

International Market Expansion for High-Tech B2B Platforms

Master thesis

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Sweden has produced globally successful B2C platform companies such as Spotify and Klarna thanks to strong digital infrastructure and scalable platform models. However, high-tech Swedish B2B platforms face more complex internationalization challenges due to longer sales cycles, ecosystem dependencies, and industry regulations. This thesis aims to develop a global market expansion strategy for such companies. Using an abductive approach, it conducts a qualitative case study of the case company's platform within the Swedish precast industry. By combining theoretical frameworks and empirical insights, the study develops a structured framework for evaluating foreign markets. The findings show that successful expansion requires alignment between product value, ecosystem compatibility, and relational networks.

Introduction and Background

During the past two decades, digital platform companies have transformed global markets. Firms such as Amazon, Google, and Airbnb have demonstrated how platforms can create value by connecting multiple user groups through digital infrastructure (Parker et al., 2016). These companies often benefit from strong network effects, low marginal costs, and highly scalable business models, allowing them to expand rapidly across international markets.

While the platform model initially gained prominence in Business-to-Consumer (B2C) industries, it has increasingly expanded into Business-to-Business (B2B) sectors. Unlike consumer platforms, B2B

platforms operate in complex industrial environments where relationships, long sales cycles, and technical integration are crucial (Osarenkhoe et al., 2022). As a result, the internationalization of B2B platforms poses different challenges than that of consumer-oriented platforms.

Sweden has emerged as a remarkable environment for digital innovation despite its relatively small domestic market. Companies such as Spotify, Klarna, Skype, and Mojang have demonstrated how Swedish firms can achieve global success through scalable digital platforms. This success can partly be explained by Sweden's strong social infrastructure, high digital maturity, and supportive innovation ecosystem (World Economic Forum, 2020).

However, while Swedish B2C platforms have gained global attention, a new generation of high-tech B2B platform companies is now seeking international growth opportunities. These firms operate in industries where digital platforms must integrate with existing workflows, technical standards, and professional networks.

This raises an important question: How can high-tech Swedish B2B platforms successfully expand into international markets?

Purpose & Methodology

The purpose of the thesis was the following:

To identify and propose a global market expansion strategy for high-tech, platform-based Swedish companies operating in B2B industries. [OBJ]

To address this purpose, the research followed a qualitative case-study approach. The selected case company and its digital platform support the design, production, and coordination of precast concrete construction projects.

The study applied an abductive research approach, meaning that the research moved iteratively between theory and empirical observations. Data were collected through interviews with industry stakeholders, analysis of company documentation, and market data regarding construction industries and international markets. [OBJ]

Through this approach, the study aimed to understand how the platform creates value within the Swedish precast ecosystem and how these insights can guide international expansion.

Theory

Several theoretical frameworks were used to analyze the company's value creation and internationalization potential.

First, Kotler's Three Levels of Product were applied to understand the product offering and the value delivered to customers (Kotler et al., 2016). This model distinguishes between the core product, the actual product, and the augmented product.

Second, the Grönroos Service Quality Model was used to analyze how customers perceive the platform's value and service experience (Grönroos, 2015).

Third, Moore's Business Ecosystem Model was applied to map the network of actors involved in the precast industry (Moore, 1996). This model highlights that companies operate within complex ecosystems consisting of suppliers, partners, customers, and institutions.

Fourth, the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Model was used to analyze the relationships between actors in the ecosystem and how these relationships influence business interactions (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995).

Finally, two frameworks were used to examine international expansion: The Uppsala Internationalization Model, which explains how companies gradually expand into foreign markets as they gain experience (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977).

Bonoma and Shapiro's Nested Approach, which provides a structured framework for market segmentation and selection in industrial markets (Bonoma & Shapiro, 1984).

Together, these frameworks enabled a systematic analysis of both the company's domestic ecosystem and its international growth potential.

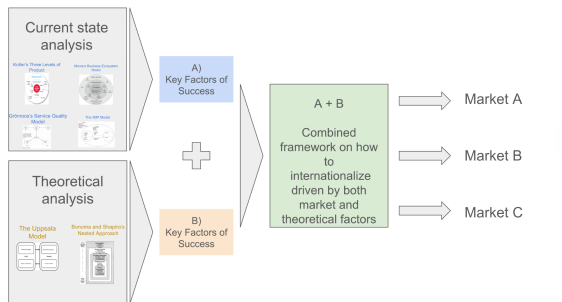


Figure 1: Illustration of how empirical insights from the current state analysis and theoretical perspectives on internationalization are combined into a structured framework for identifying and proposing new international markets.

