

The Superficial Prosperity and Structural Challenges of Emotional Marketing: A Case Study of the Automotive Industry

Yiming Gao

Orange Lutheran High School, Los Angeles, USA
gyiming059@gmail.com

Abstract. Against the backdrop of the automotive industry's upgrading characterized by electrification, intelligence, and digitalization, emotional marketing has received extensive attention in enhancing brand recognition and user stickiness. However, in practice, there are still problems such as strategy convergence, positioning deviation, and inconsistent brand tone, which affect its communication efficiency and the construction of user loyalty. This article starts from the consumer psychological mechanism, analyzes the emotional strategy practices of luxury car and new energy brands, focuses on the emotional paths of brands such as Audi, BYD, and Tesla, and reveals typical predicaments in the current industry such as the thematization of emotional narratives, the mismatching of audience emotions, and the drift of brand images. Research has found that successful emotional marketing should possess three core characteristics: clear emotional anchor points, precise user profiling, and consistent brand tone. Based on this, this paper proposes suggestions such as building an emotional motif asset library, introducing emotional portrait modeling, and optimizing the tonality protection mechanism, aiming to help automotive brands achieve a closed-loop upgrade from emotional expression to emotional experience and then to emotional attachment, and enhance the systematicness and sustainability of brand emotional assets.

Keywords: Emotional Marketing, Automotive Industry, User Loyalty

1. Introduction

As the global automotive industry moves towards a structural transformation stage of multiple integrations of "electrification, intelligence and digitalization", the traditional marketing logic mainly based on performance parameters and price competition is gradually being replaced by emotional connection and brand experience. Over the past few decades, consumers' evaluation of automotive products has been more based on rational indicators such as technical performance, usage cost and brand reputation. However, in today's society where product technology is homogenized and the consumer group is getting younger, a single function is no longer sufficient to support differentiated competition. With China's rapidly developing automotive market and its sales ranking first in the world, consumers' expectations have been continuously rising. The purchase of cars has undergone significant changes. Buyers no longer only focus on price but pursue the value of

the car itself, increasingly seeking emotional supply. They hope to establish an emotional connection with the product. Consumers are increasingly making decisions based on emotional perception, which not only reshapes the way cars communicate but also drives significant changes in areas such as car development and services. This has led car companies to consider how to establish emotional connections with consumers. In such an environment, emotional marketing has become a key strategy in car sales. By evoking resonance through emotions, cultivating brand favorability, and strengthening the connection between consumers and automobiles, this approach can enhance loyalty and expand word-of-mouth and influence. For the younger generation, especially Generation Z, car manufacturers should not only focus on the performance of functions and functions but also provide consumers with an emotional experience of being listened to and valued.

Emotional marketing has now been widely adopted by many automakers, but the automotive industry still faces new and complex problems. Common issues include overlapping emotional stories, leading to a mismatch between the transmission of ambiguous brand identity information and audience demands, as well as a significant gap between dealers' promises and consumers' actual experiences. In addition, excessive use of emotional narratives on the Internet may cause consumers' aversion to this situation. From the perspective of consumer psychology, when exploring the emotional marketing strategies in the automotive industry, the goal is to establish a model that aligns theory with practical challenges and provides practical application. Emotional connection has become the core and is used for the development of automotive enterprises. It can not only enhance the brand image but also It can also enhance consumers' loyalty.

2. The emotional marketing mechanism in the automotive industry

In the era when consumer culture increasingly focuses on individual feelings, brand significance and Emotional value, Emotional Marketing, as a marketing paradigm centered on evoking consumers' inner emotions and value recognition, has gradually risen from a marginalized auxiliary strategy to the mainstream path of brand building. Brand communication is not merely about information transmission; it also requires the stimulation of emotional resonance and trust mechanisms. Hashem et al. pointed out that the empathetic behavior and emotional trust of sales consultants significantly influence brand love and loyalty intentions [1].

