

“STANDARDIZATION VS ADAPTATION STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY OF BYD COMPANY’S INTERNATIONAL MARKETING APPROACH”

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**Abstract**

The ongoing debate between standardization and adaptation strategies remains central to international marketing literature, particularly concerning rapidly expanding multinational corporations. This study examines BYD Company Limited, a leading Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer renowned for its cost-effective product offerings, to investigate how strategic choices between standardized and adapted approaches influence international growth trajectories. Through comparative analysis of BYD's market entry strategies across diverse geographical contexts—including developed European markets and emerging economies—the research evaluates the efficacy of each strategic orientation. The study further traces BYD's strategic evolution from initial market penetration to current positioning, assessing whether the company maintains consistent strategic principles or demonstrates adaptive flexibility. Findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of the standardization-adaptation continuum while providing practical insights for firms navigating global market complexities in the electric vehicle sector.

**Keywords**

international marketing, standardization and adaptation, BYD company, case study

**Introduction**

Global marketing strategy is crucial for multinationals because it balances efficiency and local responsiveness. Levitt (1983) argued that technological convergence

is driving consumers everywhere to want similar products, favoring standardization. At the same time, others stress that cultural, regulatory and competitive differences often force adaptation to local tastes. The “globalization vs. localization” dilemma remains a core issue. In practice, many firms pursue glocalization – integrating global consistency with local tailoring.

The contemporary marketing environment has undergone significant transformation driven by accelerating globalization and digital interconnectedness. While technological advancements facilitate standardized global messaging, increasing cultural awareness and local identity movements simultaneously demand market-specific customization. This tension generates a strategic dilemma for multinational enterprises: whether to pursue uniform marketing approaches for economies of scale or to invest in localized adaptation to enhance consumer resonance.

The question of why manufacturers begin exporting represents a fundamental issue in international business. This need typically emerges when domestic markets become saturated, meaning growth opportunities at home are limited. Expanding abroad allows companies to access new customer bases, increase production volumes, and extend their product lifecycle. Additionally, earning revenues in strong international currencies provides financial stability, while successful international expansion builds global brand recognition.

BYD Company Limited presents a distinctive case of strategic transformation. Founded in 1995 by Wang Chuanfu as a mobile phone battery manufacturer, the company leveraged its expertise in battery chemistry to enter automotive manufacturing in 2003. BYD launched its first passenger vehicle in 2005 and began international expansion with electric buses in the 2010s. From 2020 onward, the company initiated aggressive global penetration with passenger electric vehicles and currently maintains presence in over 100 countries. The company's competitive strength derives from its vertically integrated business model, encompassing in-house production of batteries, semiconductors, and electric motors.

This study investigates BYD's international marketing strategy to examine how emerging market multinationals navigate the standardization-adaptation continuum. By analyzing market entry patterns across developed European economies and emerging markets in Southeast Asia and Central Asia, this research identifies the conditions under which each strategic approach proves most effective. The findings aim to contribute to international marketing theory while providing practical implications for manufacturing enterprises seeking to optimize their international expansion strategies.

The research problem is framed as: Standardization or adaptation? Does BYD market the same products and brand everywhere, or adjust to each region? The

objectives are to identify BYD's approach in different markets, analyze the outcomes, and draw lessons for global marketing strategy.

### Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative case study approach** to examine BYD Company Limited's international marketing strategy, focusing on the tension between standardization and adaptation. The case study method is appropriate because BYD represents a rapidly expanding multinational enterprise whose practices illustrate the dynamics of global marketing strategy in the electric vehicle sector.

#### Research Design

- **Case Study Approach:** BYD was selected as the focal company due to its rapid global expansion, vertically integrated business model, and diverse market entry strategies.

