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International Business Approaches as a Catalyst for Strategic Flexibility in Zhejiang Province, China

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Abstract
This study examined the international business approaches and strategic flexibility of a clothing company, focusing on the relationship between global operational strategies and organizational adaptability Assessments of international business approaches showed that digitalization and technological integration, risk management and regulatory compliance, market entry and expansion, supply chain resilience, cross-cultural competence, and innovation and competitive positioning were all rated at the "Agree-Evident" level. While technological infrastructure, compliance structures, and competitive positioning were strengths, weaker areas included long-term strategic alignment, cultural competence, research and development, and consumer feedback integration. Correlation analysis revealed limited but meaningful relationships. Digitalization and technological integration showed a positive correlation with operational and technological flexibility but a negative correlation with supply chain flexibility. All other international business approaches did not significantly correlate with flexibility dimensions. These findings indicate that digitalization is the strongest driver of adaptability, but its influence is uneven across organizational domains.

Keywords: international business approaches, strategic flexibility, clothing company, digitalization, supply chain, workforce adaptability

Introduction

Strategic flexibility is an essential skill for businesses operating in dynamic and uncertain environments, particularly in fast-growing places such as Zhejiang Province, China. Maintaining a competitive advantage is dependent on an organization's ability to reallocate resources, adapt its strategy, and respond to changing market conditions—all of which constitute strategic flexibility (Herausen et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2021). Global markets change, and foreign business strategies are what provide the strategic flexibility of the companies. This makes Zhejiang, the central engine of international trade and innovation in China, an interesting subject to investigate how companies use global strategy to adapt and flourish in an ever complicated economic environment.

The research claims that strategic flexibility has several dimensions and covers operational adaptability, coordination flexibility, and resource flexibility (Yang et al., 2020). Managing uncertainty, grabbing prospects that are likely to arise, and finally with long-term expansion of the companies clearly show that a high strategic flexibility is favorably correlated with managing uncertainty (Muneeb et al., 2022). Since the region forms a strategic base of industrial and export-led economies, strategic flexibility becomes particularly critical in the case of such highly worldwide integrated supply chains, technical development, and open international investment in the region (Sen et al., 2022). As the country of Zhejiang grows in international commerce capacity, this is essential to practitioners and legislators in understanding how the international business strategies offer strategic flexibility.

Such strategic flexibility evolves by developing global business strategies by which companies located in Zhejiang Province acquire that theoretical model that has been explicated by Teece et al. (1997): The company has to continuously restructure then organize otherwise reconfigure its operational systems and resource base in order to remain competitive in erratic environments. Empirical research points out that for the majority of Chinese cities like Zhejiang-the manufacturing, e-commerce, and high-tech related-to accessing very high levels of strategic flexibility established through global market participation and international best practices integrated within the business models (Kafetzopoulos et al., 2023; Yang & Gan, 2020). Given the great sensitivity of this area to consumer taste changes.

Transnational strategies include aspects like an online and digital transformation, a global and cross-border collaboration, and international market development. The evidence points towards these elements as being critical enhancers of strategic flexibility. Bashir's (2023) research shows that international cooperation enhances business model innovation, thereby guiding businesses along the changes in the market. Similarly, newly developed technologies like artificial intelligence and big data analytics improve companies' agility to changing worldwide demand (Yoshikuni et al., 2023). Many companies in Zhejiang have converted to international business techniques to avoid risks related to geopolitics, changes in trade policies, and varying global customers' behavior (Matalamäki & Joensuu-Salo, 2021).

The economy of Zhejiang is characterized by strong networks of SMEs, many of which have combined international business strategies into their firms to enhance that strategic flexibility (Dhar et al., 2022). Evidence also proves that cross-border e-commerce engagements, international joint ventures, and export-based operations SMEs tend to show more strategic flexibility than their domestically driven counterparts (Chen et al., 2021). Knowledge spillovers and technological dissemination brought about by their global activities help these companies to be even more adaptive (Jiang et al., 2021). Notwithstanding these benefits, though, obstacles still exist especially in negotiating cultural differences, legal restrictions, and the necessity of ongoing innovation and digitization investment.