2.1. Classification and characteristics of emotional marketing in the automotive industry

Overall, emotional marketing encompasses a brand's product information services and other interactions, enabling consumers to generate emotional responses. If implemented effectively, this approach can help consumers establish a stronger emotional connection with the brand, trust the brand, and eventually become long-term loyal customers.

In the car industry--where purchases are highly sensory, identity-driven, and socially influenced--emotional marketing goes far beyond catchy slogans or dramatic storytelling. It touches every layer of the customer journey, from how showrooms feel to how test drives are conducted and how users interact with brand representatives. The real goal isn't just to entertain or create touching ads. Instead, brands aim to make themselves part of the consumer's emotional memory, using intentional design and psychological triggers. In fact, studies suggest that emotional impact can shape preferences more powerfully than technical specs, especially when it comes to cars [2]. What truly matters is how emotional connection transforms a person's view of the brand--building trust and affection that eventually lead not only to first-time purchases but also to repeat buying behavior.

In the traditional functional communication strategy mainly based on rational demands, consumers, as rational individuals, make cost-benefit trade-offs. In the marketing logic driven by emotions, consumers are "emotional decision-makers", and their cognitive judgments are often guided by irrational variables such as situational influence, value projection, and social reference. Emotion is not only the prerequisite mechanism of cognition but also the driving engine of behavior.

Based on the integration of enterprise practices and academic research in recent years, emotional marketing in the automotive industry can roughly be summarized into four typical strategic paths: emotional narrative type, experience immersion type, value resonance type and social participation type.

Emotional narrative type focuses on triggering emotional resonance through storytelling brand communication, commonly seen in forms such as advertisements, brand documentaries, and celebrity endorsements, emphasizing "touching people's hearts". For instance, in its "Breaking Through Technology to Inspire the Future" series of advertisements, Audi has successfully established a warm, inspiring and realistic brand image by integrating its brand philosophy into social issues such as father-son relationships, women's independence, and the realization of dreams. When consumers watch advertisements, they should not only receive information but also be emotionally involved and touched, thereby strengthening the brand impression.

Immersive experience emphasizes the construction of an immersive brand experience through sensory design and service processes, which is specifically manifested in the coordinated control of multiple links such as showroom layout, test drive routes, vehicle-machine interaction, delivery ceremonies, and after-sales scripts. For instance, BMW's high-performance test drive camp for M series owners not only allows users to experience the ultimate thrill of speed and handling, but also arranges interactive explanations by professional drivers, ambient music and customized gifts, making the experience full of "respect and exclusivity".

The value resonance type mainly attracts consumer groups with similar beliefs through the values conveyed by the brand, such as environmental protection concepts, technological ideals, and national sentiments. For instance, Tesla has always built its narrative around the brand spirit of "sustainable future" and "breaking with tradition", integrating product functions and brand ideals into an emotional symbol of "changing the world". Consumers are not only choosing cars, but also participating in a "green revolution". Byd, through its promotional slogan "Green Technology Chinese Dream", has strengthened its local manufacturing capabilities and green commitments, combining patriotic sentiments with the narrative of future technology to inspire collective emotional identification among users.

The social participation type, by leveraging social media platforms and content ecosystems, encourages consumers to express their emotions around the brand through topic operation, user co-creation, community management and other means, and spreads individual emotions into collective emotions. Take Li Auto as an example. By organizing family camping activities for car owners, parent-child parties and the "Car Owner Co-creation Design Proposal" program, it has built an emotional community with the themes of "family" and "companionship", enabling users to establish a sense of belonging through participation and strengthening the recognition that "we grow together with the brand". When a brand is recognized as a lovemark, its loyalty stickiness will be significantly enhanced [3].

