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Report: Business environmental analysis of Apple.

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Executive Summary

Organisational analysis is the process of assessing the development, work environment, personnel and operation of a business. The purpose of this report is to analyse Apple's business operating environment from multidimensional perspective, hence, the report analyses both the internal and external environment in which Apple operates. I shall use applicable tools to evaluate the internal and external environment through SWOT analysis, PESTLE analysis, Value Chain Analysis, and Porters five forces model. In addition, the report examines the challenges confronting the global tech giant and proposes intervention measures that could be used to alleviate the situation. Recently, Apple has continued to dominate the tech space, in particular the segment of consumer electronics by providing high end personal computers, music hardware, software, and other IT solutions. (Khan, Alam, and Alam, p134-140, 2015) suggest that Apple has been so successful to revolutionise consumer experience with digital technology and at the same time to consistently post positive returns. Based on this background, the current study analyses the strengths, weaknesses of Apple's hardware and its potential and vulnerability in the future. Apple's key internal strengths and weaknesses were examined in the context of its industry. External factors are those that are beyond the control of company, therefore, keeping product development is of high importance in the decision making bodies. Apple's strategic value are segregated strategy, lessor but integrated products, low focus on market share, low shareholder return policy, global cheaper marketing. The analysis of the value chain of the Apple Inc. showed a very critical aspect in the manufacturing and production sector of the company. This is due to the fact that Apple Inc. does not have any manufacturing facilities to produce the hardware for its products. They, instead rely on the outsourcing of the manufacturing to Chinese corporations. This can be very detrimental to the company in the long run. Another aspect that could be improved is the Human Resource aspect that is critical to support activity of the value chain. Based on the report findings; Apple prioritises intensive investment in new market segments, gradual decrease of product prices, increase market share, focus on emerging markets, and retain skill labor.

1. Introduction

1.1 About Apple

Apple was established in 1976 and adopted product diversification strategy by actively taking part different market segments and diversified products that are in the industry of technology (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012). Apple developed computer hardware for Mac, iMac, Mac Pro, MacBook, MacBook Air and software, (IOS, OS X, Safari, iLife, iWork, iMovie, iPhoto). Apple also has digital products, for example, iTunes store, iCloud, App Store, Mac App Store.

Apple sells products on their stores or online. The company Headquarters is California USA and provides online services over 100 countries and has offices in over 22 countries as well as Apple employees are approximately, 123, 000. Apple's competitors are obviously from electronic market segment that specialises in hardware and software development. Apple's competitors but not limited are: Hewlett-Packard Company, Sony Corporation, Samsung Electronics, Google Inc, Microsoft Corporation, etc. Apple annual gross profit for 2019 was \$98.392B, a 3.38% decline from 2018. Apple annual gross profit for 2018 was \$101.839B, a 15.48% increase from 2017.

Apple has a reputation to design a wider lens that are integrated in hardware, and software service seamlessly. (Gaylord, 2012). Apple has the capacity to develop unique applications that is distinct from rival companies and had a success in the past. Google had a success in developing good software application, however, its hardware is yet to match Apple.

1.2 Mission

Apple designs Macs, the best personal computers in the world, along with OS X, iLife, iWork and professional software. Apple revolutionized how we consume music through the introduction of iPods and iTunes as well as set the innovation pace of mobile phones and computers (Apple Inc, 2019).

1.2 Vision

Apple is committed to best consumer experience through innovation and to provide high quality products, both hardware and software. (Apple Inc., 2019).

1.3 Values

Apple has core values and principles that is to develop great products, innovative technologies, value maximisation, specialisation, and customer excellency (Apple, Inc., 2019).

2.0 Apple's external environmental analysis.

Baye (2017) elucidates the evaluation of external elements that can affect the organisation's performance, as well as strategically appraise the organisation's own resources which are critical components of doing an organizational analysis. Analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and challenges, are critical to a company's success.

2.1 Pestle Analysis for Apple

2.1.1 Political and Legal Factors

According to (Khan and Alam 2018) “political lobbying is a bid to influence politicians and external political environment that has positive implications for the iPhone maker”. The trade war between USA and China can be Geo-political factor that affects revenues and long-term growth prospects of Apple. Apple's payment of taxes in different regions is geo-political factor that is also affecting Apple (Morrison, 2020). President Donald Trump has long accused China of unfair trading practices and intellectual property theft; therefore, Trump's tariffs policy aims to encourage consumers to buy American products by making imported goods more expensive. (BBC, 16 January 2020).

