



A Strategic Report on Alibaba Group Holding Limited

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid technological globalization, companies operating in the international digital marketplace must employ innovative strategies and develop adaptive organizational capabilities to secure long-term competitiveness and profitability. Alibaba Group Holding Limited, a global leader in e-commerce and cloud technology, has strengthened its position by cultivating dynamic capabilities—enabling it to identify emerging trends, capture new opportunities, and continually reshape its resources to meet evolving market demands (Teece et al., 1997). Driven by its “AI + Cloud” vision, Alibaba has transformed into a multifaceted digital enterprise, integrating data intelligence, online retail, logistics, and financial technologies. This report explores Alibaba’s strategic and capability-based initiatives that underpin its leadership in a highly competitive, fast-evolving business landscape. By applying the VRIO framework (Barney, 2007) and the Dynamic Capabilities approach, the analysis examines Alibaba’s internal advantages and limitations, external market influences, and strategic direction. The objective is to evaluate how Alibaba’s innovation-driven ecosystem and adaptive strategies foster sustainable growth, resilience, and enduring global success.

1.1 Background of Alibaba Group Holding Limited

Founded in 1999 by Jack Ma and a team of entrepreneurs in Hangzhou, Alibaba Group Holding Limited began as a B2B e-commerce platform connecting Chinese manufacturers with global buyers. Over time, the company expanded into C2C and B2C markets through Taobao and Tmall, revolutionizing online retail in China. Today, Alibaba operates a diverse digital ecosystem encompassing e-commerce, cloud computing, logistics, digital media, and AI technologies, serving billions of users globally. Guided by its mission “*to make it easy to do business anywhere,*” Alibaba’s business model integrates technology infrastructure with AI-driven innovation to empower merchants, enterprises, and consumers worldwide. Its “AI + Cloud” strategy has positioned it as the largest cloud provider in Asia-Pacific and a leading force in global digital transformation. The company’s long-term vision—“*to be a good company that lasts for 102 years*”—emphasizes sustainability, innovation, and inclusive growth (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025).

2. STRATEGIC INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

2.1. Internal Analysis

2.1.1. Organization’s Core Competencies and Dynamic Capabilities:

The market is increasingly volatile, driven by technological advancements and changing consumer preferences. Sustaining competitive advantage is complex, requiring understanding of internal and external forces (Sun, Chen & Mei, 2024). The **VRIO framework** helps identify resources that

create long-term competitive advantage and determines whether resources are strategic (Barney & Clark, 2007; Fisher, Wisneski & Bakker, 2020).

VRIO evaluates resources as **Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Organized**. Resources meeting all four criteria yield sustained competitive advantage (SCA). VRIO framework Applied to Alibaba group and its outcomes are shown in Table 1.

Value: Alibaba's resources create value by effectively exploiting market opportunities and mitigating threats. Its multi-platform ecosystem—comprising B2B (Alibaba.com), B2C (Tmall), C2C (Taobao), and cross-border (AliExpress)—enhances market penetration and strengthens network effects across users, merchants, and partners (Xia, 2024). Alibaba Cloud, the largest cloud provider in Asia-Pacific, adds value through advanced computing, cybersecurity, and enterprise services (Xia, 2024). Big data and AI systems optimize logistics and personalize marketing through real-time processing, intelligent recommendations, and predictive analytics (Zhang, 2024). Moreover, financial technologies like Alipay and Ant Group facilitate global transactions and provide savings opportunities, further enhancing the ecosystem (Li & Li, 2022).

Rarity: Alibaba possesses resources that competitors find hard to replicate. Its inter-cultural organizational assimilation combines Chinese, Asian, and global cultural values, offering a competitive edge over companies like Amazon that struggle in Asian markets (Verliana Elzagi et al., 2024). The company's ecosystem-based business model integrates trade, finance, cloud, logistics, and entertainment—features not widely available among competitors (Zhu, 2018). Additionally, proprietary operations research competencies, such as vehicle routing algorithms, generate significant cost savings, estimated at over USD 50 million annually (Hu et al., 2022).

Inimitability: Alibaba's resources are costly or difficult for rivals to imitate. Its extensive ecosystem of SMEs, logistics networks, cloud services, and payment partners has been built over decades, making replication extremely expensive (Wang, Jiang & Wakuta, 2024). The company's organizational and cultural experience, including its unique entrepreneurial culture, is hard to duplicate. Alibaba's proprietary AI infrastructure and big data systems, including ET-Brain and predictive analytics platforms, have been developed over years using massive proprietary datasets, making imitation unfeasible for new entrants (Zhang, 2024).

Organization: Alibaba is well-structured to leverage its valuable, rare, and inimitable resources, although some operational inefficiencies exist. The company is divided into strong business units, such as Core Commerce, Cloud Intelligence, Digital Media, and Local Services, and uses Zhong Tai (middle platform architecture) to integrate data and resources across units (Wang, Jiang & Wakuta, 2024; Xia, 2024). Leadership focuses on technology adoption, creativity, and long-term ecosystem development (Zhu, 2018). However, declining operating margins (26.9% in 2018 to 16.1% in 2020) indicate challenges in execution efficiency (Xia, 2024).

Table 1. VRIO framework and Alibaba Group

Resource / Capability	V	R	I	O	Outcome
Multi-platform ecosystem	✓	✓	✓	✓	SCA
Alibaba Cloud	✓	✗	✓	✓	Temporary Competitive Advantage
Big data & AI capabilities	✓	✓	✓	✓	SCA
Fintech & Alipay capabilities	✓	✗	✓	✓	Temporary Competitive Advantage
Cultural & organizational integration	✓	✓	✓	✓	SCA
Logistics & Cainiao infrastructure	✓	✗	✓	✓	Competitive Parity

2.1.1.1 Core Competencies:

It must be emphasized that the core competencies represent the product of the intangible resources possessed by the organization, which in this case, is the knowledge and capabilities of the company (Ceglinski, 2020). Simply put, Core competencies are **packages of VRIO resources** enabling the firm to carry out activities in a superior manner than the rivals. According to the VRIO results, there are **three main core competencies** of Alibaba and they are as follows:

Platform Ecosystem: The integration of the platform of Alibaba in B2B, B2C, C2C, cloud computing, logistics, media, and payment platforms forms a distinctive, self-promoting system (Xia, 2024).

This competency provides Massive network effects, Large customer and merchant lock-in and Scalability within a short period of time.

Financial Technology: Alibaba is expanding its financial services (Zhu, 2018), which enables long-term expansion. Secure global payments are achieved through Micro-lending and consumer credit and SME financing. This enhances the entire ecosystem and value addition to the users.

Data and Analytics: The data competency of Alibaba is composed of Predictive analytics, Real-time data processing, Tracking behaviour of the customers and Artificial intelligence (AI) personalization (Zhang, 2024). Big data enables Hyper-personalized experiences, Faster decisions and Better logistics & routing. This is among the competitive advantages that Alibaba is having in the long term.

2.1.1.2 Dynamic Capabilities

Dynamic capabilities refer to a firm's ability to **adapt, reconfigure, and coordinate resources** in response to evolving market conditions (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). These capabilities allow firms to maintain consistent performance while addressing technological, competitive, and consumer-driven changes. For Alibaba, dynamic capabilities can be understood in terms of **sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring** opportunities.

Sensing: Sensing is the firm's ability to identify emerging trends, market gaps, and technological opportunities. Alibaba has demonstrated strong sensing capabilities by recognizing the potential of an integrated multi-platform ecosystem that spans B2B, B2C, C2C, cross-border commerce, cloud computing, logistics, and financial services (Xia, 2024; Li & Li, 2022). By leveraging big data and AI, the company continuously monitors market trends, consumer behavior, and technological innovations, allowing it to detect new opportunities and optimize decision-making before competitors (Zhang, 2024).

