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The strategy of international brand expansion of IT enterprises: a case study based on Huawei

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Abstract

There are two ways of brand expansion for IT enterprises in the world, i.e. internal accumulation expansion and external expansion, involving internal expansion and external expansion respectively. The international expansion strategy of IT brands mainly includes product positioning strategy, customer group selection strategy, location selection strategy, marketing channel strategy, and global public relations strategy. If IT enterprises want to expand their brands successfully in the world, they need to carry out effective innovation in product positioning, market segmentation, location selection mode, marketing methods, public relations system construction, etc.

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1. Introduction

Brand is the fundamental way for enterprises to obtain consumers' recognition, reputation and loyalty. Stephen (1991) believes that consumers' subjective feelings about a company will affect the consumer's purchasing behavior^[1]. Brown (1997) and other scholars believe that when customers face new products, important information about the product is usually missing, which will affect the customer's evaluation of the product^[2]. Philip Kotler (2002) believes that the weight of the "brand premium" held by buyers makes a "mutually equal" market exchange

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relationship between them. This deepening of tacit understanding has formed brand competitiveness^[3]. Aaker (1996, 2002) believes that brand competitiveness is the ability of enterprises to build superior brands and promote the long-term development of superior brands under the specific market background^[4]. Keller (2003) believes that consumer behavior affects the brand value of enterprises and is the root of determining the brand value of enterprises. It is a mutual support community of the brand's consumer value and brand competitiveness^[5]. Through the analysis of factors such as brand elements, development marketing plans, integrated marketing circulation measures and brand secondary Association, we can find that there is a significant difference in brand construction investment between small and medium-sized enterprises with high performance and those with low performance (Ke, 2017)^[6]. An excellent corporate brand can well maintain the brand loyalty of customers, which can make the enterprise gain promotion space of long-term profit (Cao, 2017)^[7]. An enterprise's brand competitiveness can be evaluated from five aspects, i.e. market, management, relationship, foundation and sustainable development of enterprises. (He, 2010)^[8]. Enterprise brand value can be evaluated by means of the evaluation model of enterprise brand value. (Cheng & Hong, 2013)^[9].

An appropriate brand strategy can build and continuously improve the brand value of an enterprise (Zhang, 2017)^[10]. Brand is not only the external performance of enterprises' own assets, but also the commitment and guarantee made by enterprises to all walks of life. Brand is the embodiment of an enterprise's credit, as well as the external manifestation of its operational strength (Ren, 2017)^[11]. The manufacturing industry has gradually entered the era of brand competition (Tang, 2015)^[12]. Brands are built on the basis of products and services, and the implementation of brand strategy has become an urgent issue for enterprises (Jin, 2017)^[13].

2. Global brand expansion of IT enterprises

2.1. The situation of brand expansion of major IT enterprises in the world

Samsung and Apple ranked first and second in the global sales ranking of mobile phones for four consecutive years, but their sales lacked stamina. The global sales ranking in 2014-2017 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Global sales ranking of mobile phones in 2014-2017

Company name	2014	2015	2016	2017
Samsung	310.9	323.0	310.8	317.2
Apple	193.0	231.7	215.5	216.0
Huawei	73.7	105.1	139.2	153.3
OPPO	29.8	50.3	94.1	112.1
VIVO	19.6	40.3	76.8	101.1

Source: IC statistics; Unit: million

Three major companies, Samsung, Apple, and Huawei, are not only involved in wireless terminal products, but also perform excellently in other fields, such as Samsung in the communications industry, Apple in software development, and Huawei in semiconductor research. In terms of brand familiarity, according to the China Business Intelligence Bureau analysis, the top five brands involved in the IT industry or products are Microsoft, Intel, Samsung Electronics, Apple and Huawei as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Brand familiarity of global IT enterprises

	Country	Brand Name	Familiarity
1	United States	Microsoft	100.00
2	United States	Intel	100.00
3	South Korea	Samsung Electronic	98.77
4	United States	Apple	96.98
5	China	Huawei	89.73
6	China	Lenovo	88.54
7	Japan	Sony	74.30
8	Japan	Canon	69.89
9	China	Haier	68.88
10	Japan	Fujitsu	50.76

Source: China Business Intelligence Bureau

The leading IT enterprises distribute in the intercontinental regions mainly in the United States, China, Japan and South Korea, accounting for 93.3% of the total IT enterprises on the list^[4].