The Study

Case company

The case company examined in this study is a Swedish software company specializing in digital solutions for the construction industry. One of its key products is a Building Information Modeling (BIM) platform designed for the precast concrete industry (Case company, n.d.). [OBJ]

The software integrates multiple stages of the precast value chain, including structural design, production planning, logistics, and on-site assembly. By connecting these processes within a single digital environment, the platform enables more efficient collaboration between design consultants, factories, and construction teams. (Case Company, n.d.) [OBJ]

Currently, the system is widely used in the Nordic precast industry and serves as the dominant digital platform in the Swedish market.

Kotler's Three Levels of Product

The core value of the software platform lies in improving efficiency within the precast construction process. At the core product level, the platform helps companies streamline production workflows, reduce errors, and increase productivity in complex construction projects.

At the actual product level, the software platform provides specialized software modules such as Design and Production. These modules enable engineers to generate detailed technical drawings, manage production planning, and simulate construction processes through 3D models.

At the augmented product level, the case company offers additional services, including technical support, training programs, and continuous software updates. These services enhance the overall user experience and strengthen long-term customer relationships.

Ecosystem of the Swedish Precast Industry

The Swedish precast industry operates within a complex ecosystem involving multiple stakeholders.

The construction process typically begins with a developer, who initiates and finances a building project. A main contractor is then responsible for coordinating the construction process, including the procurement of prefabricated structural frames.

The precast contractor, usually a precast factory, delivers the structural frame and may also handle design, manufacturing, transport, and assembly. In addition, design consultants produce structural

calculations and manufacturing drawings, while transport companies and assembly teams ensure that the elements are delivered and installed on site.

This network of actors forms a highly interconnected ecosystem in which collaboration and coordination are essential for successful project delivery.

Digital platforms, such as the case company's, play an important role in this ecosystem by enabling information exchange and workflow integration across organizational boundaries.

Analysis

The empirical findings show that the success of a B2B platform, such as the case company's, depends on several interconnected factors.

First, the product offering must provide clear value to customers by improving efficiency and reducing operational risks. Automation of repetitive tasks and accurate digital modeling were identified as key benefits of the platform.

Second, ecosystem compatibility is essential. Since the platform connects multiple actors in the construction process, it must integrate seamlessly with existing workflows and technical standards.

Third, relationship structures play a crucial role in B2B markets. Long-term collaboration between factories, consultants, and contractors creates trust and enables the adoption of digital solutions.

Based on these insights, the study identified several key factors of success that must be present in potential international markets, including digital

maturity, the presence of precast factories and design consultants, stable economic conditions, and established construction ecosystems.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that international expansion for B2B platform companies requires a strong alignment between three key dimensions:

1. Product offering - the platform must provide clear operational benefits for users.
2. Ecosystem compatibility - the market must contain the necessary actors and workflows for the platform to function effectively.
3. Relationship structures - successful adoption depends on trust and collaboration among stakeholders.

By combining theoretical insights with empirical findings, the study developed a structured framework for evaluating potential expansion markets.

Applying this framework enables high-tech B2B platform companies to systematically identify markets that offer the right conditions for successful adoption and long-term growth. Regarding the case company and its product, we have identified two optimal markets for the company's next steps in internationalization: Country A and Country B. Both of these markets align well with the case company's requirements and offer favorable conditions for successful adoption and long-term growth. We recommend that the case company consider entering these markets next.

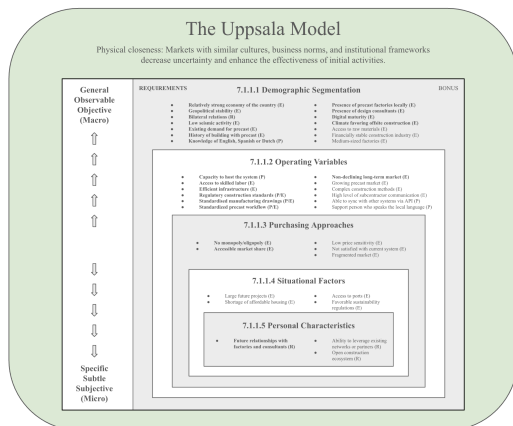


Figure 2: Complete Framework to identify and propose market expansion.

Reflection

The study highlights how international expansion for B2B platforms differs significantly from traditional software expansion strategies. Unlike consumer platforms, B2B solutions must integrate deeply into existing industrial ecosystems and workflows.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates the importance of understanding the domestic market ecosystem before attempting international expansion. By identifying the key factors that enable success in the home market, companies can better evaluate whether similar conditions exist abroad.

For the company, the study provides guidance on which markets to target for market expansion. For industry practitioners, the study provides practical guidance for Swedish high-tech platform companies seeking global growth. For academia, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of internationalization in ecosystem-dependent industries.

Future research could focus on determining the best pricing strategies for B2B software in international markets, specifically examining whether prices

should be standardized or adapted to local economic conditions. Additionally, it could explore effective market-entry strategies for high-tech platforms and investigate how artificial intelligence might transform workflows, competition, and software requirements in the construction industry.

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