Seizing: Seizing refers to capitalizing on identified opportunities through effective business model execution. Alibaba has successfully seized opportunities by expanding its digital ecosystem, offering solutions in cloud computing (Alibaba Cloud), fintech (Alipay, Ant Group), and international commerce (AliExpress, Lazada, Trendyol) (Zhu, 2018; Xia, 2024). Its use of AI-driven personalization and logistics optimization allows the company to translate market insights into actionable strategies, reinforcing its global competitiveness (Zhang, 2024).

Reconfiguring: Reconfiguring involves adjusting resources, processes, and strategies in response to market feedback. Alibaba continuously reconfigures its operations through Zhong Tai to integrate resources across business units, enabling innovation and rapid deployment of services (Wang, Jiang & Wakuta, 2024; Xia, 2024). The company also strategically divests non-core assets, such as Sun Art and Intime, to focus on AI- and cloud-driven efficiencies, resulting in improved operating margins and profitability (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 4). Coordination among merchants, logistics partners, and customers demonstrates Alibaba's capacity to adapt its ecosystem dynamically to meet market demand (Wang, Jiang & Wakuta, 2024).

2.1.2. Organizational Culture and Structure

Alibaba is a dual-listed holding company (NYSE: BABA; HKEX: 9988/89988), governed by the Board, Executive Management, and specialized committees (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2024, pp. 6–8, 132–153).

Business Groups (2024):

The business ecosystem of Alibaba (Figure 1) consist of seven core groups;

- **TTG** – Taobao & Tmall (China retail).
- **AIDC** – International platforms (AliExpress, Lazada, Trendyol).
- **Cloud Intelligence** – Cloud, AI, big data.
- **Cainiao** – Global logistics.
- **Local Services** – Ele.me, Amap.
- **Digital Media & Entertainment** – Youku, Alibaba Pictures.
- **All Others** – DingTalk, Quark, emerging tech (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2024, pp. 12–20).



Figure 1. Seven Core business groups of Alibaba.

These units are semi-autonomous, each led by a Group CEO reporting to Eddie Wu (Group CEO). Leadership comprises Chairman, CEO, Board, Top Management, and specialist committees (Capital, Compliance, Audit, Remuneration, Nomination). Structure of Alibaba's leadership is shown in (Figure 2). Moreover, the complete organizational structure of Alibaba is illustrated in (Figure 3)



Figure 2. Leadership Structure of Alibaba group.

Cultural Philosophy:

- Mission:** “To make it easy to do business anywhere.”
- Vision:** “To be a good company that lasts for 102 years.”
- Core Values:** Core values of group are as follows: (Table 2)

Table 3. Core values of Alibaba Group (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2024, pp. 2–5). .

Core Values:	Slogans
Customer First	Customers first, employees second, shareholders third.
Teamwork	Trust makes everything simple.
Embracing Change	Change is the only constant.
Integrity	Today's best performance is tomorrow's baseline.
Passion	Live seriously, work happily.
Commitment	If not now, when? If not me, who?

Alibaba blends **Confucian collective responsibility** with **Silicon Valley innovation**, fostering entrepreneurial flexibility and ecosystem-level value creation.

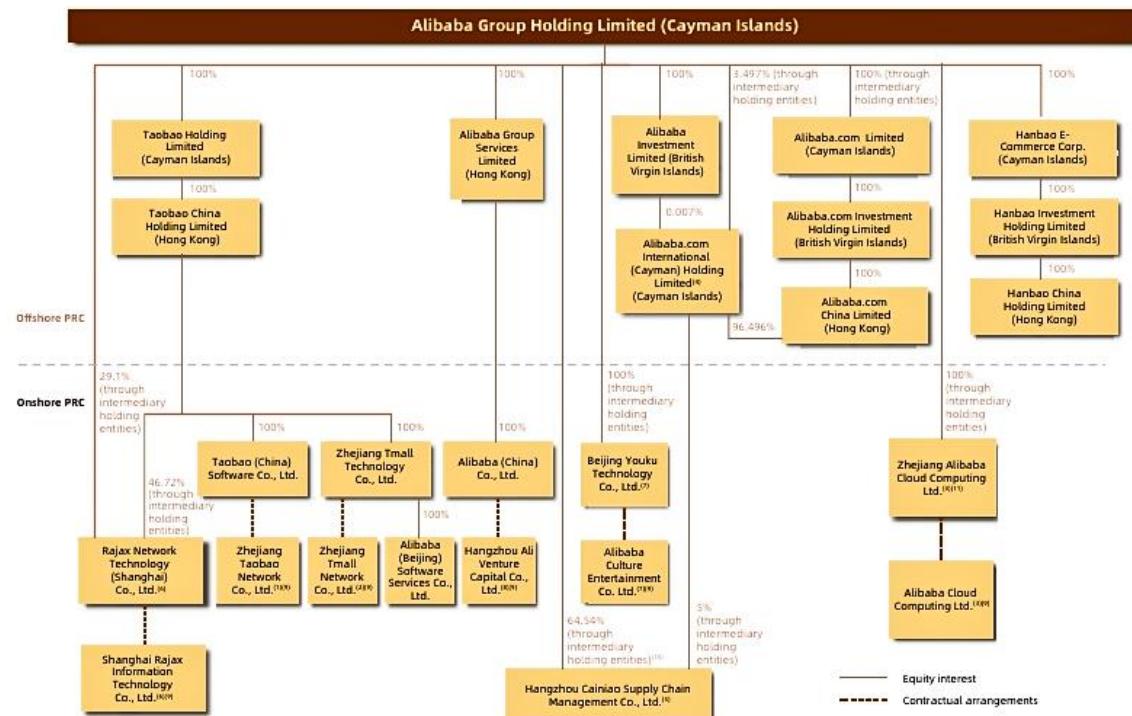


Figure 3. Organizational Structure of Alibaba Group as of 2025.

2.1.3. Alibaba Group: Competitive Market Analysis (FY2025)

Alibaba is one of the giants of the digital economy, which includes e-commerce, cloud computing, logistics, and AI-assisted services. Alibaba is in a very competitive local as well as international market. Its key competitors are JD.com and Pinduoduo (Temu) in China, Amazon and Shopee around the world. Competitive market analysis of Alibaba Group is demonstrated in table 3.

In the period between FY2021-FY2025, Alibaba has transformed into an AI-based technology ecosystem out of a commerce giant. The Alibaba strategy centers on the use of AI + Cloud ecosystem, which can remain competitive over the long run. JD.com is dependent on the efficiency of logistics, whereas Pinduoduo is dependent on the cheapness of social business, the integration of the ecosystem at Alibaba offers broader scalability (Market Share: *Services, Worldwide, 2024*, no date). Its diversification in terms of revenues and adoption of technology enhances its competitiveness in the world (*2024 Asia Consumer Trends and E-Commerce Impact - Euromonitor.com*, no date). Therefore, AI and Cloud are some of the discriminating factors. Alibaba Cloud is the technological leader and penetrates the market well, being the largest in Asia-Pacific and the fourth in the world by revenue in the IaaS category (Market Share: *Services, Worldwide, 2024*, no date).

Table 4. Competitive analysis of Alibaba Group.