2.2. The deep mechanism of emotional marketing

It is worth emphasizing that these strategies are not isolated from each other but work together in a complete psychological path, namely the five-stage chain of "emotion arousal - perception

transformation - identification generation - attachment formation - behavioral transformation". In the first stage, the brand triggers consumers' basic emotions, such as joy, emotion, surprise and reassurance, through various means including vision, sound, language and stories. In the second stage, consumers associate this emotion with the perception of the brand, forming a positive understanding of the brand's characteristics and value. In the third stage, emotions and cognition are further integrated. Consumers start to incorporate the brand into their self-concept, generating psychological identification and identity projection. In the fourth stage, long-term identification is transformed into emotional attachment, which is manifested as consumers psychologically regarding the brand as "a part of themselves". In the fifth stage, the attachment relationship further promotes purchase, repurchase and recommendation behaviors at the behavioral level, and even shows a tolerant and protective attitude when encountering negative events. This complete mechanism indicates that the ultimate effect of emotional marketing is not merely to increase one-time sales volume, but to build "brand relationships" and accumulate "emotional assets". This mechanism has been verified in multiple empirical studies. Eklund pointed out that brand experience influences loyalty through brand love and image mediation [4].

In addition, the emotional marketing mechanism in the automotive industry also has its own uniqueness. Unlike other industries, automotive products have a long service life, strong visibility and prominent social attributes. This means that from purchase to use and then to social sharing, a car is often a continuous process of consumers' "emotional expression". Milheiro et al. found in their research on Porsche users that brand attachment strength was significantly positively correlated with satisfaction and loyalty [5].

Overall, the wide application of emotional marketing in the automotive industry is attributed not only to the high-sensory characteristics and identity value of automotive products themselves, but also to the changes in consumers' psychological structure and the reconstruction of the media communication ecosystem. It is no longer the art of a brand "telling a good story", but a systematic, designable and evaluable psychological drive model, which is the strategic core for building differences, accumulating trust and consolidating loyalty. Emotions are becoming the most difficult soft capital for new era car brands to replicate, quantify but with the greatest decisive significance.

3. Questions

Although the application of emotional marketing in the automotive industry shows a widespread and in-depth trend, and major brands also attach great importance to consumers' emotional construction and value recognition at the strategic level, from the overall practice, emotional marketing still faces many challenges and structural bottlenecks. Its effect is not as linearly clear and continuously magnified as the theoretical model. Instead, in actual operation, it has exposed serious problems such as strategy homogenization, inaccurate group positioning, and brand image style drift.

3.1. Homogenization of strategies

The most prominent problem is the severe homogenization of strategies, and the content expression tends to be templated and formulaic. Today, as more and more automakers emphasize emotion-driven approaches, "emotional resonance" is no longer a differentiating resource but has gradually evolved into a "standard process" or "marketing symbol". Local brands also exhibit similar problems. Research shows that trust and a unique image are the decisive factors driving loyalty [6]. A large number of advertisements and dissemination contents show a phenomenon of similar forms and highly overlapping emotional tones, especially concentrated in themes such as environmental

protection narratives, a sense of technological futurism, and a sense of family warmth. The proliferation of such emotional rhetoric has made the brand narrative, which should be unique, empty and redundant, making it difficult to leave a truly personalized impression on consumers' minds. Many car advertisements today follow similar emotional patterns and share comparable visual styles, making it hard for viewers to tell one brand from another. As a result, people often walk away with a blurred impression, thinking that most brands feel the same. This kind of overused emotional packaging can reduce communication impact, weaken brand distinctiveness, and even cause consumers to feel tired or disconnected from the message.

3.2. Fuzzy marketing

The problems of inaccurate positioning of the target user group and the mismatch between emotional content and the audience's psychology have become increasingly prominent. The core of emotional marketing lies in resonance, and the prerequisite for resonance is precise positioning. However, in reality, many brands, when designing emotional expressions, overlook the differences in emotional styles, personality preferences, and social needs among segmented users, resulting in an awkward situation where "the words sound pleasant but are addressed to the wrong audience." For instance, some new energy brands, on the one hand, emphasize a youthful and technological feel, with aggressive body designs and cyber visual elements in the interior, and their voice assistants being highly individualistic. On the other hand, they convey the family warmth of "safe companionship" and "reliable trust" in their advertising slogans. As a result, young single users feel that it is "too greasy". However, true home users experience security anxiety due to the complexity of the interior and unstable interaction. This "audience imagination bias" reflects that some enterprises, when planning emotional content, lack in-depth research on the user's psychological map. They often replace data insights with subjective guesses, ultimately resulting in emotional content "floating in the air" and failing to take root in individual minds. In the luxury car market, the lack of satisfaction directly weakens loyalty formation [7].

