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Introduction

The connection between first mover and second mover companies is a theme of interest in the field of marketing strategy, especially in industries where innovation is rapid and high competition exists. First mover companies usually have first mover benefits through disruptive innovation, which influence consumer behaviour and build a powerful brand. An example of first movers is the launch of the iPhone by Apple, which explains the possibility of changing the category of the products and the industry norms. By contrast, their follower firms like Samsung can capitalise on the experience of the pioneers to mitigate the risk, get more refined product offerings, and better serve the untapped and emerging market segments. In this essay, the phobia of these opposite strategic standpoints will be discussed with the help of the model of the Product Life Cycle (PLC), with special reference to the stages of growth and maturity. It critically evaluates the position and flanking defence strategies used by Apple and the frontal and flanking attack strategies used by Samsung to justify the continued existence of pioneer and follower companies in dynamic markets.

Definitions

A pioneer organisation is usually characterised as the first firm to present a new product, service technology to the market, which in the process develops a new category or dramatically reforms an existing category (Liu *et al.*, 2019). A firm that is able to be a pioneer firm gets enormous advantages basically by being able to get a head start and lead in the market, which enables it to have strong brand recognition and customer loyalty long before any competitor steps into the market. Pioneers are standard-setters for the industry who acquire important resources and develop long-term partnerships (Liu *et al.*, 2019). They may be enabled to enjoy premium pricing with larger market shares and more leverage over what the customer expects. Being first encourages innovation and learning, thus enabling firms to fine-tune products even faster than competitors and sustaining the competitive lead.

A follower company, in comparison, comes into the market when an innovation has already been brought out by a pioneer. This allows the followers to see the achievements and failures of the pioneer and therefore make improvements on the product, cut the costs of developing the product and also strategically focus on the gaps in the needs of customers that have not been satisfied (Robertson, 2021). To be a follower company bears several advantages. Followers keenly observe mistakes made by pioneers. This reduces risk and cost of development, besides the added benefit of market awareness- allowing quick entry into the market with better or cheaper products (Dreiling and Bican, 2022). They adopt technologies that have already proved their worth in the market and do not carry heavy research expenses attached to them. Flexibility according to changing preferences of customers can be brought in easily when one is not leading the market and can fine-tune offerings by observing strategies adopted by competitors (Dreiling and Bican, 2022). Moreover, these types of companies can deliver better value and often achieve higher efficiency and profitability.

Being a pioneer company offers significant advantages, including early market entry, which helps establish strong brand recognition and customer loyalty before competitors arrive. Pioneers can set industry standards, secure key resources, and build long-term partnerships (Liu *et al.*, 2019). They often enjoy premium pricing, greater market share, and influence over customer

expectations. Additionally, pioneering encourages innovation and learning, allowing companies to refine products faster and maintain a sustainable competitive edge.

Apple has also pioneered in the smartphone industry with the advent of the iPhone, which redefined communication in the mobile sector and set a new paradigm in terms of smartphone design. As a follower, Samsung joined later on, using the market understanding of Apple to create differentiated devices and compete against it in a wider scope of customer segments.

Advantages of Being a Pioneer (Apple)

Early Market Leadership

Early leadership in the market by pioneer companies is often decisive since the company is the first to establish a product type and own consumer interest before rival firms venture into the market. This benefit is evident when Apple released the iPhone in 2007, and the company was able to gain high initial demand and dominate the new category of smartphone products on the market (Mirzayev, 2023). Being among the first to enter the market managed to influence the perceptions of consumers on what a smartphone must be like, and later entrants into the market may find it harder to push it out of place. According to Robertson (2021), first movers often create a good market atmosphere that makes it challenging to enter the market, such as brand loyalty and customer loyalty. The same advantage of leadership in the early days can be noticed in the Tesla case, where it led the electric vehicle market by entering the market early enough to define how performance and designs would work before the traditional car manufacturers got in the picture.

Ability to Set Industry Standards

One of the most important strengths that comes with pioneering is the capability to establish the standards which are to be followed in the industry. This was reached by the introduction of a capacitive multi-touch interface and an integrated hardware-software project, which essentially transformed the smartphone operation (Mirzayev, 2023). Before the iPhone, interfaces were mostly based on physical keyboards or styluses; gesture interaction by Apple was a big leap in enhancing the user experience and became the standard in the industry (Zakiy and Haryanto, 2021). Moreover, in 2008, with the introduction of the App Store, mobile software distribution was redefined, and the principles of the global app economy were laid, transforming the digital ecosystem in industries. Similar behaviour in setting standards would be observed in how Netflix pioneered in online streaming and transformed the way people consume content, and compelled traditional broadcasters to change with the times.

Learning Curve and Cost Advantages

The advantages of pioneering are that there are learning curve effects, so that initially the operation can achieve efficiency and reduced costs and high product improvement over time. This has helped Apple to streamline its production processes through its consistent investment in supply chains, sourcing of components and software development, which has enabled it to maintain consistent quality in its products. Bodolica and Spraggon (2021) argue that first movers build capability in innovation that builds a competitive advantage in the long term. Nevertheless, despite the significant benefits of learning, the start-up cost of pioneers is very high, and the benefits may be accrued only with long-term investment and acceptance in the market.