Segment	Alibaba FY2025	Competitors	Edge
China E-commerce	Largest platform by GMV	JD.com, Pinduoduo	AI personalization, user base
International Commerce	33% YoY growth	Amazon, Shopee	Localized logistics, AI
Cloud & AI	#1 APAC, #4 global	AWS, Azure, Tencent	Qwen3 AI, open-source
Logistics	Global smart network	JD Logistics, SF Express	Asset-light, automated
Digital Media	Profitability FY2025	Tencent Video, iQiyi	AI-driven engagement

2.1.4. Financial Analysis and Ratio Interpretation

The FY2025 of Alibaba was marked by strategic sales (Sun Art, Intime) and increased concentration on profitability and capital efficiency. Alibaba paid a dividend of US\$4.6B and bought US\$11.9B of shares, which decreased the number of outstanding shares by 5.1, which positively impacted the shareholder earnings per share (Table 4). The profitability of Alibaba compared to JD.com and Pinduoduo, the net profit margin was 10.9% compared to 5.3% at JD.com and 6.2% at Amazon (Market Share: *Services, Worldwide, 2024*, no date). The ROE of the company was 13.3, which is an indication of a superior deployment of capital as compared to other companies in the country. This stable performance highlights the strength and high cost-discipline of Alibaba in the changing digital economy of China (*Worldwide Semiannual Public Cloud Services Tracker*, no date).

Table 4. Alibaba Group Financial Performance (FY2021–FY2025)

Metric	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend / Notes
Revenue (US\$ B)	109.5	109.5	118.3	126.5	130.3	Steady rise; CAGR ≈ 5.9 %
Operating Income (US\$ B)	15.6	13.0	14.4	15.4	18.1	AI-driven Efficiency
Net Income (Shareholders, US\$ B)	21.9	10.3	11.5	11.9	14.2	Boosted profitability; +19 % YoY FY2025
Gross Profit Margin (%)	41.3 %	36.1 %	35.7 %	36.2 %	38.1 %	Cost Optimization (Figure 4)
Operating Margin (%)	15.5 %	11.9 %	12.2 %	12.2 %	13.9 %	Rising efficiency (Figure 6)
Net Profit Margin (%)	13.0 %	9.4 %	9.7 %	9.4 %	10.9 %	Profit growth (Figure 5)
Total Assets (US\$ B)	256.5	270.0	284.5	289.7	298.6	Stable asset base
Total Equity (US\$ B)	85.2	91.4	94.0	100.6	106.8	Disciplined reinvestment
ROE (Return on Equity %)	15.6 %	11.2 %	12.1 %	11.8 %	13.3 %	Strengthened shareholder performance
Cash from Operations (US\$ B)	19.6	20.2	21.5	22.1	24.5	Strengthened liquidity
Dividend Payout (US\$ B)	—	—	2.5	4.0	4.6	Increasing cash dividends
Share Repurchase (US\$ B)	—	9.6	10.0	11.0	11.9	Share buyback; 5.1 % reduction in outstanding shares FY2025
Cloud Revenue Growth (%)	13 %	9 %	12 %	9 %	>10 %	Alibaba Cloud expansion

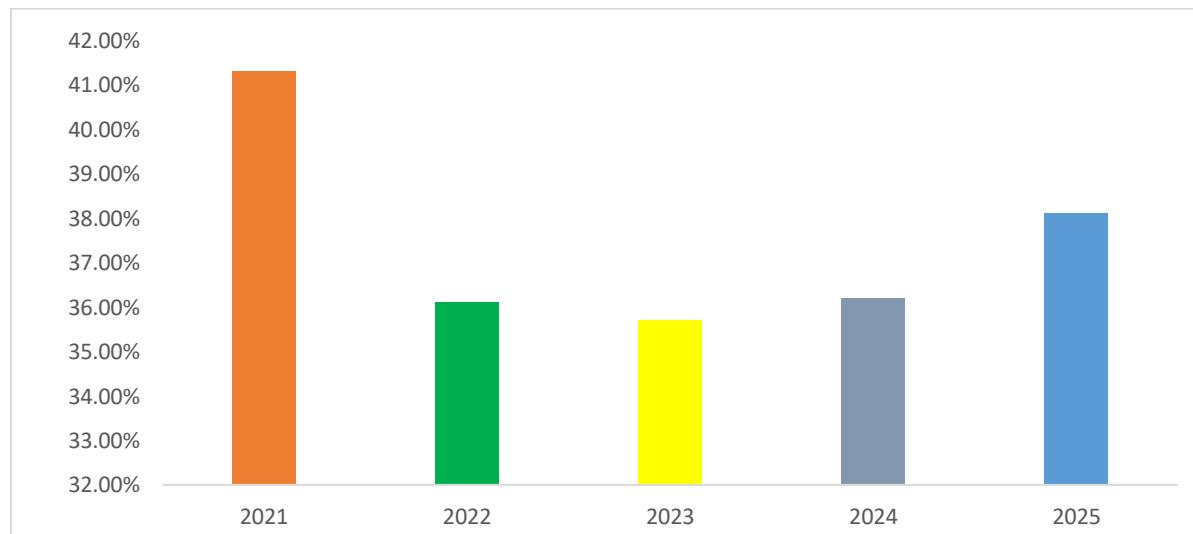


Figure 4. Gross profit margin for the financial year 2021-2025

2.1.4.1 Financial Ratios: Profitability and Liquidity (FY2021–2025)

Between FY2021 and FY2025, Alibaba shifted from a growth-focused to a profit-oriented technology leader, with profitability and liquidity improving due to its AI- and Cloud-based efficiency model (Table 5, Table 6 & Table 7). ROE growth reflects stronger shareholder value, outperforming JD.com's 8–9% during the same period (Market Share: Services, Worldwide, 2024, no date). Liquidity also strengthened, with the current ratio rising from 1.48 to 1.85 and the debt-to-equity ratio falling from 0.54 to 0.42, demonstrating prudent capital management and superior liquidity compared to JD.com and Pinduoduo (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, pp. 4–5; Worldwide Semiannual Public Cloud Services Tracker, no date).

Table 5. Profitability Ratios (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025).

Ratio	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Interpretation
Gross Profit Margin (%)	41.3 %	36.1 %	35.7 %	36.2 %	38.1 %	Recovered margin due to AI efficiencies
Operating Margin (%)	15.5 %	11.9 %	12.2 %	12.2 %	13.9 %	Margin rebound through AI-driven expense optimization
Net Profit Margin (%)	13.0 %	9.4 %	9.7 %	9.4 %	10.9 %	Stable profit recovery post-COVID
Return on Equity (ROE %)	15.6 %	11.2 %	12.1 %	11.8 %	13.3 %	Shareholder return improved
Earnings per Share (EPS USD)	5.12	3.40	4.02	4.25	4.85	EPS recovery

Table 6. Liquidity Ratios (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 55).

Ratio	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Interpretation
Current Ratio	1.48	1.55	1.60	1.67	1.85	strengthening of short-term solvency (Figure 7)
Quick Ratio	1.22	1.30	1.38	1.42	1.57	High liquidity
Debt-to-Equity Ratio	0.54	0.51	0.48	0.45	0.42	Conservative leverage profile
Interest Coverage (x)	9.6x	10.5x	11.2x	12.0x	13.8x	Improved debt service
Operating Cash Flow (US\$ B)	19.6	20.2	21.5	22.1	24.5	Strong internal funding

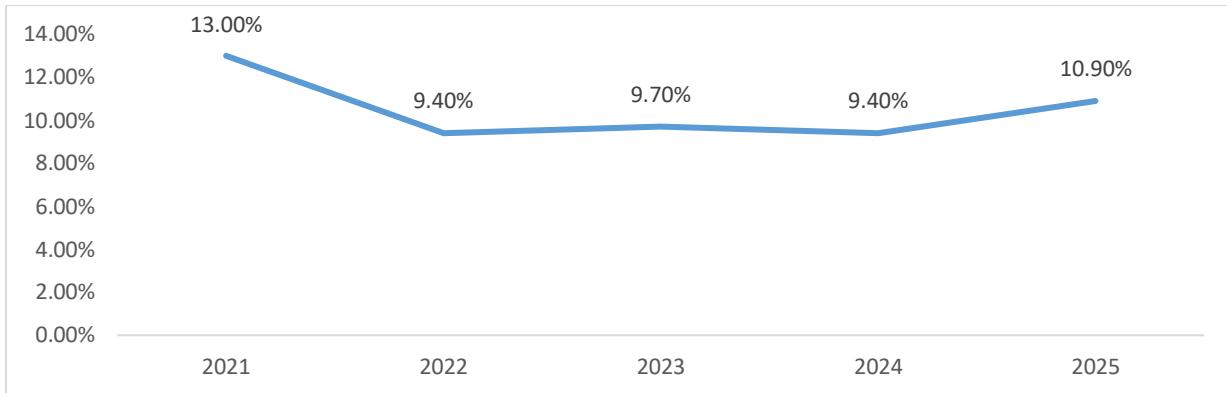


Figure 5. Net profit margin graph.

