



# Enhancing the Image of Chinese Brands: Strategies and Case Study of Haier

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**Abstract.** Against the backdrop of Chinese brands going global, this paper examines the image of Chinese brands and strategies for its enhancement. A review of existing literature reveals that while the image of Chinese brands still requires improvement, product innovation and high-quality marketing serve as crucial methods for this purpose. This paper also investigates the case of the Haier Group's brand image enhancement. We find that Haier has centered its strategy on product quality, adopted an "internationalization through localization" approach to explore the global market, and pursued digital and high-end transformation to elevate its brand image in the minds of consumers.

**Keywords:** Brand Image, Globalization, Haier

## 1 Introduction

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section II summarize the relevant literature. Section III provides case of Haier Group. Section IV provides suggestions for enhancing the image of brands.

With the improvement of China's manufacturing capabilities, brand globalization represents a critical phase in the development of Chinese brands. However, going global involves not only competition in product price and quality but also a test of the overall brand image. A strong brand image can help companies expand into international markets and gain recognition from global consumers, making it an essential challenge for businesses venturing abroad.

To explore how to enhance brand image, this paper first summarizes the current characteristics of Chinese brand image. There are still shortcomings in the construction of Chinese brand image, such as insufficient protection of intellectual property rights, low international recognition, and weak awareness of corporate culture development. Common strategies to enhance brand image include product innovation, marketing, and adaptation to the cultural and consumption habits of target consumer groups.

This paper also examines the Haier Group, which has a strong brand image, as a case study to analyze strategies for enhancing the brand image of Chinese companies. Starting as a single refrigerator manufacturer, Haier built a corporate culture that

prioritizes quality. As its operations expanded, it gradually ventured into other home appliances such as air conditioners and washing machines, as well as overseas markets like Europe and the United States. During its expansion, Haier adhered to its quality-first principle while implementing an "internationalization through localization" strategy. This involved establishing factories, hiring local workers, and setting up production lines overseas to tailor products to the habits of international consumer groups, earning a strong brand reputation. Its high-end sub-brand "Casarte" has also secured a significant share of China's premium market, further enhancing Haier's image in the minds of consumers.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section II summarizes the relevant literature. Section III provides the case study of Haier Group. Section IV concludes.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Current Image of Chinese Brands**

There are many shortcomings in the brand building of Chinese enterprises, mainly including: first, domestic enterprises generally lack sufficient protection of overseas intellectual property rights and have weak legal awareness; second, international market recognition is low, with insufficient global market share; third, enterprises have weak brand building awareness and fail to consider the long-term development effects of brands, resulting in low brand added value[1]. An interview survey of more than 3,000 consumers from different countries found that when consumers learned that China was the country of origin, they developed significant negative perceptions of the brand's image, quality, and purchase intention[2]. From the perspective of cross-cultural brand communication, consumers hold the stereotype of Chinese brands as "low quality and low price," which is a major challenge faced by Chinese brands in the process of internationalization. Shu (2021) believes that Chinese brands possess characteristics such as path autonomy, efficiency salience, advantage sharing, and long-term consistency. It is suggested that Chinese brands can be shaped by leveraging the value guidance of the "Chinese Dream," building a modern socialist powerhouse, enhancing the soft power of Chinese culture in the new era, and establishing international trust and cooperation, among other practical pathways[3].

### **2.2 The Significance of Enhancing Brand Image**

High-value brands can enhance consumers' perceived value of products and strengthen their trust in the products, thereby reducing the risks associated with information asymmetry. After enjoying a high-quality shopping experience and establishing deep trust in the brand, consumers often exhibit greater tolerance for prices and are more receptive to the additional value of the brand[4]. Through direct product and service experiences, consumers translate their personal feelings into purchasing behaviors, which in turn translate into economic profits for the enterprise, thereby constructing the brand value of the enterprise. This value is reflected not only in customer loyalty but also in brand influence and reputation. The more positive the

brand image is in the minds of consumers, the higher the customer loyalty and purchase frequency tend to be, and the greater the brand value becomes.

Most research findings on the impact of brands on corporate performance indicate that brands have a positive effect on corporate performance [5]. High brand value can bring excess corporate financial returns to enterprises because consumers' perception of a corporate brand is influenced by two key factors: brand image and brand association. This, in turn, alters consumers' purchasing decision behavior, and the shift in consumer preferences ultimately leads to excellent financial returns for the enterprise[6]. From the perspective of shareholder value, brands can enhance the future earnings level of an enterprise, thereby increasing shareholder value, with this impact moderated by the industry in which the enterprise operates. Some scholars have also focused on the impact of corporate social responsibility and brand equity on corporate performance. The research results show that corporate social responsibility promotes the enhancement of brand equity and corporate performance, and brand equity also shows a positive correlation with corporate performance, indicating that brand equity plays a mediating role in the positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate performance[7].

