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Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Name of the Programme: Master of Business Administration

Name of Module: Marketing Management (LCMB7024)

Title: Assessment Component 1- Essay

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Submission Date: 28th March 2025

Word Count: 2363

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1. Introduction

Today's competitive world, business is growing and changing very rapidly. But, in strategic marketing there are always a matter who will enter first in the market and who will later. The decision to enter as a pioneer and later as a follower is difficult to make, affecting not only the company's position in the market, but also its long-term growth, competitiveness, and brand perception. Marketing scholar like Kotler and Keller (2020) give an explanation that timing of market entry will affect how the consumer expectation, competitors' reaction, and how resources are allocated. Therefore, first and late it not only a race but also about flexibility, understanding, and leadership.

1.1 Topic Overview and Background

Pioneer is the one who introduced the new product, service, and ideas first in the market. As a first mover allow them to set the category, price structure, and gain customer loyalty (Kotler and Keller, 2020). As a result, pioneer got the scope to being a leader in market and always try to innovate something new to acquire competitive advantage. On the other hand, the follower or latecomers enters market after launched the pioneer ideas and get the opportunity to see the success and failure of any products. According to Tellis and Golder (2002), the strategy of late mover helps to reduce risk and gain success in market easily.

1.2 Key Definitions (Pioneer, Follower, PLC)

However, enter market early or late doesn't matter to competitive success. The matter is how they manage their products throughout the business journey. The Product Life Cycle (PLC) introduces a structure that visualizes four key stages: introduction, growth, maturity, and decline (Hooley, Piercy and Nicoullaud, 2020). To acquire audiences, appreciate allegiance, avoid apathy are important during these stages.

1.3 Statement

This essay analyses the advantages of pioneer and following strategies, with a critical assessment of their strengths. It uses real-world company pairs - Nike and Adidas, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, and Amazon and Walmart- to assess how pioneers and followers manage their markets and how they apply PLC strategies to support long-term growth. The analysis indicates that success starts not simply from being swift,

but from smart strategy and steady steps during the growth and maturity stages. Both pioneers and followers can be market leaders—when their strategies are informed, responsive, and customer-centric.

2. What are the advantages of being a pioneer and follower company? Provide examples of successful pioneer and follower companies.

2.1 Advantages of being a Pioneer Company

A pioneer is the one who launched innovation, product, and service at the very first from another competitor. It helps them to develop customer perception, establish early brand trust, and industry standard (Kotler and Keller, 2020). According to the marketing Lieberman and Montgomery (1988), pioneer acquire the tech leader in market, make believe consumer to move from competitor, and benefit from unique resources like shelf visibility and distribution partnerships.

Coca-Cola is a strong example and the first world carbonated drink, by using same bottling method in everywhere in the world they achieved a strong image that make them dominant player. In 2023, Coca-Cola confirms that they're operating business about 200 countries over the world which proves their longevity and image as a first mover (Coca-Cola Company, 2023).

By using the introduction of Air Jordan and athlete endorsement, catches deep emotional engagement with consumers Nike achieved a pioneering role. Nike's early authenticity make bridge long-term trust and loyalty. According to their website, in 2023 revenue was \$51.2B which indicates that first mover opportunities before entering others in market.

Amazon is a digital platform and started their journey in 1990s as an online book retailer. This early entry gave them critical time to scale, invest in logistics infrastructure, and develop Amazon Web Services (AWS), making technological obstacle for late mover. As a result, in 2024 Amazon hold 37.6% market share in US for its early entry (Statista, 2024). This is the pure early strategy built long-term dominance and set industry norms.

2.2 Advantages of Follower Companies

Follower's companies always follow the market result before launching any products. Lower risk, reduce development cost, and refine the existing offer are the main advantages of them. First-entry companies always dominate by bypassing early failure and bring better product for second time stated by (Markides and Geroski, 2005).

Adidas comes in the market when Nike was in rising position. But became successfully by collaborating cultural and environmental positioning. Adidas's follower strategy is appeals to younger, sustainability-minded consumers Ekstract, S. (2021). The annual report of 2023 Adidas revenue was €22.5 billion form environmentally friendly product ranges and online e-commerce.

Likewise, PepsiCo followed Coca-Cola but opted for a broader, value-oriented strategy. Okonkwo et al. (2023) PepsiCo's localisation and product variation allowed it to win global markets. PepsiCo confirm their revenue in 2023, and it was \$91.5 billion across food and beverage items (PepsiCo, 2023).

Walmart enter the market following Amazon. At the very begging they used hybrid model and connected to the physical shop to online. Even offered same day delivery option, fulfilment in-store, and reward program which led them succeed in offline and online store. Morgan and Zhang (2022) noted that this model saved Walmart because they avoided Amazon's early setup costs but still competed strongly.

