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Section 1: Strategic Analysis of Apple Inc.

1.1 Organisational Context and Overview

Apple Inc. was established in Cupertino, California in 1976 by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne. Its resurgence in 1997 under Jobs has seen it become a digital powerhouse. Apple's iconic products including the iPod, iPhone and iPad transformed consumer electronics and positioned Apple as a market leader.

Apple transitioned from a hardware focused firm to one focused on an integrated ecosystem of hardware, software and services. In fiscal 2024, revenues reached \$416 billion (Apple Inc., 2025). The company's focus is on offering the best user experience through its operating systems (iOS, macOS, watchOS), and digital services (App Store, Apple Music, Apple TV+, iCloud, Apple Pay, Apple Card).

The product range includes core products such as the iPhone, Mac, iPad, Apple Watch, and, recently, Apple Vision Pro. As the topmost firm in the global tech industry, Apple competes with global giants Samsung, Google, and Microsoft, whilst also maintaining the highest average prices for smartphones.

Table 1: Competitor Comparison (FY2024/25)

Metric	Apple Inc.	Samsung Electronics	Microsoft Corp.	Alphabet (Google)
Revenue (FY2024/25)	\$416 billion	\$232 billion	\$281 billion	\$402 billion
Net Income (FY2024/25)	\$112 billion	\$13.82 billion	\$101 billion	\$132 billion
Market Capitalisation	~\$3.32 trillion	~\$542 billion	~\$3.6 trillion	~\$3 trillion
Primary Strength	Ecosystem integration and brand premium	Hardware scale and component manufacturing	Enterprise cloud and productivity software	Search dominance and advertising revenue

Sources: Statista, (2026); Apple Inc. (2025); Yahoo Finance, (2025a); CompaniesMarketCap, (2026a); Trading Economics, (2026); Xinhua News Agency, (2026); Microsoft Corporation, (2025); Trading

Economics, (2026; CompaniesMarketCap, (2026b); CompaniesMarketCap, (2026c); (Macrotrends, 2025); and CNBC, (2025).

1.2 External and Internal Environment Analysis

1.2.1 PESTEL Analysis

The framework is an effective way to cluster external drivers in a firm's environment (Johnson et al., 2023). For Apple, these are in a state of flux due to the global nature of its operations, the intricacies of its global supply chain and the ever-changing landscape of the digital technology industry.

The most important political issue facing Apple is the escalation of the US-China trade war. Apple's largest contract manufacturer, Foxconn, has most of its iPhone production in China. The placement of tariffs and potential for further supply chain delinking between the world's two most important economies presents significant strategic risk (Li and Liu, 2026). Meanwhile, the EU's Digital Markets Act, enforced in 2024, entailed Apple to open iOS to external app marketplaces and non-Apple payment options, consequently affecting segments of its income from Services (Apple Inc., 2025b). In the US, a landmark antitrust case against Apple was brought by the US Department of Justice in 2024, which accused the company of illegally monopolising the smartphone market (United States Department of Justice, 2024).

From an economic perspective, Apple's premium-pricing approach, while maintaining the company's high gross margins, also carries risks in times of consumer spending weakness. Apple's continued significant reliance on China as a source of manufacturing and as a market places it at risk of currency and macroeconomic headwinds in China (Li and Liu, 2026). However, the increasing prominence of Apple's Services division, which enjoys gross margins exceeding 70%, is increasingly de-coupling the company from the traditional hardware cycle (Yahoo Finance, 2025b).

The social environment is generally supportive of Apple. Growing consumer interest in data privacy has allowed Apple to differentiate its privacy-friendly architecture. The rise of personal health monitoring equipment is a natural fit with the growing set of health capabilities of the Apple Watch, including electrocardiogram (ECG), blood oxygen levels and fall detection. The greatest changes are the technological ones. Generative AI as a

platform technology offers Apple opportunities and threats. In one sense, the introduction of Apple Intelligence in 2024 showcases its potential; yet in another, competitors with strong roots in artificial intelligence may reshape the user interaction paradigm in a way that reduces the value of iOS (Apple Inc., 2024).

