



How "Wolf Warrior" Diplomacy Shapes Chinese Brands' Internationalization Pathways through National Image: A Comparative Study of Western and Non-Western Markets

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Abstract. Protectionism has gained momentum worldwide. Trade wars, tariff disputes, and non-tariff barriers have proliferated, prompting an increasing number of Chinese firms to pursue a go-global strategy. Going abroad presents firms with fresh opportunities and risks. A central consideration is how national image affects the route to internationalization (the country-of-origin effect). The article examines the period from 2017 to 2022, a time marked by a more assertive Chinese diplomatic posture, commonly referred to as "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy. Drawing on Pew Research Center findings to track changes in China's image across countries and regions, and review contemporaneous progress in the internationalization of major Chinese brands, the study then evaluates whether this style is linked to a deterioration in national image and, consequently, to lower receptivity to Chinese brands in overseas markets. A mixed-methods design is adopted. The study begins by quantifying national image and then uses representative cases to unpack the mechanisms at work qualitatively. The study illuminates the interplay between foreign policy, national image, and corporate brands. It aims to deliver policy-relevant insights for decision-makers and practical guidance for firms choosing internationalization pathways.

Keywords: "Wolf Warrior" Diplomacy, National Image, Brands, Internationalization, Country-of-origin Effect.

1 Introduction

"In international politics, the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others); its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad); and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)" [1]. From 2017 onwards, as China's capabilities and international standing increased, its diplomatic posture shifted from the Deng Xiaoping-era principle of 'keeping a low profile and biding one's time' to a "more strident and assertive", a more forceful expression associated with nationalism and great-power revival—often labeled 'Wolf Warrior' [2]. At Ministry of Foreign Affairs briefings and across social media, spokespeople began to rebut external criticism sharply, at times

using combative language. In the age of the internet and social media, such hard-line messaging travelled quickly, creating for some the sense of a power already ascendant and prompting a surge in nationalist sentiment. The shift in diplomatic posture has had complex implications for national image and for the globalization of Chinese brands. Domestically, rising nationalist sentiment has energized support for home-grown labels; the 'China-chic' wave has observed some surpass established international names. Abroad, however, many have met repeated setbacks. Political sensitivities around Chinese-origin brands have intensified, and certain markets display a tendency towards de-Sinicization. Whether these patterns are positively associated with "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy warrants closer examination.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' outward-facing briefings constitute public diplomacy and are sometimes referred to as 'external publicity'. Eytan Gilboa points out, public diplomacy is not new, and its essence is 'the good impression that a country seeks to make on the public of another country' [2]. As Eytan Gilboa notes, public diplomacy is to seek 'to make a good impression on the public of another country'. At its core, it is an attempt to enhance attractiveness and cultivate soft power. The strident tone linked to "Wolf Warrior" messaging can leave audiences feeling pressured or uneasy, and many respond negatively. Such tactics do little to enhance national appeal and, by extension, struggle to generate soft power. Scholarship on public diplomacy has tended to emphasize its benefits. This study asks how the negative repercussions linked to "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy may shape a country's image.

A nation's image can be subject to brand-oriented management, much like a product brand. The concept of nation branding, introduced by Simon Anholt in the 1990s, holds that countries can be strategically managed as brands to enhance their global reputation. A stronger reputation enhances the country's recognition and boosts its overall appeal. "National branding is about making people want to pay attention to a country's achievements and believe in its qualities. It is the quintessential modern exemplar of soft power" [3].

In the course of globalization, firms face the country-of-origin effect—the set of associations and perceptions elicited by a given country [4]. "The central tenet of previous country of origin studies is that the association of a country and its products is based on a halo effect, which means that consumers use country image in product evaluation" [5]. Consumers often judge products through the lens of a nation's image. A favorable national image enhances brand acceptance in overseas markets. How, then, might shifts linked to "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy shape foreign consumers' attitudes?

Work on public diplomacy typically falls within international relations, whereas the country-of-origin effect (COO) is rooted in marketing. Public diplomacy, nation branding, and the COO have largely been studied in isolation, with few analyses integrating public diplomacy, national image, and corporate brands within one framework. Cross-cutting research on China's foreign policy and firms' internationalization remains limited, and empirical studies on the consumer electronics industry are likewise scarce. The inquiry centres on the impact of the Chinese government's "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy on national image. Amplified by social media and global circulation, this influence has broadened over time. The article then explores how an altered national image

affects firms' current choices of internationalization pathways and the practical progression of internationalization. This paper addresses two questions:

RQ1: Is "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy a correlation to a deterioration in China's standing internationally?

RQ2: Do shifts in national image influence overseas acceptance of Chinese brands?