2.3 Discuss, analyse and critically evaluate the advantages.

First mover always gets attention and control, but it doesn't last long. Tellis and Golder (2002), sometimes pioneer become fail because they face high cost and more risk. In contrast, followers always wait and observer the market and gather experience from early mistakes.

Amazon given the opportunity to people to shop online at first. They provide fast delivery, digital services, and global logistics network. On the other hand, Walmart followed later but they connected all the physical shops and offer click-and-collect same day delivery online and offline. This mix of Walmart selling strategy help them grow fast. According to Companiesmarketcap.com (2023), Amazon holds 37.6%

(\$574.78 billion) of the U.S. e-commerce market, but Walmart generated total revenues of \$611 billion (Walmart Inc., 2023).

Coca-Cola enters the first in market with soft drinks. Later, PepsiCo enter with snacks and health drinks. This is why; PepsiCo grown in market with new ways. In 2023 Coca-Cola and PepsiCo generates total revenue of \$45.75 and \$91.47 billion individually.

Nike led its position with athlete branding and emotional marketing. Adidas follow the digital culture and eco-friendly fashion. According to Ekstract, S. (2021), Adidas use these ideas and connect with young generation. Companiesmarketcap.com (2023), the total revenue of both was \$51.54 billion and \$23.22 billion separately.

2.4 Examples of Pioneer and Follower Companies

Amazon started their journey in e-commerce with fast delivery, warehouses, and cloud technology. It changed the human shopping style. Walmart followed Amazon but connected their physical stores with their online platform. Morgan and Zhang (2022) explained that initially, Walmart was slower to adapt but soon caught up by implementing a hybrid model to effectively reach both offline and online consumers. It provides consumers both speed and choice.

Coca-Cola achieved its position in the soft drink industry with its early branding, bottling, and strong global image. Then, PepsiCo entered the market and grew faster by offering snacks and health drinks. A wider product mix helped PepsiCo reach new markets. PepsiCo's variety gave it long-term strength.

The shoe company Nike, which used athletes as brand ambassadors. Without these, they established a powerful emotional brand identity through its Air Jordan line model. Later, Adidas followed, using fashion and eco-friendly ideas to attract the younger generation. Ekstract, S. (2021) wrote about how Adidas built trust in consumers through style and sustainability.

In final analysis, each pioneers moved first and shaped the market. In case of follower, they observed closely, learned quickly, and often grew stronger by improving the model.

3. What product life cycle strategies do successful pioneer and follower companies implement to increase growth and maintain a strong competitive advantage? Provide examples of companies to support statements made.

3.1 Product Life Cycle Strategies of Pioneer and Follower Companies

The Product Life Cycle (PLC) illustrates how goods change over time in several phases: introduction, growth, maturity, and decline (Kotler & Keller, 2020). In every phase it follows different marketing strategy. All the successful companies fix to acquire long-term competitive advantages. For this reason, pioneer always lead the categories and follower adapting and improving themselves through late step. In this part compare how pioneers and followers manage the **growth and maturity stages**, with real examples and critical insight.

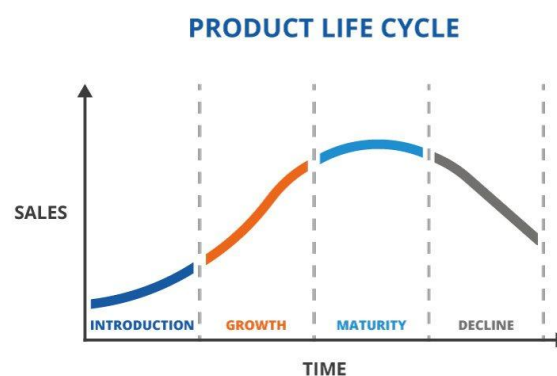


Figure 1 Image Source: (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012)

3.2 Growth and Maturity Stages for Pioneers

In case of growth state pioneer intention is always trying to be ahead of others competitor, grow fast, and build their brand. They increase promotion, sells in more places, and always improve the product.

In growth stage Nike is one of the companies that reached the highest stages through its Air Jordan brand during its entry stage. To maintain momentum, Nike collaborated with top athletes, developed fitness apps, and sold products through their website and stores. During this stage, strong emotional branding helps to connect with the consumer through Nike sport, culture, and identity Kapferer (2012).

In maturity stage, pioneers always changing themselves according to the market. If not, they will lose their positions. For this reason, Coca-cola keep changing them packing, bottling, seasonal ads or campaign, and sponsoring in the big event. Even extended its product life cycle through zero-sugar variants and global market penetration (Coca-Cola, 2023).