Customer Loyalty and Switching Costs

The other substantial benefit of pioneering is that of establishing customer loyalty, which is a high switching cost. Apple has achieved positioning its users into its ecosystem by creating hardware, software and supplementary services like iCloud, Apple Watch and AirPods. This ecosystem improves the perceived value and decreases the readiness of customers to change to competitor brands (Zakiy and Haryanto, 2021). The same loyalty benefits can also be seen in the case of Amazon, with a Prime-based system that allows one to use the system repeatedly and promise customer loyalty.

Intellectual Property and Innovation Leadership

This is a common defence that pioneers seek to protect a legal right to their innovations in terms of patents and trademarks. The initial patents Apple had in the sphere of multi-touch interfaces and sensor technology gave it a lead in innovation (Dreiling and Bican, 2022). Although intellectual property does not completely discourage imitation, it makes online followers incur higher costs and strengthen the strategic stance of the pioneer.

Case Example: Apple iPhone as a Successful Pioneer

The iPhone is a good example of successful pioneering, where the iPhone 16 is a combination of other technologies in one user-friendly, intuitive and easy-to-use product that transformed the expectations of the consumer (Kafoe, 2025). When the communicational element was added to the smartphone along with the entertainment and internet features, Apple changed the

smartphone into a lifestyle product, and it shows how successful pioneering can reinvent the whole industry.

Advantages of Being a Follower (Samsung)

Reduced Market Risk and Lower R&D Costs

The follower firms enjoy the advantage of penetrating markets already proven by the pioneers, and the uncertainty and financial risk are highly minimised. Samsung is a good example of this strength, as it was keen to keep an eye on the initial successes and failures of Apple before it made a big investment in smartphone development. By enabling pioneers to either recoup the initial experimentation costs, the followers can divert the resources to refine the work on the proven features and hasten commercialisation. Regarding this, Tomas and Adelaide (2022) observe that the follower strategies minimise the cost of exposure to expensive processes of trial and error, enabling firms to be able to selectively invest in investments that customers desire to see. The same benefits can be observed with Facebook having implemented the features called Stories, which Snapchat introduced first and implemented later on a greater scale by its followers.

Ability to Improve on Pioneer Weaknesses

One of the greatest benefits of follower strategies is to realise that there are drawbacks in innovative products and provide better or varied alternatives. Samsung took the opportunity presented by Apple with the initial design limitation and fulfilled it by launching bigger screens, the possibility to expand the storage capacity, provided with stylus-supporting devices and the expanded range of devices compatible with iPhones, in the first place, which were not available, to begin with, in the iPhone product range. As Giachetti and Pira (2022) state, fast imitation with intentional improvement enables the followers to not only follow the pioneers but, in certain situations, they surpass them. The trend can be observed as well in the motor industry, with traditional manufacturers stepping into the early electric vehicle models that Tesla produced by providing longer range, reduced prices, and increased models.

Faster Scaling and Market Penetration

The followers can also be in a better position to scale up production swiftly by using already proven technologies and supply networks. The large-scale vertical integration, visibility of

production of displays, processors and memory chips allowed Samsung to scale quickly and achieve cost efficiency and quick global penetration. According to Kamp and Ruiz de Apodaca (2023), more often and more aggressive operational efficiencies are taken by more attentive followers than pioneers, who can grow more internationally at a faster pace. This competitive edge is also evident in globalisation through the popularity of Xiaomi mobile devices in the smartphone industry, with efficient production and lower prices helping the company gain entry in the target market rapidly.

Targeting Untapped Market Segments

Although first movers often focus on the high-quality market segment, followers have the potential to expand the market penetration by catering to the underserved or traditional price-sensitive clientele. Samsung has successfully differentiated its products through the launch of products of high-end, mid-end and low-end products, thus increasing the overall market size. According to Dreiling and Bican (2022), it is common that followers tend to succeed when they offer products or services to niche or underserved markets that cannot be fulfilled by market leadership. Such a plan is a reflection of how Amazon pursued cloud computing, where it addressed a wide range of clients when competitors were originally targeting the enterprise market.

Case Example: Samsung as a Successful Fast Follower

The key factors that contribute to Samsung being a successful fast follower are the early adoption of the Android operating systems, enabling the company to prevent lengthy software development time and focus on hardware development. The Galaxy S and Galaxy Note products are examples of Samsung absorbing the lessons of the innovative innovations that were pioneered by Apple, whilst making the distinction of display technologies, S Pen innovation and an impressive range of device sizes. Instead, Giachetti and Pira (2022) argue that successful imitation not only allows followers to compete well with pioneers but also to conquer them in market share, which is evident in Samsung's market smartphone shipment leadership.