In contrast, Friedman's position is that free trade results in cheaper products for the consumer, therefore, improving the overall economy for Americans. Although Trump's protectionist policy may create more local jobs, however, it can increase the cost of manufacturing for Apple who heavily relies on manufacturing its product to Chinese cheap workforce.

2.1.2 Economic Factors

The first economic component is currency exchange rate. Apple generates about 59% cent of its total sales from international markets outside of United States (Sullivan, 2020). Accordingly, company revenues are negatively affected by currency exchange rate fluctuations, USD (Sloman, Hinde & Garratt, 2019). The tech giant hedges portions of its forecasted foreign currency exposure associated with revenue and inventory purchases, typically for up to 12 months. Changes in interest

rates can affect Apple revenues to a significant extent. Based on investment positions as of September 26, 2020 and September 28, 2019, a hypothetical 100 basis point increase in interest rates across all maturities would result in a USD 3.1 billion and USD 2.8 billion incremental decline in the fair market value of the portfolio, respectively (Hoxie, 2018) . Apple has based its manufacturing units in China due to cost-efficiency of resources in general and cheaper workforce. Rising costs of labour is a significant economic factor that has direct implications on the profitability of the business (Tibken, 2019).

2.1.3 Social Analysis

Throughout its history, Apple has been making a series of changes in its products to satisfy customer wants. The company has been making many acquisitions – such as Embark, Prime Sense, and Topsy. Sales of Apple products increased in India in 2013, therefore, open franchises and make investments in India, which is clear evidence of Apple rationale for growth strategy.

2.1.4 Technological Analysis

Apple is a trend setter in consumer electronics business and had aggressive philosophy on innovation. Apple offers unique and advanced technology, hence, retained 49% of its customers and convert 20% to iOS users 2012-13 (Frobes 2013). Apple’s deal with China Mobile had also brought 760 China Mobile subscribers into their circle, giving Apple a competitive advantage in world’s largest growing market (Frobes 2013).

2.2 Porter’s Five Forces

Studies reveal that the assessment of Porters five forces enables more effective strategic decision making (Johnson, Whittington, Regner, Scholes, & Angwin, 2020). Porter Five Forces are framework that analysis the five categories or “forces” that impacts the sustainability of industry profits: (1) entry, (2) power of input suppliers, (3) power of buyers, (4) industry rivalry, and (5) substitutes and complements. (Baye, 2017, p7-9)

2.2.1 Rivalry among competing sellers: (High)

Apple Inc. had a well-diversified portfolio of tech-based products; it sells hardware and software which makes a tough situation for Apple to compete globally (Apple 10-K). Positive point of Apple is, its product line is less, simple and user friendly, so they manage to make sales out of it easily compared to competitors. (Apple Form 10-K). Apple products had high differentiation when compared with other competitors' products. Moreover, Apple distribution channel for example, via Amazon and direct outlets is very strong, and helps Apple to strategically position their products. The report suggests, due to the intense competitive environment, Apple should increase its investment more in mobile, computer and software.

2.2.2 Potential entry of new competitors: (Low)

Apple's threat of new entrant competitors is low. Apple is world's dominant IT by focusing on niche market, for example, high income consumers that makes difficult for new entrants to grasp market. Huawei new innovations had increased the competition for high-end consumers and mostly, the competition revolves around the camera and the resolution power technology. The P30 Pro and iPhone camera resolutions are similar, and customers can substitute from one to another. Huawei and Apple have smart HDR modes that helps the range and quality of photo, therefore consumers may not be disappointed in each products camera

2.2.3. Competitive pressure from substitute products: (High-Moderate)

Apple's substitute product pressure is high-moderate. For almost every product of Apple there is a substitute product that is available. Comparing Apple Mac to HP, it is evident that Apple's main challenge is pricing. For instance, a basic HP laptop would go for \$350 whereas a low-end Mac can be \$1000. It is somehow irrational for a consumer to spend \$650 extra on a computer that can basically serve the same purpose for example, checking email, printing, and communicating. On these grounds, HP managed to export 40,000 units more than Apple in the first quarter of 2012 for example. Despite the higher prices, Apple's products dominated the high rankings on customer satisfaction and product superiority and majority of cost sensitive customers opt for more affordable HP that has basic functions (Kan, 2012).