### **2.3 Strategies for Enhancing Brand Image**

Innovation assets are considered a key driver of sustainable enterprise development, particularly product innovation capability. Product innovation is a way to enhance value, and an enterprise's innovation capability can enable it to gain sustainable competitive advantages and a market leadership position. New product innovation has a positive impact on an organization's sustainable competitive advantage and is a competitive strategy that supports long-term success[8].

Marketing activities also play an indispensable role in the process of enhancing brand value. Information embedding, as one of the key strategies in marketing, involves subtly integrating brand information into various media contents, such as movies and TV series, to positively influence consumers in a covert manner, thereby enhancing the brand's appeal. Additionally, the number of brand stores and marketing expenditures in developed cities are key factors driving the growth of brand value [9].

For example, for domestic automotive brands, the first priority is to focus on quality, building a good reputation among consumer groups. Secondly, unique trademark designs can be used to improve the enterprise's recognizability, and by enhancing the brand's core competitiveness, such as intelligent electric systems, the consumer experience can be improved. In terms of sales and promotion, diverse distribution networks should be utilized, not relying solely on traditional 4S stores but also leveraging online distribution channels. Meanwhile, industry associations should be relied upon to enhance the overall image of domestic automotive brands. Adaptation to local culture and consumer habits is also essential, ensuring proper localization [10].

### 3 Case Study

Haier Group was founded in 1984. Starting as a traditional manufacturer of white goods like refrigerators, it has now evolved into a global leader providing solutions for better living and digital transformation. Its business primarily focuses on the smart home ecosystem, the large health industry ecosystem, and the digital economy industry. In 2024, Haier Group's global revenue reached 401.6 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 8%, with a total global profit of 30.2 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 13%. It employs more than 130,000 people globally . Haier has been recognized as the only IoT ecosystem brand globally on the "Kantar BrandZ Most Valuable Global Brands 100" list for 7 consecutive years, ranked among the top ten on the "Google & Kantar BrandZ Chinese Global Brand Builders" list for 9 consecutive years, maintained the top position in "Euromonitor International's Global Large Home Appliance Brand Retail Sales" for 16 consecutive years, and has been included in the World Brand Lab's "World's 500 Most Influential Brands" for 21 consecutive years . Haier Group has eight listed companies, including Haier Smart Home, Thunderobot Technology, Haier Biotech, Yingkang Life, Shanghai RAAS, Step Electric, Autohome, and Zhongmiao Holdings. It owns global high-end brands such as Haier, Casarte, Leader, GE Appliances, Fisher & Paykel, AQUA, and Candy, as well as the world's first smart home scenario brand, Three-Winged Bird. It has built the globally leading large health industry ecosystem Yingkang Life and the industrial internet platform COSMOPlat .

#### 3.1 Haier's Development History

**Focusing on the Refrigerator Industry.** In 1984, the Haier brand was born. In its early entrepreneurial stage, Haier focused on refrigerator production, adhering to the principle of quality first [11]. A classic example of Haier's emphasis on quality was the 1985 incident where Haier destroyed 76 refrigerators due to quality defects. This act was considered remarkable in an era of material scarcity in China, demonstrating Haier's determination for quality control . Just four years after its founding, in 1988, a Haier refrigerator won the first gold medal in the national refrigerator quality appraisal, the first of its kind in the Chinese refrigerator industry, indicating that Haier's refrigerators had gained recognition across the sector .

**Diversified Home Appliance Manufacturing.** By the 1990s, after successfully establishing its leading position in the refrigerator industry, Haier decided to implement a diversification strategy to expand its market share . Haier gradually expanded from a single refrigerator product line to include multiple home appliance categories such as washing machines, air conditioners, and water heaters. By 1998, Haier possessed a product portfolio exceeding 13,000 specifications . During this period, coinciding with the reform of state-owned enterprises, Haier also expanded by merging with other state-owned enterprises. For example, in 1995, Red Star Electric Appliance was incorporated into Haier. At that time, Red Star Electric Appliance was

suffering from low operational performance, perennial losses, and insolvency. By implementing scientific management and a corporate culture that emphasized employee unity, Haier improved the operational efficiency of Red Star Electric Appliance, turning it profitable within three months. This also enriched Haier's product lines and facilitated the company's expansion .