Environmentally, Apple has announced carbon neutrality in production and product lifecycle by 2030, and has evidence of progress towards this goal (Apple Inc., 2023). From a legal perspective, the emergence of a global regime of data privacy including Europe's GDPR and various state-level regulations in the US require legal and compliance expertise and resources. The analysis of PESTEL is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: PESTEL Analysis of Apple Inc.

Factor	Impact on Apple	Strategic Response
Political	US-China trade tensions threaten supply chain. EU Digital Markets Act (DMA) forces App Store interoperability. Regulatory scrutiny in the US on App Store monopoly practices.	Diversifying manufacturing to India and Vietnam. Compliance adjustments for EU markets while contesting DMA scope in legal proceedings.
Economic	Premium pricing model vulnerable during recessions. Strong US dollar reduces international earnings when repatriated. Consumer spending slowdown in China affecting device sales.	Growing high-margin Services revenue to reduce hardware cycle dependency. Offering Apple Card and Apple Pay to capture financial services margin.
Social	Rising digital-native consumer expectations for seamless cross-device experiences. Growing health and wellness technology demand. Privacy increasingly valued by consumers globally.	Expanded Apple Health and Apple Watch health monitoring. Privacy as a brand differentiator (App Tracking Transparency).
Technological	Generative AI reshaping consumer and enterprise software expectations. Competitors (Google, Microsoft, Samsung) rapidly integrating AI into products. Risk of disruption from new interaction paradigms (AI agents).	Launched Apple Intelligence AI platform in 2024. In-house silicon (M-series, A-series) provides competitive AI processing advantage.
Environmental	Increasing ESG investor scrutiny. Consumer and regulatory pressure to reduce e-waste and emissions. Climate risk to manufacturing regions in Asia.	Intent on achieving net-zero emissions throughout its global production and distribution network by 2030. Daisy robot

		programme for recycled materials recovery.
Legal	EU DMA enforcement requiring third-party app stores. US Department of Justice antitrust lawsuit filed in 2024. GDPR compliance requirements across European markets.	Legal teams managing multi-jurisdiction antitrust cases. Policy changes to App Store in EU while defending practices elsewhere.

Adapted from Johnson et al. (2023); Apple Inc. (2023); Li and Liu (2026) and United States Department of Justice (2024).

1.2.2 Porter's Five Forces

Michael Porter's (1980) Five Forces model remains a key model to assess the attractiveness of the industry and competitive landscape. Notably, the model was conceived before the digital age, but its application to Apple demonstrates how it has positioned itself well to deal with the bad forces (Grant, 2021).

The threat of new entrants is low. The cost of replicating Apple's position is high - billions of dollars of R&D investment, a 40-year global brand, exclusive silicon design skills, and more than two billion active devices creating network effects (Statista, 2026b). The threat of substitute products is moderate. Although the functions of Android phones are equivalent to those of iPhones, Apple's ecosystem produces a lock-in effect that makes functional substitution psychologically and practically difficult for iPhones users. The growing integration of iPhone with health and financial services further integrates it into consumers' lives.

Rivalry in hardware is fierce. Competition is fierce between Samsung, Google's Pixel series and Chinese brands like Huawei and Xiaomi, on price and performance. But Apple has largely removed itself from the competition for value through its premium positioning (Zhao, 2024). In services there is fierce competition from Spotify, Netflix and Google. Suppliers' bargaining power is a strategic issue. Apple's reliance on TSMC for high-end chip manufacturing and few suppliers for other key components present vulnerabilities as seen during the supply chain issues post the COVID 19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022. Apple has countered this challenge through long-term supplier contracts and diversification (Zhu, 2023). Buyer power is low for individual consumers, who have high

switching costs in the Apple ecosystem. But regulators have increasingly mandated structural reforms to Apple's App Store practices, on behalf of developers and consumers, as a form of collective bargaining power (European Commission, 2024a).