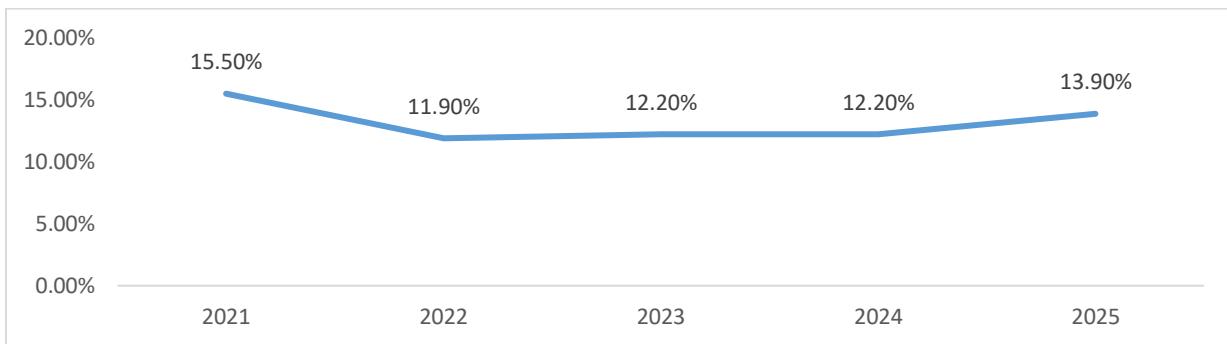


Figure 6. Operating profit margin graph

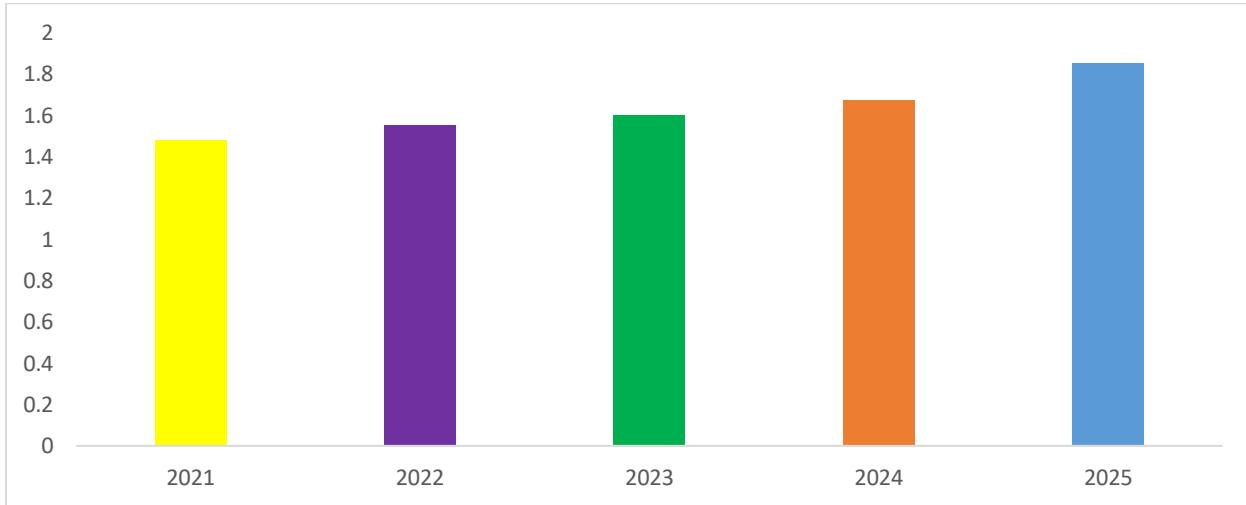
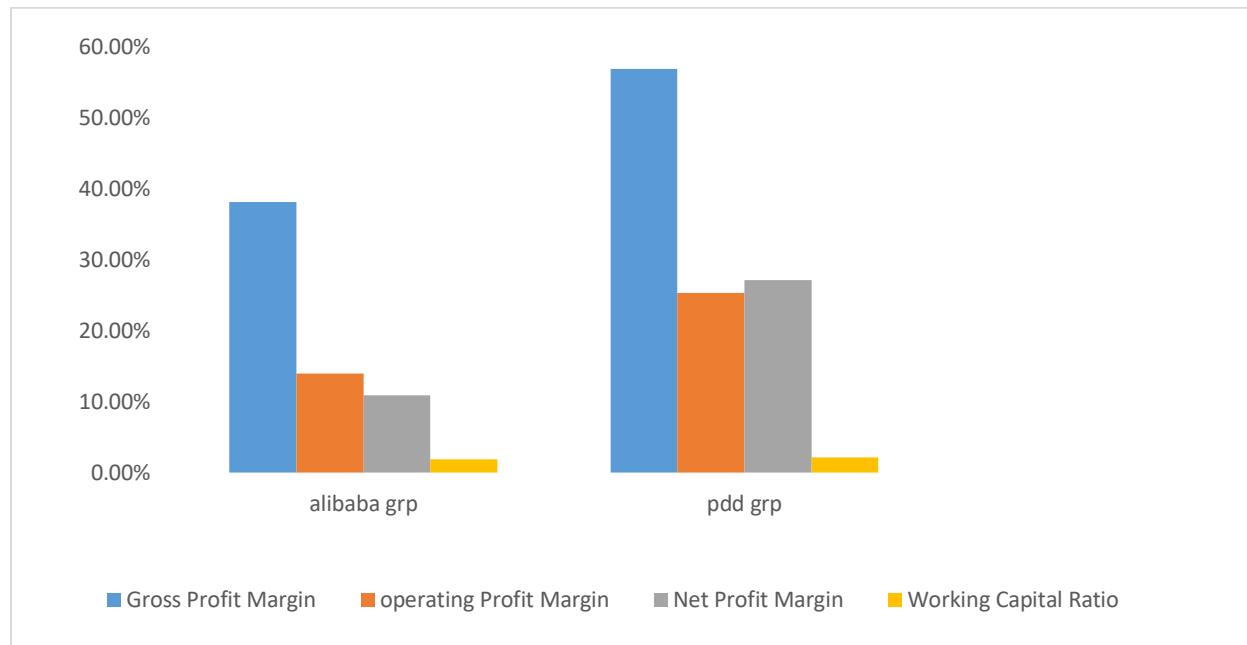


Figure 7. Working Capital ratio graph

Table 7. Financial Analysis of Alibaba Group and PDD Group 2025 (Figure 8).