**Exploring the Global Market.** Entering the 2000s, Haier began to go global . Haier's internationalization strategy adhered to the principle of "internationalization means localization," emphasizing local design, local manufacturing, local marketing, as well as local financing and local talent integration. This was the initial stage of Haier's internationalization strategy . For instance, in 1999, Haier's decision-makers resolutely decided to invest \$30 million to establish Haier Industrial Park in South Carolina, USA, specifically for manufacturing home appliances . To mitigate risks and ensure success, Haier formulated meticulous budgets and plans. They adhered to the philosophy of "establishing a market presence before building a factory" and accumulated experience by exporting refrigerators to the U.S. Haier calculated that the breakeven point for building a factory was nearly reached when export volume hit 290,000 units . Regarding costs, although the annual salary of the U.S. workforce was 8 to 10 times higher than in China, Haier's in-depth analysis revealed that high shipping costs might offset the advantage of low Chinese wages . Building a factory in the U.S. had other benefits. Firstly, it allowed Haier to collect information and develop technology more rapidly; secondly, it saved container shipping time from China; additionally, the "Made in USA" label was attractive to American retailers, enabling Haier to compete on equal footing with U.S. companies. Today, among the younger generation in the U.S., Haier is a recognized home appliance brand, even transcending its identity as a Chinese brand . As Chinese companies gradually step onto the world stage, Haier's steps towards internationalization have become an important reference for Chinese companies going global .

**Smart Home and Digital Transformation.** By the 2010s, Haier shaped the vision of "Creating Infinite Possibilities with a Borderless Ecosystem," aiming to meet the personalized and diverse needs of users in the digital economy era by building an open, shared, and win-win ecosystem . Its business expanded into the smart home ecosystem, the large health industry ecosystem, and the digital economy industry . Haier now possesses global high-end brands like Casarte and the world's first smart home scenario brand, Three-Winged Bird. It has built the globally leading large health industry ecosystem, Yingkang Life, and the industrial internet platform COSMOplat .

### 3.2 Haier's Brand Image

The image of a brand in the minds of consumers is defined as the perceived quality of the brand, which includes five major indicators: the brand's tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and empathy [12].

**Brand Tangibility** refers to the brand's inherent quality, design, and cost-effectiveness, which is the most important aspect of the brand image, measuring the product's inherent appeal to consumers. The product quality, styles, prices, and supporting maintenance facilities of Haier's household appliances have received high satisfaction from consumers, and their cost-effectiveness is considered higher than that of overseas brands like Siemens.

**Brand Responsiveness** refers to the quality of services related to purchasing, delivery, and after-sales service, measuring the appeal of product-related services to consumers. Consumers express considerable satisfaction with the convenience of the services provided by Haier Group, and Haier values consumer opinions, which helps enhance the shopping experience at various stages.

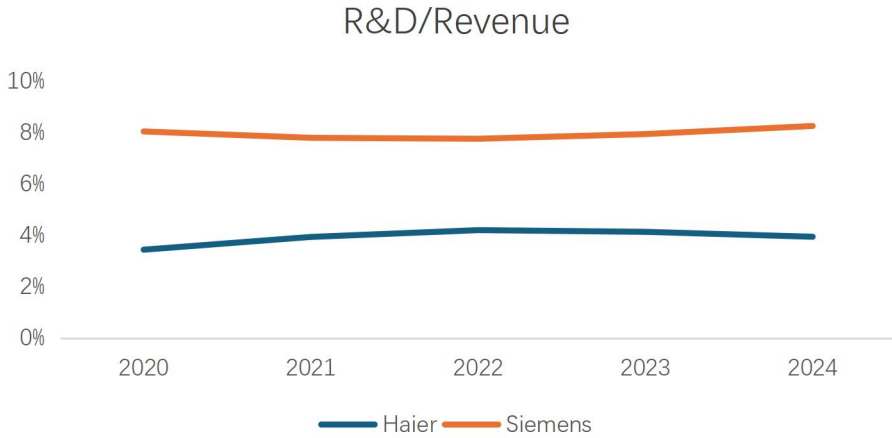
**Brand Reliability** encompasses product repair, commitment fulfillment, and consumer privacy protection. Haier Group possesses an efficient repair service system and skilled maintenance staff, and consumers feel assured with the after-sales services provided by Haier Group.

**Brand Empathy** refers to whether service personnel consider things from the consumer's perspective. Professional and attentive service personnel can enhance consumers' perception of the brand. This is an area where Haier still needs improvement, as the provision of personalized services for consumers is currently lacking.

