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Apple strategic analysis

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Executive Summary

Apple Inc., established in 1976, is recognized globally as a leader in innovation and a dominant player in technology, known for its exceptional design, software integration, and wide-ranging product portfolio, including the iPhone, MacBook, and the Vision Pro AR/VR headset. Over the past three years, Apple has reinforced its position through continued technological advancements, notably the introduction of Apple Silicon (M2, M3, M4 chips), the integration of USB-C connectors, and enhancements in artificial intelligence with "Apple Intelligence".

Apple's strategic foundation is based on differentiation, emphasizing superior quality, innovative design, and an integrated ecosystem that creates significant customer loyalty and retention rates of approximately 90%. This approach allows Apple to command premium pricing, securing robust margins significantly higher than those of its competitors. A theoretical shift to a cost-leadership strategy would compromise Apple's brand integrity, customer experience, and profitability.

Analyzing Apple through strategic frameworks like Porter's Generic Strategies, Mintzberg's Ten Schools of Thought, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Matrix and Porter's Five Forces reveals that Apple thrives due to its ability to differentiate itself and leverage its brand strength effectively. Its product portfolio reveals a balance of revenue streams, with the iPhone and Services segments as market leaders, while newer products like Apple Vision represent potential future growth opportunities.

PESTEL analysis highlights several external challenges and opportunities, including geopolitical tensions affecting its global supply chain, economic fluctuations, and increasing environmental and social responsibility expectations. Technologically, Apple continues to invest substantially in research and development, ensuring its leading position in innovation. Legal compliance, particularly concerning data privacy and intellectual property, remains crucial.

Apple must remain adaptive and innovative and concentrate on market changes. Its strategic alignment of visionary leadership, quality products, strong brand loyalty, and an integrated ecosystem positions it well to sustain its competitive advantage and continue shaping the technological landscape.

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1. Introduction

Apple Inc., founded in 1976 in California (Congress, 2025), is one of the leading global leaders in designing, manufacturing, and marketing mobile communication devices, personal computers, and digital media products. It is the world's largest IT company by revenue and total assets and the second-largest mobile phone manufacturer (Alsop, 2025). Apple excels in hardware and offers a comprehensive range of software, services, accessories, networking solutions, and high-quality third-party digital content and applications. In the last three years, Apple INC. continued innovations across all product lines, expanding technological capabilities and facing various challenges. Apple targets to create products that enhance people's daily lives (Apple.com, 2025). This includes developing entirely new product categories, like the iPhone and Apple Watch, and consistently innovating within those existing categories.

Over the past three years, Apple has continued to cross the boundaries of innovation, constantly refining and expanding its product lineup. Each year brought something new — from the launch of the iPhone 14 in 2022 to the iPhone 16 in 2024 (Apple, 2025). One of the biggest changes came with the iPhone, which introduced USB-C connectors to comply with European regulations (EU, 2025). Apple has also been making big moves on the computer chip. With the introduction of Apple Silicon chips, like the M2, M3, and M4, Apple has revolutionized performance and energy efficiency, making its devices faster and more powerful. In June 2023, Apple entered the world of virtual reality with the launch of the Vision Pro headset, which ran on its new visionOS. Priced at \$3,500, it is a bold venture into AR/VR technology, though early sales have been somewhat cautious as consumers begin to explore what it has to offer.

At WWDC 2024, Apple introduced "Apple Intelligence" — a collection of powerful on-device AI features built into iOS, iPadOS, and macOS. This new AI suite enhances user experiences by making them more innovative and seamless while adhering to Apple's firm stance on privacy and security. Through these innovations, Apple continues to show that it is not just keeping up with the times but shaping the future — all while staying adaptable to changing consumer demands and regulatory challenges.

Apple.com (2025) argues that its strategic goals are built around six core principles: privacy, education, environmental sustainability, accessibility, inclusion and diversity, and supplier responsibility. A key value for the company is its dedication to privacy, as reflected in marketing efforts emphasizing safeguarding user data. Furthermore, Apple prioritizes inclusivity by promoting diversity within its workforce and ensuring its products are designed to be accessible to everyone (Apple, 2025).