Though a lot of research on strategic flexibility and international business has been done, little is known about the specific processes by which international business policies improve strategic flexibility in Zhejiang Province. With little attention paid to regional industrial clusters like Zhejiang (Yang et al., 2020), most of the current study has concentrated on developed economies or big MNCs. Given the strategic relevance of Zhejiang inside China in her global economic integration, a need has been recognized to find out how such companies in the province use international business techniques toward strengthening their strategic flexibility.

This paper aims to close the gap by criticizing the way international business strategies help companies all around Zhejiang to become strategically flexible. The research especially seeks to investigate how international company strategies are influenced by digital globalization, foreign direct investment, and expansion of export market. Moreover, this study will ascertain the part institutional and policy frameworks play in determining adaptive skills and in attempts of corporate internationalization. It also seeks to identify some of the main opportunities and difficulties that companies in Zhejiang experience using strategic flexibility based on foreign commerce.

Statement of the Problem

1. What is the assessment of the respondents on the approaches used by the company in conducting international business in terms of:

1.1. Digitalization and Technological Integration;
1.2. Risk Management and Regulatory Compliance;
1.3. Market Entry and Expansion Strategies;
1.4. Supply Chain Resilience and Global Logistics;
1.5. Cross-Cultural Competence and International Collaboration;
1.6. Innovation and Competitive Positioning?

2. What is the assessment of the respondents on the level of strategic flexibility of the clothing company in terms of:

2.1. Operational Flexibility;
2.2. Supply Chain and Logistics Flexibility;
2.3. Market Adaptability and Consumer Responsiveness;
2.4. Technological and Digital Flexibility;
2.5. Financial Flexibility and Investment Strategies;
2.6. Workforce and Talent Management Flexibility?

3. Is there a significant correlation between assessment of the respondents on the approaches used by the clothing company in conducting international business and level of strategic flexibility of the clothing company?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study was to determine whether there was any relationship between the international business approaches of a clothing company and its strategic flexibility. The research was conducted in an area famous for textile and clothing manufacturing, namely in Zhejiang Province of China. A total of 300 employees were selected from the company based on some criteria, such as experience and knowledge of the company in its international business approaches and strategic flexibility. The various departments from which respondents came included international trade, supply chain management, marketing, finance, and production. The involvement of managers, supervisors, and operational staff addressed a more diverse perspective regarding how international business strategies impacted the company's ability to respond to changes in global markets. An employee was eligible to participate only if he/she had a minimum of one year's work experience in and around global trades; being involved directly in the company's global trade practices, digital integration, and supply chain strategies; and willing to complete the survey questionnaire. The purposeful selection of respondents allowed for a sufficient sample size to generate statistically significant findings that could be generalized to the company's workforce and broader industry trends in the clothing sector. The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire, which assessed respondents' perceptions of the company's international business approaches and strategic flexibility in Zhejiang Province, China.

Results and Discussion

1. **Assessments of Respondents on International Business Approaches.** The international business strategies employed by the corporation were consistently scored at the "Agree-Evident" level across all domains. The average score for digitalization and technology integration was 2.93, with technical

infrastructure (M = 2.96) serving as its most powerful indication. In addition, the average rating for regulatory compliance and risk management was 2.93, with the presence of a compliance team (M = 3.02) receiving the highest rating. With a score of 2.88, plans for market entry and expansion performed somewhat worse, and risk evaluation (M = 2.94) was the strongest element, while long-term strategic alignment was the poorest (M = 2.76). The supply chain resilience score was 2.93, with effective global logistics management (M = 2.96) being the most prominent feature. On the other hand, the cross-cultural competence score was a modest 2.86, with cultural considerations in strategies (M = 2.93) being the strongest aspect and cultural awareness promotion (M = 2.82) being the weakest. Last of all, the categories of innovation and competitive positioning had a score of 2.92. Competitive adaptability had the greatest score out of all the categories (M = 3.00), while investment in research and development had the lowest score (M = 2.80). These findings, taken as a whole, indicate that the practices that were seen are apparent but not extremely apparent. This suggests that, across the many approaches to international business, performance is balanced but only moderately successful.