- **Comparative Analysis:** The research compares BYD's strategies across three distinct geographical contexts:

- **Developed markets** (Europe, e.g., Norway and Germany)
- **Emerging markets** (Southeast Asia, e.g., Thailand and Indonesia)
- **Transitional markets** (Central Asia, e.g., Uzbekistan)

#### Data Collection

- **Secondary Sources:** Data was gathered from academic literature, industry reports, company announcements, and reputable news outlets.

- **Figures and Charts:** Conceptual frameworks (e.g., causes for adaptation vs. standardization in the marketing mix) were used to interpret BYD's practices.

- **Market Statistics:** Sales volumes, growth rates, and market share data were analyzed to assess the effectiveness of BYD's strategies.

#### Analytical Framework

- **Standardization vs. Adaptation Continuum:** The study evaluates BYD's practices against theoretical perspectives from Levitt (1983), Kotabe & Helsen (2008), and recent glocalization literature.

- **Marketing Mix Analysis:** Product, placement, promotion, and price decisions were examined to identify causes driving either adaptation or standardization.

- **Contextual Factors:** Institutional environments (regulations, incentives, cultural preferences) were considered to explain BYD's strategic choices.

#### Scope and Limitations

- The study focuses on BYD's strategies between 2023–2026, a period of rapid international expansion.

- Findings are based on secondary data; primary interviews with BYD executives or customers were not conducted.

- While BYD provides a rich case, results may not be fully generalizable to all multinational corporations, but they offer valuable insights into the EV industry.

### Literature Review

**Theoretical Foundations: Standardization versus Adaptation.** The debate between standardization and adaptation in international marketing has persisted for over four decades, originating with Theodore Levitt's seminal work "The Globalization of Markets" published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1983

Levitt argued that technological advances were creating homogeneous global consumer preferences, enabling firms to market standardized products worldwide and achieve "enormous economies of scale in production, distribution, marketing, and management". This perspective challenged the prevailing multinational corporation model that emphasized tailoring products to local tastes.

However, subsequent scholarship has revealed significant limitations in Levitt's homogeneous market thesis. Critics note that cultural differences, regulatory variations, and diverse consumer behaviors persist despite globalization pressures. The standardization approach offers advantages including cost efficiency through economies of scale, streamlined marketing efforts, global brand consistency, and efficient resource allocation. Conversely, adaptation strategies recognize market heterogeneity, enabling firms to respond to cultural nuances, legal requirements, competitive landscapes, and specific consumer preferences.

Contemporary research suggests that neither pure standardization nor complete adaptation represents an optimal approach. A systematic literature review by **Eze, Inyang, and James (2024)** analyzing 79 peer-reviewed articles found that the majority of scholars (19 studies) advocate for a **hybrid "glocalization" approach** that combines elements of both strategies. This perspective emphasizes maintaining global brand identity while strategically adapting product features, pricing, promotional messages, and distribution channels to local market conditions. The Eze et al. (2024) study further identifies key drivers of standardization (cost-effectiveness, economies of scale, brand consistency) versus adaptation (government regulations, cultural differences, customer habits) across the marketing mix.

**Strategic Frameworks for International Expansion.** **Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989)** provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how multinational corporations balance global integration with local responsiveness. Their seminal work *Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution* identifies four strategic orientations that remain foundational in international business research:

- **Global Strategy:** High global integration, low local responsiveness—emphasizing standardized products and centralized decision-making
- **Multi-domestic Strategy:** High local responsiveness, low global integration—operating as independent subsidiaries tailored to specific markets
- **International Strategy:** Low pressure for both integration and adaptation—exporting domestic business models with minimal modification

• **Transnational Strategy:** High global integration AND high local responsiveness—balancing efficiency with flexibility through networked organizations.

Research indicates that transnational strategies are increasingly prevalent among modern multinationals seeking competitive advantage in diverse markets. This approach requires sophisticated organizational capabilities, including cross-border knowledge sharing, decentralized decision-making, and simultaneous attention to global efficiency and local relevance. Bartlett and Ghoshal's framework is particularly relevant for analyzing emerging market multinationals like BYD, which must rapidly establish global presence while adapting to diverse institutional environments.