2. Main Findings

2.1 Business Strategy

Apple has been in the market for nearly fifty years. Over this time, Apple has evolved into a global organization (Sims, 2022). Throughout its history, Apple has experienced significant fluctuations, yet over the past decade, it has consistently expanded to become a leading global technology company. As of 2024, Apple has earned a revenue of more than \$383 billion, putting the tech giant in the seventh position in the world (Ahmed, 2025). On top of that, Apple is also the most valued company in the world, with a market cap of \$3.195 trillion as of March 2025 (Figure 2).

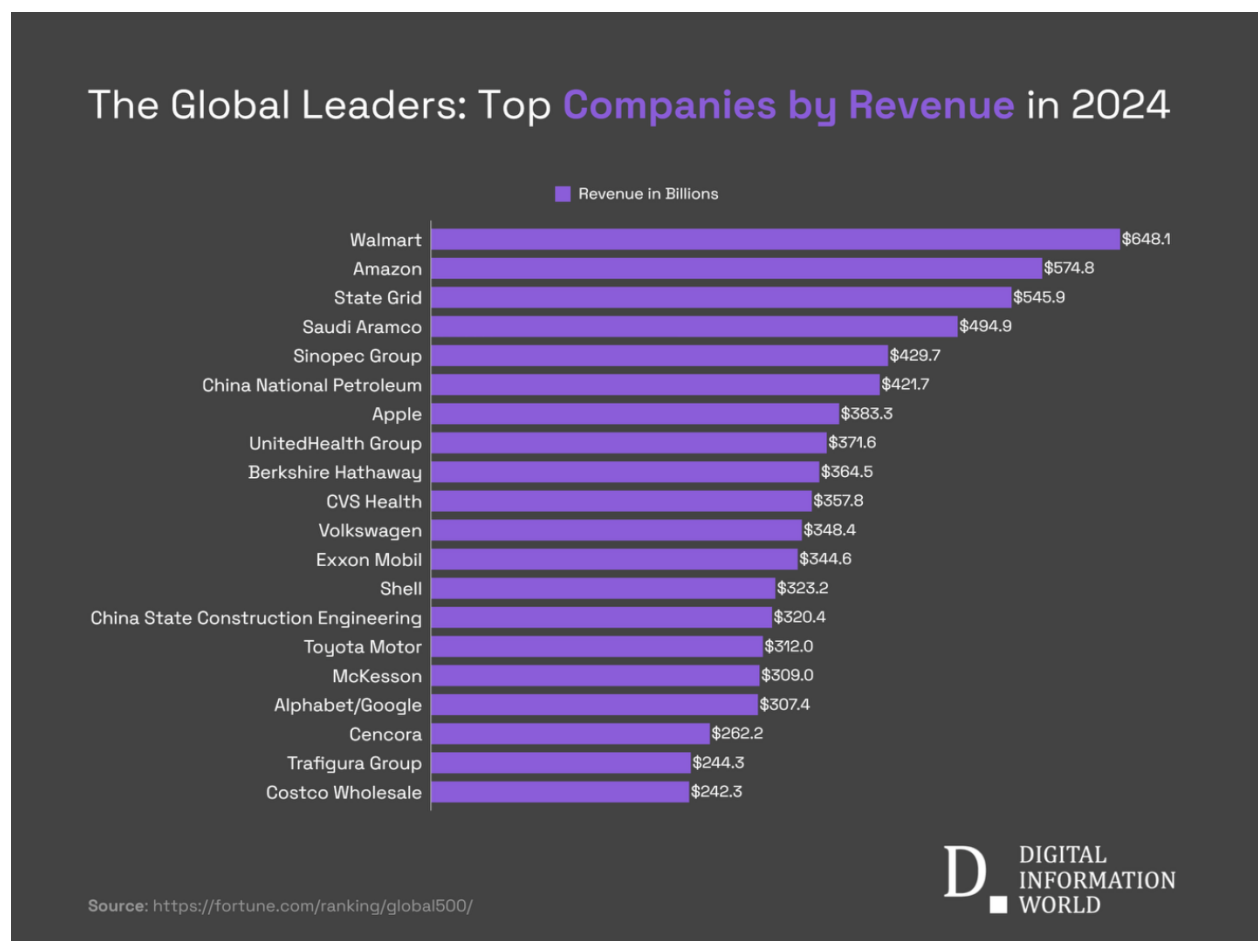


Figure 1 2024 top companies by revenue



Figure 2 Apple Market Cap Yahoo finance 2025

Apple operates in the technology sector, which is the fastest-growing industry at present. The rapid industry growth has consistently drawn new market players, intensifying the competition to unprecedented levels (Daodu, 2024). Apple's competitors are constantly trying to outface the company by introducing new products and services, which strongly impacts consumers. However, even in such a strong competitive environment, Apple has been able to maintain its leadership position. Q4 2024, Apple Inc. ended up in the first position with the best-selling phones on the market (Counterpoint, 2025).

Global Top-10 Best-Selling Smartphones, Q4 2024

Brand	Model Name	Global Sales Rank				
		2023		2024		
		Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Apple	iPhone 16 Pro Max				13	1
Apple	iPhone 16 Pro				17	2
Apple	iPhone 16				22	3
Apple	iPhone 15	2	2	1	1	4
Apple	iPhone 15 Pro Max	1	1	2	2	5
SAMSUNG	Galaxy A15 4G	100+	13	5	4	6
SAMSUNG	Galaxy A35		100+	11	8	7
SAMSUNG	Galaxy A15 5G	100+	6	4	5	8
Apple	iPhone 15 Pro	3	3	3	3	9
SAMSUNG	Galaxy A55		100+	12	12	10

Source: Counterpoint Research Smartphone 360 – Global Handset Model Sales Tracker – Q4 2024

*100+ means outside of Top 100

Figure 3 Top-10 Best Selling Smartphones Q4 2024

2.1.1 Vision and Mission statement

“We believe that business, at its best, serves the public good, empowers people around the world, and binds us together as never before.”

Apple(2025) CEO Tim Cook

According to Fitzsimmons (2022), the basis for the functioning and prospects of success of any organization is its possession of a long-term vision defining its future in terms of the modernity of the products it offers, the technologies it has, the information and organizational systems it uses, the human capital it has, the territorial scope and segments of sales markets, customer service, forms of marketing and the