2. **Assessments of Respondents on Strategic Flexibility**. The average for operational flexibility was 2.88, with production changes being the highest (M = 2.95) and restructuring processes being the lowest (M = 2.83). The average score for supply chain and logistics flexibility was 2.89. Resilience in crises (M = 2.93) was the strongest factor, while absence of continuous evaluation (M = 2.81) was the weakest. Market adaptability had a score of 2.90, with product changes and competitive positioning (M = 2.96 each) being the strongest and customer feedback integration (M = 2.81) being the weakest. Technological and digital flexibility was greater at 2.93, with personnel training (M = 3.00) being the most important element. The average for financial flexibility was 2.90, with risk assessment and liquidity (M = 2.97 each) helping and low alignment with long-term trends (M = 2.75) getting in the way. The total score for workforce and talent management was 2.87, with talent acquisition methods (M = 2.92) being the strongest and leadership development (M = 2.81) being the weakest. These results show that there is clear flexibility among domains, although none of them achieved the level of very clear practices.
3. **Correlation Between the Assessment of Respondents on the International Business Approaches and Strategic Flexibility of the Clothing Company**

Table 20. Correlation Between the Assessment of Respondents on the International Business Approaches and Strategic Flexibility of the Clothing Company

International Business Approaches	Statistical Treatment	Strategic Flexibility in terms of Operational Flexibility	Strategic Flexibility in terms of Supply Chain and Logistics Flexibility	Strategic Flexibility in terms of Market Adaptability and Consumer Responsiveness	Strategic Flexibility in terms of Technological and Digital Flexibility	Strategic Flexibility in terms of Financial Flexibility and Investment	Strategic Flexibility in terms of Workforce and Talent Management Flexibility

						Strategies	
Digitalization and Technological Integration	Pearson Correlation	.114*	-.135*	.023	.117*	.037	-.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.019	.695	.042	.519	.384
	Decision	Rejected	Rejected	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
	Interpretation	Significant	Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Risk Management and Regulatory Compliance	Pearson Correlation	.000	-.002	.021	.073	.023	.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.999	.971	.719	.210	.695	.737
	Decision	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
	Interpretation	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Market Entry and Expansion Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.016	-.083	-.036	.085	.004	-.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.782	.151	.536	.144	.938	.541
	Decision	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
	Interpretation	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Supply Chain Resilience and Global Logistics	Pearson Correlation	-.047	.011	-.004	.018	-.051	-.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.414	.855	.946	.758	.379	.596
	Decision	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
	Interpretation	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Cross-Cultural Competence and International Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	.055	.024	-.021	.019	.048	.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.344	.677	.722	.744	.403	.436
	Decision	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept

	Interpretation	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Innovation and Competitive Positioning	Pearson Correlation	.021	-.005	.050	-.069	.100	.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.712	.930	.389	.235	.082	.643
	Decision	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept	Accept
	Interpretation	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
	Pearson Correlation	.069					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.231					
	Decision	Accept					
	Interpretation	Not Significant					

The results in Table 1 show that there are only a few significant relationships between international business strategies and aspects of strategic flexibility. There was a strong link between operational flexibility and digitalization and technology integration ($r = .114$, $p = .048$). There was a strong link between digitalization and technical integration and the flexibility of the supply chain and logistics ($r = –.135$, $p = .019$). As digital integration gets better, the company will probably be able to change its operational decisions and production processes more easily, as shown by the positive link with operational flexibility. Conversely, the adverse correlation with supply chain and logistics flexibility indicates that progress in digitalization may not invariably lead to enhanced logistics flexibility. It is possible that digitalization could improve things at the same time that people think supply chain processes are too slow or too rigid. This double discovery shows both the good and bad things that can happen when you try to coordinate digitization with plans for more flexibility.