Table 3. Distribution of IT enterprises of the top 500 in the world in 2017

Country	The top 500 in the world	IT enterprises	Proportion
United States	132	71	53.80%
China	115	56	48.71%
Japan	51	9	17.66%
Korea	15	4	26.66%
Canada	11	2	18.19%
France	29	3	10.23%
Germany	29	1	3.45%
Other	118	4	3.38%
Total	500	150	30.00%

Source: China Fortune Net www.fortunechina.com

2.2. Ways and methods of brand expansion of IT enterprises

2.2.1. Brand expansion mode of IT enterprises

There are two main ways of brand expansion for IT enterprises in the world, that is, internal accumulation expansion and external burst expansion. Internal accumulation expansion usually exists in the initial stage of IT companies^[1] when IT enterprises have the potential to develop economies of scale^[14]. And it is the best choice for start-up enterprises to carry out internal accumulation expansion to gain a certain market share, expand production, improve core competence and reinvest their profits. On the contrary, external bursts of expansion allow IT enterprises to build a good reputation and credit base internationally. World-class IT enterprises often experience the process from internal accumulation expansion to external expansion. World-class IT companies position their development pattern in global scope, and take measures such as mergers, acquisitions and alliances to carry out external burst expansion.

2.2.2. The methods of brand expansion of IT enterprises

The development and growth of an enterprise cannot be separated from the international expansion of the brand. The international brand expansion of IT enterprise brands may be observed from two aspects: internal expansion and external expansion. The matrix adopts a structured method to analyze different strategic schemes^[11] as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Matrix of IT enterprise brand expansion^[15]

	Internal expansion	External expansion
Local	Internal expansion	Mergers and acquisitions、 joint operations、 franchising
International	expansion, foreign offices, outsourcing	Mergers and acquisitions, joint operations, international franchising

3. The composition of brand expansion strategy of IT enterprises

Brand expansion is inseparable from the implementation of brand strategy^[13]. Brand expansion strategy of IT enterprises mainly includes product positioning strategy, strategy of selecting customer group, location selection strategy, marketing channel strategy and global public relations strategy.

3.1. Product positioning strategy

Product positioning involves product pricing, and there are two kinds of product pricing strategies. High price positioning strategy. International IT brands pay more attention to the technological level of products and high-quality experiences to consumers. The price range of iPhones in the past generations has been increasing since Apple's most famous iPhone 4 era as shown in the table below.

Table 5. Price list of previous iPhones

	price
iPhone 4	199-299
iPhone 5	199-399
iPhone 6	299-499
iPhone 7	649-849
iPhone 8	799-949
iPhone X	999-1149

Source: statista statistics; Unit: USD

Besides apple, the other world-famous IT companies such as Samsung and Microsoft are also set at the high-end position in terms of product price and technology level. Enterprises can easily enter the market by adopting the low price positioning strategy with small profits and high sales, and enjoy obvious advantages in the market competition.

3.2. Customer group selection strategy

Customer group selection strategy is just like product positioning selection strategy^[16]. International well-known IT enterprises fix the position of their products at the high-end level, so the choice of their customer groups is naturally high-end customer groups. IBM often adopts the strategy of specific level division and gradual progress^[17]. The enterprise seeks the customers who have the idea to become IBM's customers, and then selects the customers who have the strength and intention to firmly support IBM and become the potential customers of IBM.

