



University of Wales
Trinity Saint David
LONDON

Student Name: Himanshi Prajapati

Student ID: 2426638

Module Name: Marketing Management

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Lecturer's Name: Dr. Laila Maazouz

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1. Introduction

Strategic marketing represents a business method that enables organisations to discover market opportunities, then choose targets and outline plans to execute initiatives that deliver competitive advantages (Dibb *et al.* 2019). Businesses need to conduct market research simultaneously with target audience segmentation analysis and competitive analysis, as well as product positioning development and promotional strategic planning. The fundamental choice for business leaders in this process involves deciding between launching first as pioneers or entering the market after other competitors (Primario, Rippa, and Secundo, 2024). A pioneer company benefits from entering the market first to introduce new products or technology since this creates brand prominence while developing customer faith and defining industry benchmarks (Chavez and Chen, 2022). The electric vehicle (EV) market received its revolutionary breakthrough from Tesla as the company led the way prior to traditional automotive manufacturing companies embracing EVs.

Pioneering comes with risks, which include substantial development expenses, unpredictable customer reception, and competitor development of upgraded innovations (Balaji, 2024). Conversely, follower organisations launch their products in markets which already have pioneer companies serving because they utilise previous mistakes to develop superior versions of existing products (Pantano *et al.* 2022). After Apple launched its smartphones, Samsung joined that segment and managed to acquire market share through its Galaxy smartphone series (Park and Kim, 2021). Followers who enter the market later encounter lower research expenses along with established markets yet encounter difficulties making their products stand out within intense competition. This report will discuss the benefits and obstacles that pioneer and follower entities encounter while utilising product life cycle approaches to build ongoing expansion with competitive dominance.

2. Advantages of Being a Pioneer and Follower Company

2.1 Advantages and Risks of Being a Pioneer Company

- ***Advantages of Being a Pioneer***

The initial company which presents fresh products and services or technological advancements at market entry qualifies as a pioneer company (Stacchezzini *et al.* 2023). A first mover in the

market receives various advantages that include gaining market control, defining industry norms, and creating customer loyalty ahead of competition entry.

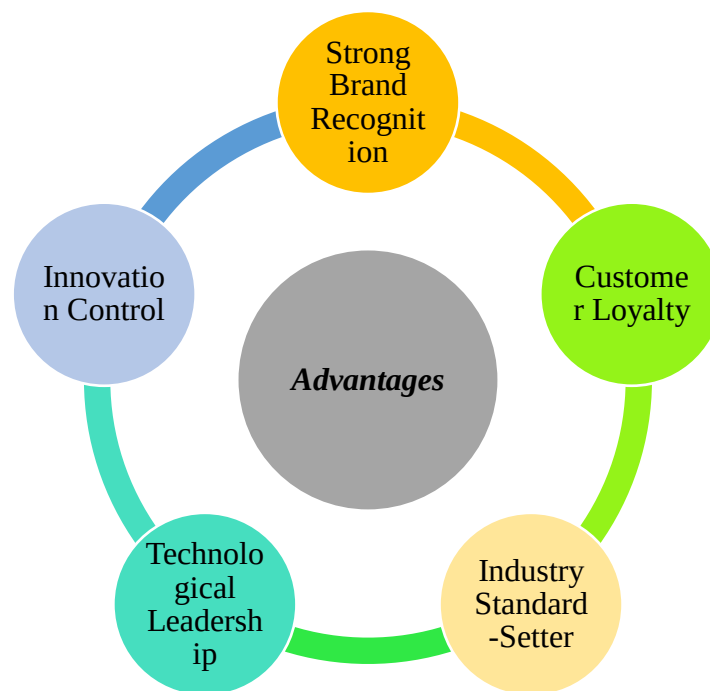


Figure: Advantages of Being a Pioneer Company

(Source: Self-made)

According to Schmid-Petri and Elschner (2024) when a company is the first to enter a market, it has the opportunity to develop a robust brand image and achieve the early trust of consumers. As pioneer companies represent innovation leadership, they achieve extended consumer loyalty. For example, Tesla entered the market in 2003 to revolutionise the electric vehicle sector by developing EVs (Thomas and Maine, 2019). Also, Safaricom's M-Pesa impacted the mobile money transactions in Kenya and became the first of its kind in Africa (Musembi, 2024). It aimed at the unbanked population; users could send and receive money through their mobile phones.