Organization	Gross Profit Margin	Operating Profit Margin	Net Profit Margin	Working Capital Ratio	References
Alibaba	38.10%	13.90%	10.90%	1.85%	Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025
PDD Group	56.80%	25.30%	27.10%	2.12%	PDD Holdings 2025

*Figure 8. : Financial Analysis of Alibaba group and PDD group (temu).*

2.1.5. Stakeholder and Powers:

Alibaba Group Holding Limited operates as a dual-listed company with a dual-class share structure, where executives and founders hold shares with greater voting rights than ordinary shareholders. Partner nominations require referrals from existing partners and approval by at least 75% of shareholders (Should securities regulators allow companies going public with dual class shares? | Oxford Law Blogs, no date; Gong, 2024). The company emphasizes transparency, accountability, and long-term vision, aligning management incentives with shareholder and stakeholder value. Alibaba engages internal and external stakeholders (Table 8) through ESG-focused governance, achieving over 50% renewable energy consumption and enhancing long-term corporate trust compared to peers like Tencent and JD.com (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 19; 2024 Change the World | Fortune, no date). The power, influence and strategic involvement of these stakeholders is concluded in Table 9.

Table 8. Different Stakeholders of Alibaba group.

Internal stakeholders	External stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shareholders & Investors • Board of Directors & Executives • Employees (Aliren) • Subsidiaries & Business Units (e.g., Taobao, Tmall, Alibaba Cloud, Cainiao) • Management Committees (Risk, Audit, ESG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers (Consumers & Merchants) • Suppliers & Partners (Manufacturers, Logistics, Tech vendors) • Regulators & Governments (China SEC, HKEX, U.S. SEC) • Communities & NGOs • Financial Institutions & Creditors • Media & Public • Competitors (PDD, JD.com, Tencent, ByteDance)

Table 9. Alibaba's stakeholders, their influence and engagement strategies.

Stakeholder	Interest	Power/Influence	Engagement Strategy
Shareholders (Institutional, Retail)	Dividends, share appreciation	High	\$4.6B dividends and \$11.9B buybacks (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 4).
Customers (1.1B+ users)	Product quality, pricing, data privacy	High	“User first” AI personalization (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 8).
Employees (230,000+)	Compensation, growth, inclusion	Medium	AI tools improve sales (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 11).
Merchants/SMEs	Platform accessibility, fees	High	Ranked among <i>Forbes World’s Best Employers 2024</i> (<i>Meet The World’s Best Employers 2024</i> , n.d.)
Government & Regulators (China, HK, US)	Compliance, governance data	Very High	Enhanced governance post-2022 reforms (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 19).
Communities & Environment	ESG and sustainability	Growing	52.2% clean energy usage and carbon neutrality target by 2030 (Alibaba Group Holding Limited, 2025, p. 19).

The power and interest matrix, a stakeholder mapping framework, was used to determine the influence of each stakeholder on Alibaba group (Figure 9). It expresses the extent to which stakeholders could help the organization accomplish their vision and objectives.

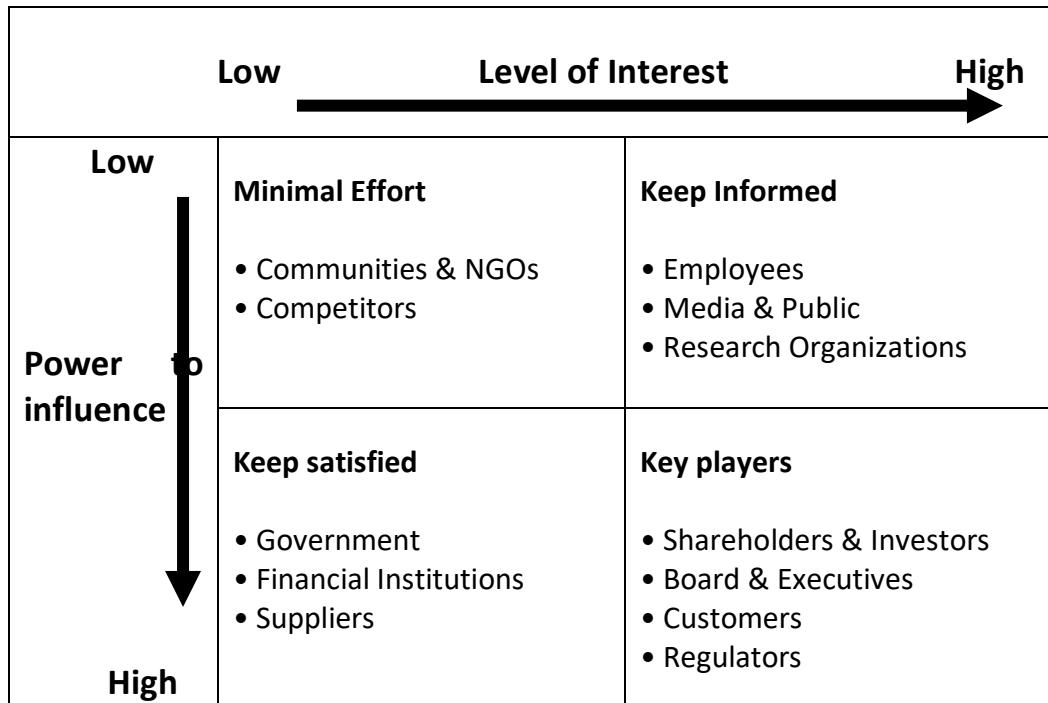


Figure 9. Stakeholder mapping of Alibaba group (Power and Interest Matrix)

2.2. External Analysis

2.2.1. Institutional Pressures and Legitimacy:

2.2.1.1 *Institutional Pressures on Alibaba*

Chinese firms face both “domestic regional isomorphic pressure” and “domestic industrial isomorphic pressure,” where firms adopt similar strategies to gain legitimacy from stakeholders and government actors (Guo, Xu and Li, 2017). Institutional pressures include coercive (government regulations), mimetic (imitation of successful competitors), and normative pressures (professional standards) affecting internationalization intensity (Li and Ding, 2013) as illustrated in Figure 10. Alibaba faced significant pressures in China’s evolving e-commerce environment (Kwak, Zhang and Yu, 2018).

- **Coercive/Regulatory Pressures:** Regulations on data privacy, platform monopolies, and AI governance (Cybersecurity Law, Anti-Monopoly Law), opposition from state-owned banks regarding Alipay, and underdeveloped e-commerce legal frameworks increase compliance requirements domestically and internationally (Zhao, 2024).

- **Normative Pressures:** Chinese consumers' preference for cash and face-to-face transactions, along with concerns over counterfeit products, created resistance to online commerce, particularly in rural areas.
- **Mimetic Pressures:** Competitors like Tencent, JD.com, PDD, and ByteDance innovate in AI and global expansion; international firms such as Amazon set digital standards.



Figure 10. Institutional isomorphic pressures on Alibaba Group.

2.2.1.2 Alibaba's Legitimacy-Building Strategies

Alibaba addresses institutional pressures via a **three-pronged legitimacy approach** (Kwak, Zhang and Yu, 2018):

- **Market Legitimacy:** Introduction of Alipay in 2003 addressed payment security, gaining government endorsement aligned with China's e-commerce policies.
- **Relational Legitimacy:** Trust built through transparent buyer-seller communication, buyer-friendly policies (7-day returns), and lower fees (5–7%) than competitors like Amazon (10%).
- **Social Legitimacy:** Initiatives such as Rural Taobao and Taobao Villages served 674 million rural residents via 12,000 service centers across 20 provinces by 2015.

Competitors like EachNet and Paipai failed due to inadequate legitimacy strategies, highlighting Alibaba's advantage in comprehensive legitimacy building.

2.2.2. Industry Analysis of Alibaba

Porter's Five Forces (Porter, 1980) provides insights into competitive dynamics impacting Alibaba (Table 10 & Figure 11).