3.3. Location selection strategy

International expansion of IT enterprise brand mainly depends on the attraction of location endowment. International IT brands, such as Apple, IBM, Samsung and other enterprises, pay more attention to developed countries or regions in the choice of location. The following table shows the evaluation values of IT companies' location choices for 18 representative countries. The value of location advantages of developed countries and emerging countries (such as the United States, Japan, Germany, France, and Singapore in the table) is higher. Good competitive environment of these countries is conducive to the expansion of corporate brands.

Table 6. Evaluation of IT enterprises for location selection of various countries^[8]

Country	Location advantage evaluation	Country	Location advantage evaluation
Japan	0.8659	South Africa	0.1326
South Korea	0.4134	Egypt	0.1776
Singapore	0.5207	Australia	0.3815
Malaysia	0.2427	Brazil	0.2953
Indonesia	0.2708	Germany	0.5273
Thailand	0.1588	France	0.526
Vietnam	0.1972	UK	0.468.5
Russia	0.3259	Philippines	0.135
Kazakh	0.1303	US	1.2212

3.4. Marketing channel strategies

Marketing channel strategy includes online marketing channels and traditional marketing channels^[18] as shown in Figure 1 and 2. International IT enterprise brands have adopted online marketing channel strategy. For example, when Apple's new generation of Mac Book Pro is released, consumers in Central Asia can only choose to book through the official designated internet. The company of Apple arranges real-time delivery in the special area, which can be delivered to every consumer's hands.

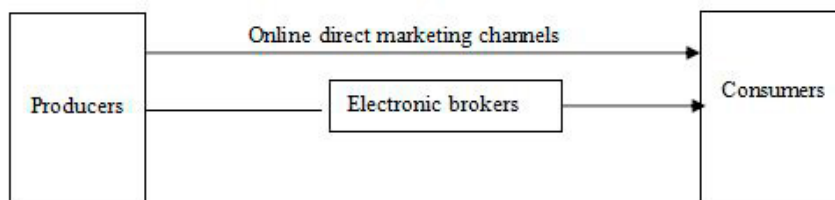


Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of online marketing channels^[19]

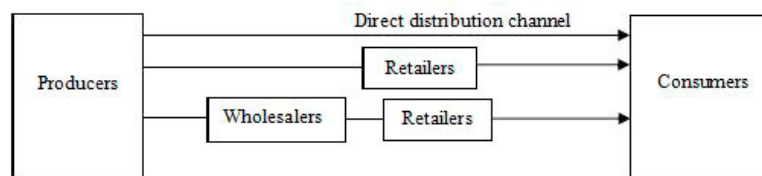


Fig. 2. Schematic diagram of traditional marketing channels

3.5. Global Public Relations Strategy

To deal with global public relations well is to help enhance the reputation of enterprises and to lower the entry threshold. Good public relations activities are conducive to enterprises' access to the new market^[20].

4. Case study of Huawei's brand expansion strategy

4.1. Overview of Huawei's corporate brand

Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd. is the most valuable and influential IT enterprise in China^[7]. Founded in Shenzhen in 1987, Huawei has continued to rise in the rankings of the world's top 500 for six consecutive years, and in 2017 it has entered the top 100 companies. As shown in Table 7.

Table 7. 2012-2019 ranking of Huawei on the top 500 enterprises in the world

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Ranking	353	315	285	228	129	83	72	61

Source: Fortune Chinese Website

The products of Huawei enterprises mainly involve three parts, i.e. cloud, pipeline, and terminal^[21]. As to the cloud, Huawei provide a variety of services and software installation to all sectors of the society. Of the pipeline, Huawei enterprises bring a comprehensive and intelligent network experience from access to carrying, and from carrying to the core. On the aspect of the terminal, it brings satisfied terminal products to consumers. Huawei's products (products involving cloud, pipeline and terminal businesses) remain in the top three in the world rankings as shown below.