Pioneers have the advantage of setting industry standards as well as capturing a potential market share, stated by Stacchezzini *et al.* (2023). With this advantage, they can direct regulatory, pricing, and customer expectation standards. For instance, Apple (established in 1976) produced its iPhone model in 2007, which reshaped the entire smartphone market (Glimstedt, 2020). The innovative touchscreen design, as well as the complete app

infrastructure, propelled the company to become a market leader that shaped future smartphone design capabilities.

According to Schmid-Petri and Elschner (2024) R&D investments by pioneering companies create a position of technological superiority. Continuous innovation and product improvement through their efforts allow them to remain ahead of their industry rivals. For example, Netflix (Founded in 1997) began its streaming services in 2007 prior to other streaming platforms in the market (Jenner, Jenner and Aboujieb, 2018).

- ***Risks of Being a Pioneer***

Pioneers face the challenge of spending generously on R&D together with innovation and market education, which can be risky and costly, argued by Arman *et al.* (2022). The poor market reception of an investment prevents its ability to reach projected financial outcomes. Xerox, a company, established photocopying technology in 1906, yet it neglected personal computing advancements, which let Apple and Microsoft amass success in the industry. Furthermore, Despite being a pioneer in the mobile payment technologies, M-Pesa initial acceptance was slow because of low literacy in the use of the internet and regulatory pressure from the banks.

The followers of initial innovators tend to develop better versions of pioneer products while charging less money (Palmié *et al.* 2024). For instance, Friendster (founded in 2002) introduced the concept of social networking first, yet Facebook (founded in 2004) enhanced it, which caused Friendster to fade out of existence.

2.2 Advantages and Risks of Being a Follower Company

- ***Advantages of Being a Pioneer***

A follower company can preserve R&D resources by using existing technologies instead of creating new ones (Tuncer Manzakoğlu, 2022). Through this dynamic, they dedicate their efforts to product perfecting and cost reduction. For example, Safaricom's M-Pesa success was followed by the entry of Airtel Africa into the mobile money and telecom sector (Carney, 2024). It spread to other African countries by acting as a company that provided lower tariffs, mobile networks, and e-vouchers.

Through the analysis of pioneering mistakes, followers create superior products which prevent them from repeating those problems. They enter the market with improved marketing strategies and improved technology. For example, Disney+ entered the streaming industry in 2019 but rose rapidly to challenge Netflix through its extensive library that featured content from Marvel to Pixar and Star Wars to its customers (Brookey, Phillips and Pollard, 2023).

Followers benefitted from an already established demand, which decreased uncertainty, according to Tuncer Manzanoğlu (2022). Followers adopt a differentiation strategy instead of market creation because pioneers have already educated customers about the new product category. For instance, after Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure was launched (2010) and became a powerful competitor by developing advanced security features and connecting its cloud services to Microsoft products.

- ***Disadvantages of Being a Follower Company***

Although following can be beneficial, companies must compete with the well-established pioneers, distinct themselves, and avoid being seen as mere limitations, argued by Sharma and Sharma (2021). Companies face difficulties when entering markets where existing competition controls most available opportunities. Pioneers establish robust brand recognition as well as consumer loyalty, which makes it harder for followers in order to gain market share (Yatna and Yulianah, 2024). For example, having joined the mobile money market after Safaricom's M-Pesa, Airtel had to set lower transaction charges to increase the number of users, thus lowering its profit margin.

According to Posen *et al.* (2023) a follower needs to provide special value which proves their position differs from simple imitation. Following companies become endangered because they fail to create unique features. For instance, October 2009 brought Bing to the market, but Google Search remained superior because Bing lacked compelling differentiating features. Follower businesses have to sacrifice their control of early market entry and premium prices because they eventually have to fight on price points instead of innovation. For example, Lyft (founded in 2012) started its ride-sharing service after Uber, yet it failed to gain control of Uber's marketplace.

Therefore, from the discussion, it can be summarized that while pioneers face a significant cost, competition from followers, and uncertainty, followers struggle to gain strong brand recognition and market entry barriers. Success in either role depends on the strategic execution.

3. Product life cycle strategies for pioneer and follower companies

Product Life Cycle (PLC) contains four developmental stages, which start with Introduction, followed by Growth, Maturity, and Decline (Kumari *et al.* 2014). Strategy is crucial for each business as it helps in making strategic decisions and guiding innovative strategies and marketing. Understanding PLC allow both pioneer and follower companies to sustain market relevance, maximise profit, and adapt to competition effectively (Kumari *et al.* 2014). The strategies of pioneer and follower organisations serve different functions in order to support growth and combat market competition. In their approach, pioneers target market growth through innovation, yet followers choose to deliver improvements to their products at competitive prices.

