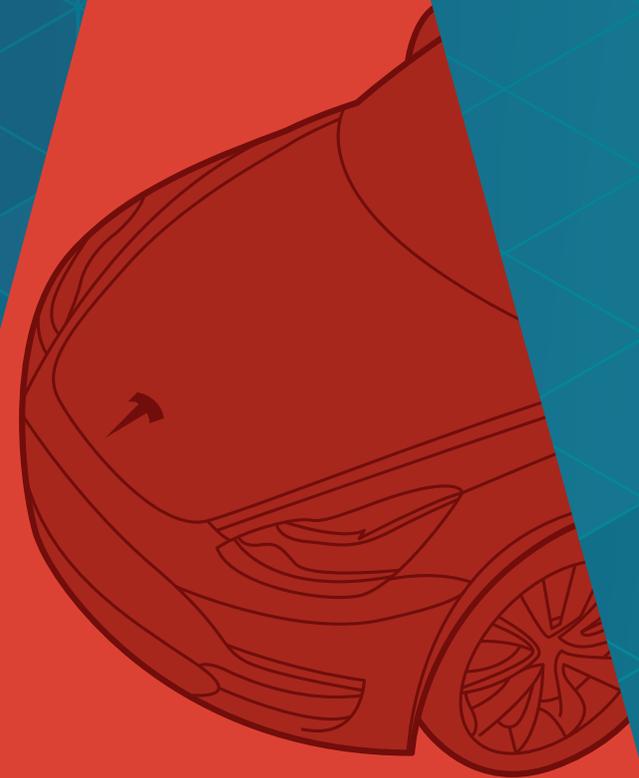


DRIVEN TO DISRUPTION:

THE RISE OF TESLA



Crimson Hexagon

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Introduction

The story of Tesla, Inc. is one of the most intriguing and unprecedented company tales in American commercial history. In less than two decades, Tesla — led by its impossibly big-thinking CEO, Elon Musk — has gone from the epitome of a Silicon Valley ‘moonshot’ to one of the country’s most promising, ambitious, and respected car companies. Or is it a tech company? Or an energy company?

Indeed, Tesla’s genre-bending identity is one of its most essential characteristics. There is no precedent for what Tesla is trying to do, no roadmap for its future evolution. Even if we are to focus solely on Tesla’s automotive ambitions (which is missing a big part of the picture), we are left with one of the most far-reaching and complex companies on the planet. Is it focused on bringing the eco-friendly car into the mainstream? Or are its sights set on making driverless cars a reality?

Whatever the case may be for Tesla’s future, one thing is already certain: **The company has struck a chord with consumers.** People cannot seem to talk about Tesla enough. Especially on social media.

As Tesla’s brand cements itself in the industry, and inserts itself into the global car conversation, social media becomes an increasingly powerful way to understand the company’s past, present and future.

In this report, we analyze the social media conversation surrounding Tesla to better understand the brand it has forged, the features that most excite consumers, and how this conversation translates into sales.

This report is divided into three main sections:

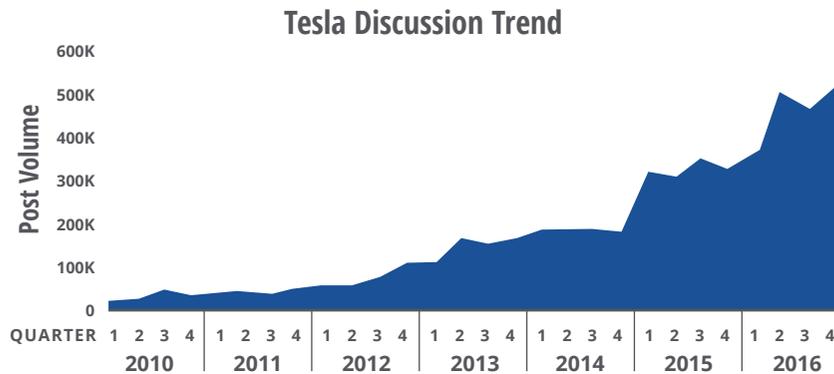
- The rise of Tesla buzz on social media
- How people feel about Tesla
- Who is talking about Tesla

The Tesla Conversation

Tracking the company's rise through social media

In only a few years, Tesla has gone from an essentially unknown commodity to one of the most talked about companies in the world. Unsurprisingly, a lot of this chatter has come on social media.

