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Introduction

In the present times, the correct timing to launch new products or technologies and expand into new regions is one of the major issues business owners faces in the strategic marketing process. There are two options: to be a pioneer or a follower. When a fresh product is launched in the market, it grows, matures and ultimately loses its appeal, leading to a decline in its sales. This essay discusses the advantages and disadvantages of being a first mover or a pioneer and a follower company. Different product lifecycle strategies used by follower companies and successful pioneers to enhance growth and preserve competitive advantage are discussed below using appropriate examples.

Pioneer and follower company

Pioneer

A pioneer is an innovator or a visionary who is among the first to introduce or launch new ideas, products, or technologies or change established rules for future success and growth (Kaličanin, 2008). Pioneers seek gaps in the market and grab opportunities to improve the current offerings of the industry. They value achievability and bring imagination and energy to their teams. They believe in risk-taking and long-term visions. Being a pioneer offers several advantages, such as establishing a strong brand recognition, shaping consumer preferences and achieving high market share.

Establishing a Strong Brand Reputation

Being first in the market helps to establish the product as the standard in the industry and allows the building of a strong brand impression, which can create brand recognition and customer loyalty before the competitors emerge (CFI, 2025). The pioneer or first-mover benefit allows a company to create brand awareness and loyalty earlier than the entry of competitors. This advantage is used by large companies that enter the market. For example, even though Amazon was not the pioneer in selling books, it was the first company to attain that height of success in that line of business (CFI, 2025). Pioneers can also create strategic advantages to make it difficult for competitors to enter and imitate their processes or products. For example, if the pioneer can reduce the production cost of a product, it can establish a great cost advantage and securing patents can protect

from imitation by other competitors. The early stage of a new market offers attention, especially from consumers and competitors, and being a pioneer helps to build credibility as customers trust the first launched product in a specific category (van Kleef, 2006).

Shaping Consumer Preferences

A pioneer has the advantage of shaping consumer preferences in the product category and setting the standards in the industry (Golder and Tellis, 1993). The design, features and overall user experience of the product can become the standard against which competitors in the industry are judged. Being a pioneer can help to define consumer needs and desires before consumers are aware of them. Shaping consumer preferences increases product sales, creates a long-term connection and shapes their expectation which can benefit the brand in the long run.

Achieving a High Market Share

Being the first in the market provides opportunities to capture and capitalise on the market share before the competitors. Pioneers are often responsible for creating barriers that make it difficult for competitors to enter the market effectively (Mittal and Swami, 2004). Entering the market in the first place leads to capturing opportunities such as shaping consumer preferences, setting the standards, leading the marketplace and increasing customer loyalty. The pioneer is also able to manage resources, such as establishing themselves in a beneficial location, hiring a talented workforce, or forming premium and close contracts with the major suppliers. For example, when Apple introduced the iPhone, it created brand recognition and revolutionised the smartphone industry (Giachetti and Giachetti, 2018). Apple set the standard for innovation, design and quality of smartphones. This strong brand reputation led consumers to link themselves with Apple over time and allowed Apple to dominate the smartphone market. It also helped to create a loyal customer base and dominance in the operating industry. This demonstrates that pioneer advantage enables a company to gain a significant position in the market and makes it challenging for competitors to match the level.

Follower

A follower company or fast follower tends to observe and follow the product and strategies of a market leader instead of trying to innovate and create new products (Kaličanin, 2008). It focuses on maintaining its position in the marketplace and improving the existing offerings. The fast follower approach allows companies to learn from the mistakes of leading companies and adopt best practices to prevent them. A follower company does not work to be a leader instead, it operates effectively within the established market. Rather than pioneering and innovating new products, these companies evaluate and refine the products of market leaders. It can offer several advantages, such as a lower risk of failure, cost savings, and an established market.