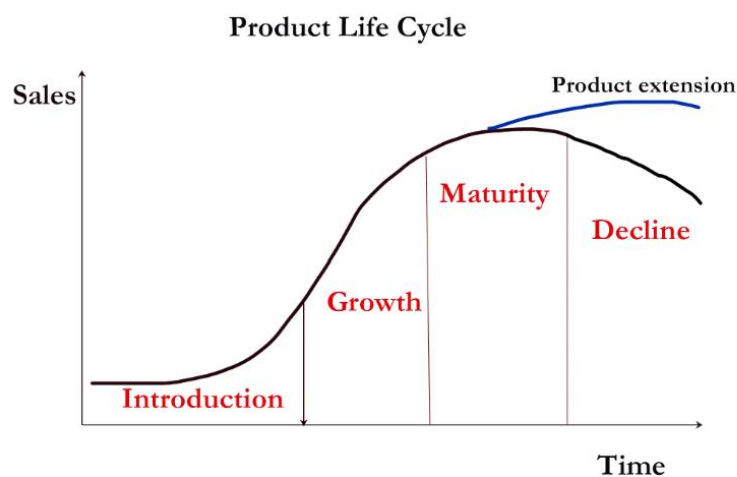


Figure: Product Life Cycle

(Source: Pettinger, 2019)

Introduction Stage:

Pioneers devote their focus to raising consumer knowledge through research and development as well as consumer education (Kholidun and Febriansyah, 2024). Uncertain demand drives them to execute intense promotional activities alongside acquiring the first adopters of their products. For instance, Tesla introduced electric vehicles to the market at its founding in 2003 while developing the battery technology that underpins its EVs and building the Supercharger network (Thomas and Maine, 2019). Furthermore, M-Pesa has also grown its service delivery through affiliate links with the banks and other retail outlets.

The follower companies access markets at a later stage after pioneering companies adopt differentiation strategy and focus on reducing costs. For instance, Airtel Africa has entered the mobile money after M-Pesa and leveraging the telecom presence. Also, Ola is an Indian firm, which has launched as the local alternative to Uber in India in 2010.

Growth Stage:

Business pioneers shift their attention to enhancing market penetration after customer demand starts to rise (Kumari *et al.* 2014). For instance, the iPhone sales expansion by Apple (1976) included the addition of both their proprietary stores and connections to global carrier networks, which improved user reach. Also, In the growth stage, M-Pesa has faced challenges due to its branding, lack of aspirational appeal and safety concern. Through strategic partnerships, Tesla received government incentives simultaneously with battery manufacturers to strengthen their production force capabilities (Cheong, Song, and Hu, 2016).

To increase production, Tesla entered into a strategic cooperation with battery manufacturers such as Panasonic to increase production efficiency and also work together with governments to secure subsidies for sustainable energies (Chen, 2022). Such incentives as tax credits and subsidies contributed to the reduction of costs of production and fostering of expansion of Gigafactories. Therefore, Tesla secured its supply chain by aligning with clean energy policies, optimised battery technology, and manufacturing, which helped the company to reinforce its competitive advantage in the EV market (Zheng, 2024).

Conversely, market capture strategies for followers include offering price discounts alongside product enhancements as well as intense advertising strategies (Strategy, 2005). For example, after Coca-Cola introduced the market in 1886, Pepsi (1898) established itself as a brand for young people by charging less than Coca-Cola. Samsung applied Apple's smartphone technology by developing larger screens combined with styluses and foldable devices, which generated exclusive market appeal (Anand, 2023). Ola also ventured into auto-rickshaw, bike taxi, and corporate travel markets in this stage. Another company Flipkart in this stage, Expanded categories, introduced cash-on-delivery and deep discounts.