Since 2010, Tesla conversation on social has grown more than 10x.



From 2010 to 2014, Tesla conversation grew steadily. But starting in early 2015, the discussion skyrocketed. It was around this time that Tesla went from a fringe automaker to a central part of the industry landscape, thanks largely to several newsworthy events: the announcement of its autopilot system, rumors of an acquisition by Apple, and the preview of its new Model S.

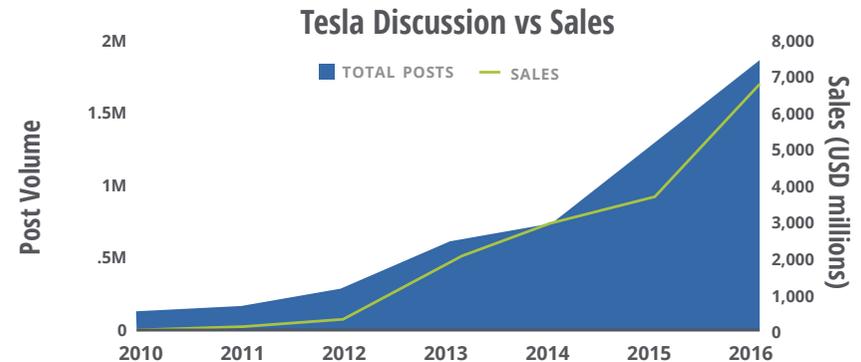
Willie James
@lts_RooZay
Amazing: New Tesla Model S Can Go 0-60 in 3.2 Seconds & Can Drive Itself In Autopilot Mode!- I can't wait for this worldstarhiphop.com/videos...

#BWIGM
@JamzLdn
That Tesla autopilot software is amazing. How is it predicting other cars crashing

There's no denying that Tesla is a buzzworthy company and common topic of discussion — but has its rise in popularity correlated to a rise in sales?

Tesla Sales

Conversation is one thing, but is the company's rise only about buzz? To find out, we compared the conversation volume about Tesla on social and plotted it against actual sales totals. The results were clear: The rise of Tesla conversation on social is closely mirrored by a commensurate rise in sales.



It's clear that, over the last 6 years, Tesla has achieved the two-pronged success that most companies only dream of: rapidly increasing buzz coupled with steadily rising sales.

But has this rapid rise been unanimously positive for Tesla?

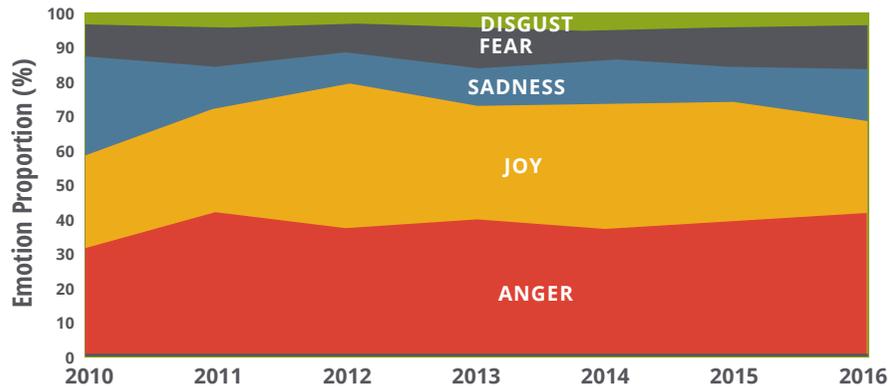
Mixed Emotions?