Another comparison could be drawn from iPad and the Kindle Fire sold by Amazon. It is factual that tablets produced by Apple leads in customer stagflation and ratings. On the same scale,

Samsung tablets rates below average. Generally, on global trend demand for tablet hardware is appreciating unlike the PC which has been shrinking due to market saturation and intense competition which derives smaller market share per player. Competition to lead the tablet niche market drove Apple to modify the new version of iPad with a 7.85-inch screen and a cut-rate price tag. On the other side, Amazon embarked on the new project developing a larger version of its pint-size Kindle Fire (Moscaritolo, 2012). Apple is feeling the pressure from Google's decision to produce the Nexus 7, but Apple's iPad's sales have continued to follow a positive trajectory.

Lately, apple managed to ingrate the IPod and the ITunes or the iPhone + App Store (Moscaritolo, 2012), creating two distinct models which aids consumers on decision to purchase the Apple iPad or go for the Kindle Fire.

2.2.4 Bargaining power of suppliers: (Low-Moderate)

Suppliers bargaining power is moderate because of their unique capability to manufacture product for Apple. Apple has well diversified supplier numbers, therefore, Apple is not manufacturing everything from one supplier and in one place, hence, Apple buys in large quantities, that gives them higher purchasing power (Hamilton & Webster, 2018).

2.2.5 Bargaining power of customers: (Low)

Apple enjoys its bold image of being innovator, quality assurance and big investor in R&D helps retain its current customers. Apple is also successful in switching competitor's customers towards Apple products (Tech Crunch 2014). Apple's targets high-end customers who are attracted to high quality products and services, therefore, Apple's white design was distinct that appealed to its core customers. (Gross, 2012). Apple has continued to grow its music product line by introducing the shuffle, the iPod touch, the nano, among other products aimed at certain consumers.

3.Apple's Internal Environmental Analysis

3.1. Apple Value Chain Analysis

The value chain of Apple contains Primary and Secondary activities. Primary activity includes Inbound and outbound logistics, Operations, Marketing & Sales and Service. (Porter, 2008). Apple value chain analysis is an analytical framework that assists in identifying business activities that

can create value and competitive advantage to the business. Figure1 below illustrates the essence of Apple value chain analysis.

