



Research on the Internationalization of Huawei

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Abstract

Driven by the global technological revolution and trends in internationalization, the survival and development of China's private enterprises have become increasingly linked to the global economic landscape. In response to new challenges, internationalization has become an imperative strategic choice. This paper examines the case of Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., outlining its internationalization path and context, analyzing key challenges encountered during its global expansion, and proposing solutions grounded in China's national conditions. The study summarizes Huawei's strategies across products, marketing, management, and talent, and identifies issues such as brand perception constraints, market instability, and technological blockades. Corresponding solutions include strengthening international cooperation, aligning with national foreign policy, and enhancing independent R&D. Finally, the paper offers strategic suggestions for other Chinese private enterprises seeking international growth, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies, technological sophistication, and talent localization.

Keywords

Huawei; Internationalization; Transnational operation; Globalization

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1. Introduction

In recent years, private enterprises have become a major driver of China's GDP growth. Amid economic globalization and the internationalization of high technology, Chinese private multinational firms significantly enhance the country's comprehensive competitiveness (Deng, Bai, & Li, 2020). Since joining the WTO, China has deepened its openness, and initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have further intertwined Chinese enterprises with the global economy. Consequently, the internationalization of private firms has evolved from an option to a necessity.

High-tech industries are now central to international economic competition. Guided by national strategies such as "Made in China 2025," Chinese communication technology firms have accelerated their global operations. However, they face trade barriers, regulatory hurdles, and intense competition abroad. As a leading firm in China's communications sector, Huawei possesses extensive international experience and a mature operational model. Its strategies and practices offer valuable insights for the internationalization research of Chinese private enterprises (Dai & Quan, 2021).

2. Huawei's Internationalization Strategies

Huawei adopted a gradual internationalization approach, starting from neighboring markets and progressing through agent exports to joint ventures. Its strategies can be categorized into four areas (Fu, Zhang, & Fu, 2022).

2.1 Product Strategy

Innovation is central to Huawei's product strategy. The company emphasizes open innovation, learning from and acquiring external technologies while investing heavily in independent R&D. The development of the Hisilicon chip series exemplifies its success in core technology innovation, which has been crucial to its resilience under external pressure.

2.2 Marketing Strategy

Huawei employs flexible and localized marketing. While focusing on Asia, Europe, and America, it continues to cultivate emerging markets. For instance, in Brazil—the world's fourth-largest smartphone market—Huawei has achieved significant growth in mobile devices and services, demonstrating its ability to adapt to diverse market conditions.

2.3 Management Strategy

As an employee-owned joint-stock enterprise, Huawei's governance structure aligns employee interests with corporate development. This model fosters a strong corporate culture, encourages innovation, and enhances internal cohesion, providing a stable foundation for international operations.

2.4 Talent Strategy

International talent is vital for globalization. Huawei prioritizes the recruitment and training of global talent, investing substantially in cultivating employees with international perspectives and capabilities, thereby supporting its worldwide business operations.

3. Problems in Huawei's Internationalization and Solutions

3.1 Problems

3.1.1 Brand Image Constraints from "Easy-First" Strategy

Huawei's early strategy of entering developing markets before developed ones helped it avoid direct competition but also created a perception of being a budget-friendly brand. Changing this consumer mindset remains a long-term challenge.

3.1.2 Risks from Unstable Target Markets

A significant portion of Huawei's international revenue comes from developing countries, where political and economic instability can increase operational costs and risks, diverting resources from R&D.

3.1.3 External technological restrictions

Restrictions led by the United States on key technologies such as chips and 5G have severely impacted Huawei's supply chain and market share, presenting a major obstacle to its global development (Li, 2022).

3.2 Solutions

3.2.1 Enhance International Cooperation and Brand Building

Huawei should strengthen strategic partnerships with established international brands while actively engaging in high-impact marketing initiatives, such as global exhibitions and targeted celebrity endorsements, to reshape its brand perception. Concurrently, sustained commitment to global corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives is crucial for building trust and goodwill in local communities. Ultimately, a reputable global brand must be underpinned by consistently high-quality products and services, enabling Huawei to gradually access and compete within the premium market segment (Cui & Wang, 2019).

3.2.2 Align Corporate Internationalization with National Foreign Policy

Huawei can proactively align its global market selection and investment strategies with China's diplomatic frameworks and major initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This alignment helps identify politically stable and cooperative markets while mitigating systemic geopolitical risks. Furthermore, leveraging institutional support and diplomatic channels can provide critical assistance in navigating complex international disputes, thereby offering a more secure foundation for long-term overseas operations.

3.2.3 Strengthen Independent R&D and Seek Cooperation to Break Through Core Technologies

Continued investment in independent R&D (e.g., Kunpeng, Kirin chips, HarmonyOS) is essential. Simultaneously, Huawei should seek new international partnerships to circumvent technological barriers and foster collaborative development.

4. Suggestions for Private Enterprises' Internationalization

Develop a Suitable Internationalization Strategy: Enterprises must conduct thorough market analysis, clarify their positioning, and choose an appropriate entry strategy—whether gradual or focused—that aligns with their long-term global vision. A deep understanding of local consumer behavior, regulatory environments, and competitive landscapes is essential to tailor products and operations effectively. Implementing localized strategies not only enhances market acceptance but also builds resilience against regional uncertainties and cultural barriers. Success in internationalization, therefore, depends not only on strategic planning but also on continuous adaptation to dynamic global market conditions (Hudson et al., 2016).

Develop “Sophisticated” Technology: To achieve a lasting competitive advantage in the global arena, enterprises must transition from relying on business model innovation to making substantive breakthroughs in core and original technologies. This entails investing consistently in high-end research and development, mastering critical technologies, and building intellectual property portfolios that can withstand external pressures. By focusing on developing sophisticated and proprietary technologies, companies can move up the global value chain, reduce dependency on external suppliers, and establish themselves as leaders rather than followers in technology-driven industries (Zhang, 2018).

Focus on Talent and Cultivate Localized Teams: Employing and integrating local talent in host countries is a strategic imperative for mitigating cultural, political, and operational risks. Local teams bring invaluable insights into market nuances, enhance stakeholder trust, and improve responsiveness to regional challenges. Furthermore, cultivating localized talent supports sustainable market integration and fosters long-term organizational stability. A deliberate focus on talent localization not only facilitates smoother market entry but also contributes to building a globally cohesive yet locally adapted corporate culture (Wang, 2020).

5. Conclusion

Huawei's internationalization demonstrates the evolution of a Chinese high-tech firm from a follower to a contested global leader. Its success was initially built on a pragmatic, staged market entry strategy and a strong value proposition. However, its sustained resilience amid severe geopolitical headwinds underscores a more fundamental driver: a deep commitment to independent R&D and technological sovereignty, as evidenced by its proprietary semiconductor and software ecosystems. This journey highlights that in today's landscape, long-term global competitiveness is intrinsically linked to strategic innovation and the ability to manage complex non-market risks.

For other Chinese enterprises, Huawei's experience offers crucial insights. International expansion must transition from competing on cost to competing on technology, brand, and localized integration. Navigating geopolitical tensions requires both strategic alignment with national policy and proactive efforts to build trust within global communities. Ultimately, Huawei's path forward, and that of similar firms, depends on a dual strategy: fortifying indigenous innovation capabilities while persistently seeking open international collaboration to remain integral to the global technology ecosystem.

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