESIAN LAUNCH OF JAPAN'S SMALL ELECTRIC VEHICLE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: The electric vehicle (EV) market in Indonesia has garnered significant attention, particularly in the city car segment that is dominated by Chinese brands. Government support and growing demand for eco-friendly alternatives have paved the way for the introduction of electric vehicles in Indonesia.
Purpose: This study aims to formulate a relevant marketing strategy for PT XYZ's upcoming launch of a Japanese city car electric vehicle in Indonesia scheduled for 2025-2026.
Design/methodology/approach: This study employs a qualitative, exploratory approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with PT XYZ's management and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with city car electric vehicle users. Data analysis was conducted using coding and categorization methods.
Findings/results: The findings reveal a strong market potential for city car electric vehicles, especially in urban areas. Key drivers include government incentives and the desire to lower operational costs. The proposed marketing strategy integrates the STP model (Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning) and the 4P framework (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), focusing on modern urban consumers, with product differentiation through design, premium features, and competitive pricing.
Conclusion: PT XYZ's brand image as a trusted Japanese manufacturer plays a critical role in differentiating its product from its competitors, particularly Chinese brands. This strategy fosters consumer trust, and positions PT XYZ as a viable player in the Indonesian electric vehicle market.
Originality/value (State of the art): This study contributes to the literature on electric vehicle marketing strategies, providing valuable insights for PT XYZ in navigating the competitive landscape and enhancing its market entry strategy for city car electric vehicles in Indonesia.

Keywords: marketing strategy, electric vehicle, city car, STP, 4P, competitive advantage

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INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry in Indonesia continues to experience growth and innovation, particularly with the emergence of electric vehicles, which have been well received despite suboptimal adoption. The implementation of electric vehicles offers many positive impacts and requires government support in the form of incentives, on both the supply and demand sides (Regina & Ulmi, 2023). According to Kuswardani (2024), although Indonesia's electric car industry is still in its early stages, its growth potential is enormous. This is driven by strong government support, increased environmental awareness, and rapid technological advancement.

The Indonesian government has taken strategic steps to accelerate the Battery Electric Vehicle Program through tax exemptions, import duty reductions for vehicles, and development of charging stations. This has opened new opportunities for automotive manufacturers to expand their market penetration and create differentiation in the automotive industry.

PT XYZ, the official distributor of passenger and commercial vehicles from Japan, sees this as both a challenge and an opportunity to expand its product portfolio by introducing competitive electric vehicles. As a well-known brand with a strong presence in the Indonesian conventional gasoline-powered vehicle market, PT XYZ is striving to adapt to the growing market trend towards environmentally friendly technology.

The most popular type of electric vehicle is the city car electric vehicle because of its compact size, which makes it suitable for urban areas. The presence of city car electric vehicles in Indonesia is currently dominated by Chinese brands, which have demonstrated their commitment and presence through the establishment of manufacturing plants and the launch of products tailored to local preferences, as exemplified by Wuling. The success of Wuling can be attributed to its omni-channel marketing strategy, which combines online and offline channels to engage consumers. This approach involves utilizing various platforms such as social media for online promotions, car exhibitions, and dealerships for direct customer interaction (Permana et al. 2024).

According to data from GAIKINDO (2024), about 66 percent of Indonesian consumers have a positive view of Chinese electric vehicles owing to their affordable prices, innovative features, mobility, and comfort. Recognizing the market potential and consumer demand for city car electric vehicles, PT XYZ has begun introducing its upcoming city car electric vehicles as an initial step to compete with the dominance of Chinese brands.

The urgency of this research is increasing, given the market demand for city car electric vehicles that are suited to the characteristics of major cities in Indonesia. Consumers need vehicles that are efficient, have a sufficient range, and are supported by competent after-sales services. This study aims to identify marketing strategies that not only strengthen PT XYZ's position in the competition, but also align with consumer needs and market trends.

Based on PT XYZ's strategic plan to launch a city car electric vehicle, this study analyzes the company's internal and external environments, evaluates competitors, and understands the behavior of electric vehicle consumers. The aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current electric vehicle market, with the objective of developing a relevant and applicable marketing plan to ensure the successful launch and sales of PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle.
The strategy involves selecting a well-defined market in which the company will compete and determining the value it aims to create in that market. (Kotler & Keller, 2022). An effective marketing strategy is key to achieving business objectives by understanding the market, conducting proper segmentation, and implementing an efficient marketing mix to create competitive advantage.

