

Strategic Planning Process: Feedback from the Automobile Industry

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Abstract

Introduction: Global Vehicle production exceeds 80-million-unit recent years, where China alone accounts for over 30% of global vehicle sales. Along with traditional automakers such as Toyota, Volkswagen, General Motors, Ford, Honda, and Hyundai-Kia, electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers like Tesla, BYD, NIO and Rivian (with autonomous driving using AI and sensor technology) are leading the charge. The EV market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 20% through 2030. The rise of connected cars, ride-sharing platforms and subscription based model both for luxury and commercial brands, with increased focus on carbon emissions reduction, recycled materials and adopting circular economy principles, car companies must rehearse it strategic planning for profit protection and market expansion; regional and global, as well as prepare to face supply chain challenges (semi-conductor shortage), technological disruption and economic uncertainty (fuel price, inflation)

Purpose of the research: Based on the diagram of strategic planning process, this study outlines all seven levels/categories of strategies for automobile industries globally.

Design/Methodology: The is exploratory research. Primarily 50 random companies are selected, along the websites, secondary data are sought and tabulated. Finally, tables and charts are calculated and placed for the pertinent strategies.

Results/Findings: The investigation provides the strategic framework for seven categories of strategies such as Functional strategy (efficiency, quality, innovation, and customer responsiveness), Business level strategy (cost leadership, differentiation, focus differentiation, niche and best), Global strategy (standardization, transnational, international, and localization), Technological strategy (Licensing or Strategic Alliances), Corporate Level Strategy (Merger, Acquisition, Diversification), Ethical & Sustainable strategy (ethical, eco-branding and eco-efficient) and, finally, the Organizational strategy (structure, culture and control) for car manufacturing companies.

Practical Implications and Conclusion: To phase out the internal combustion engines (ICE) and the rise of Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS), the strategic feedback could enable the industry to face future challenges comprehensively.

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Introduction

Strategic planning is the process of formulating and executing approaches to business that will allow a company to work towards long-term goals. This concept gained traction in the 1950s and 1960s but faded somewhat in the 1980s (Mintzberg, 1994). According to Leontiades (1983), the use of some form of structured framework, such as those that include organizational levels, management styles, and stages of growth to help define effective strategy alternatives. In Encarnatio layman's terms, competitive advantages of superior products, reduced costs, and customer contentment (Singh & Khamba, 2019) and industrial capabilities in manufacturing as well as implementation of strategic plans (Ileri & Deya, 2019).

Figure 1 shows the strategic planning process from which seven categories of strategies are derived and adapted (Hill et al., 2012)

Automobile Industry Worldwide: Current Scenario

Worldwide automobile industry is an evolving sector, with around USD 2810.63 billion market size in the year 2022, of 866 companies, anticipated to be worth USD 3969.84 billion by 2030, developing at a Compound annual growth rate of 4.42% (Zion Market Research, October 2023) and built on broad lines of cars, motorcycles, trucks, buses and other vehicles, as well as recent phenomenon towards electric vehicles (EV) due to rising apprehension over environmental sustainability and the long-term availability of petroleum resources (Sarath, 2021). China now has the world's greatest automobile production and exporter, surpassing the United States and Japan. The US automobile industry faces difficulties from Chinese competition regarding the EV market. Also, Brazil is known as one of the largest players in the global automobile industry (Marx et al., 2020). Government incentives for foreign direct investment directly affect location decisions and how the industry's competitiveness shapes them (Encarnation & Wells, 1986).