1.2.3 Internal Analysis: VRIO Framework

Barney’s (1991) resource-oriented perspective on firms explains that sustained advantage arises from assets which are distinctive, hard to replicate, strategically valuable, and effectively structured for optimal use. The VRIO framework translates this theory into action and offers a structure for analysing Apple’s internal resources (Rothaermel, 2021).

Perhaps the most important resource for Apple is its brand. It is valuable as it allows premium pricing that is impossible for rivals to match, rare as no other consumer technology company possesses the same combination of aesthetic influence and trust, and inimitable due to decades of branding complemented with product consistency, and well-organised due to the unified marketing and distribution efforts of Apple. The iOS ecosystem is a second source of ongoing advantage. The App Store, with more than 1.8 million apps and nine hundred thousand publishers, enables a network that becomes more valuable with each user and each developer, and is difficult to replicate because of the network effects that result (SQ Magazine, 2026).

Apple Silicon, its custom semiconductor chips, is a more recent capability that is currently delivering a temporary to sustained advantage. The M-series in Mac and A-series in iPhones provide industry-leading performance per watt in the products that they power, allowing product differentiation that is unavailable to software-only competitors (PreScouter, 2022). But Qualcomm and Samsung are making significant investments in similar custom silicon capabilities, so this may be a temporary advantage. The VRIO analysis is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: VRIO Framework Analysis of Apple Inc.

Resource Capability	/	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Organised	Competitive Implication
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Apple Brand and Reputation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Long-term market strength. Globally acknowledged as a leading brand, enabling the firm to set premium pricing levels.
iOS and macOS Ecosystem	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Long-term market strength. High switching costs lock consumers and developers into the Apple platform.
Apple Silicon (M-series and A-series chips)	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	From short-lived gains to enduring competitive strength. In-house chip design delivers performance and efficiency gains. Competitors investing in similar capabilities.
Retail and Service Experience	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Competitive parity moving to advantage. Premium retail model is distinctive but rivals (Samsung, Microsoft) have experimented with similar formats.
Services Platform (App Store, iCloud, Apple Pay)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Long-term market strength. Network effects strengthen with each additional user and developer, creating self-reinforcing growth dynamics.
Privacy and Data Architecture	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Competitive advantage. On-device processing and App Tracking Transparency differentiate Apple from Google and Meta in the eyes of privacy-conscious consumers.

Adapted from Barney (1991) and Rothaermel (2021).

1.3 CSR and Sustainability Objectives

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a central focus in the strategies of global enterprises. Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid comprises four tiers of responsibility: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. Apple's CSR strategy can be assessed within the framework of all four dimensions, but the most visible expressions of Apple's CSR are environmental.

Apple's largest CSR initiative is its goal to reach carbon neutrality (across the whole value chain including supply partners and emissions from product use) by 2030 (Apple Inc.,

2023). Apple has declared that its business activities have operated on a carbon-neutral basis since 2020, and many of the suppliers within its network are transitioning toward complete reliance on renewable energy sources (Apple Inc., 2025b; Apple Inc., 2026). Apple's Daisy robotic recycling initiative reclaims valuable components such as cobalt, rare-earth elements, steel and aluminium from used iPhones, supporting a circular economy (Sustainability Magazine, 2023). Apple operates a Supplier Responsibility initiative designed to monitor working conditions, occupational health and safety, and adherence to environmental standards across its supplier network (Apple Inc., 2025c).

The alignment of Apple's CSR strategy with business goals is multifaceted. Its privacy-as-a-product brand stands in contrast to those dependent on advertising (Google and Meta), thus influencing consumer choice. Sustainability efforts minimise regulatory risk and attract institutional shareholders with Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investment strategies. But some critics contend that Apple's approach to sustainability is carefully crafted, pointing out the company's long history of poor repairability in its products, which contradicts the principles of a circular economy (Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson, 2024). The conflict between revenue-generating through planned obsolescence and the sustainability imperative is a critical strategic dilemma that Apple has yet to fully address and that continues to expose the company to reputational risk.