expected financial results. A company’s vision represents how it sees itself in the long term—it reflects its future identity, the image it aspires to project, the form it aims to take, and the strategic direction its leadership is determined to pursue (Nanyangwe, 2021). A broader concept than the vision is the company's mission, fulfilling the function of the "soul" of the vision, i.e. the reason for its existence, distinguishing it from all others (Gulati, 2022). The mission contains the most general formulation of the purpose of the activity, the message, and the chosen idea of the company's development. The mission defines the assumptions, values, and reasons for the company's existence and indicates the directions and areas of its activity (Akpa, 2021). From the point of view of rapid and unpredictable changes in the market situation and changes in the environment, it seems advantageous not to specify a detailed business profile in the mission (Farida, 2022). However, it should be taken into account that the market identifies the company with the specialization associated with its brand, which guarantees the quality and reliability of its product (Malyarets et al., 2024). As a public part of the strategic plan, the mission is directed internally and externally, and it should be clear and comprehensible to the company’s owners, shareholders, employees, and customers (Grant, 2024). The basis for developing the company's mission is its past, as well as the current preferences of the management and the influence of the environment, financial resources, the human factor in the form of a professional crew and creative management. The mission results in goals defined as intentions to be realized, fulfilling organizing, planning, motivational and control functions.

2.1.2 Porter's Generic Strategies

A company's competitive advantage arises from strategic decisions that capitalize on market opportunities (Komolafe et al., 2024). Business strategies must effectively integrate various functional activities across the organization to achieve objectives (Farida, 2022). Profitability over the long term is fundamentally rooted in maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. According to Potter (1980), an organization can achieve competitive advantage through two primary methods: low cost or differentiation. When combined with the scope of activities, these advantages lead to three generic strategies for superior performance: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. The focus strategy is further divided into two sub-strategies: cost focus and differentiation focus.