In their study, Widitya et al. (2023) explained the differences between the marketing strategies of conventional cars and electric cars, where the marketing of electric cars focuses more on environmental awareness, emphasizing sustainability and green technology. The strategies used included clean energy promotion, participation in environmental events, and collaboration with green organizations.

This study used the Mullins 4C (company, context, competitor, and customer) model approach. The model provides a comprehensive framework that considers all the critical aspects of the market. Company analysis focuses on the internal factors that influence performance and strategic direction, referring to the external environment in which the company operates. Context analysis consists of all factors outside the company that can influence its potential to gain and sustain competitive advantage. By analyzing these external factors, strategic leaders can mitigate threats and capitalize on opportunities (Rothaermel, 2021).

Competitor analysis focuses on identifying the competitive landscape, understanding who a company's competitors are, what competitors offer, how competitors are currently positioned, and their performance in the market. Customer analysis focuses on the desires, needs, and characteristics of existing or potential customers. Yaputra et al. (2023) showed that consumer preferences for electric vehicles tend to increase if companies support sustainability practices such as using eco-friendly fuels and recyclable batteries.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by expanding the literature on electric vehicle marketing strategies, particularly for city car electric vehicles, which is a relatively underexplored area. Practically, the study's findings offer valuable insights for PT XYZ to develop effective marketing strategies to accelerate the adoption of city car electric vehicles in Indonesia.

METHODS

Business research is a systematic, data-driven, and objective investigation of specific issues to find solutions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). This research applies exploratory techniques utilizing qualitative methods through primary and secondary data. A qualitative method was used in this research to gain a deeper understanding of customer motivation, perception, and experience. This method explores the factors that influence purchase decisions, often involving emotional and rational elements that are challenging to uncover through quantitative methods. Exploratory techniques aim to gain new insights and understanding, with researchers remaining open to new ideas and perspectives as the study progresses (Malhotra, 2020). The exploratory technique used in this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of business activities and the automotive industry within the city car electric vehicle segment. The findings are then applied to the design of relevant and practical marketing strategies to support PT XYZ's business efforts for its new product.

To understand PT XYZ's internal environment, primary data were gathered through interviews with company executives directly involved in the EV city car development. These executives, possessing strategic decision-making knowledge, provided insights into marketing initiatives, brand image plans, and the company's position within the competitive landscape, informed by PESTEL and Porter's Five Forces analysis. A Focus Group Discussion was conducted with eight consumers who had experience using city car electric vehicles, with the following criteria: 1) consumers who have direct experience in using electric vehicles, and 2) individuals involved in the purchase of electric vehicles and decision-making processes. FGD aimed to explore the consumer decision-making process (CDMP) for electric vehicle purchases and gather insights into their perception of PT XYZ's brand image and city car electric vehicle products, serving as the basis for customer analysis.

The competitor analysis in this study was based on internal interviews and focus group discussions with electric vehicle consumers. The analysis explores the marketing strategies of key competitors in the city car electric vehicle segment, focusing on (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) and 4P (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) approaches, along with an evaluation of their brand and product image.

The primary data obtained through interviews and FGD were subsequently processed using coding and categorization methods. Coding is the process of interpreting and grouping data into specific categories (Stuckey, 2015). The next step after coding is categorization or grouping of similar codes to gain a broader understanding of the data collected. Secondary data were obtained from PT XYZ's internal research. Figure 1 illustrates the research framework of this study.

The marketing strategy analysis framework for PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle includes internal (company) and external (context, competitor, and customer) environment analyses. The internal analysis identifies the company's marketing initiatives and brand image plans, while the external analysis examines how PESTLE and Porter's Five Forces affect strategy, explores competitors' marketing tactics, and assesses customer behavior and purchase intent. These findings form the basis for PT XYZ's marketing objectives, benchmarking, and brand image decisions, which are used to formulate the final marketing strategy through Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning (STP), and 4P marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion).