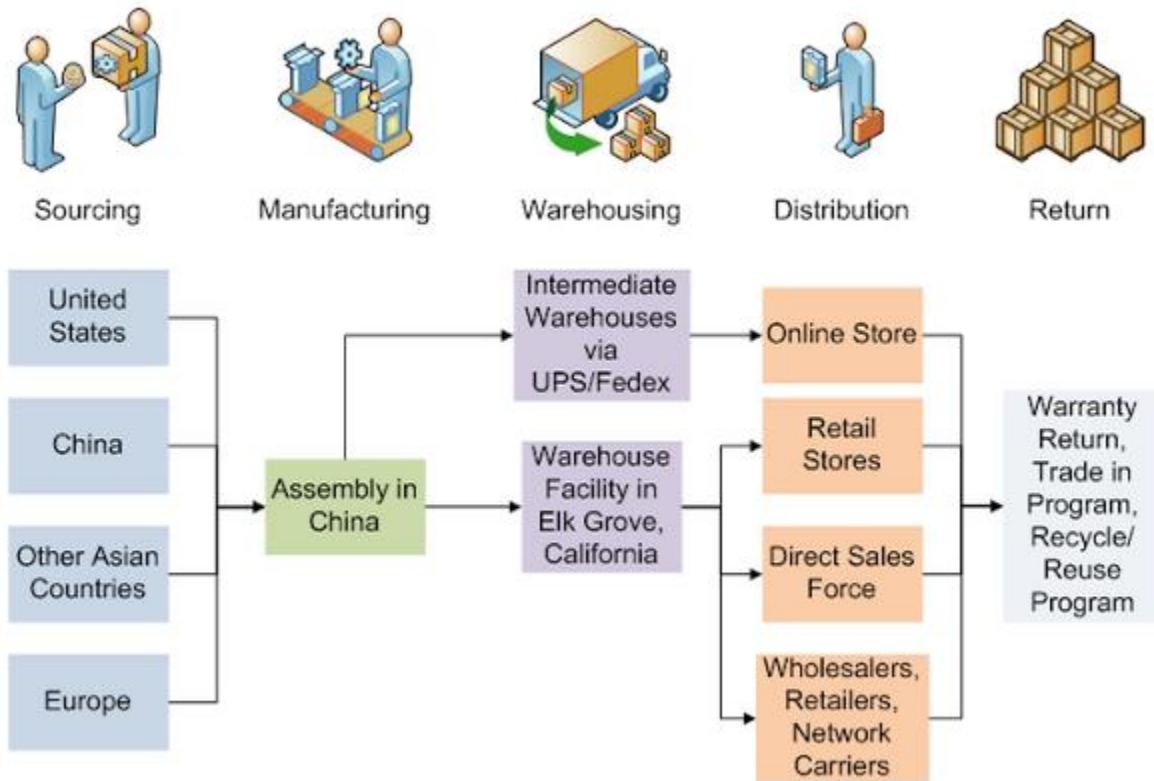


Figure 1: Value Chain Analysis. (Dudovski February 23, 2021)

Primary activities:

Inbound logistics: Apple has a large supply chain and obtains raw material from several suppliers that are mainly located in Asia, China, and Japan. The main sources of value in Apple's inbound logistics relate to the economies of scale due to the massive scope and scale of business operations. Moreover, Apple has bargaining power in dealing with its suppliers and as a result, the company is able to secure cost advantage when purchasing resources. Apple set quality standards for its suppliers so that they maintain the highest quality standards for their goods and services.

Operations: The manufacturing of the Apple products takes place in different places, however, most of the products are assembled in China and bear the tag of made in China. Labor costs have been low in the Asian countries which reduces the manufacturing costs for Apple.

Outbound logistics: Apple has managed a very large distribution channel consisting of both direct and indirect channels. From retail stores to online retail and its own branded stores, Apple has managed a very large channel for the distribution of its products to the customers. Apple outbound logistics involves in warehousing and distribution of ready iPhones, iPads, Mac computers and other products. For high-tech items such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, inventory depreciation rates are very high due to short product life cycles, therefore, the company ships products to Apple Stores that are typically located at high-traffic locations in quality shopping malls and prime shopping area to sell quickly.

Marketing and sales: Apple are popular brand and its products are known for quality, design and technological innovation. Any new product from Apple is like news that is highlighted in media and social websites, however, that does not mean Apple does not spend on marketing. While its products are publicized heavily in the media, Apple also makes unique ads that engage its customers. It has acquired remarkable brand loyalty using creativity and imagination in its advertising strategy. Apart from television and online commercials, the brand also makes use of print ads for the marketing and promotion of its brands.

Products and services: Apple are famous for exceptional quality of customer services in all three stages: pre-purchase, during the purchase and post-purchase. Apple sales assistants are usually trained and are technically savvy and happy to demonstrate product features and capabilities. Post-purchase customer service is also impressive with unique iPhone trade-in programs that allow iPhone users to upgrade their phone to newer models with additional payment.

Human Resource Management: Apple hires skill labor and pays well and has been the norm since the times of Apple's founder Steve Jobs. However, the style of HRM has changed a little in times of Tim Cook and promotes more in inclusion and diversity.

Procurement: In terms of the units sold, Apple ranks third, its annual revenues commands lion's share in the phone and computer industry. This places it at par with global tech giants such as Microsoft, Samsung, Dell, Huawei, Sony, IBM, Google, among others. The company capitalized on intensive growth strategies, center on innovation to develop new and developing markets. This culminated into the company maintaining strong global position. The company has always emphasized innovation, customer excellence; superior positioning that enabled access to high-end markets despite operating an industry characterized by low-cost products. Strategically, Apple also

managed to transform casual purchasers into brand ambassadors, a tactic which enabled Apple to penetrate the niche market.

Firm Infrastructure: Apple has strived to balance its hardware and software so to have most desirable product, thus, reaching specific hardware decisions that maximizes the value of the software is instrumental (Villas-Boas, 2019). Apple is well-known for its great operating system which creates a core software e.g the iLife with the potential to suit any new Mac. This approach sets Apple apart from other tech companies.