1.4 Comprehensive and Holistic View: The Balanced Scorecard

The Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) approach converts strategy into operational objectives in four key areas: financial, customer, internal processes, and learning and development. Its focus on non-financial aspects provides a broad view of performance management and can be used as a strategy evaluation tool for the strategic and operational management of large and complex firms like Apple.

Apple's financial strategy is to continue to drive revenue growth while incrementally increasing the Services revenue mix to increase the company's gross margin. In fiscal year 2024, Apple services brought in \$109 billion in revenue, accounting for more than 25% of total revenue and growing at more than 14% year-on-year, compared to low single-digit growth in the Products category (Yahoo Finance, 2025b). The critical financial metrics to track include revenue growth, Services segment gross margin, earnings per

share (EPS) and free cash flow. Apple continues to excel in the above metrics among its peers.

In terms of customers, Apple's topmost goal is to entrench ecosystem loyalty and customer base in new high-growth markets, including India. The Apple ecosystem's customer retention rate is over 90% (a measure of switching cost effectiveness). Net Promoter Score indicators, while not reported in detail, consistently rank iPhone as a top consumer product (SQ Magazine, 2026). The progress in health, finance and content distribution services within the Apple device ecosystem gradually adds value to the device lifecycle for the customer.

From an internal processes perspective, Apple's key focus is to accelerate the deployment of artificial intelligence technologies across the product portfolio, while hedging its supply chain risk. The release of Apple's on-device and server-side generative AI platform, Apple Intelligence, in 2024 is the largest internal process change in the post-Jobs era (Apple Inc., 2024). Simultaneously, Apple has made considerable investments in ramping up production in India and Vietnam (HFS Research 2024; ASEAN Briefing 2024). From a learning and growth perspective, Apple's future growth is dependent on its continued ability to recruit and retain the best talent in the world in silicon design, machine learning and health technologies. Apple spent more than \$34 billion on R and D in FY2025 - not to mention the time (Macrotrends 2026). Apple's Balanced Scorecard is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Balanced Scorecard for Apple Inc.

Perspective	Objective	KPI	Target	Strategic Initiative
Financial	Sustain revenue growth and expand high-margin Services segment	Total revenue growth; Services revenue as percentage of total revenue	Services to exceed 25% of total revenue by FY2026	Expand Apple TV Plus, Apple Arcade, and Apple Intelligence subscription tiers
Customer	Deepen ecosystem loyalty and expand installed base in emerging markets	Customer retention rate; Net Promoter Score (NPS); active device count	Grow active device base beyond 3 billion units by 2029;	iPhone expansion in India; localised product pricing; Apple Watch

			maintain NPS above 70	health ecosystem deepening
Internal Processes	Accelerate AI integration across product lines and strengthen supply chain resilience	R and D spend as percentage of revenue; supply chain diversification index; product cycle time	Maintain R and D investment above \$34 billion annually; 30% of production outside China by 2029	Apple Intelligence platform rollout; India and Vietnam manufacturing scale-up
Learning and Growth	Build AI and health technology talent pipeline and developer ecosystem strength	Number of App Store registered developers; AI and ML headcount growth; employee satisfaction index	Grow registered developer community beyond 35 million; increase AI engineering headcount by 20% annually	University research partnerships; internal Apple University leadership development; developer conference (WWDC) expansion

Adapted from Kaplan and Norton (1992); Yahoo Finance (2025b); SQ Magazine (2026); HFS Research (2024); ASEAN Briefing (2024); Asymco, (2026); Streamline Feed, (2026); Yahoo Finance, (2026c) and Mactrotrends (2026).