The study brings together the political facet of national image and the market facet of corporate internationalization to inform political-risk mitigation for Chinese firms. This two-track analysis supports brands in achieving resilient growth amid a complex global environment.

2 Methodology

The research employs a mixed-methods design: national image is quantified first, followed by case-based mechanism analysis to unpack the underlying dynamics.

2.1 Analysis of Diplomatic Discourse and International Image

Research data. The research draws on the NLPPIR-released corpus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' regular press conferences for 2017–2021, which provides the complete text of these briefings [6]. Measures of national image come from Pew Research Center surveys [7].

Measurement Approach. Two core variables are specified—an independent and a dependent variable. China's diplomatic assertiveness index is treated as the independent variable, while the country's negative international image is the dependent variable. The study compares their respective trends and then examines the correlation between them. To enable consistent comparisons, it quantifies the intensity of "Wolf Warrior" diplomatic assertiveness and, separately, its aggressiveness, thus supporting subsequent statistical analysis. The analysis covers 2017–2021, encompassing the nascent, formative, and fully mature phases of the "Wolf Warrior" approach. All materials come from the NLPPIR-released corpus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' regular press conferences for 2017–2021, which includes the complete sets of questions and answers [6].

Using this corpus, the study identifies a set of representative terms as measurement tools for quantification. These terms are employed to derive the "Wolf Warrior" diplomatic assertiveness index, which functions as the study's independent variable (X variable). Terms are mapped to distinct levels on an assertiveness index, with some entries carrying overtly aggressive connotations. Terms are grouped into three weight tiers—1, 2, and 3 (1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high). Because they embody clear elements of criticism, rejection, or threat, these terms function as quantifiable indicators of "Wolf Warrior" discourse.

The final lexicon contains 23 items (details are provided in the table 1). Each is assigned a weight of either 2 or 3. Weights reflect semantic intensity. For instance, formulations such as 'firm opposition' and 'solemn representations' are generally more

forceful than ‘grave violation’ or ‘provocation’; hence, they receive a weight of 3, whereas entries like ‘provocation’ and ‘escalation’ are weighted 2.

Table 1. Glossary of diplomatic assertive terms and weightings

Keywords	Weight	Keywords	Weight
Firm opposition	3	Grave violation	2
Solemn representations lodged	3	Provocation	2
Solemn statement	3	Smear campaign	2
Strong dissatisfaction	3	Bullying	2
Absolutely not	3	Red line	2
At all costs	3	Bottom line	2
Pay a price	3	Core interests	2
Countermeasures	3	Cease wrongful practices	2
Sanctions	3	Clampdown	2
Punitive measures	3	Escalation	2
Gross interference	3	Strong condemnation	3
Inviolable	3		

Measurement relies solely on assertive (‘hard’) terms; conciliatory or cooperative language is not introduced as a countervailing variable. The aim is to ensure the index captures relative shifts in assertiveness, minimizing any attenuation caused by mixed-sentiment content. The MFA diplomatic assertiveness index is operationalized as the yearly frequency of the selected terms; weighting these frequencies produces the score.

Diplomatic assertiveness score (definition). The metric gauges, for each year, the aggregate volume and intensity of assertive phrasing in responses at the Ministry’s regular press briefings. No standardization by text length is applied; the final figure is the annual total divided by the number of months observed that year.

Diplomatic assertiveness score: computation method. Drawing on the NLPPIR corpus of regular MFA press conferences for 2017–2021 [6], a Python program is implemented to count, for each calendar year, the occurrences of every assertive term and multiply each count by its corresponding weight. For example, if the term ‘bottom line’ occurs five times in a given year, its frequency is 5. Multiply the frequency (5) by its assigned weight (2). The resulting annual score for that term is 10. Repeat this for all terms and sum the results to obtain the total assertiveness score.

Coverage is incomplete for 2017 and 2023: 2017 includes only June–December (six months), and 2023 extends to the end of September (ten months). Accordingly, to compare year-on-year trends, the study divides each year’s total by the number of months observed, deriving a monthly average diplomatic assertiveness index, as shown in Fig. 1.

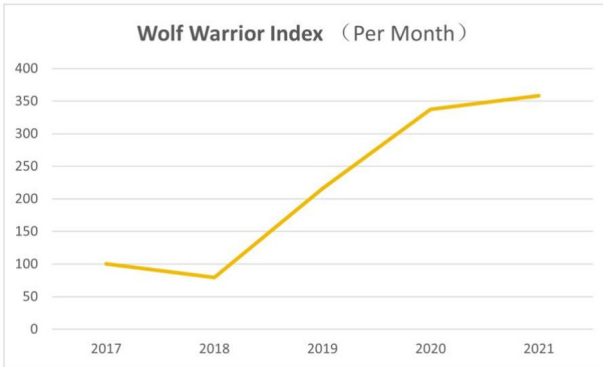


Fig. 1. Monthly average diplomatic assertiveness index

China’s international image (Y variable): The study quantifies China’s national image using the data from the Pew Research Center [7]. Across 24 countries, majorities report an unfavorable view of China’s foreign policy (Silver, Huang & Clancy, 2023).