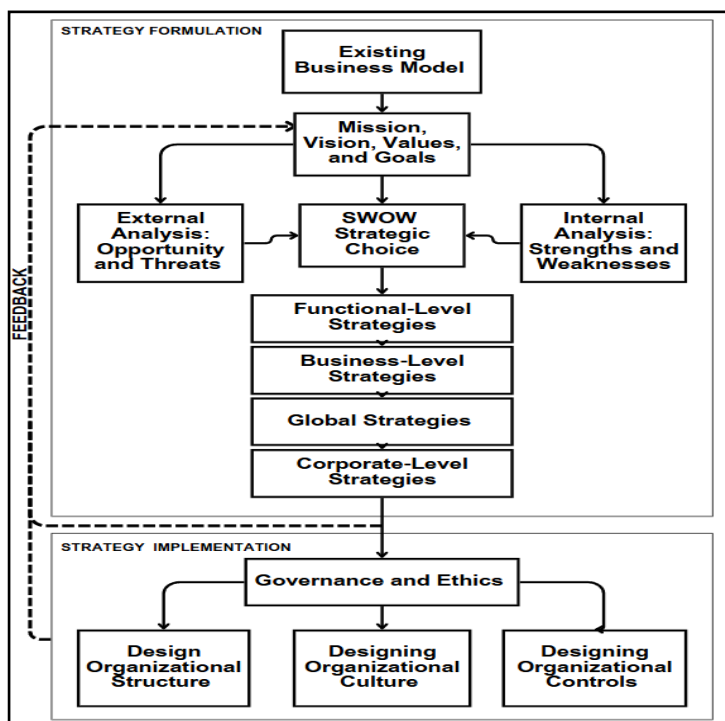


Figure 01: Main Components of the Strategic Planning Process (Hill et al., 2012)

The automobile industry has been heavily influenced by globalization processes, especially since the 1980s, with auto-makers expanding their operations to other countries and adapting new competitive strategies to stay relevant in a rapidly changing market (Bechmann & Scherk, 2009) with diversified strategy (Nazir & Shavarebi, 2019). maintaining a competitive advantage and continue to grow over an extended period of time (Armonas et al., 2010).

Literature Review

Business Model and Mission Statement:

Elements of business model typically consist of value proposition, customers targeted, revenue models, cost structures and operational plans (Amit & Zott, 2012). The rise of e-commerce and the evolution brought about by Industry 4.0 (Yang & Wang, 2018; Müller, 2019) urges the models traditionally based on dealerships to be reshaped towards online sales, subscription-based car ownership, direct-to-consumer sales, and other innovative models with the growth of electric vehicles (EVs) and the

rise of mobility and data services. Along, a good mission statement aligns the firm's internal structure, policies, and procedures with its strategic goals and future direction which, in turn, enhances financial performance and drives its decision-making process (Chahal & Mahapatra, 2013) and sustainability focus (Zahan & Sultana, 2019).

Strategy – Distinctive Competition, External and Internal Analysis:

Snow & Hrebiniak's (1980) study found that businesses achieve high performance by aligning their strategy (Defender, Prospector, Analyzer) with appropriate distinctive competencies, internalization of skills and better positioning (Hamel, 1991), organizational and environmental innovations (Karmanov et al., 2016) and green supply chain specially for automobile firms through strategic alliances (Abbas & Tong, 2023). Hence, it is crucial to choose an appropriate partner (Wang et al., 2016) that influences the competitive intensity and formation of vertical alliances (Burgers et al., 1993). Absorptive capacity for cross-industry innovation involves managing cognitive distance and coordination antecedents (Enkel & Heil, 2014; Enkel & Gassmann, 2010). As Musk's hegemony extends to the auto industry with the example of Tesla's (Hopkins & Lazonick, 2024) whereas differentiation serves as strategic factors (Ngo et al., (2016), so automobile industry needs to adapt procurement strategies with attention to supply, cost and innovation (Garcia, 2024).

Sustainability requirements in the automotive industry can be met through digitizing vehicle circularity on industry progress (Istriteanu et al., 2024), data-driven strategies (Micus et al., 2023), with asset-light production models (Brun et al., 2019) and technology adaptation (Ahmad et al., 2016). Machine learning (ML) algorithm, AI and big data analytics and automated driving are beneficial and cutting edge phenomenon for the automobile industry today (Saini et al., 2024; Kunder et al., 2024; Ma & Chang, 2024; Ahmed et al., 2022). Advanced driver assistance systems are trickling down from luxury to mass-market cars in the automotive sector (Nandakumar & Deepa, 2019) as new features on cars such as safety or convenience. Maps (Woo et al., 2021), automotive radar, alternative fuels, and the rising role of software and safety in the automotive lifestyle have all been evolutions of the industry as explored by Jahin (2016).

Functional Strategy:

Firms leverage functional strategy to establish a competitive advantage while ensuring their operations are in line with the organizational goals. Orishede (2022) shows functional strategies contribute positively to competitive advantage and optimal allocation of resources can yield better firm productivity (Agwu & Onwuegbuzie, 2017). Orwa et al., 2022 and Oh & Jiang (2022), both point out the need for functional strategies to enhance competitiveness in the manufacturing industry. Few more functional issues are investigated by Gaubinger et al., (2015); innovation strategy, Dyer (1996; networks effect and Phongpetra, Ph, & Johri (2011); cost focus, cost leadership, and differentiation strategies improve financial and marketing performance.