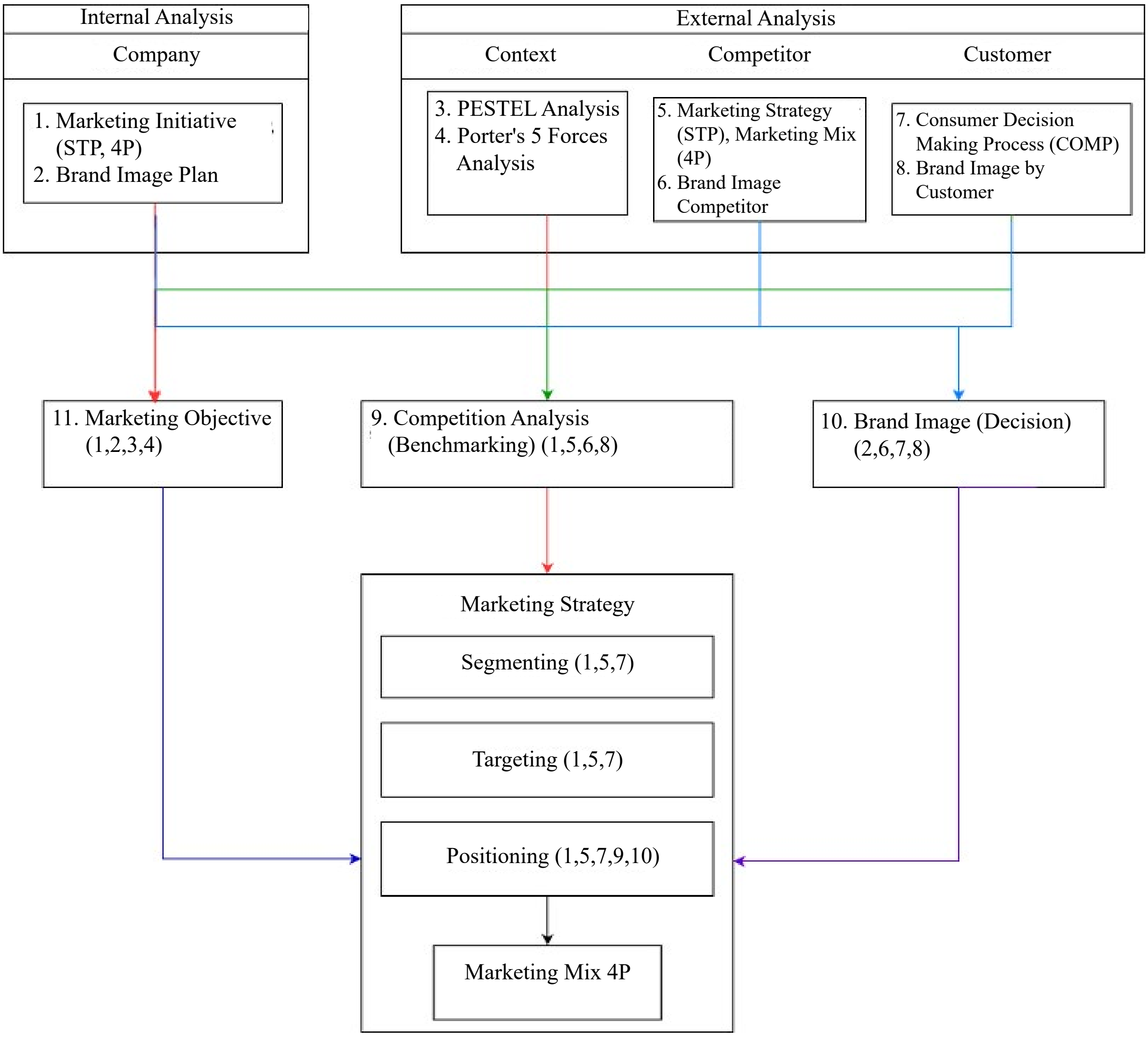

Figure 1. Research Framework

RESULTS

Context Analysis

Based on the internal interview results with PT XYZ, the external factors from the PESTEL analysis that have the greatest impact on the electric vehicle industry in Indonesia are currently the political, social, technological, and environmental aspects. From a political perspective, government support through Presidential Regulation No. 79 of 2023, such as a 0% Luxury Goods Sales Tax (PPnBM) incentive and reduced Motor Vehicle Tax (PKB), makes electric vehicles' prices more competitive. This aligns with the findings of Wijaya et al. (2023), which indicate that one of the government policies, namely the exemption of luxury goods sales tax, encourages the adoption of electric vehicles.