Table 8. Ranking of Huawei Products in 2017

	China Ranking	World Ranking
Huawei Ethernet Switch	1	2
Huawei Data Center Switch	1	3
Huawei Enterprise Router	1	2
Huawei Enterprise Firewall	2	2

Source: IDC report

Huawei has gradually formed their comparative advantages in the three major business areas of communication networks, global services and terminal products. The company provides consumers with cloud, pipeline, and mid-range products and services, helps all sectors of the society to improve their operational difficulties, enhances the level of network competitiveness, and reduces business risks. In recent years, Huawei's total business income has risen linearly as shown in the table below.

Table 9. Huawei's business revenue

	2015	2016	Year on year	2017	Compared with the same
Operator business	2351.49	2905.67	23.6%	2978.51	2.5%
Corporate business	276.18	407.23	47.3%	549.48	35.1%
Consumer business	1252.69	1798.74	43.6%	2372.31	31.9%
Other	70.11	105.25	48.6%	137.86	32.4%
Total	3950.47	5216.89	32.0%	6038.16	15.7%

Source: Huawei's annual report integration; Unit: RMB 100 million

4.2. Contents of Huawei's brand expansion strategy

4.2.1. Positioning strategy of cost-effective products

Huawei adopts the method of cost-effective product positioning^[22]. Whether in high-end products or low-end products, Huawei pursues the best price-performance ratio to meet the needs of consumers at every level.

4.2.2. Comprehensive selection strategy of customer groups

Huawei's customer group selection strategy is comprehensive, and it has different levels of consumers in the market. The telecom companies using Huawei's telecom equipments are all over the world. As consumers play a role of weather vane for the survival and development of enterprises^[10], Huawei always adheres to the concept of consumer first. It creates a consumer business department, and establishes a complete consumer business official website.

4.2.3. Reverse location selection strategy

The level of location concentration will have a series of impacts on Huawei's external expansion effect^[7]. The location choice of Huawei's international brand expansion is to start from Russia to explore the Asian, African, Latin, and American market, and then go deep into the European mainstream countries and finally enter the United States. Huawei adopts the location strategy of "encircling the city by the countryside". Developing countries have created tens of millions of consumers for Huawei. Huawei can rapidly increase their market share in the world and promote Huawei's brand.

4.2.4. Wolf marketing strategy

Huawei adopts the strategy of wolf marketing with the feature of being "fast, accurate and ruthless"^[23]. The strategy includes three aspects.

- Price marketing strategy. Huawei guarantees that each product meets the basic needs of consumers or the special needs of a certain aspect. Its price marketing strategy ensures Huawei's stable customer resources and lays the foundation for its brand expansion. Huawei is striving to be the first in terms of global customer satisfaction with major IT brands as shown in the table below.

Table 10. Global Customer Satisfaction Index for IT Brands in 2017

Ranking	Brand	Satisfaction
1	Huawei	80.7
2	Apple	79.7
3	Meizu	78.3
4	VIVO	78.0
5	Millet	75.7
6	Samsung	75.3

Source: CCSI-AI evaluation results of China Quality Association

- Channel marketing strategy. Huawei adopts all-round channel marketing strategies in brand expansion, such as integration and assistance both online and offline.

- Promotional marketing strategy. Huawei pioneered hunger marketing. When the new porsche series was released in 2017, it grasped the psychology of scarcity and adopted the hungry marketing strategy, which stimulated consumers' desire to buy.

4.2.5. Strategy of joint public relations

Based on the core circle of IT enterprises, Huawei has adopted the strategy of industrial alliance and business alliance in public relations^[24]. As shown in the table below, Huawei has joined various industrial alliances, and actively cooperates with famous IT enterprises (such as IBM) in the same circle to achieve win-win results^[25]. More and more enterprises cooperate with Huawei. Huawei.