3.3. Development deviations of brand image and brand culture

The problem of brand image tone misalignment and style drift is constantly eroding the accumulation of a brand's emotional assets. This issue is particularly prominent in the transformation process of some traditional automakers: in order to cater to young people or the trend of electrification, brand styles have begun to be frequently adjusted and reshaped, and even there has been a "self-denial" of core values. The style transformation of traditional car brands has led some original users to feel strange or even alienated, believing that the brands have "lost their original flavor", ultimately resulting in the blurring of the brand's tone and an identity crisis. This phenomenon of "tone confusion" stems from the lack of long-term planning and full-chain control in emotional marketing strategies, causing brands to "lose their origin" during the transition and disrupting the long-term accumulation logic of emotional assets.

Taken together, these recurring challenges in emotional marketing practices suggest that emotion is not a cure-all. Although emotional strategies can promote connections and evoke resonance, if not managed properly, they can also confuse and distort consumers' perception of a brand. When a brand lacks an accurate target audience and brand emotional positioning, the information it conveys may become popularized and homogenized. This might attract consumers' short-term attention, but it is difficult to have a lasting impact. Therefore, the root causes of this issue were deeply explored, examining the failure of emotional marketing caused by strategic convergence, ambiguous audience

positioning and inconsistent brand image. At the same time, feasible practical solutions were also discussed, and a set of structural improvement measures was proposed, hoping to help automotive brands enhance emotional interaction and brand health

4. Suggestions

Emotional marketing is not a fixed model; it is more like a complex psychological project, involving the brand's story, building links that guide consumers to regulate their emotions, and achieving consistent touchpoints. When enterprises ignore the intrinsic connections among these system elements and merely regard emotions as communication tools or packaging language, problems will inevitably arise. Therefore, returning to the issue itself, this article condenses the three major challenges previously proposed into three more essential propositions: the "structural simplification" of emotional strategies, the "path fragmentation" of emotional matching, and the "system fragmentation" of brand tone.

To address the issue of homogenized strategies, the primary optimization direction is to establish an "emotion recognition system". Enterprises often habitually borrow existing emotional vocabulary and communication templates from "market trends", resulting in similar emotional expressions and converging communication forms. Truly effective emotional marketing should start from the brand's own genes, explore unique emotional anchor points, and continuously repeat and reinforce them through long-term and multi-media expression methods. For instance, if the brand proposition is "companionship", more emphasis should be placed on the construction of scenarios such as "security", "emotional stability" and "reliability". Only when enterprises clearly define their own emotional labels and establish an "emotional language system" that can be reused for a long time and applied across touchpoints can they maintain stable recognition and unique appeal in a fragmented communication environment. In addition, it is encouraged that brand teams establish the principle of "content exclusivity" - that is, in any large-scale marketing communication, ensure that the core emotional expression does not overlap with that of similar competing products. At the same time, online interaction mechanisms can be combined to enhance brand participation [8]. It is also an effective means to eliminate the risk of homogenization.

The key to addressing the issue of inaccurate group positioning lies in establishing an "emotional personality matching model" to achieve efficient adaptation between emotional content and target users. Traditional user positioning methods mostly remain at superficial features such as age, gender, and geographical region. However, in the context of emotional marketing, what truly needs to be identified are consumers' "psychological personality", "emotional preferences", "value orientation", and "social expression methods". These dimensions constitute the way consumers receive and respond to brand emotional information, and also determine whether a certain emotional content can generate true "emotional resonance". To this end, enterprises need to introduce the "psychological portrait modeling" mechanism at the early stage of marketing planning, and combine consumer research, user behavior data, social language analysis, and other means to identify the dominant emotional patterns of the target group. For instance, when it comes to "family companionship", for some users, warm scenes and gentle music should evoke soft emotions, while for others, more emphasis should be placed on responsibility, intergenerational inheritance and identity obligations, to truly hit the emotional bullseye. At the same time, brands should also establish a multi-scenario version content adaptation system, and release differentiated emotional expressions based on different media, scenarios and user states, so as to form a closed-loop structure of "scenario - personality - emotion". Only when brands truly understand "who to say it to, when to say it to, and how to say it to" can emotional marketing achieve the maximization of emotional efficiency.