In this study, national image is empirically derived rather than treated as an abstract notion; it is measured via cross-national polling. Fig.2. shows record-high negative ratings for China in most countries surveyed.

% who have an unfavorable opinion of China

■ Most unfavorable ■ Least unfavorable

	'02	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'22-'23 change
Poland	-	34	-	42	54	41	41	32	41	43	52	44	42	29	37	34	-	-	55	67	▲12
Canada	-	27	-	37	-	36	-	-	-	45	-	48	40	40	45	67	73	73	74	79	▲5
France	-	42	41	51	72	60	59	49	60	58	53	49	61	52	54	62	70	66	68	72	▲4
Israel	-	-	-	45	-	37	-	46	-	60	50	42	-	43	42	25	-	-	46	50	▲4
Spain	-	21	38	43	56	41	38	39	46	47	55	50	56	43	48	53	63	57	63	66	▲3
Sweden	-	-	-	40	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	49	52	70	85	80	83	▲2
Netherlands	-	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	43	42	45	58	73	72	75	77	▲2
Germany	-	37	33	54	68	63	61	59	67	64	64	60	60	53	54	56	71	71	74	76	▲2
Australia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	87	85	86	▲1
U.S.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	79	76	82	83	▲1
Greece	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	38	37	46	-	37	40	48	32	-	42	50	51	▲1
Japan	42	-	71	67	84	69	69	61	84	93	91	89	86	83	78	85	86	88	87	87	0
UK	-	16	14	27	36	29	35	26	35	31	38	37	44	37	35	55	74	63	69	69	0
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	44	45	47	37	-	-	52	50	▼2
South Korea	31	-	-	42	49	54	56	-	-	50	42	37	-	61	60	63	75	77	80	77	▼3
Italy	-	-	-	61	-	-	-	-	64	62	70	57	61	59	60	57	62	60	64	58	▼6
																					'19-'23 change
India	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41*	39	32	36	41	-	46	-	-	-	67	▲21
Brazil	-	-	-	-	-	34	37	39	28	44	36	-	25	33	27	22	-	-	-	48	▲21
Mexico	-	-	-	41	38	43	31	46	36	33	38	34	-	23	27	22	-	-	-	33	▲11
Argentina	-	-	-	31	31	24	28	-	-	22	30	26	-	26	27	24	-	-	-	34	▲10
South Africa	-	-	-	-	51	-	-	-	-	43	40	34	43	32	38	35	-	-	-	40	▲5
Kenya	-	-	-	15	-	14	10	21	-	13	16	22	23	21	17	25	-	-	-	23	▼2
Nigeria	-	-	-	-	-	15	-	-	-	11	14	14	18	13	17	17	-	-	-	15	▼2
Indonesia	-	25	31	30	34	34	37	28	-	24	25	22	-	36	32	36	-	-	-	25	▼11

Fig. 2. China’s negative impression scores, 2002–2023 (Source: Pew Research Center [7])

Countries are categorized into Western developed and non-Western developing groups. The Western group comprises six states with close ties to China and a complete series for 2017–2021 (Pew Research Center, 2023): Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, and South Korea. All sustain substantial bilateral or multilateral engagement with China. The non-Western developing group includes eight additional countries, among them Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Indonesia.

For clarity, countries such as the United States, Australia, and India are likewise salient to China’s external relations, but their data are incomplete over the study horizon in the Pew report. To ensure robustness, they are excluded from this analysis.

2.2 Brand Case Analysis

Case Selection. The cases are deliberately selected to be typical. Two consumer-electronics companies are examined that entered global markets early, expanded deeply, and achieved a broad consumer reach. For comparison, both are analyzed over the 2017–2021 period associated with “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy, with smartphones as a shared line of business. Because their market choices and internationalization routes differ, so do the effects they experience.

Huawei: often seen as a national showcase for advanced technology. Operating in 170 countries and serving over 3 billion people, it was long regarded as a standard-bearer for Chinese corporate internationalization. From 2017 onwards, however, it faced sanctions and restrictions in Western markets, reflecting the influence of national image and security framing.