From a social perspective, millennials are the social group most likely to consider purchasing electric vehicles. Millennials are generally more highly educated and technologically aware than the previous generations (Jati, 2021). From a technological perspective, the charging infrastructure plays a key role in the successful implementation of electric vehicles (Regina & Ulmi, 2023). From an environmental perspective, electric vehicles are considered an alternative solution to support clean energy and eco-friendliness, and to reduce pollution and exhaust emissions caused by the use of fossil fuels (Ananta et al. 2024).

The external factors from the industry analysis using Porter's five forces include the following. As a newcomer to the Indonesian electric vehicle market, competition between Chinese and Korean brands is becoming increasingly intense. The high bargaining power of buyers and suppliers, along with hybrid cars as potential substitute products, is considered in developing adaptive and competitive marketing strategies to create new opportunities.

The company analysis outlines the development of marketing initiatives to create relevant, competitive, and practical strategies. Based on interviews with PT XYZ's management, determining marketing initiatives for city car electric vehicles requires an appropriate STP (segmenting, targeting, and positioning) strategy. The company's target market comprises millennial consumers living in urban areas. These consumers seek additional cars to meet their high mobility needs, prioritize environmental issues, and are open to new technologies.

The STP strategy serves as the foundation for PT XYZ to develop its 4P strategy. Product strategy focuses on the quality of Japanese branded products, which are known for their reliability and trustworthiness. The price strategy adopts a competition-based approach. The place strategy targets major cities such as Jabodetabek, Surabaya, Bandung, Medan, and Bali, leveraging the existing network of official dealerships. The promotion strategy maximizes exposure through ATL and BTL strategies and conducts extensive test-drive events.

PT XYZ's marketing objective for its city car electric vehicles is to address the growing demand in the electric vehicle market, capitalize on competitive advantages, and incorporate benchmarking insights and market competition in Indonesia. By positioning itself as a trusted Japanese electric vehicle brand, PT XYZ aims to launch a new lineup that highlights quality and reliability on par with gasoline cars, driving the faster adoption of its city car electric vehicle in the Indonesian market.

According to Watson (1997, as cited in Syafarullah & Patiyusuf, 2021), there are four main types of benchmarking: internal, competitive, functional, and generic. The type of benchmarking used in this study is competitive benchmarking, which involves comparisons between a company and its competitors, such as product characteristics, performance, and functions of similar products in the same market.

The benchmarking analysis in Table 1 shows that PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle product has a competitive advantage in terms of brand image compared with its competitors. As a Japanese brand that has been widely recognized in both global and domestic markets, PT XYZ has a strong reputation based on its long history of producing high-quality conventional vehicles.

Customer Analysis

Brand image decisions are derived from an analysis of a company, its competitors, and its customers. These decisions inform the identity of a new product to be launched and serve as the foundation for developing a marketing strategy. Brand image is a critical factor in marketing strategy planning as it directly influences consumer decisions. According to Edinata et al. (2023), brand image is the impression and feeling that arises towards a brand, stored in memory, and capable of influencing consumer behavior. Istiyanto and Nugroho (2016, as cited in Purwantoro & Faisal, 2023) state that a good brand image should be able to represent all product characteristics, both external and internal, so that it can influence the target market and consumers regarding the brand.

Table 1. Benchmarking analysis

4P	Competitor A	Competitor B	City car electric vehicle PT XYZ
Product	Smaller dimensions with standard features, lower battery capacity	Larger dimensions, comfortable interior, and advanced safety features.	Complete safety features, comfortable interior, suitable for urban us
Price	More affordable price	Price is higher compared to competitor A.	The offered price is competitive and aligns with market demand
Place	A network of 150 dealers, available on e-commerce platforms	Limited dealer network	Focused only in major cities and not yet spread to regional areas
Promotion	Excels in direct incentives for buyers and focuses on digitalization	Attractive warranty and after-sales services	Convincing consumers through a trusted brand image with large scale promotions

The brand image decision that PT XYZ needs to develop for its upcoming city car electric vehicle is to emphasize a differentiation strategy, highlighting the quality and reliability of the Japanese brand, supported by proven product quality and excellent service. This will provide peace of mind for consumers using PT XYZ's products. This strategy will also help increase the appeal of this product despite a slightly higher price compared to competitors by assuring consumers that they are choosing a product with the best quality and service.