3.2. SWOT Analysis

3.2.1. Strengths

Apple is capable of introducing profitable new products by virtue of its strong brand image. In 2018, Apple was ranked ahead of other brands such as Coca Cola, IBM, Google, and Microsoft. Apple's products such as Mac, iPhone, and iPad operate on a similar software, making Apple a natural choice for customers (Okusolubo, 2020). One of the strongest capabilities that define Apple's success is innovation. Over the years, apple has remained committed to developing new products. The introduction of the iPod Music player as well as initiating performance enhancement on Apple smartphones are some examples in ensuring Apple stays on top of the industry. As a result, Apple believes that remaining competitive demands developing new products in the software, operating system, as well as the application..

3.2.2. Apple's Weaknesses

Apple is regarded to have rigid control management system and do not share operating system with outsiders. Apple has a limited distribution network because of the company's policy of exclusivity. For instance, the company carefully selects authorized sellers of its products. In addition, because of the premium pricing strategy, Apple has the weakness of having most of its sales revenues from the high-end market. This market is composed of customers from the middle and upper classes. Customers from the lower class, which represents the majority of buyers in the global market, struggle to purchase Apple products because of the relatively high prices.

3.2.3. Opportunity

Apple has the opportunity to expand its distribution network that can help the firm reach more customers in the global market. Through further innovation, Apple can introduce new product lines the Apple Watch and as such, development of new product lines can support the company's growth.

3.2.4. Threats Facing Apple.

Apple competes with firms like Samsung, which also adopt aggressive and rapid innovation. Due to the aggressive nature of the industry, it is necessary to have strong fundamentals for maintaining a competitive advantage. In addition, Apple faces the threat of product features copying.

Moreover, rising labor costs in Apple plants, such as in China, can reduce profit margins or push selling prices even higher.

4. The limitations and mitigation measures

4.1.Holding onto the Future: iTunes and Digital Asset Management

The tech industry is characterized by rapid technology changes and high uncertainties. The leadership of Apple understands and appreciate that the future is unknown, therefore, competition remains unavoidable. The iTune innovation has expanded the scope of Apple into a digital asset management company. The company announced that it had access to credit card information for more than 100 million clients courtesy of iTune by the year 2009. This implies in the future; these consumers will continue to trust in shopping Apple's products.

Apple's success seems to stem from the organizational structure and leadership practices as well as its accomplishments. The company has organizational order of structure and arranges its products into groups; hence, Apple's main products are the iMac, iPod, and the iPhone. The inter-divisional collaboration gives birth to the weak functional matrix. In terms, of leadership, most of the decisions is made by the CEO and in the early days was Steve Jobs. When Jobs passed away, the new leadership focused on interdepartmental collaboration, for example, the software and hardware teams to take on the same project, therefore, the structure seems less rigid compared in the past.

4.2.Hardware

The Macbook Air is linked to the following limitations: it does not core with USB 3.0 and the same USB is expensive, the hard drive is small, the battery life is short, versatility is limited, limited flash storage, and RAM, lack of ports and optical drive, and the inbuilt battery is difficult to replace. Although Apple's software rank best in the market, however, the premium pricing is a challenge to consumers. It is irrational for customer to spend hundreds of dollars on a single hardware only to end up spending additional dollars on software that is esteemed to expire or crack down. The hardware of Apple suffers from low support staff with limited labor force of experts who can repair or handle Apple products, majorly the hardware and few technicians who charge high and inevitably escalates the cost of repair. Generally, the support services by Apple are not customer accommodative.

Moreover, there is limited enterprise support. For example, connecting MacBook to the company VPN might not be supported all the time. This is also linked to the fact that a few technical staff have adequate skills to guide others on how effectively to integrate this. It also means that if technical issues happen, then few remedy could be made. In other words, Apple is dominated by poor enterprise support, and this has nothing to do with whether Apple brands are superb or not.

On several occasions, Apple has also been beaten on its own game: the hardware. Apple has been slow in releasing new hardware to the market. For instance, in 2014, HP and Lenovo launched the Haswell-EP workstations but Broadwell chip for MacBook was unveiled in the second half of 2015. Also, Apple's products cannot be upgraded to better versions; for instance, customers could not integrate MacPro to meet the functionalities of the new Firepro workstation GPUs. Large proportion of Apple hardware does not provide for overclocking. The hardware of Apple need to consider flexibility of their products. Macbooks can only be upgraded at the time of purchase in the United States but it becomes different when trying to upgrade in another country. For Windows, the storage, memory, and other features could be upgraded at any given moment. Moreover, variety for Macs is limited to two models , forexample, 13 inch Macbooks and 15 inch Macbook, iMac and Mac Mini whereas Windows has released multiple models in the market depending on consumer specifications. MacBook Air utilizes the older version of processor; the

fifth generation Intel processor generates a lot of heat compared to the seventh-generation Intel Kaby Lake processors.