Business-Level Strategy:

The business-level strategy is what a firm uses to compete in an industry (DesRoches, 2022) on essential competitive advantages, cost leadership and differentiation (Acquaah & Yasai-Ardekani, 2008; Khoshtaria, 2016; DesRoches, 2022). In reaction to growing competition and evolving industry dynamics, a number of organizations transition from low-cost strategies toward differentiation strategies (Gehani, 2013) with a focus on efficiency, supplier integration, and lean production (Dietl et al., 2009). Environmental, globalization and digitalization lead the strategic changes in the car industry (Jain & Garg, 2007). Similar results come from positioning strategy (Löffler & Decker, 2012) with core-periphery character, where Germany acts as the leaders (Pavlínek, 2022).

Global Strategy

The impact of globalization on the global automobile industry during the latter 1990s was unprecedented and explained that the industry was moving from national to global strategies (Shimokawa, 2002) approaching of international and global strategy (Peng (2022). The study of Belis-Bergouignan et al., (2000) show multinational firms' model of American, Japanese, and European automobile industries and local taste focus at a lower cost (Schlie & Yip 2000). Developing a new market at different locations key takeaways on globalization drivers, differences between multi-domestic and global strategies, and the impact local versus global brands internationalization etc. are worth justifying

Strategy and Technology:

Corporate-Level Strategy:

Ethics and Sustainability

Strategy 1: Eco-Efficiency	Strategy 4: Environmental Cost Leadership
Strategy 2: Beyond Compliance Leadership	Strategy 3: Eco-Branding

Organizational Strategy: Structure, Culture and Control System

In this respect, Oliveira (2011) observed that organizational structure is an important element of governance and ethics, as it influences control, differentiation, and innovation. The structure is also studied by Ouchi (1977), Ullah (2016), Herath & Cooray (2015), and Lloria (2007) showing organizational structure in order to make a balance within an enterprise to achieve goals.

Culture plays a pivotal role in the automotive sector. Cooke and Rousseau (1988) show how effective it is to survey culture in organization. Gregory et al. (2009) and Hofstede (1998) both investigated how culture affected employee attitudes and values. Chang et al. 2017 highlight the mediating role of knowledge sharing between culture and innovation in the automobile industry. Similar findings are also available by Zawawi and Putrawan (2019), Abdi et al. (2018), and Rathi & Srivastava (2024).

Behavior and output are interrelated (Ouchi & Maguire, 1975). Flamholtz et al. (1985) Proposed an integrative control model focusing on planning, measurement, feedback, and evaluation. Outcome, behavior, and clan controls enhance performance, and functioning complementarily was further established by Sihag & Rijdsijk (2019). Clegg (1981) saw organizations as historically constituted based on the labor process whereas Neimark & Tinker (1986) argued a dialectical approach in the case of General Motors. The most common control mechanisms are quality control, performance metrics, cost control, lean manufacturing, and sales tracking. Figure 3 shows how to design an organization through aligning the structure, culture and control system.

Objectives, significance, and research questions

From the experiences companies are gaining overtime, this strategy depicts its feedback to a format. Strategic planning plays a significant role in the automobile industry by helping to navigate the competitive market and achieve long-term success by aligning all the skills and resources strategically.

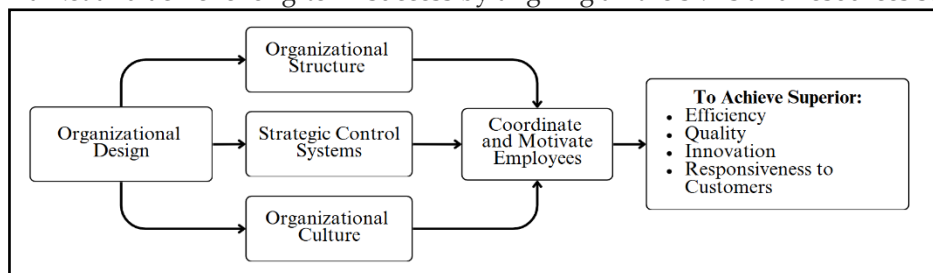


Figure 03: Diagram of Organizational Strategies (Designing an organization, Hill et al., 2012)

This paper is a comprehensive and unique framework for the particular industry and benchmark for organizational success. There are several questions this study would answer:

- What are the seven basic strategies companies should focus to establish their strategic planning?
- How to utilize feedback, benchmark and best practice to achieve superior performances in the automobile industry?
- What is the market trend and how the companies are overcoming the local to global market challenges from strategy formulation to strategy implementation, And
- How can strategic planning be applied to different organizational levels?