The competitive advantage of Apple is based on its differentiation. Differentiation not only sets Apple apart from its competitors but also fosters a loyal customer base, which is crucial in maintaining its market dominance. Steve Jobs once noted that design encompasses not just a product's appearance but also its functionality. This is particularly noticeable in Apple's notebook computers, where a thoughtful design feature allows users to easily open the laptop with one hand, thanks to a subtle indentation below the trackpad. Another example of company attention to the details is showed on Figure 4.

One Example of Apple's Attention to Detail

The standard method for rounding the corners of a rectangular object is to use an arc of a circle to connect the object's perpendicular sides. That can result in an abrupt transition in curvature. To produce softer highlights by minimizing light reflection, Apple uses a "squirrel," which creates continuous curves.

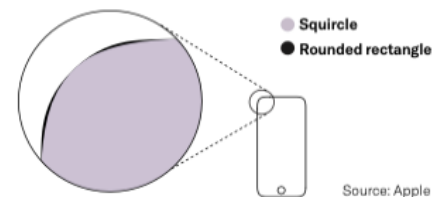


Figure 4 How Apple is organized for Innovation

Apple effectively adopted a differentiation strategy. This approach established the present company position. Apple manages premium pricing power across its portfolio. It gives the organization a gross margin higher than competitors, ranging between 37-45% if we compare it to the industry, which on average is 20-30% (CNBC, 2021). Apple has a strong brand *loyalty* and very high customer retentions - according to Htet (2024), 90% of iPhone users stays *loyalty* to the brand. This ensures a consistent revenue stream while significantly lowering the costs of acquiring new customers. *Organistation* has developed a seamlessly integrated ecosystem that creates high switching costs for customers. Apple has developed a seamlessly integrated ecosystem that creates high customer switching costs. Purchasing and utilizing multiple Apple products and services, customers become increasingly integrated into the ecosystem, strengthening their brand loyalty and creating consistent revenue opportunities (Jiang, 2024).



Figure 5 All your devices. One seamless Apple 2025

Going to hypothetical analysis, if Apple had adopted a cost leadership strategy, its market position and financial outcomes would have differed. This approach would conflict with Apple's strength and established brand identity. To reduce production costs, Apple couldn't use premium materials, drop the build quality, or innovate its design—this kind of shift could damage the brand reputation and ability to implement a premium pricing strategy. Apple can face stiff competition with current cost leaders like Xiaomi, Lenovo, or other Android manufacturers. The gross profit margin would likely drop to 15-25%, which would impact research and development and product innovation. Apple is focused on customer experience - going to cost leadership strategy, it will probably need to transition to lower-cost distribution channels, weakening its control over the customer experience.

- A cost leadership strategy would fundamentally conflict with Apple's core competencies and market positioning in several ways:
- The company would need to sacrifice its emphasis on premium materials, build quality, and design excellence to achieve lower production costs. This would undermine Apple's brand perception and eliminate its pricing power in the market.
- Apple's retail strategy, which emphasizes premium store locations and high service levels, would become unsustainable under a cost leadership approach. The company would need to shift to lower-cost distribution channels, reducing its control over the customer experience.

2.1.3 Mintzberg's 10 Schools of Thought

Apple's differentiation strategy can be analyzed through the lens of Henry Mintzberg's 10 Schools of Thought (Soares, 2023). This Framework refers to a collective way of thinking formed by a group of individuals who hold similar views or perspectives regarding a particular philosophy, discipline, belief system, social movement, economic theory, culture, or form of art (IJLERA, 2017). In the field of strategic management, Henry Mintzberg's Ten Schools of Thought model serves as a framework for organizing and classifying different approaches and perspectives within the discipline of strategy (Henry, 2021).

Steve Jobs's Vision has impacted Apple's strategy (Stier, 2024). He had an intuitive need to understand customers' needs and a willingness to pursue revolutionary products, which can assign him to an Entrepreneurial School. He first examined customers' expectations before designing the product (Isaacson, 2011). Minimizing costs was not in the first place but by functionality and innovation. That is how the touch screen in the iPhone was created. He took care of every detail and function so that it was not unnecessary (Zhang, 2022). As Apple is positioning its products as a premium and customers have a strong brand identity, it can place their strategy in positioning schools.