Analyzing Tesla's conversation topics and sentiment

The sales figures speak for themselves, but the growing volume of social discussion raises another question: What is the tone of the Tesla conversation?

For that, we need to go beyond the sheer size of the social conversation and dive into the emotions driving it. And, indeed, when we divide the Tesla conversation by emotions, we see that the carmakers rise is not viewed entirely favorably by consumers. In fact, overall, Tesla's brand is talked about more negatively than positively.

Emotions in the Tesla Conversation



Anger is the most common emotion associated with posts about Tesla. Since 2010, anger represents 40% of the conversation, while joy clocks in at 31%.

Understanding the Anger Behind Tesla

Why are consumers angry about Tesla? When we dug in, we realized that the Tesla-related anger is less about the company itself than it is about one of the technologies most closely associated with the brand: **autonomous vehicles**.

Self-driving fear?

As Tesla's vehicles have become more synonymous with driverless cars, their reputation has become more fraught. As we've **covered previously**, consumers are displaying a lot of anxiety and skepticism about the emergence of self-driving vehicles, and Tesla has not been immune to this negative sentiment. As Tesla has recently placed bigger and bigger bets on self-driving technology, the conversation surrounding the brand has become more negative.

Adisa M
@chocoeyedbambi
The self driving Teslas are scary

1994 Subaru Outbot
@Sadieisonbot
The Tesla autopilot feature is SkyNets newest attempt at destroying the human race

After a **man was killed in a car crash** involving Tesla's autopilot system last year, the social conversation about the brand veered even more into the negative. Questions over the safety of the technology in general, and Tesla's use of it in particular, have echoed across social media ever since.

The eco-friendly price tag

But it's not all about danger. Some of the negative sentiment around the Tesla brand stems from its prices. Tesla, which started as a strictly luxury brand, is often criticized on social for being unaffordable to the average carbuyer.

 **Steven Chao**
@StevenChaoMD
@elonmusk at Tesla service again for the 3rd time trying to fix door issues on my Model X. Very unhappy customer right now SMH

 **Dee Henry**
@human1time
@elonmusk I'm poor. I can't afford a Tesla.

Whether it is consumers talking about how they want a Tesla but can't afford one, or have a Tesla but are frustrated by maintenance expenses, the conversation around the brand features a consistent and non-negligible stream of comments about its perceived unaffordability.

Other Dents in Tesla's Reputation

Fear over Tesla's autopilot feature and anger over its price tag are the two main drivers of Tesla's negative sentiment, but there are a few other lower-volume topics that contribute, including: poor customer service, backlash against Tesla hype, app glitches, and concerns about the company's over-the-air (OTA) software updates.

 **Les Green**
@LGreen1
Can someone at Tesla please provide an update to disable the auto-wake feature on a Tesla vehicle? Very annoying. @Teslamotors

 **Drmerge**
@drmarginino
@elonmusk Tesla's customer service SUCKS! After 4 months can't get anyone to call me back on upgrading my model X. Cancelling my order for 3

 After only 2 years my car has been in service more than all my other cars I have ever owned...what makes it so frustrating is that all I know, no matter how many times I bring my car back in, the same problems will keep coming back... It's so frustrating to see how Tesla is focusing all its efforts on the Model X, the new features and Model 3 and has no interest in fixing those early cars that paved the road of success for them.

While there is a (perhaps surprising) number of topics dragging down the sentiment of Tesla's social conversation, the company does generate a lot of positive conversation. What are the topics driving that portion of the conversation?

Positive Momentum

On social media (and elsewhere), Tesla is praised as an innovative, important company bringing about positive change to what is often viewed as a stagnant, profit-obsessed auto industry.

Elon Musk, the most public figurehead of the company, is similarly viewed as a forward-thinking agent of environmental change. A substantial portion of the positive conversation surrounding Tesla involves consumers praising Musk's entrepreneurship and imagination.