Transsion: the leading handset player in Africa, oriented towards non-Western markets and holding strong positions across Africa and other emerging economies. Even during the peak of “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy, Transsion appears less exposed to geopolitical headwinds, relying instead on localization-led product innovation.

Research Methods. The case work is informed by a literature review and policy document consultation, supplemented by institutional market data, related reporting, and academic studies.

3 Results

3.1 “Wolf Warrior” Diplomacy and National Image

Data Analysis. Table 2. reports the annual total scores for 2017–2021 along with the corresponding monthly averages. Because only half of 2017 is covered, the monthly average is 100—above 2018’s 79.6—suggesting concentrated assertive statements in the latter half of 2017. From 2019, the index climbs sharply, with monthly averages surpassing 200, signaling a shift into a high-intensity phase of diplomatic discourse. The series reaches a peak in 2020, with a monthly average above 330, consistent with intensified rhetoric amid pandemic-origin disputes and broader geopolitical strains.

Although 2021 records only ten months of data, the monthly average still exceeds 358, indicating no softening of the assertive stance and a modest further intensification.

Table 2. Diplomatic assertiveness scores, 2017–2021

Year	Wolf Warrior Diplomacy Index Score	Number of Months	Wolf Warrior Diplomacy Index Score Per Month
2017	600	6	100
2018	955	12	79.6
2019	2589	12	215.8
2020	4049	12	337.4
2021	3581	10	358.1

China’s negative International Image (Western Developed Countries). Table 3. Shows that negative impressions are essentially unchanged between 2017 and 2018, then climb quickly from 2019, with modest pullbacks in some countries in 2021. A caveat is Japan, where negative views are persistently high; a floor effect limits visible movement. Nonetheless, the direction of travel remains upward.

For comparability between the independent variable (diplomatic assertiveness) and the dependent variable (six-country negative views), the annual mean across the six countries is calculated, and a line chart of the average share of negative impressions across the six countries is presented (Fig. 3.).

Table 3. Average negative-impression scores for China in major Western countries

Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Canada	40	45	67	73	73
UK	37	35	55	74	63
Germany	53	54	56	71	71
France	52	54	62	70	66
Japan	83	78	85	86	88
South Korea	61	60	63	75	77
Average	54.3	54.3	64.7	74.8	73

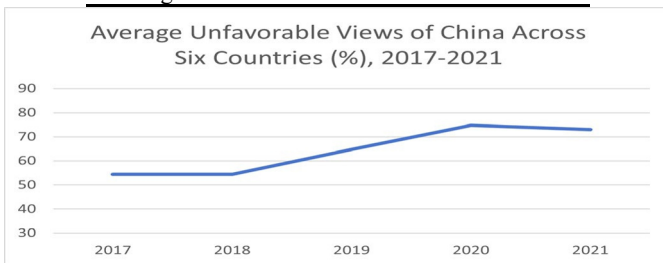


Fig. 3. Average share holding an unfavorable view of China

The series is essentially flat in 2017–2018, accelerates upward from 2019, and eases slightly in 2021.

Variable comparison. The chart (Fig.4.) traces both the monthly average assertiveness index and the six-country mean share of negative impressions over 2017–2021. The curves move in close step, rising sharply after 2019 and reaching a common peak in 2020. The monthly average assertiveness index jumps from below 100 in 2018 to above 330 in 2020, while the negative share rises from under 55% to nearly 75%—a pronounced synchrony. In 2021, both measures edged down but remain at high levels. The pattern suggests a strong correlation over time between worsening international perceptions of China and the increasing assertiveness of its diplomatic discourse.

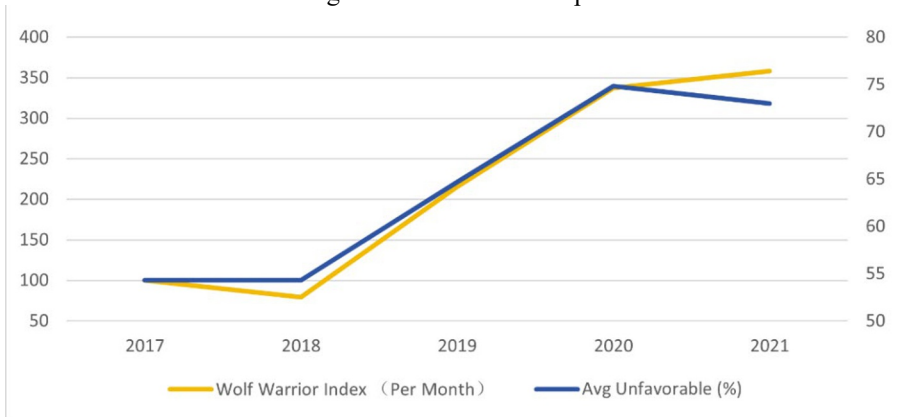


Fig. 4. MFA "Wolf Warrior" diplomatic assertiveness index (monthly average) versus six-country average of negative views of China, 2017–2021