Apple's success goes beyond just innovative technology; it's rooted in a deep understanding of what people truly need and want in their lives. This kind of approach allows them to create products that resonate with users on a personal level. Steve Jobs' legacy inspires Apple to innovate with a customer-centric approach. This human touch is what sets Apple apart in a crowded tech market. By focusing on creating beautiful and functional products, Apple has effectively established a dedicated customer base that values its commitment to excellence and innovation (Htet, 2024).

2.1.4 BCG Matrix

The Boston Consulting Group matrix is a valuable tool for businesses to identify growth opportunities, evaluate their competitive positioning, and determine the potential for product development (Kuc, 2021). This framework helps organizations make strategic decisions regarding their product portfolio.

Apple (2025) states that high growth and market share belong to the iPhone and its services. We can classify MacBook's and iPads as cash cows with low growth and high market share. Apple Vision and Apple TV are question marks and products no longer in sale, like Airport can be classified as dogs – low growth and low market share

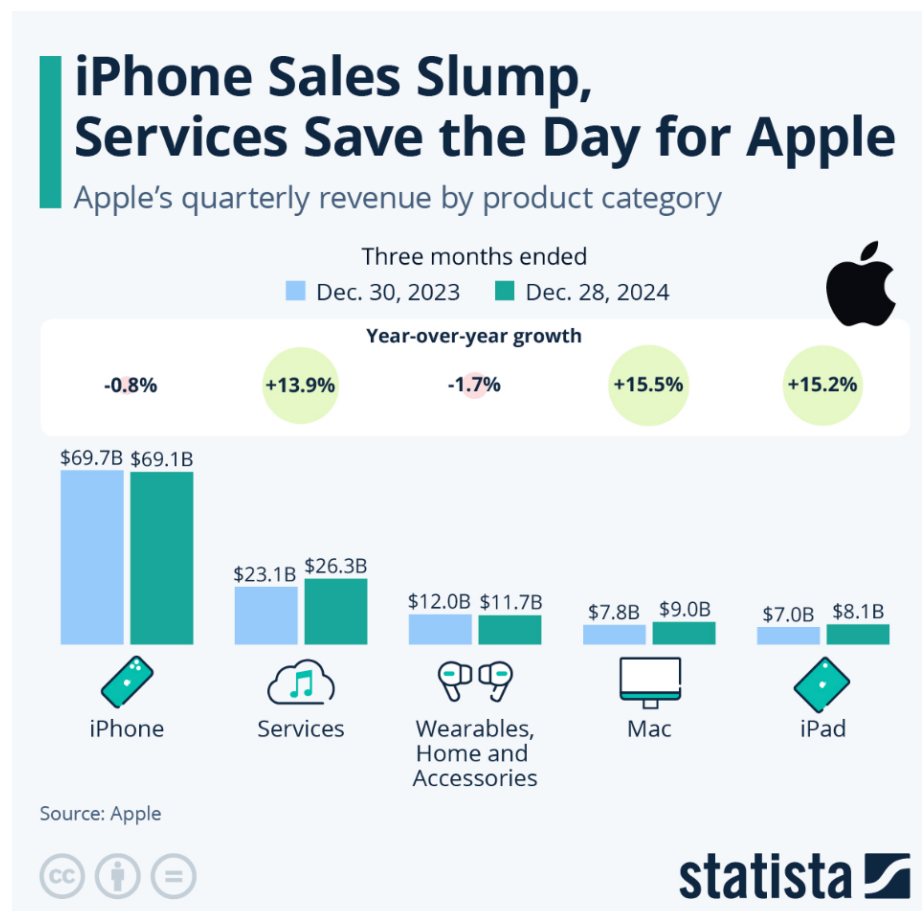


Figure 6 Statista Apple quarterly revenue by product category

BCG Matrix for Apple

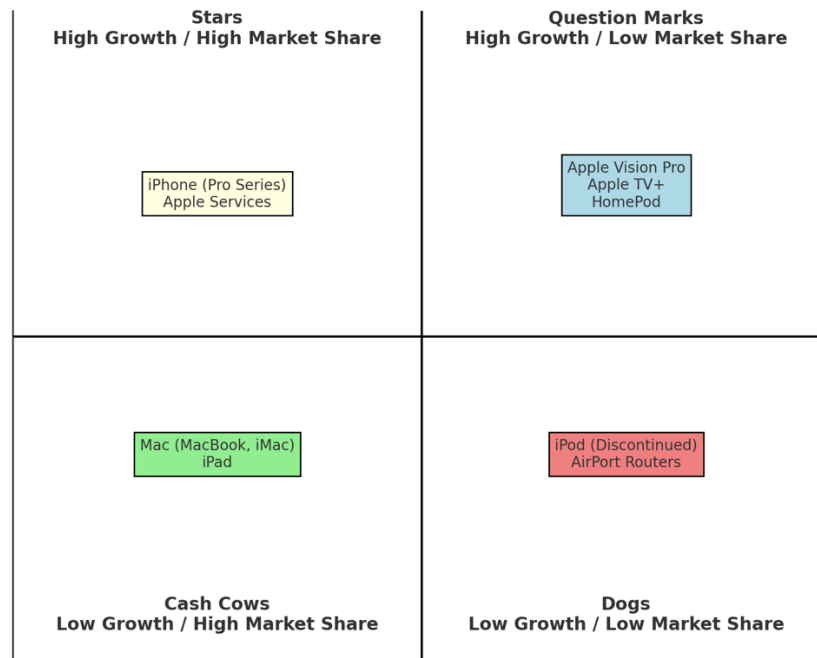


Figure 7 BGC Matrix for Apple

Figure 6 shows Apple's quarterly revenue by product category, comparing two specific quarters ending December 30, 2023, and December 28, 2024. **iPhone Sales:** Revenue slightly decreased by 0.8%, from \$69.7 billion to \$69.1 billion, indicating a minor drop in iPhone sales.

Services: Revenue increased by 13.9%, from \$23.1 billion to \$26.3 billion, showing substantial growth. This suggests Apple effectively leverages its digital services to offset slower iPhone sales.

Wearables, Home, and Accessories (like Apple Watch, AirPods, HomePod, etc.): Revenue slightly declined by 1.7%, going from \$12.0 billion down to \$11.7 billion, indicating a modest decrease.