Data and Methodology

This study relies on secondary sources such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate, and various websites to gather relevant data. A sample of 50 car companies are vigorously studied. Data have been collected and systematically organized in Excel sheets for further analysis. An exploratory research approach has been adopted and placed the findings using tables and charts using percentage. The main purpose of this study is to analyze information through a qualitative lens. The Strategic Planning Process was applied as for systematic methodology.

Findings and Interpretation

Based on the seven strategies from strategic planning the findings are placed thereafter.

Functional Level Strategy: Table 1 shows that efficiency is paramount, with 90% of car companies prioritizing cost reduction and operational streamlining, exemplified by Toyota's TPS and Tesla's Gigafactories. Conversely, customer responsiveness, focusing on satisfaction and personalized after-sales service, is employed by 60%, as seen in Tesla and Lucid Motors. Quality and innovation are also significant, with 80% emphasizing product excellence (like Mercedes-Benz) and 70% investing in tech trends (like Tesla and BYD) and R&D (like Toyota and Volkswagen), respectively.

Strategy	Description	% out of 50	Insights with Example
Efficiency	Cost reduction, operation efficiency Lean and supply chain	90%	Toyota (TPS) and Tesla (Gigafactories)
Quality	Product Excellence, Reliability, and Safety	80%	Luxury quality Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Lexus; Toyota and Honda for reliability and durability
Innovation	Tech Trending (EV and Auto-driving) and Investment in R&D as well as new design	70%	Tesla, BYD, and Rivian (EV and Auto-drive), Toyota and Volkswagen (heavy investment)
Customers' Responsiveness	Focus on customer satisfaction and after-sales service (personalized service)	60%	Tesla, Lucid Motors (advanced customer service) Honda and Kia

Table 01: Functional Level Strategies in the Automobile Industry

Table 02: Generic Business-Level Strategies in the Automobile Industry

Strategy	Description	Feedback % of 50	Insights with examples
Cost Leadership	Economies of scale, Efficient Production, Cost Control	20%	Toyota, Hyundai, Kia, Renault, Suzuki, Tata Motors,
Differentiation	Unique Features, Brand Prestige, Higher Price	25%	Tesla, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Audi, Porsche, Lexus,
Focus Differentiation	Specific segments with specialized products	15%	Ferrari, Bentley, Lamborghini, Aston
Niche	Very Narrow Market	10%	Rivian, Lucid Motors, Fisker, BYD (initially in EVs)
Best Strategy	Covering all aspects or a combination	Varies	Toyota (Cost Leadership + Differentiation), Tesla (Differentiation + Innovation), etc.

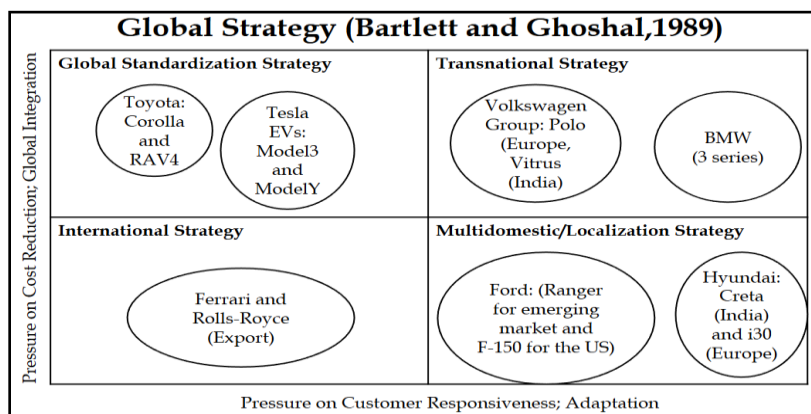
Generic business Level Strategy: Table 2 shows differentiation, with 25%, as the most prevalent strategy, highlighting brands like Tesla and BMW focusing on unique features and prestige. Conversely, at 10%, niche strategies target very narrow markets, exemplified by Rivian and Lucid Motors. Cost leadership, at 20%, emphasizes efficiency, as seen in Toyota and Hyundai. Focus differentiation, at 15%, serves specific segments, like Ferrari. The "best strategy" varies, combining elements like Toyota's cost leadership and differentiation.