Low risk of failure

The main advantage of being a follower is that it allows companies to learn from the errors of first-movers (Min et al., 2006). The fast followers evaluate market response regarding the initial product and make improvements in their products that help them to become successful in the marketplace. Followers increase success potential while simultaneously decreasing their exposure to market failure. The first-mover companies face several market challenges that can be addressed by the followers in product refinement before entering a market. Followers can utilise this acquired information to avoid dangers and successfully operate in the market. Businesses that fix flaws found in their initial products will achieve high-quality and dependable solutions for their consumers. The competitive advantage in the market leads to higher success rates because of these strategies.

Cost savings

Another advantage of being a follower is that the company can use the existing infrastructures and technologies. The pioneers spend heavily to develop required infrastructure for their services or products, but followers utilise this existing infrastructure at a lower expense (Mittal and Swami, 2004). Followers save money on research and development costs and can use these financial resources effectively and dedicate them to improve their products.

Already established market

The follower companies utilise the market entry advantage of accessing a defined market structure with a ready consumer base (Min et al., 2006). The analysis of market and consumer demand permits followers to reach customers who know about the product category. Entering an already established market becomes easier because pioneer companies have developed the customer base. Manufacturing products at a lower competitive cost enables followers to benefit from production efficiencies. The high costs and dangers of the place become easier to handle for follower companies since they can access a well-established market space with lower levels of investment risk.

For example, Samsung can be considered as a follower company in the smartphone industry that followed the strategies of Apple (Haizar et al., 2020). Apple transformed the smartphone market by launching the iPhone in 2007, setting the standard for touchscreen devices and mobile applications. By leveraging the market and strategies of Apple, Samsung avoided the research and development cost related to the market creation and focused on enhancing its products. The company did not create a new market but instead enhanced the existing smartphone concept. It introduced features such as large screens, expandable storage and removable batteries, which attracted a new segment of customers.

Product life cycle strategies

PLC

A product lifecycle demonstrates a product's experiences, from manufacturing, launching, and maturity to its decline in the marketplace (CFI, 2025). It is a tool for businesses that helps them analyse and adopt strategies for the products as it enters and exits the marketplace.