Mac Computers: Revenue grew significantly by 15.5%, increasing from \$7.9 billion to \$9.1 billion, suggesting stronger demand or successful product updates in this segment.

iPad: Revenue increased notably by 15.2%, from \$7.0 billion to \$8.1 billion, reflecting growing interest or product enhancements.

Figure 6 highlights that despite slight declines in iPhone and wearables revenue, Apple's services, Mac, and iPad businesses performed strongly enough to offset those drops and drive overall growth. It shows Apple's resilience by diversifying revenue sources, particularly emphasizing service growth.

2.1.5 PESTEL Analysis

PESTEL is a crucial strategic analytical tool that stands for political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors. It provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing an organization's external environment (Buye, 2021). Several external factors can affect Apple Inc.'s business operations and marketing strategies as it operates in a highly dynamic business environment. The PESTLE analysis will examine the future implications of these factors on Apple's business operations and marketing strategies.

Political Factors: Apple's marketing strategy and corporate operations depend highly on the political conditions of the countries where it distributes its products. The ongoing trade war with China hurts the country's market position. According to BBC (2025), President Donald Trump announced a 10% tariff on all imports from China, a major supplier of Apple products, including most of its iPhones. Trump indicated that Apple was planning to invest \$500 billion in US facilities and create 20,000 jobs in the country (CNN, 2025). Global political instability could prove disastrous for Apple's business, especially since its dependence on inexpensive Chinese manufacturing has left them (Grosse, 2021). Apple's policy might be influenced by government changes that could impact all stakeholders (Lu et al., 2023). Additionally, Apple's global operations and marketing strategy may be influenced by AI legislation and the rapid advancements in AI (Terzis, 2023).