There were no important connections found in other areas. The coefficients for risk management and regulatory compliance were all close to zero ($r = .000$ to $.073$), which means that there was almost no link between these two ideas and any part of strategic flexibility. In a similar manner, the diverse elements of market entry and expansion strategies, supply chain resilience, cross-cultural proficiency, and innovation metrics exhibited non-significant correlations with flexibility indicators. The results of this study show that the people who answered the questions think that business strategies in these areas are not very dependent on the company's ability to adapt, or that the current practices are not connected well enough to show statistically significant connections. This outcome underscores the challenges the organization encounters in achieving coherence between strategic business objectives and adaptable operational implementation.

One of the more interesting things about the data is the weak but still positive link between digitization and technical flexibility ($r = .117$, $p = .042$). Even though the table said this was important, the very low correlation coefficient shows that it does not really connect to anything. Even so, the discovery does show that digitalization is linked to digital and technological flexibility to some extent, especially when it comes to things like employee digital skills, e-commerce, and new technologies. However, the fact that the correlation is weak suggests that spending on digital integration may not yet be fully optimized to allow for greater strategic flexibility. This raises the question of whether digital tools are being used in a way that limits their usefulness in many different areas, rather than in a way that makes them more useful in general.

Another noteworthy finding is that, although innovation and competitive positioning are theoretically associated with adaptability, there was no significant correlation between them and any of the dimensions of flexibility. The most robust correlation with financial flexibility ($r = .100$, $p = .082$) remained statistically insignificant; however, it indicated a potential association at a trend level. This means that even though innovation activities may require changes in resources and finances, they are not yet fully integrated enough to be seen as promoting flexibility in practice. The absence of substantial correlations across most dimensions suggests a disconnect between the firm's market or innovation strategy and employees' experiences regarding its adaptability to change.

In short, Table 20 shows that only digitalization and technology integration had strong links to strategic flexibility—strongly with operational flexibility and weakly with technological flexibility, but negatively with supply chain flexibility. The dimensions of flexibility did not exhibit a significant correlation with other business strategies, including risk management, expansion, resilience, cross-cultural competence, and innovation. The results of this study show that even though digital initiatives are starting to affect the ability to adapt, most international business strategies are still separate from the company's flexibility. If the organization wants to get more aligned, it needs to combine its business strategy with operational and structural procedures that directly make it more flexible. Because of this, strategic flexibility will not only be clear, but it will also fit in perfectly with how business is done around the world.

Conclusion

The company’s international business approaches are evident across all dimensions but remain below the threshold of highly evident practices. Digitalization, supply chain resilience, and innovation are recognized as operational strengths, yet weaknesses in long-term strategy alignment, cultural competence, and R&D investment suggest that the company’s global practices are more tactical than strategic. Thus, the firm demonstrates operational stability but needs to enhance visionary, forward-looking initiatives.

The garment company also shows clear flexibility in its operations, supply chain, market adaptation, digital, financial, and workforce areas. The best areas include production responsiveness, digital skills training, and financial risk assessment. The worst areas are leadership development, integrating customer feedback, and aligning long-term investments. These findings show that the corporation can adjust to different situations, but it does not have the level of flexibility needed to stay competitive on the world stage.

Thus, the correlation study showed that digitalization and technology integration are the most important factors that affect strategic flexibility. They are positively related to operational and technological adaptability but adversely related to supply chain flexibility. Other foreign business strategies, such as risk management, expansion, and cross-cultural strategies, did not show a strong link to flexibility dimensions, which suggests that they are still not well integrated. This shows that the company's ability to adapt is mostly based on digitization. However, the fact that other approaches do not work well together limits its ability to respond to global market issues.

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