Musk and Tesla's mission for social good dovetails with the third common bucket of positive conversation: inspiration. Many consumers take to social to praise Tesla as a source of inspiration about the ability to solve large problems, bring about social good, and infuse ethical behavior into a commercial industry.

 **Christian Aglen**
@ChristianAglen
@ElonMusk is one of the most humble business executives/entrepreneurs I've seen. Strength through excellence, indeed. #Tesla #SpaceX

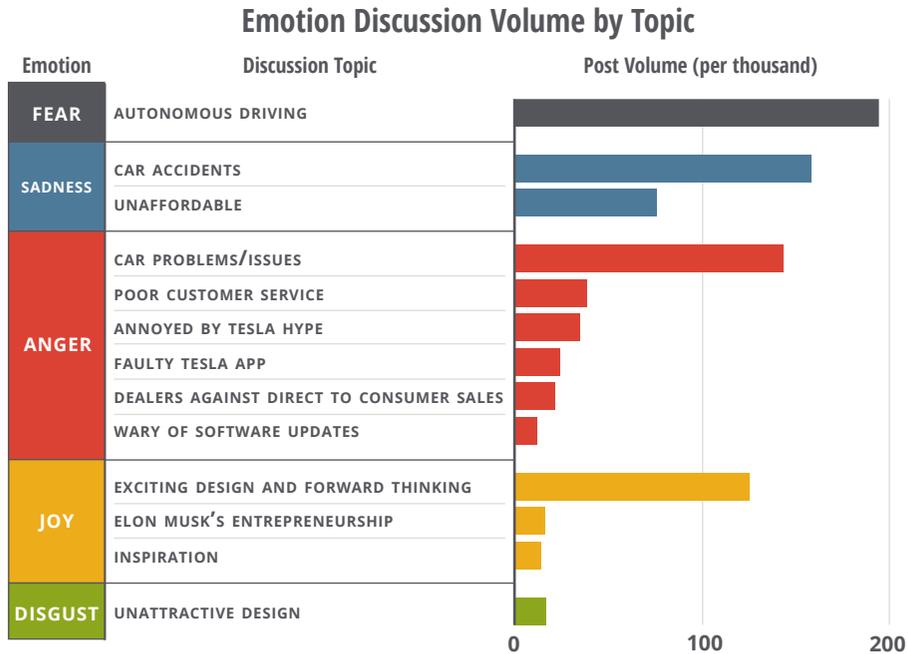
 **just_woodsie**
@just_woodsie
@ElonMusk thank you for all the awesome work you do with #Tesla and #SpaceX I absolutely love space and technology. Thank you

 **Kaley**
@sunkisskaley
Seeing a Tesla is always good morning motivation

The Big Picture

Like any conversation on social, the discussion surrounding Tesla has its ups and downs. What happens when we zoom out and look at the whole conversation? How do the aforementioned conversation topics compare to each other? Which emotions are most represented, and which topics map to those emotions?

When we do that, here's what we found:



This visualization helps clarify a few of the points we made above.

