

Homework #2
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Fortune 500 selection

I'm choosing to write this document on Tesla, an American car manufacturing company that made it onto the Fortune 500 list in 2016[1]. This company, and its CEO are quite interesting to me personally.

Elon Musk built his success in the early days of the dot com boom. He and his brother, Kimbal Musk, decided to move out to Silicon Valley and start a Software company. Today their tiny startup is known as Paypal. Elon sold the company in order to move on to some of the most challenging Engineering and Ethical concerns our society faces today. Sustainability, space travel and artificial intelligence. My focus will be Tesla's privacy policy concerning its vehicles.

Tesla Backstory

Okay, so to keep this paper dynamic, I'd like to cover why I feel like Tesla and Elon are so interesting. First, Elon does not believe in advertising. I'm sure you've noticed the complete lack of commercials and billboards for his products. Elon would rather spend his company's money tackling hard Engineering problems and the company excels at it. Their battery pack is the best on the market and Tesla is leveraging the technology from passenger cars to develop the first feasible electric semitruck for sustainable shipping. Second, Elon's cars come with some of the best Software on the market designed for cars. And the final point ties these two concepts together. Because Elon spends as little money on advertising as possible, he is sensitive to anyone who reviews his cars. This makes sense because the reviews they post are probably the only widespread publicity most consumers will see about Tesla's products.

New York Times Review

In 2003 the New York times did a review on the Model S, Tesla's most affordable sedan option at the time. During the test drive the interviewer claimed to run out of battery 4 times during the test drive. The review does not post official numbers, and it is quite a lot of adhoc mental math, which make the numbers hard to follow and calculate [3]. Luckily, Elon installed tracking software on every one of the vehicles systems.

In 2003 during a Forbes interview Elon shot back at the New York times. During the interview Elon describes some shocking information on the test driver's behavior pattern. Apparently at one point during the drive, the tester drove circles in a parking garage. The only logical conclusion? He was trying to kill the car without making progress on his trip in order to give the Model S a bad review on the battery capacity [4]. Elon was able to tell the press how many circles the driver made and what temperature he had the heater at, which was above a comfortable temperature to further drain the battery. The aftermath of this fiasco was not good for Tesla. Elon was able to deflect the negativity about the battery, however his privacy policy landed directly in the spotlight. Consumers now had concerns about why so much data could be collected from a passenger vehicle [4].

Policy Review

During the Forbes interview when Elon shot back at the New York times he made it very clear the arrangements of his opt out option for the privacy policy. "For the owner's privacy, Tesla offers the ability to disable and enable this feature via the touch screen located in the center console of the vehicle. When an owner takes delivery of their vehicle, they are offered a consent form. Only if they sign it is Tesla able to remotely access data. [4]"

Conclusion

I personally believe that an entrepreneur, like Elon, should be allowed to design a car with as much tracking as necessary. The effect of a bad review on a company's product line could be detrimental. I think that the tracking software, in this case was a positive benefit to society. Elon does not give test drivers or reviews the option to turn off tracking because they are shady and often have ulterior motives from sponsoring companies. My guess is a large oil company paid the reviewer off to tarnish Elon's reputation. The main reason I think all this tracking is okay, is because Elon gives his customers a simple opt out policy when they receive the car and they can toggle this setting directly from the dash if they change their mind later.

References

- [1] Fortune. (2019). Tesla. [online] Available at: <http://fortune.com/fortune500/tesla/> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].
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- [3] Nytimes.com. (2019). Stalled Out on Tesla's Electric Highway. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/automobiles/stalled-on-the-ev-highway.html> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].
- [4] Nytimes.com. (2019). Stalled Out on Tesla's Electric Highway. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/10/automobiles/stalled-on-the-ev-highway.html> [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].