The **Fortress Strategy** is a defensive tactic employed by companies to improve their products, lower production costs, and increase consumer loyalty in order to keep their market leadership. In order to establish robust barriers that keep competitors out of the market, this entails

providing loyalty programs, making changes to the product, and broadening the distribution network. On the other hand, An **Attack Strategy** is proactive, emphasizing aggressive pricing, aggressive marketing, and product innovation to outmaneuver competitors and quickly grow market share. The goal of both tactics is market dominance, but one actively opposes rivals while the other defends. **For Example**, by developing a devoted client base through its integrated ecosystem, improving its products (such as Macs and iPhones), and fortifying its global distribution network, Apple uses a **Fortress Strategy** that makes it challenging for rivals to enter the market. In order to increase its market share and upend established industries, Amazon, on the other hand, employs an **Attack Strategy** by setting aggressive prices for its goods, developing cutting-edge services like Amazon Web Services (AWS), and making significant investments in marketing campaigns. Amazon actively works to outmanoeuvre rivals and expand its footprint across multiple industries, whereas Apple vigorously maintains its market dominance.

Maturity Stage:

The market saturation forces leading companies to focus their strategies on keeping existing customers loyal while developing new product segments (Purbasari, Sari and Muttaqin, 2020). For example, Apple sustains iPhone customer interest by providing yearly product updates as well as linking different devices within a single ecosystem (including Mac, iPad, and AirPods products). By scaling operations, Amazon developed automated warehouses and AI recommender systems, which helped the company stay competitive through low costs. However, Tata Motors, despite the attempts to market the car, sales were still very low, and did not achieve the necessary traction (Nayak and Sahay, 2024). Nigerian e-commerce firm Jumia recently introduced JumiaPay and engage local sellers to increase market place activities.

During the maturity phase, followers should grow their business by retaining customers and branching into new markets alongside international development (Kumari *et al.* 2014). An example in this context is Lyft, which sought to achieve an advantage in the ride-sharing market by offering superior incentives for drivers as well as establishing valuable partnerships after Uber's (Started 2009) entry. Pepsi expanded its product range to include nutritious drinks in addition to Frito-Lay snacks to maintain relevance during the soda market decline (Wang, 2021). Ola has entered into new business segments (Ola Electric) and subscription services.

Flipkart has also launched Flipkart Plus (loyalty program) in this stage, an AI-driven recommendations.

Decline Stage:

Some pioneers decide to eliminate old products during the reinvention phases. During this stage, pioneers either phase out relevant or reposition products in order to stay competitive. Apple terminated production of iPods because it wanted to focus on iPhones as its main product line while advancing technology systems (Chen, Liu and Gong, 2021).

The alignment of follower companies to stay able competitors requires them to remove older products from the market swiftly (Petrillo and De Felice, 2021). However, This is the reinvention stage for Ola where it is now moving to the manufacturing of electric vehicles and going international. Similarly, Flipkart has Acquired by Walmart (2018), go ahead and shift on the digital payment.

Enterprises that lead their markets achieve success by investing in research development together with innovation systems, market growth, and ecosystem development. Any firm can achieve market leadership by implementing appropriate Product Life Cycle strategies, whether they function as pioneers or followers. Pioneers like Tesla, Apple, and Amazon focus on innovation, ecosystem-building, and long-term market expansion (Kreutzer *et al.* 2024). There are three keys to success for follower companies Samsung, Pepsi, and Lyft, which include providing affordable prices while bringing improvements to their products and serving growing customer niches.

4. Conclusion

The study has summarised that a competitive market depends on the strategic marketing process to determine which companies will succeed. The choice to lead as a pioneer or follow others represents one of the key business decisions. These different market strategies come with distinctive circumstances which must overcome specific barriers in order to succeed, depending on market dynamics, innovation capabilities, and customer taste. Pioneer companies like Netflix, Tesla, and Apple have benefitted from brand recognition, early market entry, and the ability to set industry standards. Furthermore, the study has also included the example of different companies in developing contraries, such as Tata Motors from India, M-Pesa from Kenya, etc. However, these ventures must also deal with substantial costs, possible technical

breakdowns, and the necessity of educating customers about new offerings. Follower organisations, which comprise Samsung Disney+ and Microsoft Azure, utilise the foundational efforts created by pioneering companies.

Also, it has included Airtel Africa, Ola, Flipkart, etc., companies. Such companies use existing conceptual products to create new variations that lead to lower development costs and help them enter markets because they have detailed customer demand information. The study has summarised the advantages and disadvantages of both types of companies with significant examples. Every pioneering company, alongside their following competitors, employ product life cycle approaches to stay competitive in their markets. The decision to be pioneering or follow is determined by business resources' attitude toward risk and capacity for keeping a competitive advantage. Businesses which properly link their market entry method to customer requirements and industry developments will obtain enduring business success.

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