



Programme Name: Master of Business Administration

Module Name & Code: Marketing Management (LCBM7024)

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Word Count: 2419

Submission Date: 25/03/2025

Introduction

A company's choice to pioneer or follow is a crucial one in marketing management. This decision influences the profitability, market posture, and sustainability of the business. Product development, marketing, branding, customer interactions, and financial success all rely on the market entry strategy. To choose the optimal choice a company has to look at consumer behaviour, technical capacity, market readiness, and competitiveness (Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle, 2024). The first-mover advantage allows a trailblazing company rule to define industry standards and a market. Major risks, meanwhile, include high beginning costs, unclear market demand, and strategic errors. Reducing risk, however, comes from companies joining the market after the pioneer learns from their mistakes and successes. Based on the market response to the pioneer's offering, they could change prices and products. Followers fight to stand out and create a unique brand identification as they compete with business leaders (Thölke, 2022). A deeper study of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) framework—which arranges product development from introduction to growth, maturity, and decline—is required when one is pioneering instead of following. The PLC framework allows companies to assess, throughout the product life, the strategic effects of market entry decisions. Pioneers and supporters have to change with the times to remain competitive, solve fresh challenges, and grab fresh opportunities as the business develops (Zahra, Nash and Bickford, 2023). The decision to follow or pioneer depends on client demand, technology, and market conditions. This paper explores the advantages of being a pioneer rather than a follower, provides statistically backed case studies, and looks at how successful companies use PLC techniques across growth and maturity to stay ahead.

The Advantages of Being a Pioneer vs. Follower

The Pioneer Strategy

Pioneer companies launch fresh products and services into unclaimed markets that modify both industrial operations and customer purchasing habits. Pioneering the market allows companies to gain controlling market dominance at the beginning of a product lifecycle. The initial companies establish standards of the market that future competitors must adopt. The introduction of new products by pioneer firms allows them to build industry leadership positions along with a noted brand status for enduring competitive superiority (Zahra, Nash and Bickford, 2023). Tesla succeeded massively in the electric vehicle market because it became the first company to introduce luxury electric vehicles. Statistics from Statista show Tesla owned about 65% of the U.S. electric vehicle market during 2023. Between 2013 when Tesla began and 2022 the company sold more than 1.3 million vehicles after starting with 22,000 vehicle sales. Throughout 2019 to 2022 Tesla experienced such substantial market capitalization growth that its value rose from \$58 billion to more than \$700 billion (Thölke, Hultinka and Robbenb, 2023). Tesla gained its dominant market position through its earliest entry into electric vehicles and its focus on battery technology innovation and the construction of worldwide Supercharger stations for vehicles. The proprietary battery technology along with vehicle software developed by Tesla established its position as a leader in the EV market sector. The Model 3 from Tesla became the planetary top-selling electric vehicle in 2021 when it exceeded 500,000 global unit sales (Sierra, Zorio and García-Benau, 2022). The automotive industry began a transformative shift because the company managed to consolidate its market position by becoming a leader up front. The technology corporation Apple represents a leading company which established itself as an early market pioneer. Apple published the iPhone in 2007 and quickly evolved the smartphone industry. The smartphone market conquest by Apple reached 14.9% by 2021 while earning \$365 billion in iPhone revenue during fiscal year 2021. Apple transformed into one of the most valuable entities worldwide by defining industry standards with its iPhone product segment which now holds a market capitalization worth \$2.8 trillion in 2022 (Hart, 2023). The process of pioneering involves

substantial hazards due to being a trailblazer in new ventures. The first investments for development and promotion together with consumer awareness campaigns typically cost a significant amount yet fail to provide market certainty for new products. New product and service pioneers remain uncertain about consumer adoption of their products and competitors' ability to develop or enhance their concepts. The early stages of Amazon Company involved facing major risks as one of its pioneering examples. The establishment of Amazon as an online bookstore in 1994 demanded substantial financial investment to create its website platform alongside its delivery system and acquire its first users. Amazon increased its net sales from \$510,000 in 1995 to reach more than \$469 billion in 2021 (Hart, 2023). The groundbreaking e-commerce market required Amazon to develop creative fulfilment strategies and customer service solutions which secured its position as the industry leader in online retail.