**Contextual Factors Influencing Strategy Selection.** The effectiveness of standardization versus adaptation is highly context-dependent. **Figure 1** illustrates the primary drivers of each strategic orientation across the marketing mix. Standardization is motivated by global efficiency imperatives: cost-effectiveness, economies of scale, simplified management, and unified brand image. Conversely, adaptation is driven by local market pressures: government regulations, product standards, cultural differences, customer habits, and political considerations.

**Product Characteristics:** Industrial products with functional benefits often succeed with standardization, while consumer products fulfilling emotional or symbolic needs typically require adaptation.

**Market Development Level:** Standardization may prove more effective in high-income countries with developed infrastructures, whereas emerging markets often necessitate adaptation due to varying consumer preferences and regulatory environments.

**Institutional Factors:** Government regulations, product standards, and tax incentives significantly influence strategic choices. For example, Eze et al. (2024) note that legal constraints and political considerations often force adaptation in distribution and pricing strategies.

**Research Gap and Contribution.** While extensive literature examines standardization-adaptation dynamics, significant gaps remain. Most studies focus on Western multinational corporations from developed economies, with limited attention to emerging market firms expanding globally. Furthermore, the electric vehicle industry represents an underexplored context despite its rapid growth and strategic importance. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing BYD—a Chinese multinational—as it navigates international markets, contributing empirical insights to the theoretical discourse on global marketing strategies in the EV sector. Specifically, this research applies Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) strategic typology and Eze et al.'s (2024) systematic findings to examine how an emerging market multinational balances standardization and adaptation across diverse geographical contexts.

**Conceptual review**

**International marketing** is the process of **promoting and selling a company’s products or services in more than one country**. It is different from domestic marketing because companies must **adapt to different cultures, languages, laws, and customer preferences**. **Why Companies Go Global?** Companies expand internationally for several reasons:

1. **Market Growth:**
  - Selling in new countries increases the number of customers.
2. **Revenue and Profit Increase:**
  - More markets can bring higher sales and profits.
3. **Economies of Scale:**
  - Producing more for multiple countries can reduce costs per unit.
4. **Diversification and Risk Reduction:**
  - Operating in different countries protects the company if one market faces problems (e.g., economic slowdown).
5. **Competitive Advantage:**
  - Expanding globally can strengthen brand reputation and prevent competitors from dominating new markets.

**Challenges of Standardization vs Adaptation.**

When companies go global, they face a **key marketing dilemma**:

Table 1

Standardization versus adaptation of marketing mix in international markets: A systematic literature review. May 2024

<b>A. Standardization (keeping things the same everywhere)</b>	<b>B. Adaptation (changing marketing for each local market)</b>
<b>Advantages:</b>	<b>Advantages:</b>
Saves costs (same marketing materials, same product design)	Products and promotions fit local preferences
Maintains a strong global brand image	Higher customer satisfaction and loyalty
<b>Disadvantages:</b>	<b>Disadvantages:</b>
May not meet local customer needs	More expensive (different campaigns, product adjustments)
Cultural differences can reduce	Harder to maintain a consistent

effectiveness

global brand

Source: [World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews](#) 22(2)

ADAPTATION	Reasons pulling towards Adaptation	Product	Placement	Promotion	Price	Reasons pulling towards standardization	STANDARDIZATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market development</li> <li>• Economic differences</li> <li>• Culture differences in consumer perception</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Sociological differences</li> <li>• Legal and Political aspects</li> <li>• Level of consumer similarity</li> <li>• Marketing infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product variety, design, features</li> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Brand Name</li> <li>• Packaging</li> <li>• Size and colors varieties</li> <li>• Performance</li> <li>• Pre-sales service</li> <li>• Delivery</li> <li>• After sales service and warranties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribution channels, distributor value, place of shops, logistics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Sales</li> <li>• Personal selling</li> <li>• Direct Marketing</li> <li>• Public Relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Price levels, list price, price changes</li> <li>• Discount allowances, payment, period, credit items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic of scale in production, research &amp; development, and promotion</li> <li>• Global uniformity and image</li> <li>• Consistency with the mobile consumer</li> <li>• Easier planning and control</li> <li>• Stock costs reduction</li> <li>• Synergetic and transferable experience</li> </ul>	