Table 4. China's negative national image index (non-Western countries)

Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	17-23 Change
India	41		46	/	/	/	67	+26
Brazil	25	33	27	/	/	/	48	+23
Mexico	23	27	22	/	/	/	33	+10
Argentina	26	27	24	/	/	/	34	+8
South Africa	32	38	35	/	/	/	40	+8
Kenya	21	17	25	/	/	/	23	+2
Nigeria	13	17	17	/	/	/	15	+2
Indonesia	36	32	36	/	/	/	25	-11

(Note: 17–23 change = 2023 image index minus 2017 image index; '+' indicates an increase, '-' a decrease.)

From Table 4. It can be seen that, Relative to Western countries, major non-Western states show limited growth in negative views during 2017–2019. According to 2023 data, India records a pronounced rise to 67% (likely shaped by border tensions). Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina also increased, though by less than in the West, and all remain

below 50%. South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria exhibit only marginal upticks, and Indonesia shows a decline. Taken together, the effects of "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy are not uniform: among non-Western countries, there is no clear, substantial deterioration in China's image (aside from India, levels stay under 50%). Whether "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy contributes to an improvement in China's standing among non-Western states where the negative index has declined—for instance, Indonesia—warrants further inquiry.

3.2 National Image and Brand Exports

National image shapes a country's attractiveness and can also deliver significant commercial value [3]. The country-of-origin image influences consumer choices both directly and indirectly. A favorable image raises recognition and appeal in global markets, thereby supporting product sales. "The more favorable a country's image, the more salient 'Made in [country]' becomes" [3]. Consider Germany: widely associated with rigor and craftsmanship. 'Made in Germany' signals high quality and durability—attributes that underpin the global popularity of German brands. By contrast, an unfavorable national image can impede the sales performance of the country's brands.

Huawei Case. Founded in 1987, Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd. is a leading global provider of ICT infrastructure and smart devices. "The company has grown from a small reseller of imported telephone switches into a multinational conglomerate with revenues of \$138 billion in 2020 and a presence in over 170 countries"[8]. By most estimates, Huawei is the largest of the world's four major network equipment manufacturers; the others are Nokia (Finland), Ericsson (Sweden), and ZTE Corporation.

The firm is widely seen as emblematic of China's advanced manufacturing and high-tech sector, with its globalization closely bound up with national image. According to the company's website, Huawei accounts for 20% of 5G essential patent proposals worldwide. It has long been associated with major-power manufacturing and technological leadership, helping to position China at the forefront of telecommunications. Industry bodies have recognized the firm with numerous awards. Its smartphones target the mid- to high-end segment and, in marketing, benchmark directly against Apple; the company states it is "far ahead" technologically. Huawei has remained among the top three globally by smartphone market share. Before 2017, Huawei drew on China's improving national image (country-of-origin effect). Brand and nation reinforced each other, fueling rapid expansion and, in part, serving as an emblem of soft power.

From 2017 onwards, China's diplomatic posture shifted, with "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy increasingly prominent as US–China frictions deepened. Citing national-security risks, the US government moved to restrict and sanction the company [8].

In 2017, Congress enacted measures limiting the use of Huawei equipment on specified Department of Defense (DOD) networks [8].

In 2018, federal agencies were prohibited from procuring equipment, systems, or services that relied on Huawei as an essential or critical component, and federal grants or loans could not be used to purchase its products [8].

In 2019, the Department of Justice (DOJ) brought charges of financial fraud and alleged sanctions breaches against Huawei and certain executives. The Department of Commerce (DOC) subsequently added the firm to the Entity List [8].

In 2020, the DOJ brought racketeering charges and alleged conspiracy to steal trade secrets alongside sanctions breaches. The DOC tightened export controls, curbing access to foreign semiconductors produced with US technology, and Congress allocated US\$1.9 billion to remove Huawei equipment from US networks. On taking office, the Biden administration kept the Trump-era restrictions in place and further tightened controls on semiconductor sales for 5G equipment [8].

The sanctions dealt a major setback to Huawei’s global expansion. Once a top-three smartphone brand in key Western markets, the company could no longer use Google software or the Android operating system, significantly inconveniencing consumers. Simultaneously, the loss of access to advanced-node chips constrained rapid upgrades and new product development. From late 2018, its overseas smartphone share fell quickly and persistently (see Fig. 5), dropping from 8.1% to 3.5% over 2018–2020 and materially denting performance.