Amazon reached it maturity level through expanding in retail. After reached in leading position in online they launched cloud services (AWS), smart devices like Alexa, and its Prime membership. Pioneer always need to grow in new areas to keep his strong position (Uslay and Sisodia 2020).

Therefore, in maturity stage pioneer always focus to growth to customer loyalty, cost control, and brand development.

3.3 Growth and Maturity Stages for Followers

Follower companies always enter the market when the pioneer is in the growth stage. At the very beginning, observe the market and mistakes of the pioneers, and then they improve the features and offer better value.

For example, Adidas followed Nike and targeted fashion and sustainability. That is why they followed a way to collaborate with influencers and increase the investment in digital retails. Ekstract, S. (2021) stated that Adidas's sustainable strategies helped build a younger, loyal customer. So, it also proves that in the case of growth, followers always focus on differentiation and speed to market.

In maturity level, followers always stabilise their position in the market. PepsiCo is a follower company of Coca-Cola, which used variety in their products, like healthy foods and snacks, which help them stay competitive in the business market. PepsiCo's out-of-regional portfolio helped them to lower dependence on soft drinks and enter new life cycles.

Walmart is another latecomer company in the market that followed Amazon. At that time, Amazon was in the maturity stage. So, remain in a competitive market: Walmart connects all the physical shops to online too. As a result, they could order online and receive products from their desired store. Walmart's app, delivery system, and physical infrastructure give a hybrid retailer in the first time (Morgan & Zhang, 2022). This proves that through mixed strategy, followers could challenge mature pioneers.

Therefore, it gives a clear concept that followers could succeed by being faster, more flexible, and customer-centric in the mature markets.

3.4 Strategic Examples and Competitive Advantage

In the business market world pioneer and follower use different strategy for growth and maturity across the Product Life Cycle (PLC).

Table 1: PLC Growth and Maturity Strategies of Pioneer and Follower Companies

Stage	Pioneer Company with Strategy	Follower Company with Strategy
Growth	Nike: athlete branding, apps, D2C (Kapferer, 2012)	Adidas: eco-fashion, digital retail (Ekstract, S., 2021)
Maturity	Nike: innovation, brand extension	Adidas: sustainability, influencer marketing
Growth	Coca-Cola: global distribution, mass marketing	PepsiCo: snacks & health drinks
Maturity	Coca-Cola: zero-sugar drinks, packaging refresh (Coca-Cola, 2023)	PepsiCo: product localisation, wellness range
Growth	Amazon: Prime, logistics, personalisation	Walmart: app + store integration (Morgan & Zhang, 2022)
Maturity	Amazon: AWS, Alexa, subscriptions (Uslay & Sisodia, 2020)	Walmart: hybrid retail, digital fulfilment

Source: Adapted from Kapferer (2012), Ekstract, S. (2021), Coca-Cola (2023), Uslay & Sisodia (2020), Morgan & Zhang (2022)

Interpretation: This table describe how pioneers and follower use different strategies in PLC. The pioneers like Nike, Coca-Cola, and Amazon control brand because of it's early entry in the market. On the other hand, followers like Adidas, PepsiCo, and

Walmart improving themselves through adapting ideas. Pioneers stay competitive by providing new products and services and followers take opportunity by being fast, flexible, and focused on value. Followers can sometimes do better than pioneers if they observe future mature markets (Tellis and Golder, 2002).

3.5 Critical Evaluation

In the beginning stage Pioneer always dominates, but as they mature they face slowdown. In spite of their slow start, followers always gain knowledge fast. Kotler and Keller (2020) point out that being able to adapt to timing is an advantage. Despite their early success, Nike, Coca-Cola, and Amazon had to evolve to stay competitive. Adidas, PepsiCo, and Walmart entered the market later, gained knowledge quickly, and expanded by satisfying market needs.

It is common knowledge among academic research that fast followers can outperform pioneers when they adopt the correct strategy (Tellis & Golder, 2002). Pioneers who continue to innovate, like Amazon with AWS or Coca-Cola with global variants, often maintain their lead.

Conclusion

The essay describes how pioneer and follower companies gain success by marketing strategies which align with the Product Life Cycle (PLC). The First-mover advantages, including early market dominance, strong brand identity, and innovation leadership like Nike, Coca-Cola, and Amazon. Companies that are following suit, such as Adidas, PepsiCo, and Walmart, first observe the market before providing services with cost, quality, and service, and then achieving success.

Success consist in followers through agility, cost-effectiveness, and tech-drivenness, but pioneers must keep evolving through diversification and product development. Aligning these strategies with life cycle stages can lead to long-term competitive advantage.

In the final analysis, it doesn't matter when you enter the market, matter is how you execute the plans. To maintain performance and market relevance, it's crucial to align their strategies with their PLC stage.

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