Figure 1 : Marketing mix toward standardization and adaptation

Source: International journal of business and marketing(IJBMKT), Sao Paulo, v.6, n.1, 2021, 77-99

The figure show the **trade-off between adaptation and standardization in international marketing**. Adaptation is driven by differences across markets—such as culture, economy, competition, technology, and legal systems—requiring changes in product design, distribution, promotion, and pricing to fit local needs. Standardization, on the other hand, is motivated by efficiency and consistency: economies of scale, a unified global brand image, easier planning, and reduced costs. In practice, firms often balance both approaches, adapting certain elements of the marketing mix while standardizing others to achieve global efficiency without losing local relevance.

	Product	Placement	Promotion	Price
ADAPTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government regulation</li> <li>• Product Standards</li> <li>• Cultural Differences</li> <li>• User's habits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of the market</li> <li>• Customer characteristics</li> <li>• Nature of the product</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Low legislation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer satisfaction</li> <li>• Cultural differences</li> <li>• Environmental and other factors as political and legal constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profits and sales volume can increase due to different markets</li> <li>• Lack of control due to market differentiated pricing</li> <li>• Bad image of multinational firms</li> </ul>
STANDARDIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost-effective</li> <li>• Highly product image</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve efficiency and save costs</li> <li>• Increase firms' image as whole</li> <li>• Increase customer's trust, loyalty</li> <li>• Trend of globalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-risk (fixed return is guaranteed)</li> <li>• Good image of multinational firms</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Cause for standardization and adaptation in company's Marketing Mix

Source: International journal of business and marketing(IJBMKT), Sao Paulo, v.6, n.1, 2021, 77-99

The figure outlines the causes that push companies toward adaptation or standardization in their marketing mix across product, placement, promotion, and price. Adaptation is driven by local factors such as government regulations, product standards, cultural differences, customer habits, market nature, and political or legal constraints. These pressures require firms to adjust product features, distribution channels, promotional methods, and pricing strategies to fit specific markets. Standardization, in contrast, is motivated by global efficiency and brand consistency. Causes include cost-effectiveness, economies of scale, simplified legislation, stronger brand image, increased customer trust, and reduced risk through fixed returns. Together, the chart shows that companies must weigh these causes carefully, often blending both approaches to balance local responsiveness with global efficiency.

**BYD Case Study**

**Europe (Norway, Germany)**



Figure 3: The BYD Dolphin EV hatchback (Global version) as displayed in Europe. This standardized model is sold in many markets with only minor local tweaks. Source: Understanding Glocalization: Global Reach, Local Adaptation

BYD's entry into Europe has been dramatic. In 2025 BYD's registrations across the EU+EFTA+UK jumped to **187,657 vehicles**, a 268.6% increase over 2024. This made BYD one of the fastest-growing brands in Europe, overtaking Tesla in pure EV sales for the first time.<sup>28</sup> The success is especially pronounced in EV-friendly countries. In Norway (the world's most EV-dominant market at ~96% of new car sales), Chinese brands (led by BYD) captured 13.7% of sales in 2025 – up from 10.4% – as BYD more than doubled its sales there. In Germany (Europe's largest auto market), BYD saw a **1,018.7%** year-on-year jump in January 2026 (to 2,629 registrations).<sup>29</sup>