Table 03: Corporate-Level Strategies in the Automobile Industry

Strategy	Description	Feedback % of 50	Insights with examples
Merger & Acquisitions (M&A)	Acquiring other companies or technology	30%	Stellantis (Fiat Chrysler + PSA), Volkswagen (acquired Porsche, Audi, etc.),
Vertical Integration	Control over upstream (suppliers) and downstream (distribution) activities	20%	Tesla (Gigafactories for batteries), Toyota (owns suppliers like Denso), Ford (owns parts suppliers), etc
Horizontal Integration	Acquire or merge with similar businesses	15%	Volkswagen Group (owns multiple brands like Audi, Skoda, and SEAT)
Related Diversification	Expand into related markets or technologies	25%	Toyota (investing in hydrogen fuel cells), Tesla (energy storage solutions), BYD (batteries and EVs)
Unrelated Diversification	Entirely new industries	10%	Tata Group (diversified into IT, steel, etc.) Geely (owns Volvo and invests in flying cars)
Joint Ventures (JVs)	Companies partner with others to share resources,	20%	Toyota (JVs with Mazda, Subaru), BMW (JVs with Great Wall Motors), Hyundai (JVs; EV in China)

Corporate Level Strategy: Table 3 indicates that mergers and acquisitions (M&A), at 30%, exemplified by Stellantis and Volkswagen's expansion. Conversely, unrelated diversification, at 10%, is the least frequent, with companies like Tata Group venturing into entirely new industries. Related diversification 25% and vertical integration 20% are also significant, with Toyota and Tesla investing in related technologies and controlling their supply chains, respectively. Horizontal integration and joint ventures are both at 15% and 20% respectively. The sample companies outsourced battery (34%), electronics items (31%), and interior (30%) from diversified and global sources.

Global Strategy: This figure 3 illustrates Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) global strategy framework applied to the automotive industry. Global Standardization, emphasizing cost reduction, is shown with Toyota's Corolla & Tesla EVs. In the Transnational Strategy, the cost and responsiveness are balanced, as exemplified by Volkswagen and BMW. The International Strategy, focusing on exports, is represented by Ferrari and Rolls-Royce. Finally, the Multidomestic/Localization, prioritizing customer adaptation, is



seen in Ford and Hyundai's regional models.

Figure03: Global Strategy Framework in the Automotive Industry (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989)

Technology Strategy: Table 4 illustrates the diverse strategies that automobile companies to leverage technology, ranging from proprietary development like Tesla's battery tech to collaborative approaches such as strategic alliances and licensing, and innovative business models like the "Razor & Blade" approach and leveraging killer applications.

Table04: Technology and Strategy Deployment in the Automotive Industry

Strategy	Insights
Proprietorship	Tesla (battery tech), Toyota (hybrid system).
Franchising	Ford, Hyundai.
Licensing	Toyota (hybrid tech), Volkswagen (MEB platform).
Strategic Alliance	Toyota-BMW, Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi.
Razor & Blade	Tesla (EVs + software), BMW (vehicles + subscriptions).
Leverage Killer Application	Tesla (Autopilot), BYD (Blade Battery).

Ethics and Sustainability Strategy: Table 5 outlines ethics and sustainability strategies in the automobile Industry. Toyota and Tesla lead in general business ethics and environmental sustainability, which indicates their strong commitments. Economic sustainability is highlighted by Volkswagen and BYD, while Ford and Hyundai focus on social sustainability. Eco-efficiency is shared by Toyota and BMW, and eco-branding is excelled by Tesla and Volvo. Compliance is emphasized by Toyota and Volkswagen.

Table 5: Ethical Strategy and Examples of Automobile Companies

Ethical Strategy	Automobile Companies
General Business Ethics	Toyota, Tesla
Environmental Sustainability	Toyota, Tesla
Economic Sustainability	Volkswagen, BYD
Social Sustainability	FORD, Hyundai
Eco-Efficiency	Toyota, BMW
Eco Branding	Tesla, Volvo
Compliance	Toyota, Volkswagen

Organizational Strategy: To design a perfect organizational and achieve superior performance companies coordinate and motivate the employees through various structures, cultures and control systems. Findings show that the majority; 46% companies follow divisional structure that is the activities and people are based on products lines, geographic locations, or market segments. Functional Structure (30%) and Matrix Structure (20%) are also in evidence. Based on the codes of conduct many companies practice innovation (44% for Tesla), CSR (18%), Quality (16%; TPS and Kaizen for Toyota) and, employee productivity as well customer centric (Lexus) culture. Performance metrics, quality control, cost and financial control are the major strategies the companies implement.