The Follower Strategy

A company selects the follower strategy when it enters the market behind another firm's introduction of a new product or service. Follower companies need not invest primary resources into research and development or market education as pioneers do. Such companies study the successes and shortfalls of pioneers to create product or service versions that satisfy consumer requirements better. With this method, followers can minimise three main risks which include product malfunctions and unacceptance in the market alongside unknown consumer preferences. The deciding benefit of the following position allows partners to use market information from pioneers which already exist (Doz, Santos and Williamson, 2024). The market pioneers spent their resources to shape consumer knowledge and building product love from their customers before followers entered the market. Followers can launch their products when demand from consumers has already developed due to the efforts of market leaders. By skipping market demand creation phases followers need less capital to bring their refined version of a product to more consumers. Xiaomi demonstrated a perfect application of the follower strategy when it entered the smartphone sector. The smartphone market already had leaders such as Apple and Samsung when Xiaomi decided to enter this sector. Xiaomi created high-quality smartphones which sold at reduced rates when

compared to the market competition (Ansari, Garud and Kumaraswamy, 2023). Through cost-reduction efforts in research and development and marketing, Xiaomi delivered premium smartphone features for prices much lower than what customers would normally pay. The market data from IDC shows Xiaomi reached position three as the planet's leading smartphone manufacturer by control in 2021 occupying 13.1% of global mobile phone sales. The company's commercial achievement resulted from studying product performance patterns of initial companies and implementing market-driven ideas to improve its goods.

Followers capitalise on this benefit by benefiting from pioneer-developed innovations that they obtain without needing to develop new products plus covering associated costs. Followers who introduce their products after successful pioneers do not need to experiment with technology development since proven approaches are already available in the marketplace. Google entered the search engine industry as the follower after Yahoo! and AltaVista yet developed an enhanced algorithm that delivered better results than existing products. Google achieved market dominance by dedicatedly working on user experience and existing technology improvement which enabled it to surpass all competitors and reach more than 92% of the global market share in 2021 (Aldrich and Fiol, 2022). Ones who follow market trends can make product improvements by considering what customers respond favourably to in the pioneer's initial launch. Followers bypass innovation efforts and enhance their products through the resolution of complaints and complete development of features which the pioneer did not fully execute. The speed at which followers can observe markets and alter their strategies creates flexibility in their product development cycle. During its follow-up phase, Netflix replicated the basic model of video rental pioneers in the home entertainment sector (Büyükozkkan and Çifçi, 2021). Netflix developed a digital streaming service based on subscriptions to compete with Blockbuster rental stores by serving the consumer need for inexpensive and convenient media access. After targeting online streaming consumers and using this strategy for rapid growth Netflix became the market leader that surpassed Blockbuster. The follower strategy provides businesses with competitive prices as a major advantage. Followers achieve better pricing outcomes because they understand consumer preferences thus they can

position their prices to attract price-sensitive customers. Through diverse pricing approaches PepsiCo maintains market success in its soft drink business by addressing different customer groups with their product lineup. PepsiCo achieved consistent performance in the global soft drink market through competitive market share using its broad product collection which yielded \$79 billion in revenue during 2021 (Barczak, 2021). The follower strategy presents numerous benefits to companies but also brings difficulties to overcome. It becomes essential for followers to find specific competitive advantages compared to the pioneer because joining an established market requires effective differentiation to gain market presence. Organizations whose main business model includes imitating others and lacking innovation development face difficulties in establishing powerful brand recognition. Followers who adopt a strategic market-focused strategy can succeed and excel above pioneers within particular market segments.

PLC Strategies in the Growth and Maturity Stages

Introduction to the Product Life Cycle

The Product Life Cycle (PLC) delivers an organised method to understand product development from the launch through the termination stages. A product progresses through Introduction and subsequently enters Growth before reaching Maturity and finally Decline stages as part of the PLC. Strategies employed by companies at the different stages of their product life cycle determine their ultimate success rates through both emerging opportunities and organisational hurdles (Burgelman and Grove, 2024). The essential element for success within PLC requires companies to identify their product position in the life cycle to properly plan their strategies. Pioneering companies along with their following counterparts must execute particular business strategies during growth and maturity periods to defend their market leadership while maintaining profitability.