These results suggest that BYD's standardized product lineup has strong appeal in advanced EV markets. Models like the Dolphin, Seal, and Atto 3 (see figure) are largely the same design globally. European consumers' high demand for EVs and positive reception of Chinese tech (e.g. good range, features) meant BYD could largely use its global platform without drastic redesign. (Minor adaptation did occur – for example, BYD offers plug-in hybrid versions in Europe to benefit from transitional tax rules – but these are still under the same model names.) Thus BYD leveraged **scale and global brand consistency** in Europe.<sup>30</sup> The rapid growth in Europe aligns with BYD's global surge (it sold 2.26 million BEVs worldwide in 2025, surpassing Tesla).<sup>31</sup> In sum, in Norway and Germany BYD mostly employed a standardization approach with great success, relying on global EV offerings to meet booming demand.

<sup>28</sup> <https://cnevpost.com/2026/01/27/byd-european-registrations-surge-in-2025-tesla-slips/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://autovista24.autovistagroup.com/news/byd-sees-surging-new-car-sales-in-a-declining-german-market/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://openstax.org/books/principles-marketing/pages/8-1-strategic-marketing-standardization-versus-adaptation>

<sup>31</sup> <https://cnevpost.com/2026/01/27/byd-european-registrations-surge-in-2025-tesla-slips/>

## Southeast Asia (Thailand, Indonesia)



Figure 4: The BYD Atto 3 electric crossover (pictured in Indonesia). BYD sells this model in many markets as a global EV platform, while pricing and distribution are adapted locally.

Source: Japanese automakers try to regain ground lost to Chinese car firms in Thailand with low-priced HVs - Asia News NetworkAsia News Network

BYD's strategy in Southeast Asia blends global products with strong local adaptation. Both Thailand and Indonesia are fast-growing EV markets, but with different characteristics. In Indonesia (a large, price-sensitive market with generous EV incentives), Chinese car sales surged 153% in Q1 2025, even as overall vehicle sales declined.<sup>32</sup> BYD led this boom: having only launched in July 2024, BYD became Indonesia's top-selling EV brand, moving 5,718 units in Q1 2025. Its new Denza 9 electric minivan (nicknamed "Alphard killer") sold 2,524 units in a few months, leveraging a tax break (2% vs. 40% for hybrids). In Thailand (where Japanese brands had long dominated), the government's EV push has eroded legacy share. By mid-2025 Chinese manufacturers held over 16% of Thai sales, with BYD alone at 7.8%.<sup>33</sup>

Crucially, BYD adapted to these markets. It introduced model variants and pricing to fit local needs. For example, in Thailand BYD aggressively cut prices – the compact Dolphin EV was discounted ~30% from launch price in a major promotion. This undercut competitors and rapidly grew sales (helping BYD reach 7.8% share). BYD is also building factories in both countries (Thailand and Indonesia) to localize production. These actions go beyond simple standardization: they show BYD tailoring its marketing mix (price, distribution, product range) to local conditions. At the same time, BYD's core EV models remain globally consistent. The Atto 3 pictured above, for instance, is the same design sold in Europe, Thailand and Indonesia. In summary, BYD's Southeast

<sup>32</sup> <https://jakartaglobe.id/business/chinese-car-sales-soar-153-in-indonesia-as-japanese-brands-lose-ground>

<sup>33</sup> <https://asianews.network/japanese-automakers-try-to-regain-ground-lost-to-chinese-car-firms-in-thailand-with-low-priced-hvs/>

Asia approach exemplifies glocalization: it deploys global EV platforms (efficiency and consistent tech) while customizing price, partnerships, and model mix to each market's context.<sup>34</sup>

### Central Asia (Uzbekistan)

In Uzbekistan, BYD pursued deep localization. In September 2023 BYD formed a joint venture (“BYD Uzbekistan Factory”) with the Uzbek government. Production began in June 2024 in Jizzakh region, initially targeting 50,000 annual units. The ramp-up has been exceptionally fast: BYD introduced a full production cycle within one year. For example, sales of the new Yuan Up EV in Uzbekistan jumped from **368** units in 2024 to **6,800** in 2025, with **25,000 planned** for 2026.<sup>35</sup> The factory output quintupled to **20,200** vehicles in 2025. BYD and its partners now plan to expand capacity to 40,000 in 2026 and **200,000** by 2030, backed by US\$200 million investment and 10,000 new jobs.