Table 11. Industrial alliance of Huawei Enterprises

	Member of Industry Alliance	eLTE
2015	78	84
2016	296	91
2017	360	149

Source: Huawei Annual Report

4.3. Benefit analysis of Huawei's brand expansion strategy

4.3.1. Analysis of brand competitiveness based on finance^[26]

For the study on Huawei's financial risk, we can use the wall score method for reference to study^[9], and analyze Huawei's financial situation. Research method and process of Wall measurement model is as following:

The first is to select data. This paper selects a complete accounting year data of Huawei from 2015 to 2016 according to the annual report data of Huawei. The second is to process data. This paper adopts 10 financial indicators, determines the weight according to the economic benefit evaluation system of the Ministry of Finance, and calculates the following indicators of Huawei according to the proportion of Wall and the financial data of Huawei from 2015 to 2016. The third is the establishment of the model. The equation for selection and construction model of sample data is:

$$Y = A + B + C + \dots + J \quad (1)$$

Where, y is the dependent variable of the prediction, and on the right side of the equation is the actual score value of Huawei's financial status.

Table 12. Part of Huawei's accounting entries in 2016

		Unit: RMB million yuan	
Accounting subjects	Numerical value	Accounting subjects	Numerical value
Net profit	37052	Cost of product sales	484376
Total assets	443634	Average inventory cost	67669.5
Sales revenue	521574	Sales growth	126565
Net assets	140133	Base period sales	395009
Current assets	355502	Net profit increase	142
Current liabilities	239271	Net profit of base period	36910
Net sales on credit	521574	Increase in assets	71479
Average balance of accounts receivable	100269	Total assets in the base period	372155
Total assets	443634		

Source: Huawei 2016 Annual Report

Table 13. Weights of Wall indicators and Huawei's index

Net profit on assets	Net profit on sales	Net return rate	Self-owned capital ratio	Current ratio	Receivable turn-over	Inventory turnover rate	Sales growth rate	Net profit growth rate	Asset growth rate
0.15	0.15	0.15	0.1	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.1	0.1	0.1
8.35%	7.10%	26.44%	31.59%	148.58%	510.17%	715.80%	32.04%	0.38%	19.2%

Source: Huawei 2016 Annual Report

Table 14. Standard scores and highest scores of various Wall indicators

Net profit on assets	Net profit on sales	Net return rate	Self owned capital ratio	Current ratio	Receivable turnover	Inventory turnover	Sales growth rate	Net profit growth rate	Asset growth rate
15	15	15	10	5	5	5	10	10	10
22.5	22.5	22.5	15	7.5	7.5	7.5	15	15	15

Source: data sorting within the industry

Table 15. Maximum ratio and standard ratio in the industry

Net profit on assets	Net profit on sales	Net return rate	Self owned capital ratio	Current ratio	Receivable turnover	Inventory turnover rate	Sales growth rate	Net profit growth rate	Asset growth rate
19.66	7.1	38.96	45.23	198.70	510.17	715.80	33.3	6.73	27.88
6.70	5.09	21.70	25.01	73.2	139.86	168.74	11.7	3.59	11.9

Source: data sorting within the industry

Table 16. Actual scores of financial status of Huawei

Net profit on assets	Net profit on sales	Net return rate	Self owned capital ratio	Current ratio	Receivable turnover	Inventory turnover rate	Sales growth rate	Net profit growth rate	Asset growth rate
16.65	20.20	26.50	11.63	6.50	7.62	7.5	14.70	4.89	12.28

$$Y=16.65+20.20+26.50+11.63+6.50+7.62+7.5+14.70+4.89+12.28=101.97>100$$

Finally, we obtain the results of the Wall scoring as following: the actual score value of Huawei is 101.97 which is greater than 100. Thus we know that Huawei's financial performance is good.

4.3.2. Analysis of brand competitiveness based on the market^[8].

The difference of brand can be shown by the different market share of brand. The enterprises with strong brand competitiveness often have higher market share and considerable sales.

Table 17. World mobile phone market share

	2015	2016	2017
Samsung	22.2	20.8	21.6
Apple	16.1	14.5	14.7
Huawei	7.4	9.3	10.4
OPPO	4.8	5.7	7.6
VIVO	2.7	4.8	6.8
Other	48.8	44.9	38.9
Total	100	100	100

Source: market analysis website; unit: %

As shown above, among the mainstream smartphone brands, Samsung and Apple's market share began to decline gradually. Huawei's market share of mobile phones rose from 7.4% to 10.4%. The continuous expansion of Huawei's mobile market share has laid a certain foundation for Huawei's share of the international market.