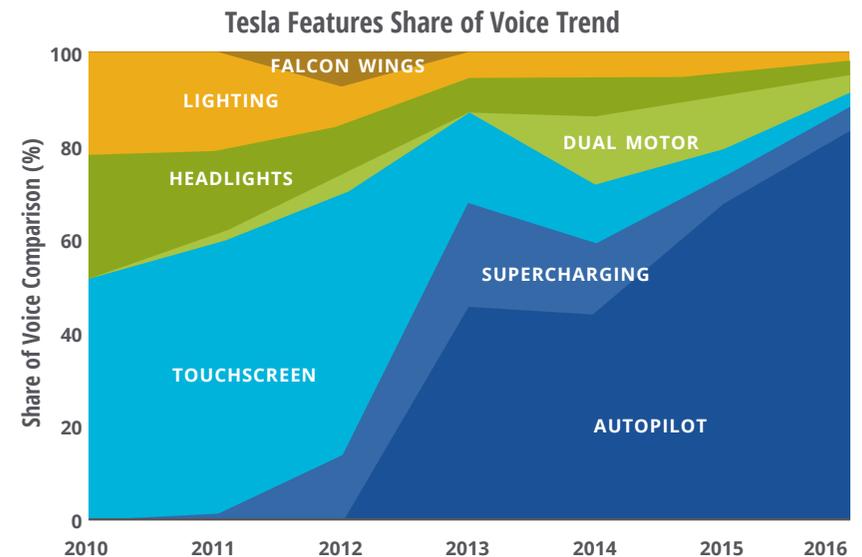
1. The single topic that drives the most conversation is Tesla's self-driving technology, and it is predominantly fearful.
2. Sadness accounts for a considerable chunk of the Tesla conversation, about two-thirds of which is about car accidents, with another one-third focusing on Tesla's high price tag.
3. Anger is the most diverse and voluminous emotion expressed in the Tesla conversation, predominantly about car issues and problems.
4. The Tesla conversation categorized as joyful is mostly about the car's designs and innovative features.

The Feature Story

As the previous section shows, much of the social conversation about Tesla is centered on the unique, innovative, and always-evolving features it adds to its cars. This, after all, is what set Tesla apart from the other, more established automakers is set to disrupt.

But which features capture consumer attention the most? What, in other words, are the elements (both technological and design) that make Tesla Tesla?

To answer those questions, we grouped the overall Tesla conversation by most discussed features and tracked how this mix evolved between 2010 and 2016. Here's what we got:



The main takeaway from this analysis is that Tesla's evolution has been a tale of two features: touchscreen and autopilot. At first (between about 2010 and 2013), the touchscreen dominated Tesla's conversation. But starting in 2013, it started to give way to Tesla's autopilot feature, which, to this day, dominates the overall discussion.

Other features — headlights, falcon wings, dual motor, supercharging — have ebbed and flowed over time, but the touchscreen and autopilot functionality are the two main players.

We've looked a lot at the rise of the Tesla conversation on social and the specific topics that drive us, but we're still missing one important piece of the puzzle: the audience itself.

Backseat Drivers

Analyzing Tesla's social media audience

When Tesla first arrived on the scene, industry experts all seemed to have one question: Could it find an audience? A decade ago, no one really knew if there was a built-in demand for electric vehicles. Not to mention that the company's first models were much more expensive than the average car. As Tesla has branched out into even less-charted waters (like self-driving technology), the question of whether the company would be able to attract a sizable and diverse audience became even more pressing.

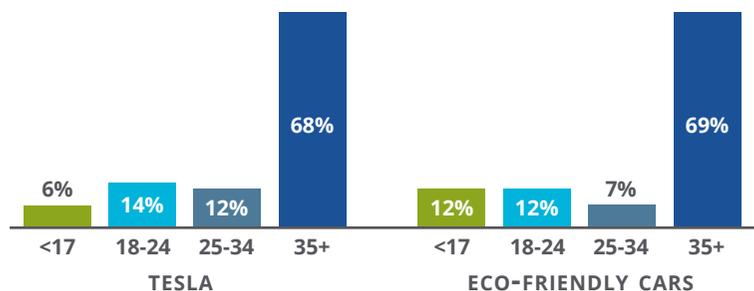
As we've seen, Tesla's conversation and sales figures have both grown, so the answer to the audience question seems to be, at the very least, a qualified 'yes'.

But what do we know about this audience? **Does it only reflect a small slice of the car-buying public? Has it changed over time? Does it skew male or female? Young or old?**

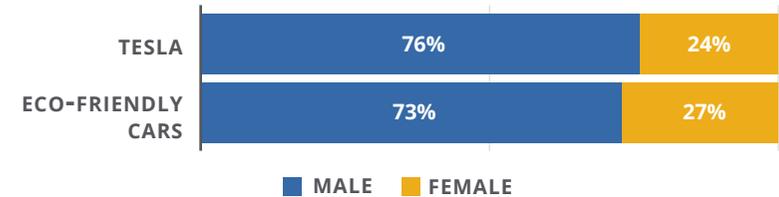
To answer these questions, we analyzed the millions of consumers who talk about Tesla online to see what we could learn about their demographics, behavior, interests, and more.