BYD's Uzbekistan case illustrates a highly adaptive strategy: rather than simply exporting cars from China, BYD is localizing production, models, and processes. The company credits Chinese technical assistance and “process standardization” for the rapid line set-up, yet the product offering is tailored for local demand (including hybrid options to fit a market in transition). In effect, BYD imported its technology (battery and EV expertise) but is **manufacturing and marketing through a local lens**<sup>36</sup>. This hybrid setup (global tech + local production) embodies glocalization: BYD's global knowledge is adapted into the Uzbek context.

### Analysis

Overall, BYD's international marketing shows that **neither pure standardization nor pure adaptation works alone**; rather, a mixed (glocal) strategy has prevailed. In mature EV markets (Europe, Norway, Germany), standardized global models and branding drove BYD's success. There the drivers aligned with standardization theory: high EV demand and similar customer expectations let BYD leverage scale.<sup>37</sup> In these contexts, only minor local adaptation was needed (e.g. compliance with European specs, right-hand drive in Europe vs. left-hand in Indonesia). In contrast, in emerging or transitional markets (Thailand, Indonesia, Uzbekistan), BYD heavily adapted on pricing, product lineup, and manufacturing. BYD's 30% price cuts in Thailand and special model launches in Indonesia reflect a local-focused approach.<sup>38</sup> Its joint venture in Uzbekistan shows structural adaptation beyond the marketing mix.

Why did BYD adopt this dual approach? **Costs and demand** explain much. In cost-sensitive Asia, standard global pricing was too high, so BYD lowered prices and built local plants to reduce costs. In high-income Europe, consumers willingly pay for

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glocalization.asp>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/byd-uzbekistan-plans-10-new-ev-models-by-2030/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/byd-uzbekistan-plans-10-new-ev-models-by-2030/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://openstax.org/books/principles-marketing/pages/8-1-strategic-marketing-standardization-versus-adaptation>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glocalization.asp>

advanced EVs, so BYD emphasized product quality and global brand. **Institutional factors** also matter: EV incentives, tax regimes, and infrastructure vary widely, forcing BYD to tailor its strategy market by market. Finally, the learning curve of a newcomer may encourage adaptation; BYD lacked established brand loyalty abroad, so it used aggressive tactics (discounts, new models) to gain share.

These observations confirm academic insights that a hybrid approach tends to win out. BYD's story supports the glocalization literature: the firm standardized its core EV technology and models globally, but layered on local customization where needed. As an example, BYD's Dolphin and Atto 3 (pictured) are essentially the same design from China, yet BYD varied their pricing and promotion regionally.<sup>39</sup> In sum, standardization gave BYD scale and consistency, while adaptation addressed local market realities.

### Conclusion

This case study of BYD demonstrates that **global marketing strategy is context-dependent**. In some markets BYD could act like a traditional global brand (standardization), while in others it behaved like a local player (adaptation). The evidence indicates that BYD's blend of the two – a glocal strategy – was most effective. Literature predicts such hybridity, and BYD's success exemplifies it: for instance, its overseas vehicle sales topped 1 million in 2025, driven by combining global EV platforms with local adjustments.

In practice, this means firms should design **global platforms but allow local flexibility**. BYD's approach yielded record growth – e.g. its global EV deliveries (BEVs+PHEVs) reached 4.6 million in 2025, making it the top EV seller worldwide. Future research could track how BYD and peers evolve their glocal strategies, but the present analysis suggests: neither copy-paste nor complete adaptation alone is enough; smart companies do both.

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