- **Threat of New Entrants – Low to Moderate:** High barriers from economies of scale (RMB 996.3B revenue FY2025), AI-driven logistics and cloud investments, and brand loyalty through Taobao, Tmall, and Alipay. Emerging digital innovations and regulatory reforms allow niche entrants, e.g., ByteDance's Douyin e-commerce (LIN, 2025; Temu-owner PDD Holdings, no date).
- **Bargaining Power of Suppliers – Low:** Suppliers include merchants, manufacturers, and cloud hardware vendors. Alibaba's scale (1.1B users) limits individual supplier power, though geopolitical tensions and chip export restrictions present moderate risk (Bloomberg, no date).
- **Bargaining Power of Buyers – High:** Price-sensitive consumers can switch platforms easily. PDD holds 17% of China's e-commerce GMV. Alibaba mitigates via AI personalization and value offerings (Alibaba, 2025).
- **Threat of Substitutes – Moderate:** Digital retail alternatives include live-commerce (ByteDance), community buying (Meituan), and hybrid cloud solutions. Alibaba addresses substitutes via AI (Qwen3 model) and service diversification (Youku, Ele.me).
- **Industry Rivalry – Very High:** Intense competition from PDD, JD.com, Tencent, ByteDance, and cloud providers (AWS China, Huawei Cloud). Alibaba's AI + Cloud restructuring and asset divestments aim to retain differentiation, though price wars and platform overlap persist.



Figure 11. Porter's Five Forces Analysis of Alibaba Group.

Table 50. Impact of Porter's five forces on Alibaba and its strategic response.

Force	Intensity	Impact on Alibaba	Strategic Response
Threat of New Entrants	Low–Moderate	Limited	Focus on AI innovation and brand loyalty
Bargaining Power of Suppliers	Low	Minimal	Expand supplier diversity, develop in-house AI chips
Bargaining Power of Buyers	High	Significant	Enhance user experience via AI-driven personalization
Threat of Substitutes	Moderate	Growing	Diversify into entertainment, cloud, and services
Rivalry Among Competitors	Very High	Critical	Restructure around AI + Cloud and efficiency

2.2.3. Strategic Group Mapping

2.2.3.1 Bowman's strategy clock

Bowman's Strategy Clock (Bhasin, 2019) as demonstrated in Figure 12 evaluates strategic positions based on price and perceived value. On this basis, there are 8 different strategic positions that are described below (Table 11). Alibaba combines **hybrid and differentiation strategies**: mid-range pricing, AI personalization, broad market focus, and global cloud network leadership (Table 12).

Table 11. Description of Bowman's Strategy Clock positions.

Position	Strategy Description	Market Behavior
1	Low price / low value	Budget or mass-market players competing on volume
2	Low price	Cost leadership, economies of scale
3	Hybrid	Moderate prices with acceptable differentiation
4	Differentiation	Higher perceived value through innovation and brand
5	Focused differentiation	Premium offerings for niche segments
6	Risky high margins	Overpricing without added value
7	Monopoly pricing	Unique position or government protection
8	Loss of market share	Failing differentiation at high prices

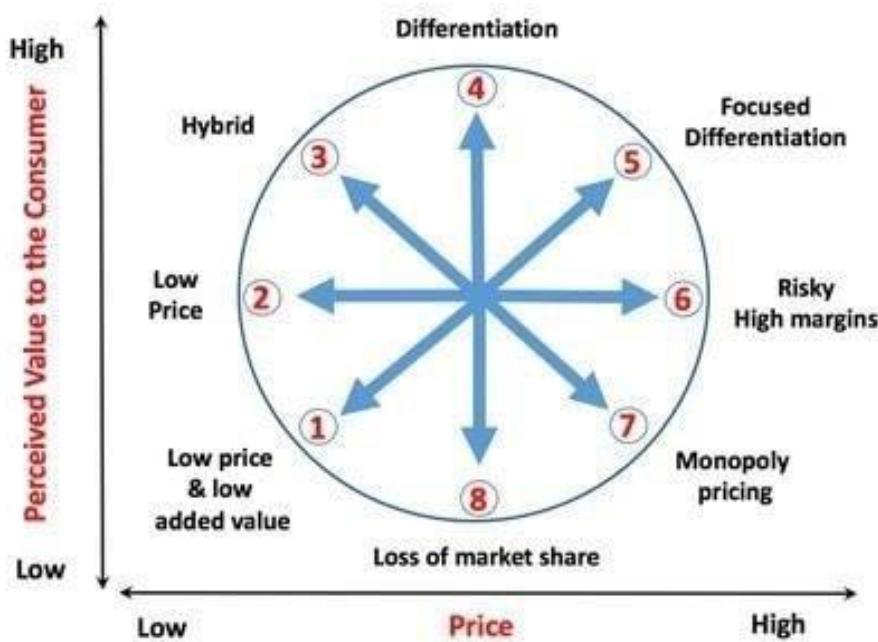


Figure 12. Bowman's Strategy Clock (Bhasin, 2019).

Table 12. Analysis of Alibaba's traits based on Bowman's clock.

Dimension	Trait	Bowman's Clock Position
Price	Mid-range	3 – Hybrid
Value/Differentiation	High AI personalization	4 – Differentiation
Market Focus	Broad (retail, cloud, logistics)	Hybrid–Differentiation
Brand & Innovation	Qwen3 AI, global cloud	4 – Differentiation
Customer Engagement	AI-enhanced platforms	Hybrid–Differentiation

2.2.3.2 Strategic Insights

Hybrid strategy maintains retail competitiveness, while differentiation in AI + Cloud targets premium B2B clients. Price pressure from PDD and ByteDance threatens hybrid positioning (*IDC: AI and Digital Transformation Drive Asia/Pacific* Public Cloud Market to \$131 Billion by 2029*, no date). Future path (2026+) points toward Focused Differentiation to secure high-margin enterprise and global markets.

2.2.4. Competitors moves and likely behavior:

In context of Bowman's Clock, Strategic Group Mapping of Alibaba's Competitors (Figure 13) showed different pricing & value propositions (Table 13) and strategic movements (Table 14)

Table 13. Analysis of Alibaba's competitors using Bowman's Clock.

Company	Primary Sector	Pricing Strategy	Value Proposition Differentiation	Bowman's Clock Position in 2025
PDD Holdings (Pinduoduo + Temu)	Low-cost e-commerce	Very low	Functional value, limited brand differentiation	2 (Low Price)
JD.com	E-commerce, Logistics	Slightly higher	High trust, own logistics infrastructure, quality assurance	4-5 (Differentiation / Focused Differentiation)
Tencent (WeChat, Fintech, Cloud)	Social Digital Services	Low to moderate	Platform integration, social commerce, entertainment	4 (Differentiation)
ByteDance (Douyin / TikTok E-commerce)	Social commerce, media	Low to moderate	High user engagement via content-driven commerce	3-4 (Hybrid/Differentiation)
Meituan	Local services & delivery	Moderate	Service integration, fast logistics, customer loyalty	3 (Hybrid)

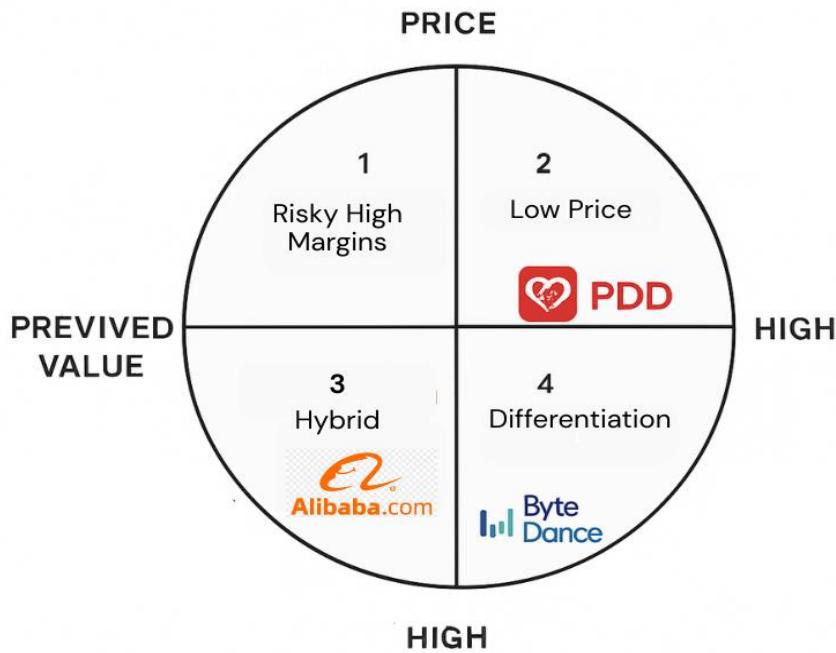


Figure 13. Strategic Group Mapping of Alibaba Vs Competitors (Bowman's Clock Context).