**Brand Assurance** refers to the professional competence of service personnel and their ability to solve problems, which is a crucial part of a brand's quality assurance. The skill level of Haier Group's maintenance personnel is relatively lower compared to that of Siemens. Consumer surveys indicate that concerns exist among consumers regarding the stability of the services provided by Haier.

### 3.3 Haier's Strategies for Improving Brand Image

**Product Innovation.** Although Haier Group invests substantial funds in product research and development, the proportion of R&D expenditure to its operating revenue is still relatively low. Increasing the intensity of R&D investment is a crucial pathway for Haier Group to innovate products and enhance its brand image in the future. According to Haier Group's financial reports over the past five years, its R&D investment increased from 7.2 billion yuan in 2020 to 11.3 billion yuan. While both the scale and growth rate of R&D investment are significant, the ratio of R&D expenditure to operating revenue is approximately 4% for Haier, whereas the same indicator for the international home appliance giant Siemens was about 8% during the same period as shown in Figure 1. This indicates that although Haier's R&D investment is substantial, there remains considerable room for growth.



**Fig. 1.** Haier's R&D Investment

**Internationalization.** As one of the earliest Chinese home appliance enterprises to implement an internationalization strategy, Haier Group has established an extensive network of overseas factories worldwide. According to the latest data, Haier has 35 industrial parks and 163 manufacturing centers across four continents and more than 20 countries, building a "three-in-one" localized system for R&D, manufacturing, and marketing .

To explore markets and integrate into local consumption habits, Haier has actively acquired local enterprises and established factories overseas to directly engage with local consumer preferences. For example, in Italy, Haier acquired the Candy brand to gain localized production capacity, leading the production of washing machines and other home appliances and supporting the Southern European market. In the United States, Haier owns 11 factories across five states, employing 8,300 workers with a production capacity exceeding 10 million units, making it the Chinese enterprise that employs the most Americans .

Thus, Haier is a Chinese enterprise that actively expands its overseas business and practices the development strategy of "internationalization means localization." The expansion of international operations and its deep rooting in overseas markets have significantly enhanced Haier's visibility and accumulated reputation, contributing to the elevation of its brand image globally.

**High-End Transformation.** Since its establishment in 2006, Casarte has topped the high-end home appliance market for eight consecutive years, achieving an upgrade from product leadership to brand leadership and further to scenario leadership. In 2021, Casarte's revenue exceeded 10 billion yuan, reaching 12.9 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of over 40%, becoming a crucial support for Haier Smart Home's high-end strategy. In the first half of 2025, the revenue of the Casarte brand accounted for 15% of Haier Group's total revenue .

According to Haier Smart Home's 2024 financial report, Casarte maintained its position as the top high-end home appliance brand in China in 2024, with annual sales growing by 12% and set sales increasing by 64.6% year-on-year. Specifically, Casarte's market shares in refrigerators, washing machines, and air conditioners priced above 15,000 yuan were 49%, 34%, and 88%, respectively .

## **4 Conclusion**

### **4.1 Strengthen Brand Culture**

A brand needs to have clear values and a compelling story to make it memorable and appealing to consumers. For example, Pinduoduo's corporate culture focuses on empowering small vendors and farmers through the digital economy, achieving technological inclusivity. Such a well-defined corporate vision creates value for society and also helps enhance the brand image of the enterprise itself .

### **4.2 Improve Product Quality and Design**

The product itself is key to enhancing a corporate brand image. For consumers, however, it's not just about good quality; appearance, tactile feel, and user experience are also very important. Haier Group has always prioritized quality, which has earned it widespread consumer acclaim and enhanced its brand image .

### **4.3 Utilize Overseas Social Media for Marketing**

Marketing is a crucial channel for enhancing brand image. Beyond traditional marketing, the rise of mobile internet and social media in recent years has become an important marketing tool. Promoting brands on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and leveraging shares by influencers and users, can significantly increase a brand's influence .

### **4.4 Emphasize Environmental Protection and Social Responsibility**

With the increase in environmental awareness, more and more consumers are paying attention to the environmental attributes of products when making purchasing decisions. Europe, for instance, has relatively high requirements regarding product environmental protection. Enterprises can enhance their international brand image by launching more energy-saving and environmentally friendly products and participating in public welfare projects .

### **4.5 Launch High-End Product Lines**

Chinese brands often start by positioning themselves in the market with cost-effective products. As brands develop and accumulate technological expertise, establishing

high-end sub-brands or launching high-quality products is an important method for brand image enhancement.

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