1.5 Strategic Choices and Implementation

Apple's strategy can be broken down into business and corporate level strategies. At the business level, Porter (1985) defines three basic strategies: cost leadership, differentiation and focus. Apple pursues a distinctiveness-based strategy, positioning its offerings at higher price points, supported by superior product design, seamless hardware–software synergy, and a strong brand reputation. Apple's average price for an iPhone is over \$800, compared to an industry average of \$300, making this strategy a success. This design is not just a "skin" - it is architecturally linked to hardware and software that is difficult to duplicate (Kambhampati and Zghair, 2025).

From a corporate perspective, Apple's strategy is one of related diversification, from being a single category personal computer manufacturer to electronics, digital media, financial services, health and spatial computing. These moves can be understood through the lens of Ansoff's (1957) product - market growth matrix. Apple's expansion into India as a high growth opportunity is a form of market development, where it applies existing products to

a new geographical market. The Apple Vision Pro is a product development strategy, where the company is taking an entirely new product to its affluent customers (Ray, 2024). Apple Health's move into diabetes monitoring and psychological health care is a diversification move into related markets (Apple Inc., 2026).

Figure 1: Ansoff Matrix showing Apple's Strategic Growth Moves

	Existing Products	New Products
Existing Markets	MARKET PENETRATION - Apple Intelligence features driving iPhone 16 upgrades. Growing Services ARPU from existing subscribers. Continued Apple Watch health feature expansion to deepen loyalty.	PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT - Apple Vision Pro as a new spatial computing category. Apple Health expansion into continuous glucose monitoring. Apple Car project (reported advanced development).
New Markets	MARKET DEVELOPMENT - India market expansion with localised pricing and domestic manufacturing. Emerging market growth through lower-tier iPhone SE strategy. Apple Pay expansion into new geographic markets.	DIVERSIFICATION - Apple Financial Services (Apple Card, Apple Pay Later). Healthcare data platform leveraging Apple Watch installed base. Potential entry into automotive software through CarPlay evolution.

Adapted from Ansoff (1957) applied to Apple Inc.'s current strategic portfolio.

In terms of execution, the successful execution of Apple's strategy must overcome organisational capability and change. Kotter (1996) proposes the successful organisational change requires a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering action by removing barriers, creating short-term wins, and building on the change. Apple's transformation into an AI company is an example of such a change where the organisation must develop technological capability, but also be able to change its engineering culture, app developer community and customer trust in AI privacy protection.

Apple's implementation strengths include a top-down management approach enabling swift turnarounds, its financial resources and its focus on secrecy and discipline in product development. The implementation challenges include the difficulty to transform the workforce with a long history of innovation in hardware design and engineering for

software and AI services development, and the regulatory issues associated with the rapid change of regulations in different countries.

1.6 Strategic Evaluation and Recommendations

The SWOT analysis, incorporating the previous external and internal analyses, provides an overview of the strategic position of Apple and possible future strategic opportunities (Johnson et al., 2023). Table 5 illustrates the SWOT analysis, and the BCG Matrix.

Table 5: SWOT Analysis of Apple Inc.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Global brand valued at over \$500 billion. Highly integrated hardware, software, and services ecosystem. In-house Apple Silicon delivering unmatched performance efficiency. Loyal consumer base with high switching costs. Services segment generating over \$109 billion in annual revenue with gross margins exceeding 70%.	Heavy dependence on iPhone, which accounts for more than 50% of total revenue. Concentrated manufacturing in China creating geopolitical vulnerability. Premium pricing excludes large portions of the global population. Limited presence in enterprise software relative to Microsoft.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Rapid expansion of the Indian smartphone market presents a significant growth opportunity. Generative AI integration across the product line can reinvigorate device upgrade cycles. Health technology (continuous glucose monitoring, mental health features) remains largely untapped. Apple Vision Pro makes spatial computing a new product innovation, thus creating a new product category.	EU Digital Markets Act and US antitrust litigation threaten App Store revenue model. Aggressive AI integration by Google and Samsung may erode software differentiation. US-China geopolitical tensions risk supply chain disruption. Economic slowdown reducing consumer appetite for premium-priced products.