Table 14. Competitor Strategic Movements Relative to Alibaba (2025–2030).

Competitor	Strategic Direction on Bowman's Clock	Behavior Type	Impact on Alibaba's Market Space
PDD Holdings	From Cost Leadership → Hybrid	Upward Mobility Competitor	Directly attacks Alibaba's value segment
JD.com	From Differentiation → Focused Differentiation	Vertical Differentiator	Pulls premium customers upward
Tencent	From Differentiation → Monopoly Pricing	Ecosystem Lock-In Player	Reduces Alibaba's ecosystem dominance
ByteDance	From Hybrid Differentiation	Convergent Challenger	Erodes Alibaba's hybrid base via content-driven commerce
Meituan	From Hybrid Differentiation	Adjacent Hybrid Competitor	Indirect competition in lifestyle and delivery services

Alibaba's competitors exert pressure from price (PDD), quality (JD), ecosystem integration (Tencent), and adjacent hybrids (ByteDance, Meituan), forcing a move toward **Focused Differentiation**.

2.2.5. Sustainability and Reporting:

There are numerous macro environmental factors that impact the operations of the Alibaba Group within China and also extrapolates to its international operations as well (Table 15). The adaptability of organization to these factors and transparent reporting ensures long-term sustainability and growth. These factors are explained using the PESTLE analysis below:

Table 15. PESTLE analysis of Alibaba Group.

Political	Economic
Strong government regulation on data and AI; geopolitical tensions limit overseas growth.	Slowing China GDP (~4.5%) and inflation challenge spending; global e-commerce offers new markets.
Social	Technological
Rise of social-commerce and demand for ethical, ESG-driven brands	Rapid AI and cloud innovation ; competition from Tencent and ByteDance intensifies tech race.
Legal	Environmental
Tighter data privacy and antitrust laws in China and abroad.	Focus on carbon neutrality, green logistics , and sustainable operations.

Political Factors: Chinese regulators require listed companies to maintain transparency and accountability in ESG reporting. China ranks 47/50 in the MSCI All Country World Index with a median Industry-Adjusted Score of 2.9/10, reflecting strong regulatory pressure (Wang, 2024).

Economic Factors: Alibaba achieved 19% YoY revenue growth in FY2022 with \$28.5B operating cash flow. Projected net profit margin is expected to rise from 8% in 2023 to 13% by 2028, partly due to ESG-driven operational efficiency (Wang, 2024).

Social Factors: Alibaba's social responsibility rating is 4.7/5, surpassing the industry average of 3.2. Employee satisfaction consistently exceeds 90%, and social projects impact ~2M people, compared to 500,000 industry average (Wang, 2024).

Technological Factors: The company invests 7% of revenue in R&D and promotes green packaging initiatives and supply chain optimization, demonstrating commitment to technological innovation for sustainability (Feng, 2024; Wang, 2024).

Legal Factors: Compliance gaps exist with international environmental accounting standards. Alibaba maintains 64% independent board members versus 58% industry average, and enforces a code of conduct covering fair competition, anti-corruption, and data privacy (Pan, 2024; Wang, 2024).

Environmental Factors: Targets include carbon neutrality by 2030 and 100% renewable energy by 2035. Alibaba scores 4.2/5 on environmental performance, ranking in the top 10% of the software and services industry, though gaps in quantified data disclosure remain (Wang, 2024; Pan, 2024).

2.3. Synthesis of Internal and External analysis

2.3.1 Strategic Position of Alibaba:

The SWOT analysis offers a clear overview of Alibaba's strategic position in domestic and global markets, highlighting key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that influence competitive advantage and growth (Table 16).

Table 66. SWOT analysis of Alibaba as of 2025

Internal Factors	Strengths	Weakness
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI & Cloud Leadership • Integrated Ecosystem • Financial Stability • Brand Trust & Scale • Agile Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margin Pressure • Regulatory Exposure • Organizational Complexity: • Domestic Dependence • High R&D Cost
External Factors	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Expansion • AI Commercialization • ESG Leadership • SME Digitization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense Competition • Regulatory Tightening • Global Political Risk • Consumer Shifts • Macroeconomic Slowdown

Strengths: Alibaba leads in AI and cloud, with Alibaba Cloud serving 80%+ of China's AI enterprises and advancing the Qwen3 model (Alibaba Group, 2025, p. 52). Its integrated ecosystem across e-commerce, fintech, logistics, and cloud enhances user retention. Strong liquidity (working capital 1.55) and net profit margin (~13%) support sustainability. Six autonomous units foster innovation and accountability (Alibaba Group, 2025, p. 14).

Weaknesses: Profit margins are pressured by PDD Holdings. Regulatory scrutiny raises compliance costs (Alibaba Group, 2025, p. 40). Organizational complexity and reliance on China (~65% revenue) limit flexibility (Bloomberg, no date). High R&D spend (RMB 127B) strains cash and talent retention.

Opportunities: Global expansion via Lazada, Trendyol, and AliExpress (+44% YoY) targets Southeast Asia, MENA, and Latin America (Alibaba Group, 2025, p. 22). AI commercialization enhances long-term margins. ESG leadership and SME digitization align with government policies (IDC, no date).

Threats: Competition from PDD, JD.com, ByteDance, and Tencent pressures market share. Regulatory tightening and global political risks constrain expansion. Social-commerce adoption and domestic slowdown pose retail challenges.

2.3.2 Strategic Outlook (2025–2030)

This section evaluates the **strategic patterns** of Alibaba Group based on *Bowman's Strategic Clock positions* and *derived behaviors*. Each dimension represents a key competitive force shaping

Alibaba's long-term position. Below is a full explanation of 3–5 years dynamic trend table (Table 17).

Table 17. Strategic outlook of Alibaba in next five years

Dimension	Expected Change	Impact on Alibaba	Strategic Implication
Market Position	Low-cost & premium rivals; ByteDance growth	Margin pressure	Alibaba must move upward to Focused Differentiation (premium AI + ecosystem model).
Regulation	Continued state emphasis on compliance, ESG, and SME support.	Brand Opportunity	Build compliance as a competitive capability
Technology	AI central to commerce	Risk of AI parity and ecosystem isolation	Prioritize AI integration across platforms
Globalization	Growth in Southeast Asia, MENA; Western markets face scrutiny.	Competitive risk in Western markets	Smart globalization via local AI partnerships
Consumer Trends	Rise of social commerce.	Shift in consumer behavior	Integrate engagement-based personalization like Douyin

2.3.3 Strategic Implications

Alibaba should shift upward on Bowman's Clock from Hybrid-Differentiation (3–4) to Focused Differentiation (5), leveraging AI-driven personalization, ESG branding, and innovation. Strengthening institutional legitimacy through compliance and sustainability provides competitive advantage. Deepening ecosystem convergence—linking Cloud, Commerce, and Alipay—ensures seamless cross-service experiences. Global expansion should focus on emerging markets with AI and logistics advantages while avoiding heavy price competition.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALIBABA GROUP (2025–2030)

The Ansoff matrix will be used as a strategic tool to explain the recommendations proposed in this review (Figure 14). The matrix will guide the growth of Alibaba group. The strategic options offered by the matrix are market penetration, market development, product development and diversification (Puyt, Antoniou and Caputo, 2024). The strategy is adopted based on external and internal factors.