Summary and Strategic Implications

In conclusion, to survive in today's automobile industry, companies must strategically equip themselves. Prioritizing the shift to electric vehicles and investing in related technologies like autonomous driving features. Alongside, they need to enhance efficiency through optimized operations while differentiating themselves with branding. Embracing sustainability, responding to evolving customer needs, and navigating economic uncertainties are also very important for long-term success.

The study discusses the different options for strategic frameworks utilized by automobile firms around the world. The study illustrates how companies adopt operational, innovative, and customer responsiveness strategies with the intent to enhance their competitive abilities while paying attention to functional, business, technological, corporate, and ethical strategies as well. Also, mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures show how businesses are increasingly joining forces and exploring new routes through partnerships and collaboration. The global strategy framework captures the extent to which market standardization, regional adaptation, and cost-respondent models are used differently. Also, green practices like eco-efficiency and eco-branding are part of an integrative approach that now belongs

to the vehicle industry's strategic positioning for long-term sustainability due to environmental and societal pressures.

Limitations, Conclusion, and Future Research.

The sample was merely 50 companies out of 866 global; seemingly biased by few major brands such as Toyota and Tesla. But the findings might be followed by. This paper explored and organized the best practices regarding the strategy for superior performance for the global automobile business.

Future research can explore these areas further, focusing on optimizing strategic planning even for other industries.

Information sources

Information was sourced from company websites and annual reports. Industry reports and analyses were taken from McKinsey. News outlets and business journals like Bloomberg and Reuters were used. Academic journals and case studies provided valuable insights. Government and regulatory filings, such as EDGAR and EC Competition Cases, were reviewed. Industry-specific databases like IHS Markit and S&P Global were consulted. Books on automotive strategies (Womack et al., Smith) and strategic management (Hill et al., 2012) were referenced. Trade associations and organizations like OICA and ACEA contributed industry data. Financial news platforms like CNBC were used for market trends. Reports from consulting firms such as Deloitte and PwC were analyzed. Online sources like Google, Google Scholar, SCOPUS, ChatGPT, EcoPilot, and DEEPSEEK were explored.

Appendix: List of the sample companies

Company Name	Country/Region	Company Name	Country/Region	Company Name	Country/Region	Company Name	Country/Region
Toyota	Japan	Tesla	dear	Fiat Chrysler Automobiles	Italy/USA (now part of Stellantis)	FAW Group	China
Volkswagen Group	Germany	SAIC Motor	China	Mazda	Japan	Jaguar Land Rover	UK (owned by Tata Motors)
Stellar	Netherlands (Multinational)	WORLD	China	Subaru	Japan	Porsche	Germany (part of Volkswagen Group)
Mercedes-Benz Group	Germany	Geely	China	Tata Motors	India	Audi	Germany (part of Volkswagen Group)
Ford Motor Company	dear	Okay.	South Korea	Mahindra & Mahindra	India	Skoda	Czech Republic (part of Volkswagen Group)
General Motors	dear	Renault	France	Dongfeng Motor Corporation	China	SEAT	Spain (part of Volkswagen Group)
Honda	Japan	GAC Group	China	Changan Automobile	China	Lexus	Japan (luxury division of Toyota)
BMW Group	Germany	Suzuki	Japan	BAIC Group	China	Acura	USA (luxury division of Honda)
Hyundai Motor Group	South Korea	Daimler Truck	Germany	Great Wall Motors	China	Infiniti	Japan (luxury division of Nissan)

Nissan	Japan	Volvo Group	Sweden	Chery	China	Genesis	South Korea (luxury division of Hyundai)
Rivian	USA	Proton	Malaysia	Peugeot	France (part of Stellantis)	Opel	Germany (part of Stellantis)
Lucid Motors	USA	Isuzu	Japan	Citroën	France (part of Stellantis)	Alfa Romeo	Italy (part of Stellantis)
Fisker	USA	Mitsubishi Motors	Japan				

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