Synthesised from PESTEL analysis, VRIO framework, Brand Finance (2025) and Investopedia (2026).

The Boston Consulting Group's (1970) Growth-Share Matrix analyses products or business units in terms of relative market share and market growth, which divide them into four categories: Stars, Cash Cows, Question Marks and Dogs. In Apple's product portfolio, the iPhone is a Cash Cow, as it has the largest market share of high-end smartphones, and it is the company's main source of revenue and profit but the growth in the smartphone market is slowing. The Services (App Store, iCloud etc.) group is a Star; it is a market share leader in the burgeoning services market and will be the future source

of profits. The Apple Watch is in the Star or "transitioning" position; it is the most popular smart watch in the premium smart watch category and the smart watch market is growing as smart health monitoring becomes a reality.

Apple Vision Pro, a new product launched in 2024 at \$3,499, is in the Question Mark position (Ray, 2024). The spatial computing market is not yet mature, and it remains to be seen whether Apple will be able to leverage its first-mover technological advantage to gain market share dominance, or if it will need to make substantial improvements before the product is widely adopted. The Mac and iPad lines of products are in a Cash Cow or transition position: profitable and stable in their respective mature markets, and they provide the revenue streams to support growth in other areas.

Figure 2: BCG Matrix

	HIGH Market Share	LOW Market Share
HIGH Market Growth	STAR Services - (App Store, Apple Music, iCloud, Apple TV+) Apple Watch (health monitoring) High growth, strong position. Primary investment priority.	QUESTION MARK - Apple Vision Pro (spatial computing) Apple Intelligence / AI Platform Uncertain trajectory. Requires investment decisions based on market development pace.
LOW Market Growth	CASH COW - Mac and MacBook (mature PC market, dominant premium share) iPhone (maturing smartphone market, dominant premium share) Generate cash to fund Stars.	DOG - iPod (discontinued 2022) HomePod (niche smart speaker market) Minimal investment warranted; maintain or selectively exit.

Adapted from Boston Consulting Group (1970) applied to Apple Inc.'s current portfolio.

Given the above analysis, it is recommended that Apple undertake the following three things. First, Apple should move to accelerate its AI strategy to protect its ecosystem position against Google and Microsoft, which have quickly responded to the generative AI threat by integrating generative AI into their respective ecosystems. The success of Apple Intelligence as a product and Services revenue generator will play a pivotal role in Apple's competitive place in second half of this decade. This recommendation meets the SAFe criteria (Johnson et al., 2023) - it is suitable because of Apple's silicon and software

capabilities, acceptable because of the revenue opportunity, and feasible because of the scale of Apple's R and D investments.

Secondly, Apple ought to pursue a faster expansion strategy in India. As the globe's second-largest smartphone market, India is experiencing a swift transition from mid-tier devices to premium models (Android Headlines, 2026). The establishment of flagship outlets in Mumbai and Delhi, combined with domestic iPhone manufacturing through Tata Electronics, provides the foundation for a sustained market-share growth plan reminiscent of Apple's trajectory in China throughout the 2010s (Masters' Union, 2025).

Third, Apple should address the inconsistency between its green rhetoric and product repairability strategy. The EU Right to Repair legislation and consumers' increasing e-waste awareness pose a regulatory and reputational risk that will worsen (European Commission, 2024b). By anticipating repairability and product lifespan, Apple's sustainability agenda is realised in practice, thereby minimising the risk of greenwash and potentially generating new revenue streams with certified refurbishment and component reuse.

Section 2: Personal Reflective Account

This reflective practice uses Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988). The Gibbs cycle was chosen in preference to Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle because it allows a clear separation of emotional and cognitive processing, offering more opportunities for academic reflection at postgraduate level.