Product Life Cycle Strategies in the Growth Stage

Pioneer Defence Strategy: Position Defence (Apple)

The pioneer firms during the growth stage of the Product Life Cycle (PLC), work towards defending their initial market positions against new entrants. Apple has been able to use the position defence approach to focus on the strengths of its iPhone brand, ecosystem and technological focus. The close combination of Apple hardware and software, a steady quality of products and the support of the high-end, innovation-driven brand image are all aspects of this strategy. According to Kafoe (2025), position defence is enabled through the accumulation of brand equity, proprietary technology and customer loyalty, which are very powerful entry barriers. The interconnected ecosystem provided by Apple, such as iOS, iCloud, Apple Watch and AirPods, makes the switching cost very high and thus the followers may find it very hard to lure the current users. It can be observed that similar position defence strategies can be applied to the Microsoft Windows ecosystem, where compatibility with software and dependence as a corporation prevent the customer from migrating to competitor platforms.

Pioneer Defence Strategy: Flanking Defence (Apple)

Besides flanking defence, in which Apple launches product variations to pre-empt competition in the conjoined segments, it uses flanking defence to defend its original core presence. Having several models of the iPhones at various prices, screen sizes, and performance rates, including the iPhone Mini, regular iPhone, and Pro models, Apple eliminates the chances of competitors taking advantage of unmet consumer demands. According to Carleton, Cockayne and Feland (2025), the innovative companies sustain their current leadership by constantly broadening the product lines and designing products in order to stay relevant. This is a similar method employed by automobile innovators, such as Toyota, that had broadened the range of hybrid vehicles to ensure that competitors did not seize a core market niche.

Follower Attack Strategy: Frontal Attack (Samsung)

Being a fast follower, Samsung often uses the form of a frontal attack as it simply challenges the flagship products of Apple. This is a strategy that entails being at par or higher than the innovator

in the features of the products, pricing and market hype. Yeboah (2023) claims that effective frontal attacks should be backed by well-developed organisational strengths and speed of innovation. Examples of this strategy can be Samsung Galaxy S and Galaxy Z, which feature better display technologies, powerful processors and aggressive marketing promotions in the world that directly contrast performance with the latest iPhones. Pepsi has employed similar frontal attack strategies against Coca-Cola by competing with its products and advertising directly to compete with its product.

Follower Attack Strategy: Flanking Attack (Samsung)

Flanking attacks are also used successfully by Samsung to focus on the market segments that are underrepresented by Apple. According to Karaferis (2025), flanking is taking advantage of what the market leaders have left vacant. Samsung fills these cracks with the provision of the stylus-capable devices, foldable phones and a variety of affordable, medium and low-reward phones. This approach will see Samsung appeal to price-sensitive customers and those who seek innovation and would therefore want Samsung to offer features that Apple does not focus on. Similar tactics of flanking may be detected in how Xiaomi is emphasising the value-driven smartphones, which helps it to compete effectively without attacking the premium giants on a head.

Product Life Cycle Strategies in the Maturity Stage

Market Modification

The slow growth and stiff competition experienced during the maturity stage of the Product Life Cycle often force firms to need to make a change in the market to maintain their performance. This is an expansionary approach whereby the user base is increased, new geographical markets are penetrated, or more products are used. Bekele and Zewdie (2024) argue that market change is urgent during maturity as companies attempt to overcome stagnation by re-engaging the existing customers with an aim of addressing new ones. Apple and Samsung use the identical strategy of constantly entering into developing markets like India, Southeast Asia and Africa, which are yet to experience a reduction in smartphone penetration.

Product Modification

Another major strategy during the maturity stage is product modification, which aims at improving product features to make it stand out and create new consumer desire. According to Mohammadi, Sani Heidary and Shahraki (2023), companies adjust their products at the end of life in order to strengthen the strategic positioning and address changing consumer expectations. Apple does it by updating its camera systems, processors and display technologies yearly, and Samsung innovates foldable designs, the ability to use a stylus and screens with a high number of refresh rates. These incremental innovations offer new value propositions and are useful in market retention in a competitive market.

Critique of the Product Life Cycle Model

Advantages

The Product Life Cycle (PLC) model is a helpful model to assume the evolution process of products and to make strategic choices in various stages. According to Iveson, Hultman and Davvetas (2022), PLC assists the managers in predicting the change in demand, plan marketing investments, and customise the strategies as the market or product changes.

Limitations and Disadvantages

The PLC model has serious flaws despite its merit. The actual product lives hardly take the expected linear direction as it is indicated in the model, particularly among the highly volatile technology products. According to Rusch, Schoegg and Baumgartner (2023), the lifecycle assumptions are being disrupted by digital innovation, fast upgrades, and the practice of the circular economy because of the disruptions these elements cause.

Conclusion

The comment on the pioneer and follower strategy explains how varying market entry positions may create a unique competitive advantage in the smartphone industry. The innovator status helped Apple to define the expectations of consumers, set the level of standards in the industry and create a solid ecosystem that creates long-term customer loyalty. Conversely, Samsung has used the follower status to reduce risk, capitalise on innovations made by Apple and gain entry into various market segments by quick iteration and strategic adjustment. The implementation of the Product Life Cycle strategies further introduces how the pioneers would employ defensive strategies, like position and flanking defence, to defend the early leadership, and the followers would use frontal and flanking to attack the dominant competitors in the growth stage. Both companies at maturity depend on markets as well as product adjustment to remain relevant in a flood of markets.

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