In terms of the issue of brand tone misalignment, the core optimization direction is to promote the "consistency project of brand emotional system", connecting the emotional chain among brand proposition, product design, communication language, and user interaction, and preventing self-contradiction of brand personality. When many enterprises pursue short-term communication effects or carry out style transformation, they neglect the emotional assets accumulated by the brand over a long period of time and the existing cognition of users. Rashly changing the tone or operating across styles often leads to a sense of tearing apart in the brand's tone, resulting in the loss of existing users and difficulty for new users to accept. The key to solving this problem lies in establishing a "tone protection mechanism", that is, whenever a brand makes any changes to its visual style, language style, product appearance, or experience path, it must go through the "tone consistency review" process to ensure that it conforms to the brand's core temperament and emotional semantic system. In addition, enterprises can also utilize the "brand perception temperature difference test" method to distribute tonal change content to a small number of users, collect their feedback in terms of emotional temperature, familiarity, and consistency dimensions, and use data to assist in determining whether there is a risk of "tonal displacement". Iqbal et al. pointed out that tonal consistency is a necessary foundation for emotional attachment to intermediary brand loyalty [9].

At the same time, attention should also be paid to the "structured accumulation" and "full-chain reuse" of brand emotional assets. Emotions can be designed and accumulated. A successful emotional narrative structure should not be confined to a single advertisement but should permeate multiple detailed fields such as product naming, color selection, interactive language, and after-sales scripts. For instance, does the "user's first voice wake-up message" continue the brand's emotional tone? Is the language style of the after-sales follow-up text message consistent with the brand's emotional tone? Are the keywords of community operation activities reinforcing the brand's emotional anchor points? This is also consistent with the logic of loyalty composition proposed by Damaschi et al., which emphasizes that emotional consistency, brand personality and premium willingness jointly drive brand relationships [10]. These seemingly minor details actually determine whether the brand's emotions can form a "psychological familiarity" in consumers' daily touchpoints, thereby generating a long-term and stable emotional sense of belonging.

In conclusion, the participation mechanism of social and emotional content is crucial for the formation of a closed loop [11]. When confronted with the common problems existing in the pre-sensing interaction of the automotive industry, such as the same strategy, inaccurate positioning and the mismatch of the image of car manufacturers, only by systematically repairing from the dimensions of emotional structure, psychological language design and touchpoint awareness can car manufacturers truly achieve a closed loop from emotional expression to emotional experience and finally to consumers' emotional attachment.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the automotive industry is entering a crucial period of innovation and transformation. Emotional marketing for automobiles should become an important communication tool for brands to stand out and establish connections with consumers. It plays a significant role in both academic discussions and actual business practices and strategies. By guiding consumers from initial emotional identification to deep identification, it eventually develops into loyal customers of the brand. This emotion-driven approach changes the way consumers evaluate products and respond to brand messages.

Still, many real-world cases reveal that emotional marketing often struggles to reach its full potential. Common challenges include overly similar messaging, mismatches between emotional

tone and audience expectations, and inconsistent branding. These factors weaken the lasting impact of emotional efforts and point to deeper problems in how emotional strategies are planned, implemented, and sustained.

In light of these issues, this paper offers several improvement strategies grounded in practical design thinking--from building more structured emotional frameworks and mapping consumer psychology, to tailoring message delivery and maintaining tone consistency. The goal is to help automotive brands shift from simply creating emotional impact to building deeper, long-term emotional resonance.

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