Economical Factors: Asian countries' rapid economic growth and rising GDP levels (Mckinsey.com, 2025), have opened doors for Apple to expand its business, even though it faces challenges due to its high-end pricing strategy (Investing.com, 2025). Rising labour costs in important manufacturing centers like China have squeezed Apple's profits, leading to investments in U.S.-based manufacturing facilities (Xing, 2021), (Apple.com, 2025). Exchange rates might fluctuate, impacting Apple's profitability since its products are sold in multiple currencies (Smith, 2023). For instance, a depreciation of the US dollar against the euro makes Apple products more pricey for European consumers.

Social Factors: This group can include customer preferences like growing demand for sustainable products (Hummels, 2021), brand perception—how the organisation is seen by customers—public opinion, and visibility in the media (Jaitly, 2021). In some parts of the world, social unrest might impact organisation operations. Mental well-being - is important for the company as devices cannot cause addiction (Alotaibi et al., 2022), i.e. Apple implemented a mental health app to monitor daily moods and overall mental health—ethical issues regarding human rights in Chinese factories. Another key point that Apple needs to consider is smartphone additions. According to BBC (2018), two investment groups holding \$2 billion in Apple stock called on the company to develop software that limits smartphone use by children. They urged Apple to improve parental control systems and address growing concerns about smartphone addiction among young people. Apple has developed a feature called "Screen Time" that provides detailed information about how much time is spent using iPads and iPhones, the specific apps used and the duration of each usage (Miles, 2022).

Technological Factors: Currently, there is a strong demand for cloud computing services. For 2023, the computing market could grow by \$602.4 billion, expected to grow at 21.2% (GVR, 2025). This is an opportunity for Apple to increase its product offers and stay ahead of competitors. Three months ended in December 2024, the company invested \$8.2 million in R&D (Apple, 2025). Research and development can affect Apple's competitiveness. R&D will help Apple to develop and implement new technologies such as AI and Virtual reality. Also, the company must focus on cybersecurity threats and invest more in cybersecurity to protect the business and reputation. 2025 will be for Apple's strategic blend of innovation and improvements across whole product lines (Macworld, 2025). Apple's technical developments in 2025 are designed to reinforce its position as a leader in innovation and user experience (Macrumors, 2025). By focusing on chip upgrades, iPhone design improvements, smart home innovations, AI integration and enhancements to other devices, Apple aims to strengthen its ecosystem and appeal to a wide range of consumers. The organization must develop Apple Intelligence to catch up with its competitors (Apple, 2025).

Environmental factors: With increasing awareness about environmental sustainability, consumers demand more eco-friendly practices from the organization (Ramii et al., 2022). Apple has proactively offered free recycling (Apple, 2025). The company is eliminating plastic from packaging and making it more compact (Apple, 2025). Additionally, they prioritize low-carbon shipping methods, including ocean, rail, and electric vehicles (Apple, 2025). Apple is developing technologies like disassembly robot Daisy to recover critical materials for recycling and reuse (Apple, 2025). Since 2015, the company has reduced CO2 emissions by 55%, the major step toward 2030 is 100% renewable electricity and by, prioritizing the use of recycled and renewable materials, generating clean electricity, and adopting low-carbon shipping practices (Apple, 2025). Apple Inc. is diligently striving to achieve a net-zero carbon footprint across the entire carbon footprint by 2030 (Apple, 2025).

Legal factors: Apple Inc. must comply with certain laws or regulations, which allows the company to operate in different countries without any problems. However, global operations expose it to various tax risks, including changes in international and domestic tax laws. Additionally, regulatory risks associated with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) targets can lead to liabilities and added costs (Nasdaq, 2024).

Apple must be compliant with increasingly strict data privacy regulations worldwide, such as GDPR in the EU (Apple, 2025). Failure to comply can lead to significant fines and reputational damage. The company invests heavily in protecting its intellectual property but also faces lawsuits from competitors alleging infringement (Williamson, 2024). This continuing legal activity is crucial for maintaining Apple's competitive edge and brand integrity.

2.1.6 Porter's Five Forces Analysis

Michael Porter introduced the Five Forces model in 1979 as a way to analyze competition within an industry (Porter, 1979). This model essentially examines how competitive or non-competitive an industry is by focusing on five key forces: the level of competition, the threat of new entrants, the threat of substitute products, and the bargaining power of both suppliers and buyers (Porter, 1979).