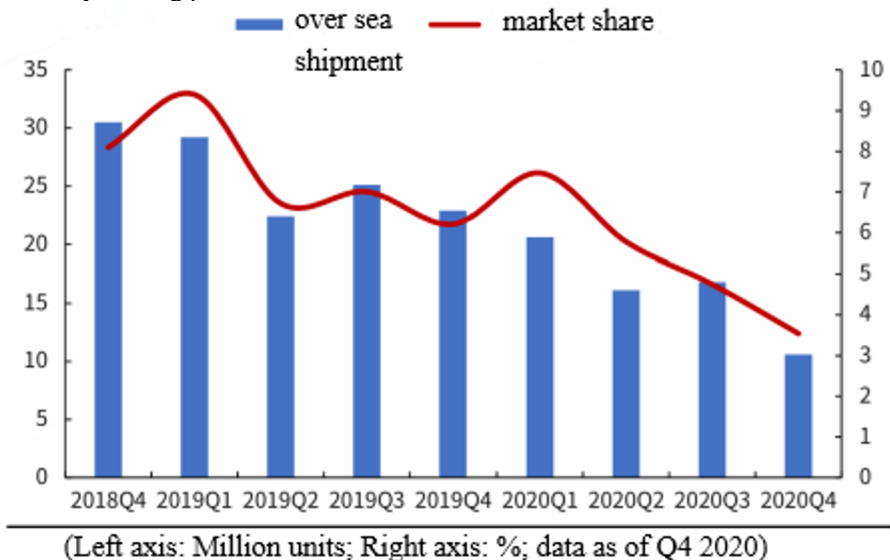


Fig. 5. Trend in overseas shipments and market share of Huawei smartphones (source: Everbright Securities Research Institute [9])

At the same time, Huawei’s global 5G commercial contracting faced substantial headwinds. Although its 5G technology was advanced and priced competitively, the firm’s lead over peers in 2018 (see Fig. 6) proved difficult to sustain. With Western access restrictions and replacements, the United States launched the Clean Network initiative and encouraged European countries to adopt it. By 2020, Huawei had fallen behind Nokia and Ericsson in contract numbers, and its average annual growth trailed that of competitors.

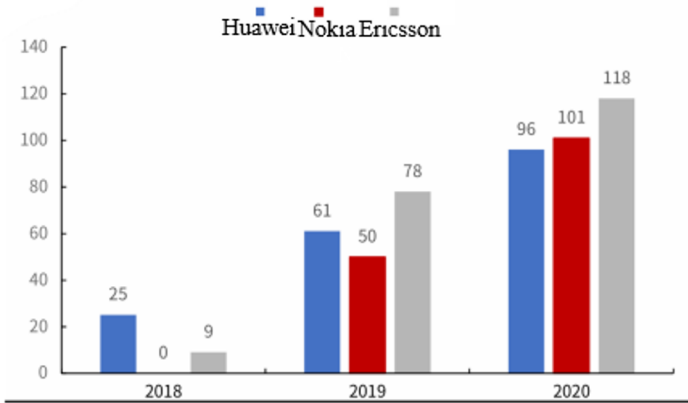


Fig. 6. Year-on-year trend in global 5G contract counts: Huawei vs competitors (source: Everbright Securities Research Institute [9])

Conclusion. Since 2017, Huawei’s internationalization has encountered significant setbacks. The contemporaneous decline in China’s standing in Western countries and the rise of "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy move in step, indicating that the firm may have been influenced by this posture, directly or indirectly.

Transition Case. Unlike Huawei, the firm has not pursued Western developed markets since its founding in 2013. Instead, it has concentrated on Africa and other emerging markets, using localized product innovation, competitive pricing, strong distribution, and integrated after-sales support to achieve leadership and wide brand recognition (see Fig.7).

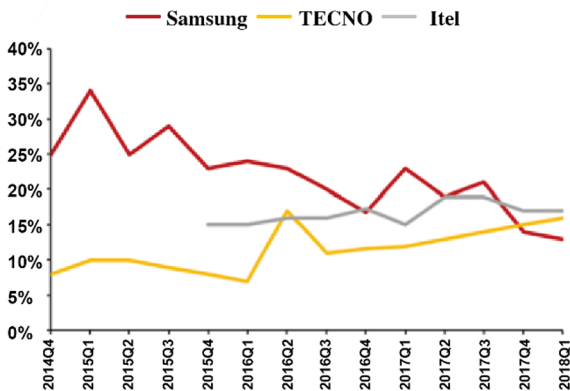


Fig. 7. Mobile-phone market share in Africa and the Middle East, 2014–2018(source: Founder Securities Research Institute [10])

From inception, Transsion pursued localization, downplaying its Chinese identity in marketing. Notably, its profile is relatively low even in China. By establishing local

manufacturing, hiring local staff, and employing local brand ambassadors, it positioned itself as an African player, limiting exposure to geopolitical pressures.