4.4. Enlightenment of Huawei's brand expansion strategy

4.4.1. Distinctive positioning strategy

This strategy provides such enlightenment as:

- Stressing prominent characteristics of product positioning. Some of Huawei's product positioning is reflected in price and some in quality. Some of Huawei's product positioning can be shown from the product entity, such as the mirror appearance of the Honor 8 series, the performance of the core processor of the MATE series, the structure of the dual camera, etc.. some can be reflected from consumer psychology, such as the luxury of the Porsche series of mobile phones, the simplicity of the X series, the vogue of the glory series.

- Being familiar with competitors of the company. Before positioning the products, Huawei fully understood the product features of competitors such as Apple, Samsung or telecommunications equipment maker Ericsson, and positioned its competitors in the market.

- Integrating the resources of the enterprise. Huawei's cost-effective product positioning is based on the integration of Huawei's excellent resources. Huawei adopted a differentiated product positioning strategy to launch two series, Huawei and Honor, which has led to the development of multiple product portfolios.

4.4.2. Development of customer groups in multiple directions

Selection of customer groups is both important and difficult^[25]. The inspiration from Huawei's experience is that companies may not only focus on a certain high-end or low-end customer group, nor may they only provide a certain product. Huawei develops customer resources comprehensively, involving both high-end customers and low-end customers.

4.4.3. Novelty of location selection

Location selection is one of the key factors affecting the success of MNCs to any kinds of transnational business^[27]. In terms of location selection strategy, Huawei has adopted an expansion strategy of “surrounding the city with the countryside.” This expansion strategy gives other IT companies a new perspective on how to enter the international market. Huawei chose to set out from Hong Kong, a close neighbor of its home base of Shenzhen, and initially entered into regions with less external constraints, so as to accumulate experience and lay a solid foundation. After that, Huawei gradually opened the market of developed countries with its experience, strength and good reputation. Compared with direct access to developed countries' markets, this strategy avoids unnecessary risks and troubles.

4.4.4. Adopt differentiated competition method

When IT enterprises do not have the strength to compete with leading enterprises, they can adopt differentiated marketing methods. In terms of the strategy of price and channel marketing, Huawei has built a differentiated competitive advantage that is different from other IT brands, and accordingly formulated a Wolf marketing plan with Huawei characteristics. Huawei not only launches cost-effective products but also promotes high-end products, and makes full use of online and offline marketing.

4.4.5. Establish alliance public relations

If it is properly used, public relation can make the enterprise brand expand internationally and successfully like a duck to water^[28]. IT enterprises do not have to be hard pressed all the time in the process of external expansion, but

can carry out international expansion through multi-faceted cooperation. Huawei's practice of playing the dual role of industrial alliance and business alliance in global public relations is valuable in enlightenment to other IT enterprises.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

IT enterprises may make efforts in the following five aspects in the process of brand expansion :

First, to accurately determine the positioning of IT products in the international market to ensure product positioning to be consistent with the image of the enterprise^[12].

Second, to segment IT customer market. How to segment the IT market effectively is a problem that enterprises need to think about^[11]. IT enterprises can build their unique market segments by selecting market scope, determining market segmentation variables, and forming market segments.

Third, to choose the circuitous mode from developing countries to developed countries. IT enterprises can first enter the developing countries to gain a good reputation, and then gradually expand their brands to developed countries.

Fourth, to adopt the marketing method of flexible response. It is the core goal of marketing strategy to promote enterprise brand and product brand^[29]. IT enterprises should effectively expand their brand with the help of the network platform.

Fifth, to build a network-based global public relations system. IT enterprises may establish a good reputation and promote the stable growth of their products and services^[30].

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