4.3. Software

Apple commands over 2.2 million applications against the 2.7 million apps by android. Google Play Store comes with more free space than the App store. The App store offers better browsing experience, and the Play store is easier to search, queue, and install multiple apps on the laptop. Side-loading of alternative apps is easier on Android than on Play Store. With the ability to cycle directions, Google Maps are rated ahead of Apple Maps. Apple' operating system provides consistent and timely software and security updates (iOS 12: 87%, iOS 11: 9% and Earlier: 4%). Apple operating system, nearly 90% run latest version whereas for Android, all 10% of Google's devices run on latest version. With texting and messaging, Google has a hangout software which allows messages, SMS, video chat, group chat, and more via Wi-Fi or your data network. Additionally, the Android messages is the primary messaging app. On average, the cost of Apple software is higher than Google's.

The competitive advantage of Apple is also associated with positioning. For years, Apple has remained a market leader in terms of invention, therefore, launches a product before other firms attempt to mimic (Worstall, 2012). iPod revolutionized the music distribution industry when released and had the capability to condense more than 1000 CD quality songs into a single folder and the potential for portability design that could be pocketed (Gross, 2012). Another differentiation of this new product emerged from the potential for auto-syncing, allowing for download of music from the iTunes and linking the songs to the Macintosh computer. (Gross ,2012). adds that iPod developed in feature, Fire Wire which could permit download of an entire CD within 10 seconds and more than one thousand songs in a record less than ten minutes. The average speed was 3000 times faster than the USB- based players. By then, Apple's iPod was faster and friendly to the customer than the usual mp3 players.

4.4. IOS Security

Apple constantly improves security and credibility of its operating system. Apple's iOS has the capability that balances different security layers such as end user security and corporate security.

Apple approach to security is in line with the company's corporate production strategy that safeguards customers from theft and develops reliable and integrated hardware and software products. Apple ensures that the design has advanced features that guarantees protection of the system, protecting all the apps running on the system, while ensuring seamless management and encryption of both personal and corporate data.

5. Conclusion

Finally, the report finds that Apple has strong internal capabilities to address the internal limitations. For example, the company's rapid high-tech innovation and with strong brand image, Apple can manage to develop new product lines, penetrate new markets, and widen its distribution network with ease. Apple's major challenge today could be an increased product imitation, copying features and aggressive competition from Google, Huawei, Samsung, and Microsoft. The company is also facing serious threats in the rapidly developing market of online digital content distribution services. There is need for Apple to intensify its investment portfolio while penetrating new and emerging markets, work on lowering the prices of its products, grow the current market share for the iPod, iPhone, and the music devices. Financially, the company should focus on enhancing shareholder returns through appreciation of company shares. Apple's leadership must come to the reality that competition is intensifying daily, and copy cuts are dominating the industry. The report recommends that Apple must reinvent itself and work towards developing alternative markets beyond the primary markets which are currently dominated by iPhone and the Mac.

The future of Apple depends on how the company strategically positions in the market. Apple needs to move away from Steve Jobs innovations that were too defensive at times and seek for fresh ideas of developing new products and services to be ahead of the competition game.. Furthermore, Apple also needs to rethink its high product prices in which they always lose the low-income market segment to competitors who develop tailored packages for different customers. It is possible for Apple to maintain value pricing while lowering the extreme cost of support services both personal and enterprise. The cost of the software should also be affordable to consumers.. Huawei or Microsoft could develop a superior and more advanced product at affordable cost at the expense Apple, hence, Apple might lose its market share to the rivalries.

The report finds that Apple commands sizeable share in the consumer electronics market segment, and recent trends indicate that Apple will enjoy growth in the future, however, rapid technology changes make the industry volatile and difficult to predict. The geo-politics and social- economic considerations such as the ongoing wars between Huawei and Google trade wars, and the struggling USA economy could have a serious implication that could shape the dominance of the key players in the global tech industry. Covid-19 had also affected global supply chains that is affecting inventory costs and inevitability of goods prices to soar. Finally, there are concerns of Apple's hardware and software that needs attention to stay in the competition.

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