The company operates a multi-brand portfolio to address distinct consumer segments. It first introduced TECNO, followed by Itel for value-for-money buyers and Infinix for younger users. The camera software was tuned for local skin-tone profiles so users with darker skin tones could capture satisfying images more easily. Devices featured high-capacity batteries and extended standby times to cope with unstable electricity supplies, as well as multi-SIM capability to accommodate different carriers. By 2015, IDC data show Transsion ranked second in Africa by handset sales, behind Samsung. In 2017—the start of “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy—Transsion had become Africa’s “phone king”, achieving a 45.12% market share and a clear lead. Over 2018–2020, its share rose further (see Fig.8. &Fig.9.). Set against Fig. 1’s diplomatic assertiveness series, the firm appears unaffected by that shift; rather, it succeeded through a strongly localised strategy. In the 2020 Africa’s Best Brands ranking, Transsion ranked fifth overall and first in mobile phones, overtaking Apple and cementing its status as the “king of Africa”.

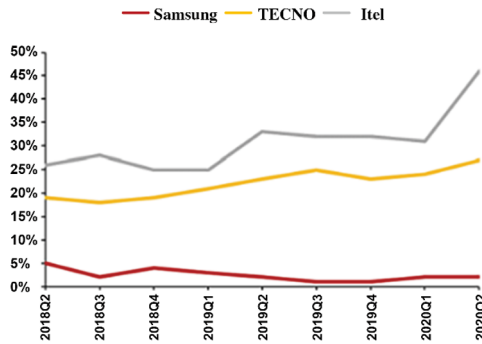


Fig. 8. Feature-phone market share in Africa and the Middle East, 2018–2020 (source: Founder Securities Research Institute [10])

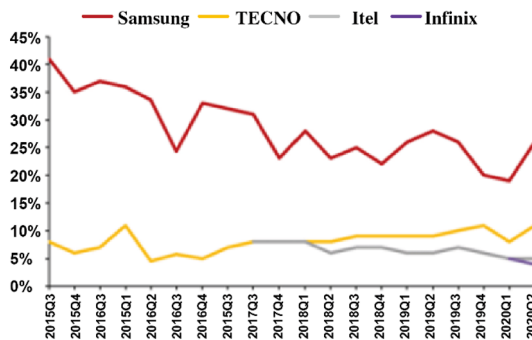


Fig. 9. Smartphone market share (source: Founder Securities Research Institute [10])

4 Discussion

In the internet and social-media age, public diplomacy effects are magnified. Diplomatic messaging—its content and tone—serves as a mirror, signaling national values and characteristics. Audiences read a nation's stance through such statements, form value judgements, and, in turn, develop an overall national image. Within our analysis, the 2017–2021 comparison between the MFA "Wolf Warrior" diplomatic assertiveness index (monthly average) and the six-country mean share of negative views shows a strong temporal association: perceptions in Western societies deteriorate as diplomatic rhetoric hardens. In non-Western settings, however, audience reactions are comparatively restrained. Taken together, "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy appears to exert a broadly negative influence on China's national image—highly salient in Western societies and comparatively restrained elsewhere.

Does this deterioration in national image impact the internationalization of Chinese brands? The Huawei example underscores how tightly the brand has been intertwined with national image. Its global expansion can be divided into two phases: the era of 'keeping a low profile and biding one's time', and the period surrounding the Olympics-themed 'Harmony'. As a TOP supplier, Huawei benefited from the country-of-origin effect, which buoyed its overseas growth. As shown in Fig. 7, Huawei's footprint in Europe, the Americas, and the Asia-Pacific rose year on year from 2014 to 2018. From 2017, however, the emergence of "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy and heightened geopolitical frictions materially disrupted the firm's internationalization, with progress in some markets even coming to a halt. As Fig. 10 indicates, from 2019, there is a pronounced decline in Europe and the Middle East, driven chiefly by European moves to scale back and replace Huawei 5G kit. Smartphone sales were also hindered by the Google software constraint. The Americas and the Asia-Pacific likewise show some weakening. The firm's 5G and smartphone lines were affected by Western sanctions and supply chain curbs, producing the shifts described above. These developments track the incremental tightening of US sanctions since 2019. The primary drivers were not product technology or marketing. The downturn in Europe and North America aligns with the post-2017 deterioration in China's image in Western societies that accompanied the rise of "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy; the timing of both series matches closely. The study further notes that "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy coincided with more negative public views of China in Western countries (see Fig. 3). Following government measures against Huawei, consumers did not oppose the decisions despite higher taxpayer costs from equipment replacement and inconvenience caused by smartphone restrictions. This pattern suggests the diplomatic posture helped cultivate public acceptance of the sanctions, thereby reinforcing their perceived legitimacy. As a flagship of China's advanced manufacturing, Huawei's global expansion appears to have been influenced—directly or indirectly—by the national-image deterioration linked to "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy.