To start, let's compare the Tesla audience to its closest cousin: people talking about eco-friendly cars.

Tesla vs Eco-Friendly Cars Age Distribution



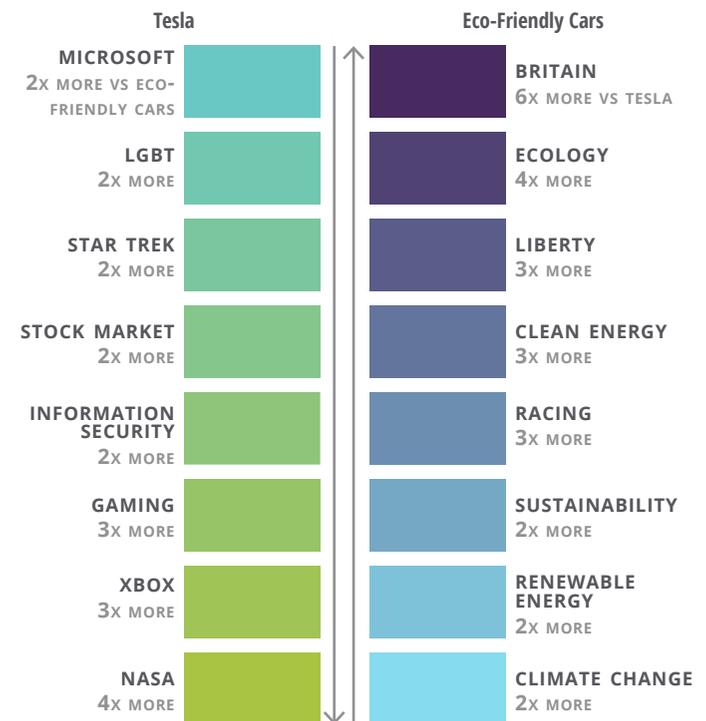
Tesla vs Eco-Friendly Cars Gender Distribution



On the surface, these audiences are (perhaps unsurprisingly) remarkably similar. But when we go beyond the age demographics and analyze the other interests of these two groups, the differences become a little clearer.

In short, the Tesla audience exhibits more interest in space (NASA) and gaming, while the general eco-friendly audience is more interested in broader environmental issues like climate change, renewable energy, and sustainability.

Tesla vs Eco-Friendly Cars Affinities



Conclusion

In less than a decade, Tesla has gone from ambitious Silicon Valley darling to one of the most valuable and talked about car companies on the planet. But the ride hasn't always been smooth. As the company has become more ambitious and mainstream, it has opened itself up to criticism — chiefly that it's self-driving technology might not be safe and that its cars are too expensive.

Of course, no company is universally beloved, and Tesla's weaknesses are counterbalanced by a reputation for innovative, eco-friendly vehicles. If anything, the increasingly negative conversation is an indication that Tesla has finally arrived where it wants to be: the mainstream. And, as any company will tell you, a spot in the center of an industry tends to come with its share of criticism.

The real question is about what comes next. Now that Tesla is one of the most discussed car brands on the planet, what can we expect in the future?

Luckily, social media can help us answer this question. Tesla's investment in self-driving technology has generated a lot of conversation (both positive and negative) and the company is still viewed as one of the most inspiring, forward-thinking automakers in the world — as well as one of the most expensive.

With the pending release of its (more economical) Model S and the continued testing of its autopilot technology, the conversation surrounding Tesla will certainly continue to evolve over the next few years.

And as it does, we'll be here to analyze the consumer reaction.

Start finding the consumer trends affecting your business today with a customized demo of Crimson Hexagon.

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