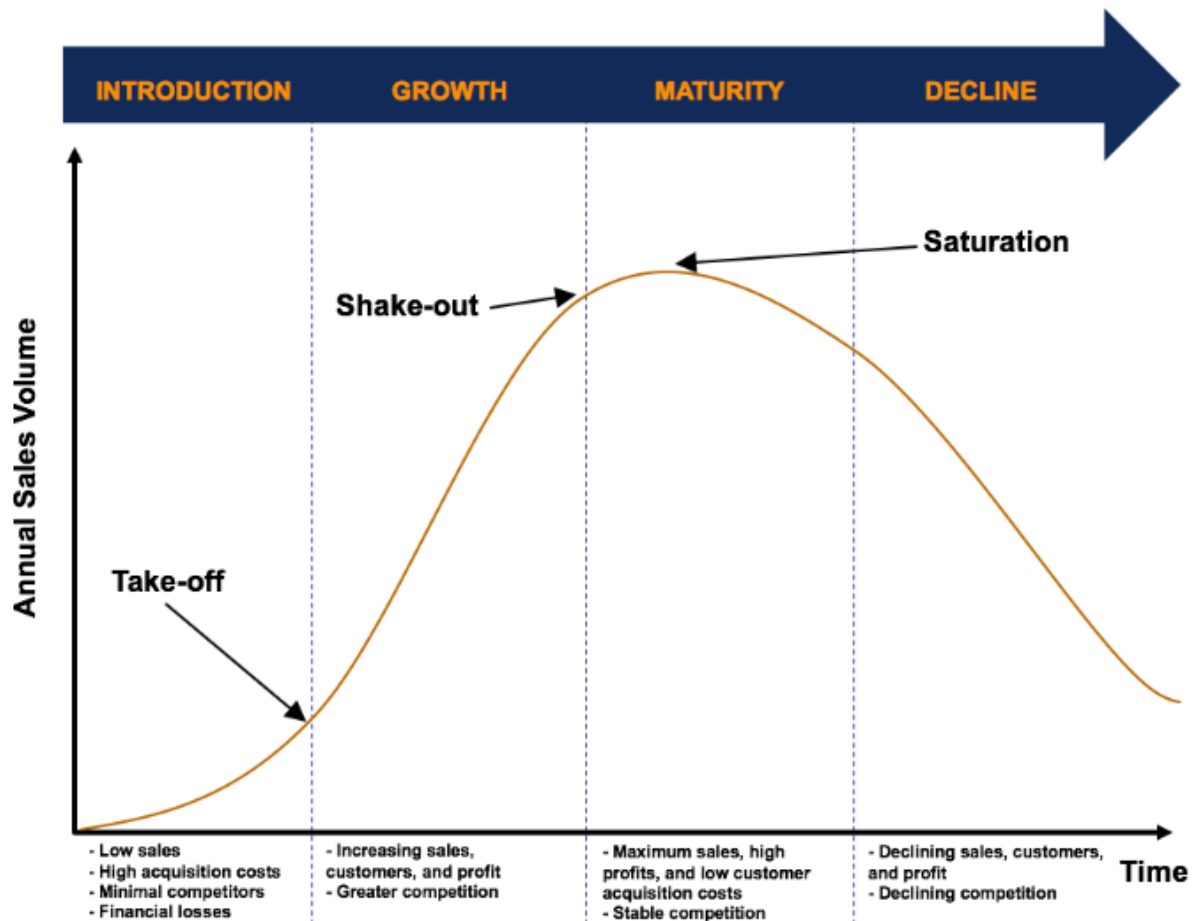


Figure 1 Stages in the product life cycle

(Source: CFI, 2025)

The four stages in a product lifecycle are introduction, growth, maturity and decline.

Defense strategies

Market expansion strategy is a business growth strategy to enhance operations, market shares, consumer base, and overall appearance in the existing market (Robinson and Lundstrom, 2003). A business executes this strategy by evaluating its existing distribution channels and new markets of interest for further operations and adopting measures to help it increase its sales and expand its reach. Market expansion is a crucial factor of business growth and for its overall sustainability and development. Companies adopt market expansion strategies to increase revenue, remain competitive, grow their customer base and achieve economic efficiency. Market expansion has other benefits as

well, such as allowing businesses to increase their revenue and sales. For example, Amazon expanded to India to leverage its economic infrastructure. Amazon reached the business owners through its Amazon Chau Cart program and explained to them about e-commerce (Shrivastava, 2015). Amazon registered those business owners as online vendors, provided them with internet connectivity and trained them to help their customers find products on the websites. Amazon expanded to a new market and adjusted itself for an Indian specific approach while remaining flexible.

Position defense strategy

A position defense strategy, also known as a fortress strategy, is used to prevent competitors from damaging a company (Gruca and Sudharshan, 2015). This strategy focuses on maintaining and defending a position in the perspective of customers and standing against competitor threats. If a company has gained loyalty and strong brand perception, then this strategy can help in protecting the strongest assets and defending from damages caused by competitors. Its other advantages include enhancing business alignment and protecting against competitive threats and defending market shares and profits with planned expansion. Taking example of the UK supermarket leading company, Tesco adopted an effective position defense strategy when its competitor Walmart made a challenge to their dominance in the market of UK (Rosnizam, et al., 2020). Their defensive marketing programs and initiatives included personalised discount offers and rewards to their customers based on their previous customer data. By leveraging those insights, it was able to provide its customers a high level of service that Walmart or any other competitor could not achieve.

Attack strategies

Frontal attack strategy

A frontal attack strategy is a direct objection to the market leaders (Yannopoulos, 2011). This approach can be difficult as the company competes against an established company, attempting to beat it. The frontal attack has three forms: pure frontal attack where a company matches all aspects of its competitors including marketing, features and positioning. Limited frontal attack is focused on a specific segment of the competitors'

marketplace. Lastly, research and development frontal attack where the competing company invests in developing new products to compete against the leading company. If the attempt is successful, it can make the attacking company the market leader. A frontal attack strategy is demonstrated by the Pepsi and Coca-Cola rivalry. Pepsi was introduced 5 years later than Coke and directly attacked Coke. Pepsi started to gain popularity on the price point (Chen, et al., 2024). Both companies have similar price points and products and compete for the same market segment.