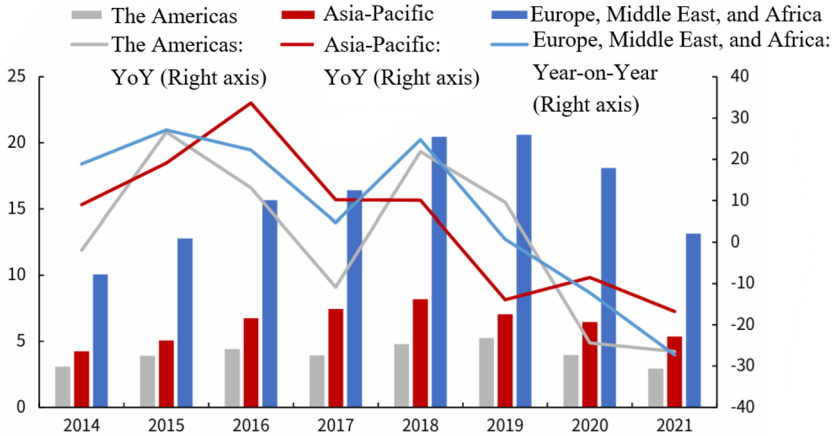


Fig. 10. Huawei sales in major overseas regions (source: Everbright Securities Research Institute [9])

By contrast, the Transsion case indicates that the impact is not monolithic; outcomes in non-Western markets are relatively subdued. Where companies pursue effective localization, discreetly downplay their national affiliation, and embed in local communities, the effect can be materially reduced or avoided.

Our analysis extends the chain connecting ‘diplomacy → national image’ and ‘national image → brand exports’. It finds that “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy has contributed to a decline in China’s image, with intensity differing across contexts. In Western markets, adverse perceptions materially dampen brand sales; in several non-Western markets, performance remains resilient. The analysis carries several warnings for policy-makers. As a global power, China should weigh the ramifications of its foreign policy for outward economic activity. When advancing diplomatic aims, it is vital to keep in mind that public diplomacy hinges on ‘the good impression that a country seeks to make on the public of another country’ [2]; messaging and conduct should therefore foster a favorable national image. For companies, careful appraisal of regional political-risk variation is likewise essential in the course of globalization.

Due to limited information, case evidence is restricted to consumer electronics (Huawei and Transsion). The absence of broader datasets prevents statistical testing of the link between brand exports and national image. Subsequent work should broaden sectoral coverage—to NEVs, TikTok and beyond—and, crucially, incorporate consumer surveys to quantify how brand perception and national image interact.

5 Conclusion

“Wolf Warrior” diplomacy is associated with a general hardening of negative sentiment among Western publics, contributing to a deterioration in China’s national image. Relative to Western countries, receptivity to China is markedly higher across non-Western

markets—perhaps because a hardened stance towards the West aligns with strands of anti-Western sentiment among parts of the public.

Deterioration in national image can shape the globalization of Chinese brands, either directly or indirectly, and its effects vary by market.

In Western economies, adverse perceptions materially hinder brand development, as seen with Huawei. In many non-Western contexts, the influence of "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy on national image is more muted; by softening overt national cues and pursuing sound local strategies, brands can limit exposure and still succeed—Transsion being a case in point.

The study strengthens the linkage 'diplomacy → national image → brand exports', offering practical guidance for policymakers and companies seeking to expand abroad. From a policy standpoint, decision-makers should anticipate how policies will play out in a highly globalized, social media-driven environment, with a particular focus on using public diplomacy to cultivate a positive national image. At the firm level, overseas strategy should rest on a dual-axis assessment framework that weighs political and market factors. Companies should not discount the country-of-origin effect or broader political risks. When selecting destinations, they should factor in local perceptions of China's image to mitigate risk and prioritize entry into receptive emerging markets such as Southeast Asia and Africa.

To conclude, the primary objective of China's diplomacy is to establish and maintain a favorable national image. Foreign policy should reinforce that image and open up space for corporate globalization. Corporate success can, in turn, strengthen the national image, contributing to China's emergence as a genuinely influential global power.

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