Industry Competition

The technology sector is incredibly competitive, with big players like Google, Samsung, and Hewlett-Packard all vying for attention alongside Apple (Investopedia, 2025). These companies use many resources in research and development and marketing to keep their edge in the market. One of Apple's challenges is the low switching cost; it is relatively easy for customers to move from an iPhone to a Samsung smartphone without significant investment (GOV.UK, 2025). Because of this, Apple needs to stay on its toes, constantly innovating and introducing new and unique products to maintain its lead in this fast-paced industry.

Bargaining Power of Buyers

Low switching costs also empower buyers (GOV.UK, 2025). Losing one customer does not significantly will impact Apple's revenue, the collective power of customers is a strong force. If many customers were to switch to a competitor, it could be a significant impact. Apple counters this by investing in R&D to create innovative products and build brand loyalty (Yang, 2023).

The Threat of New Entrants

The threat of new companies entering the market and challenging Apple is relatively low (Monden, 2022). Starting a new tech company requires massive investment in R&D and manufacturing, not to mention building brand recognition in an industry dominated by giants like Apple, Google, or Amazon. Any new entrant would need substantial capital just to develop a competitive product portfolio.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers

Suppliers have limited bargaining power regarding Apple (Chang, 2023). With many potential suppliers available, Apple can choose from a wide pool, and the industries supplying components like computer processors are highly competitive (Thapa, 2022). Additionally, switching suppliers is relatively easy for Apple, and since Apple is a major customer for many suppliers, it holds significant leverage.

Threats of Substitutes

Substitute products, while not direct competitors are alternatives that customers might consider. For Apple, most substitutes have limited capabilities compared to its products. However, the threat still exists, and Apple must continue to innovate to stay ahead of potential substitutes.

In summary, Apple faces strong competition but has strategies to maintain its position through innovation and brand loyalty. The threat of new entrants is low due to high barriers to entry, and suppliers have limited bargaining power. While substitutes exist, they currently offer less capability than Apple's products.

Looking forward, Apple will face changes driven by a constantly evolving technological landscape. Industry competition will likely become more intense, especially with technology growing rapidly. The growth of AI, virtual reality, and cloud computing will significantly reshape the market. New startups prioritizing digital technology may soon find it easier to enter the industry, reducing traditional barriers. Customers are increasingly becoming more mindful of prices and the value they receive, giving them greater influence over companies like Apple. The rise of open-source software and integrated cross-platform solutions might also make it easier for consumers to switch to alternative products. On the supply side, geopolitical uncertainties and disruptions in global supply chains could push Apple to diversify suppliers and rely more on local manufacturing. Finally, Apple's future success will depend on how effectively it can foresee these changes, adapt its innovation strategies, and stay flexible in responding to market shifts.

3. Conclusion

Observing Apple's current state, it is undeniable that the tech giant has successfully maintained its position as a leading industry player. The organization sticks to a clear strategy—make premium products that stand out from the crowd, focus on quality, and create an ecosystem that keeps customers coming back. This approach has become Apple's calling card, reflecting the vision-driven mindset that Steve Jobs instilled and that continues to guide the company today. When we look at Apple's product lineup, we can see an innovative mix of established moneymakers like the iPhone, rising stars like Services. This balanced portfolio lets them fund tomorrow's innovations with today's profits. Of course, Apple faces its share of headwinds—from political tensions affecting its supply chain to economic pressures on consumer spending, emerging social trends, technological disruption, environmental expectations, and legal hurdles around the world. However, it is managed to stay ahead by investing heavily in sustainability, research, and privacy protection, turning potential threats into advantages. They have built such powerful brand loyalty that customers will wait in line for hours to buy their latest products at premium prices. Their continued innovation and enormous leverage over suppliers help them maintain healthy profit margins while delivering products people genuinely want. Apple's continued success comes down to balancing seemingly contradictory forces – visionary thinking with practical execution, premium pricing with sensed value, technological advancement with user-friendly design, and profit-seeking with environmental responsibility. They are not just selling gadgets; they are offering a vision of how technology can enhance our lives – and millions of customers worldwide continue to buy into that vision.

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