Marketing strategy formulation for PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle

A marketing strategy for PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle was developed considering the company, competitor, customer analysis, and external factors (PESTEL, Porter's five forces). Focus group discussions with competitors' customers revealed that external factors were key purchase drivers that influenced subsequent buying decisions.

The STP strategy developed by the author aims to address the intense competition in Indonesia's electric vehicle market. The segmentation formulated for PT XYZ's city-car electric vehicle is presented in Table 2. Segment A became the target market for the city car electric vehicle PT XYZ. They are consumers who require a secondary vehicle to support their high mobility needs, particularly in cities such as Jakarta with odd-even number plate restrictions. This includes upper middle to high new families residing in urban areas who are accustomed to technological conveniences.

The city car EV of PT XYZ is positioned as a sporty, modern Japanese electric vehicle that offers peace of mind. This is a challenge in the electric vehicle market, which has been dominated by Chinese brands. PT XYZ, which has already excelled with its conventional cars, leverages the strong brand image of Japan, widely recognized for creating trustworthy, high-quality products and providing excellent service. The following is the design of the positioning strategy formulation for PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle (Figure 2).

Table 2. Segmentation for PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle

Attribute	Segment A (Young Professionals)	Segment B (Mature Professionals)	Segment C (Families)
Demographic			
Age	25-35 years old	35-50 years old	30-55 years old
Gender	Mixed (relatively equal)	Male-dominated	Mixed (slightly more female)
Income	Upper Middle to High (minimum IDR25,000,000	High Income above (IDR25,000,000)	Upper Middle Income (IDR8,000,000 -IDR20,000,000)
Expenditure	High spending on technology, entertainment, and experiences (minimum IDR10,000,000 - IDR20,000,000)	High spending on luxury goods, travel (minimum IDR20,000,000 - IDR50,000,000)	High spending on family-related expenses, education, and household goods (minimum IDR10,000,000 - IDR15,000,000)
Geographic			
Workplace	Urban areas (Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Medan, Bali)	Urban areas (Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Medan, Bali)	Suburban areas
Place of residence	Urban apartments, condos	Exclusive residential areas	Suburban houses, apartments in developing areas
Psychographic			
Lifestyle	Tech-savvy, environmentally conscious, active, health-conscious, socially connected	Status-conscious, luxury-oriented, health-conscious, socially connected	Family-oriented, value-conscious

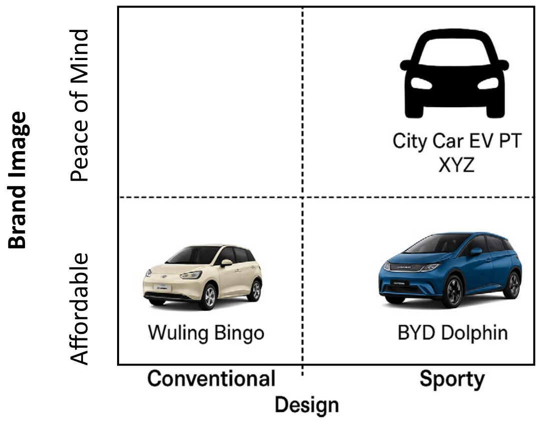

Figure 2. Positioning strategy formulation for city car electric vehicle PT XYZ

Marketing Mix (4P) Analysis

The 4P strategy is formulated to ensure that the EV PT XYZ city car meets the needs of its targeted market segment and maximizes competitiveness in Indonesia. The 4P strategy is formulated by a consumer-centered approach for creating a suitable car that meets customer needs, setting competitive pricing, optimizing distribution channels, and effectively communicating the differentiation and advantages of PT XYZ's city car EV to customers.

Product Strategy

The city car EV of PT XYZ should be available in different variants based on the range and feature completeness, with an emphasis on sporty design. The highest variant offers a dual-tone color option and is equipped with advanced smartphone connectivity and safety features suitable for daily driving on urban roads. Lifetime Battery Warranty and Free Emergency Road Assistance are added to the product strategy, creating a competitive value proposition for PT XYZ's city car EV.