Flanka attack strategy

In a flank attack strategy, a company focuses on the weak points of the competitor and attacks them to gain market share (Lucidity, 2025). Flanking can be focused on a specific product or customer segment where the competitor is not the strongest, such as price point, availability to customers, customer service, or product features. It is less expensive as compared to other attacking strategies since focusing on one element requires less investment and resources compared to attacking multiple aspects of the competitor. For example, the hotel brand Premier Inn of UK flank attacked its other budget hotel competitors by focusing on a common weakness, which was quality (Lucidity, 2025). Though these hotels were successful by offering low stay prices, no customer was fond of the quality they offered. Premier Inn recognised this weakness and adopted a strategy to attack them. Their Good Night Guarantee scheme helped them to win market shares from their competitors.

Product life cycle in the maturity stage

Increased penetration strategy

Market penetration is used to measure the amount of a service or product used by customers out of the total approximated market for that particular service or product (CFI, 2025). This strategy helps to increase the market share of a specific service or product by acquiring competitors, lowering prices, introducing new products, or targeting new markets. For example, if a cell phone is being used by 65 million people in a country out of the 300 million population, then the market penetration of the cell phone is 22%. If a company possesses high market penetration for its products, it can be considered a

leader in that industry. This strategy can help to increase the product's visibility, recognition, and sales. The consistent annual releases of iPhone versions from Apple support the company in retaining higher market share than competitors Xiaomi and vivo.

Extended use strategy

Extension strategy refers to extending product duration to delay product decline (BBC, 2025). The main goal of these strategies is to focus on producing fresh product versions to expand a product's sales period. Brand popularity, along with customer loyalty, grows through implementing these strategies, which simultaneously introduce various revenue sources. Companies that want to extend product lifetime can use multiple approaches, such as enhancing current product features through updates and transforming products for new market sectors or customer segments. Companies should make product innovations that derive from knowledgeable analysis of market needs and consumer demands. A company can make well-informed product extension choices through the combined use of market research with customer data analysis and predictive assessment (Micus et al., 2023).

Advantages and disadvantages of a product lifecycle

A product life cycle model benefits mainly by enabling organisations to develop promotional strategies for their products. For products within their growth phase, the company needs significant investments alongside extensive promotional measures to sustain forward growth. This model helps organisations make their planning steps simpler. Reliable insight about rival companies' production schedules can be obtained through analysing their product life cycles. An organization will achieve a competitive advantage through understanding their competitors' strategic approaches.

The product lifecycle model works only for individual products rather than brand-wide analysis. For example, the brand maturity or decline stage of Microsoft does not necessarily include the whole brand but the failure of its numerous product launches and withdrawals. Market fluctuations cause variations in recorded sales data to appear as a major constraint of this approach. Consumer preferences can alter product popularity between different regions so that popular items in one area show no appeal in others.

Conclusion

Multiple strategic approaches and risk evaluation processes define the selection between pioneer or follower status in an industry. Organisations that make their pioneering choices obtain several positive effects, including recognised brand status along with maximum market dominance and consumer base. To stay in the market, pioneers need to maintain a regular practice of product innovation. Currently established customer markets serve as an advantage for follower companies to enter the market while decreasing their infrastructure costs and risk factors. The product lifecycle analysis stands as an essential business tool for organisational growth as it helps adapt to marketplace changes. An organisation sustains its market position through the execution of market expansion and position defense together with product extension across lifecycle stages. Companies must maintain flexibility and adaptivity because PLC presents certain disadvantages that require businesses to respond to shifting consumer choices and market conditions.

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