Description

This research conducts a holistic strategic analysis of Apple Inc. using several models such as PESTEL, Porter's Five Forces, VRIO, Balanced Scorecard, SWOT, Ansoff Matrix and BCG Matrix. It also explores corporate social responsibility, change management, and challenges of strategic management of one of the world's leading technology companies. The report started with a detailed examination of Apple's corporate documents (such as the Fourth Quarter 2025 Results and the Supply Chain Progress Report 2025 and 2026) and engagement with postgraduate strategic management textbooks and seminal literature. The resultant analysis was then distilled into a coherent narrative.

Feelings

I was initially both excited and nervous about the task. I was familiar with Apple as a consumer and technology enthusiast but my frame of mind had to shift to consider it from an academic perspective of strategic analysis. I was somewhat confident about applying the frameworks, as I had studied them during the module, but was painfully aware of the danger of writing descriptive rather than critical analysis at Level 7. I was also uncertain initially how to cope with the mass of Apple information, and how to avoid being encyclopaedic in my analysis.

Evaluation

A successful approach was to use Apple's corporate documents as primary sources. The Fourth Quarter Results 2025 contained detailed financial information that allowed me to use actual numbers rather than estimates for the Balanced Scorecard and BCG Matrix analyses, which increased the analytical rigour of those sections. The choice of Gibbs' model of reflection over Kolb's was also effective, because the emotional component

inherent in the Gibbs model, meant I had to take into account not only what I did but why I did certain things in my analysis.

What was not effective in the initial drafts was my initial inclination to explain the models before using them. For example, the original draft of the VRIO section contained much more description of what VRIO is than it did analysis of Apple's resource base. Understanding that this is a requirement of Level 7 analysis that means we need to use frameworks as tools rather than to teach about them was a valuable corrective lesson that enhanced the quality of the later sections.

Analysis

Reflecting on the process of completing this analysis, there were three key lessons. The first was the inter-relationship of the frameworks. The VRIO analysis was significantly enhanced by the PESTEL analysis, for instance, the recognition that the EU Digital Markets Act posed an external legal threat influenced the assessment of the Apple's App Store's inimitability, as regulatory action can undermine the barriers to competitive advantage. This showed the value of applying strategic frameworks in succession and in conversation with each other, as opposed to in isolation.

The second lesson related to CSR. I was initially inclined to view Apple's environmental goals and actions as positive. Reading the literature on the disconnect between sustainability statements and practices, however, provided a more complex view. Carroll's (1991) pyramid was helpful in differentiating between ethical responsibility and a potential reputation management strategy. This was not a point of weakness in the report but rather a point of strength because it recognised tensions rather than forcing a fit.

The third learning opportunity was attempting to apply the BCG Matrix to a business as diverse as Apple. This model is based on the idea that different business units function fairly independently, something that is not totally true of Apple's ecosystem, where the value of the Apple mobile phone is partly created by the Services segment and vice versa. This necessitated the use of the model with caveats, recognising its shortcomings while drawing its insights. This ability to employ a model critically, while recognising its value and limitations, is the type of level of analytical judgement seen in Level 7 work compared to more descriptive analyses.

Conclusion

If I had the chance to redo this report, I would spend more time in the primary literature review, before writing, in particular in relation to academic journal articles published since 2021 on platform competition and digital ecosystem strategy. The field of strategic management has seen extensive research on platform business models in recent years, and a more detailed engagement with this body of work would have added detail to the analysis of the Apple ecosystem model beyond what the classical models could offer. I would also draft the Balanced Scorecard section more fully; in its final form the Balanced Scorecard is a complex synthesis and was refined in several drafts.

Action Plan

For future strategic analysis projects, I'll develop a literature search protocol to help me conduct a thorough search of the Strategic Management Journal and the Academy of Management Review databases as well as the textbooks. I will also experiment with multiple frameworks for the same strategic phenomenon before writing, to get used to the triangulation practice that undergirds rigorous strategic analysis rather than description with a single framework. In practical terms, my experience of analysing Apple has also enhanced my understanding of the fact that platform business models require a different strategic logic than can be fully captured by traditional industrial organisation economics, and this will guide me in my consulting practice in digital-intensive industries.

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