Growth Stage Strategies – Fortress / Attack strategy

The growth stage exhibits both fast sales growth together with intensified market competition. Market demand grows alongside consumer adoption of the product so businesses initiate operation expansion while advancing product quality and targeting larger customer audiences. Pioneering firms need this stage to maintain their leading position and extend their power in the market. Tesla dedicated its growth phase to expanding factory capabilities along with developing fresher car models combined with strengthening electric vehicle battery effectiveness. Tesla achieved a 50% rise in electric vehicle production when it manufactured 1.3 million vehicles in 2022 (Carpenter and Nakamoto, 2023). The company focused its investments on expanding manufacturing production and operational growth while aiming at producing 20 million electric cars per year throughout the next decade before 2030 (He and Wong, 2024). Due to its strategic approach, Tesla accomplished rapid development which enabled it to build substantial market domination in the electric vehicle sector. Businesses that join after a pioneering company reach the growth phase by benefiting from product success while making product quality improvements to their offerings. The strategy allowed Xiaomi to achieve market success with its smartphone venture. Xiaomi entered new markets swiftly through its strategy which involved providing high-end smartphone quality at competitor prices. In 2022 Xiaomi secured the third position in smartphone market share statistics with 13.1% of the total market following Apple and Samsung according to IDC (He and Wong, 2024). The company achieved market expansion speedily through its approach of delivering advanced phones at reasonable costs to customers.

Maturity Stage Strategies

During the maturity stage, most potential customers have adopted the product yet competition intensifies because markets become saturated. At this stage, organisations prioritise their market share retention through financial optimization while creating products which offer distinct advantages against competitors in saturated markets. Microsoft serves as a model organisation which achieved success through its maturity stage journey (Robinson and Fornell, 2023). The personal computer market adopted Microsoft's Windows operating system as its default system while the company

encountered fierce competition from Apple and Google. The company protected its industry dominance through an ongoing process of product advancement with Windows 10 development and Microsoft Azure cloud infrastructure integration. Based on the analysis during 2022 Microsoft Azure attained a 23% portion of worldwide cloud infrastructure deployment whereas Amazon Web Services (AWS) maintained a 33% stake in the market (Edmondson and Lei, 2022). The maturity stage for follower companies depends on both innovative products along operational efficiency measures to stand out. PepsiCo functions in the intensely competitive cola business by expanding its product range to meet evolving consumer demands. The 2021 financial performance of PepsiCo reached \$79 billion through the success of its healthy products range which includes water bottles along with sports drinks and snack items. PepsiCo keeps its soft drink market position active by regularly modifying its product range to fit consumer taste changes.

Strategic Withdrawal and Adaptation

The PLC's decline stage emerges when customer interest weakens because of new technologies changing consumer preferences and increased business rivalry. Strategic adaptation plans or market withdrawal decisions must be established by pioneer and follower firms as they exist in this phase. The pioneer company Nokia became obsolete due to its lack of market adaptation during the decline period. During the early 2000s, Nokia maintained its top position in the mobile phone market but declined into market insignificance because it did not accept the smartphone revolution with its iPhone leaders. The mobile market share which Nokia previously had at 50% reached only 3.3% by 2013 (Robinson and Fornell, 2023). The lack of innovation by Nokia after consumer preferences shifted caused the company to fade out of the market completely.

Conclusion

Organisations need to carefully evaluate market conditions and technological progress along with consumer lifestyle patterns when deciding whether to launch first or join later in the market competition. Pioneers receive market leadership combined with brand

recognition technological superiority and first-mover advantages. New market leaders must absorb both high startup expenses and unknown market factors at this time (Magnusson, 2021). The main advantage of follower companies lies in reduced costs and minimised risks yet they must face challenges related to brand identity differentiation when entering competitive market spaces led by pioneer competitors. The Product Life Cycle framework reveals essential strategic adaptations that organisations need to make when moving into the growth and maturity phases in order to stay competitive. Pioneers Tesla and Apple prioritize innovation with market development to sustain their market leadership position (Teece, 2021). Followers Xiaomi and PepsiCo establish a market foothold through pricing strategies coupled with market segmentation techniques. Success can be achieved through different strategic approaches although businesses require thorough evaluation of their resources in combination with market conditions and long-term goals to establish their preferred method. Companies that develop their strategies based on the unique requirements of each Cycle stage in the PLC achieve lasting market success in a competitive environment.

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