Pricing Strategy

The pricing ranges from IDR350,000,000 to IDR380,000,000 for the highest variant.

Place Strategy

The distribution channel will be focused on through authorized dealers located in Jabodetabek, Bali, Medan, Surabaya, and Bandung, which are already supported by the electric charging infrastructure.

Promotion Strategy

The promotion strategy formulation was developed based on the PT XYZ internal and external analyses. This strategy aims to maximize consumer experience by leveraging a combination of digital promotions, offline activities, and collaborations with third parties, such as influencers and YouTubers.

Managerial Implications

The practical benefit of this research for other companies that want to enter the electric vehicle market in a developing market is that it provides insights into the importance of understanding external factors that influence the industry, such as government policies, social trends, and technological developments.

For PT XYZ, the findings of this study have several managerial implications that should guide strategic decision-making: to strengthen its Japanese brand image positioning, initiate partnerships with stakeholders across the public and private sectors, particularly with electric charging infrastructure providers, and consider expanding its EV portfolio by including hybrid vehicle variants, catering to consumers who are in transition from conventional to fully electric vehicles.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The PESTEL analysis shows that political, social, technological, and environmental factors significantly influence consumer decisions when purchasing electric cars. Porter's five forces analysis identifies intense competition with Chinese and Korean brands, the high bargaining power of buyers and suppliers, and the threat of substitute products such as hybrid cars. These findings form the basis for PT XYZ to develop an adaptive and competitive marketing strategy for creating new opportunities.

The FGD results indicate that the characteristics of city car electric vehicle consumers in Indonesia are those who live in urban areas and need additional flexible vehicles to support high mobility. Purchase motivation is driven by benefits such as operational cost efficiency, tax incentives, exemption from the odd-even traffic rule in Jakarta, and a self-concept related to environmental issues and a lifestyle open to new technology. Satisfaction with a purchased product is a key factor influencing brand loyalty. This is supported by research conducted by Purwatiningsih et al. (2023), who found that customer satisfaction has a significant impact on the decision to purchase electric cars in Indonesia.

The competitive landscape shows intense competition between the Chinese and Korean brands. As a newcomer from a Japanese brand, PT XYZ needs to implement a different STP strategy by positioning itself between the competitive advantages of these two brands and combining competitive pricing and reliable technology as its differentiation strategy.

The strength of Japanese brands, which have already gained consumer trust in Indonesia, serves as the foundation for the brand image decision of PT XYZ's city car electric vehicles for 2025–2026. This differentiation strategy focuses on emphasizing its reputation as a trusted and reliable Japanese brand. This strategy highlights proven product quality and excellent service, providing peace of mind and a sense of security and comfort for consumers who choose this electric vehicle.

The electric vehicle market in Indonesia has significant growth potential, driven in part by government support through fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, policy incentives, and support for the development of the battery-production industry (Ardiyanti et al. 2023).

Recommendations

The electric vehicle market in Indonesia has a great opportunity to continue to grow, one of which is driven by government support through the provision of fiscal and non-fiscal facilities, incentive policies, and support for the development of the battery production industry (Ardiyanti et al. 2023). However, to maximize these opportunities, a strategic approach is needed that not only focuses on product development but also on cross-sector collaboration and a deep understanding of consumer needs. Therefore, to maintain the market position and support the sustainability of PT XYZ's city car electric vehicle in Indonesia, PT XYZ is advised to consider the following strategic recommendations: PT XYZ must conduct innovation and market research on Electric Vehicles as a development plan for the next five years based on consumer needs to increase competitiveness, develop hybrid variants as a new product line-up, and provide alternatives for consumers who want to switch from gasoline cars to cars with renewable technology and energy. In addition, PT XYZ needs to collaborate with the government and private providers of charging infrastructure (SPKLU) to ensure that consumers have easy access to electric charging facilities.

The growing electric vehicle market in Indonesia presents opportunities for the country's automotive industry and contributes to the development of literature on electric vehicle marketing strategies. Therefore, further research is required to develop data-driven marketing models. This could include customer data analysis based on different geographic regions to design personalized and effective strategies.

Companies can also utilize a clear differentiation strategy to distinguish their products in a competitive market by emphasizing their quality and brand reputation. Developing new product variants such as hybrid vehicles can also be a strategic step to meet diverse consumer needs.

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