Alibaba's Ansoff-guided pathway combines market penetration (domestic AI trust), product development (AI innovation), market development (global AI commerce), and diversification (ESG-aligned ecosystems). By aligning with institutional norms and managing resource risks through structured leadership, Alibaba can secure sustainable, innovation-driven global leadership by 2030.

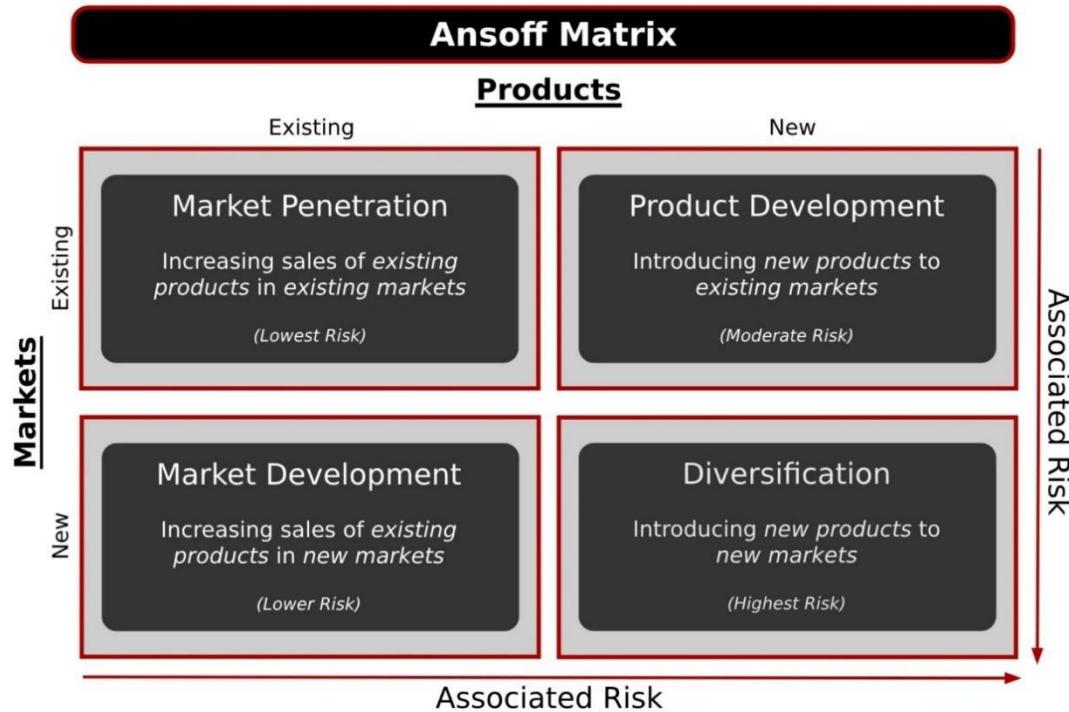


Figure 14. Graphical illustration of Ansoff matrix

3.1. Strategic Direction

Using Ansoff's Market Penetration and Product Development strategies, Alibaba's pathway should focus on deepening domestic market efficiency while upgrading technological differentiation.

- **Market Penetration:** Under coercive institutional pressures from regulators, Alibaba must sustain consumer trust through AI-driven compliance, transparent data governance, and strengthened ESG reporting. This aligns with China's national digital governance goals and mitigates regulatory risk.
- **Product Development:** Facing normative and mimetic pressures, Alibaba should expand AI and Cloud-based service innovation, integrating its *Qwen3 model* and *Cloud Intelligence* into new enterprise and cross-industry digital services. This sustains differentiation amid rapid technological convergence.
- **Leadership Implication:** The dual-CEO structure (Eddie Wu and Joe Tsai) supports decentralized agility; however, a central innovation and compliance steering committee should ensure cross-unit alignment in AI ethics, ESG, and capital allocation.
- **Resource Focus:** Balance heavy R&D investment (RMB 127B in FY2025) with operational cost control through automation and AI optimization to maintain profit resilience.

3.2. Strategic Options

Under Ansoff's Market Development and Diversification strategies, Alibaba must pursue "smart globalization" and ecosystem diversification to spread institutional and market risk.

- **Market Development:** Expand *Lazada*, *Trendyol*, and *AliExpress* in emerging markets (Southeast Asia, MENA, Latin America) using AI-based localization and SME partnerships rather than price wars. This reduces overdependence on China (~65% of revenue) and mitigates domestic policy exposure.
- **Diversification:** Invest in policy-aligned sectors — *green logistics*, *rural digitalization*, *AI-for-SMEs* — to strengthen legitimacy under China's *coercive and normative pressures*. Integrate *Alipay*, *Cainiao*, and *Tmall* through a unified AI ecosystem, maximizing data synergy and brand value.

By aligning strategic direction with institutional expectations and leveraging leadership decentralization for innovation, Alibaba can balance compliance, growth, and resource sustainability, securing its position as China's and Asia's foremost digital ecosystem.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Alibaba, the internal analysis began with the VRIO framework to evaluate the value, rarity, inimitability, and organizational exploitation of its resources, complemented by the Dynamic Capabilities Framework to assess the firm's ability to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources in a rapidly evolving environment. The external analysis employed Porter's Five Forces to examine industry competition, PESTLE to assess macro-environmental factors, and stakeholder mapping to understand influence and interests, while Bowman's Strategic Clock analyzed price and value positioning. The strategic insights were synthesized through SWOT analysis to determine Alibaba's strategic position by connecting internal strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats. Finally, the Ansoff Matrix was used to identify strategic growth options in market penetration, product development, market expansion, and diversification.

5. CONCLUSION:

Alibaba's strategic success stems from its integrated ecosystem, AI-driven cloud capabilities, and strong financial and organizational resources. The company maintains competitive advantage through innovation, ESG-led governance, and global expansion, while navigating regulatory, competitive, and macroeconomic pressures. To sustain growth, Alibaba must advance toward focused differentiation, deepen ecosystem integration, and strategically globalize, leveraging AI and logistics to capture high-margin markets and maintain long-term resilience.

6. APPENDIX

Terms	Abbreviations/Definition
GMV	Gross Merchandise Value – total value of goods sold on Alibaba's platforms.
AI + Cloud	Integration of AI capabilities within Alibaba Cloud infrastructure.
IaaS / PaaS / SaaS	Infrastructure / Platform / Software as a Service – cloud computing service layers.
ROE	Return on Equity – net income as a percentage of shareholders' equity.
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance – sustainability framework.
Quanzhantui	Alibaba's AI-based marketing and sales optimization tool for merchants.
EPS	Earnings per Share – net profit divided by outstanding shares.
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance - criteria used to evaluate corporate sustainability and ethical impact
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental - framework for analyzing macro-environmental factors
MSCI	Morgan Stanley Capital International - global investment research firm providing ESG ratings
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative - international standards for sustainability reporting
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility - company's commitment to ethical business practices and social impact
KPI	Key Performance Indicators - measurable values demonstrating company performance
R&D	Research and Development - investment in innovation and new technologies
IPO	Initial Public Offering - first sale of company shares to public investors
B2B	Business-to-Business - commercial transactions between companies
B2C	Business-to-Consumer - commercial transactions between companies and individual consumers
C2C	Consumer-to-Consumer - transactions between individual consumers

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