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Lecturer's Name: Dr Haoran Liu

Student Name: Kaiyum Ahmed

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Introduction

Organisations within the ongoing competitive business environment require a selection of strategic approaches which suit their abilities together with market situations. The path between pioneer or follower in the market presents one of the major choices which businesses need to make. As pioneers introduce new products services or technologies they earn the advantage of being the first ones to market. Followers postpone their market entry until the industry reaches maturity by observing pioneer activities and meeting the shaped consumer needs. In the competitive business environment, companies face the critical decision of whether to be pioneers or followers. This strategic choice affects their market positioning and the way they respond to consumer needs. Pioneers gain the first-mover advantage by introducing innovations early, while followers can capitalize on market maturity, learning from the pioneers' experiences to optimize their offerings (Frynas, Mellahi & Pigman, 2018). Business strategies of leadership or follower roles present exclusive benefits together with inner threats which affect companies differently according to their market niches and objectives. A pioneer business strategy enables corporations to define market conditions while defining industry standards and developing dedicated consumer loyalties. This methodology needs major capital investment yet contains the possibility that the entire initiative could fail. Followers achieve reduced market risks while benefiting from improved offerings through the refinement of established ground provided by pioneers. Three companies including Darktrace Graphcore and DeepMind have pioneered market disruption within their respective fields but Lloyds Bank (Open Banking) together with Marks & Spencer (Online Retail) and British Airways (Biofuels) have refined existing models to create their specialised business segments. This paper conducts a critical examination of pioneer advantages and follower benefits by studying the mentioned companies. The discussion examines how PLC strategies function across the growth and maturity stages while demonstrating how businesses reframe their competitive practices in altering market conditions. The analysis will explore how companies use market entry strategic decisions to determine their future business success.

The Advantages of Being a Pioneer Company

When companies launch original product offerings as initial entrants into the market they secure a special advantage that makes them highly influential within the business landscape. The First-Mover Advantage is widely known but a deeper evaluation emerges when using Porter's Five Forces Framework (1980) (King & Tucci, 2024). Darktrace alongside Graphcore and DeepMind uses Porter's Five Forces Framework to exploit industry competition together with buyer and supplier power and substitutes and entry barriers which enable their sustained market leadership. This segment thoroughly studies the pioneering approach through which each organisation implements market force control for better advantages.

1. Industry Rivalry: Establishing Market Leadership (Darktrace)

When it comes to industry rivalry force pioneers achieve success through standard-setting behaviour that creates industry control to increase market dominance. Darktrace distinguishes itself as an industry leader through market success by developing autonomous AI systems which identify security threats and respond automatically in real time. Darktrace leads the AI cybersecurity market with a 15% share value of USD 17.4 billion which demonstrates its dominance (Ethiraj & Zhou, 2019). Darktrace established the market standards for AI in cybersecurity by introducing its groundbreaking security platform and became the reference measure for adversary companies. Early industry competition becomes less intense because Darktrace establishes product standards and quickly wins new customers which enables them to dominate industry rivalry during their initial development period.

2. Barriers to Entry: Protecting Innovation through Patents (DeepMind)

The second force depends on pioneers building barriers to entry through their control of intellectual property and their advanced research and development capabilities. The leader in artificial intelligence DeepMind strengthened its position by developing an extensive collection of patents. DeepMind maintains more than 300 patents related to artificial intelligence including AlphaGo and AlphaFold advances. DeepMind's patents function as technological and legal restrictions which force new companies to obtain costly licencing to duplicate or develop beyond DeepMind's innovations. DeepMind protects its AI premier status through expensive model duplications which operate as

tough market entry obstacles. Pioneer companies use Porter's barrier to entry force to protect their competitive position in the long run.

3. Buyer Power: Shaping Customer Preferences and Brand Loyalty (Graphcore)

The power of buyers diminishes because pioneers develop new value propositions that reshape what customers expect from products. The AI hardware manufacturer Graphcore created breakthroughs in machine learning chip designs through its Intelligence Processing Units (IPUs). The company distinguishes itself by helping resolve CPU and GPU inadequacies in AI processing therefore weakening customer power (Iansiti, McFarlan & Westerman, 2020). The specialised chips produced by Graphcore make Microsoft and Dell dependent customers who cannot easily change providers. The 2022 AI semiconductor report demonstrates Graphcore's significant position in Europe's AI hardware sector where it achieves more than 10% penetration thus establishing strong customer dependence. Graphcore stands as a market leader that establishes the performance definition which restricts prospective buyers from negotiating rates and allows the company to determine pricing for its innovative products.

4. Threat of Substitutes: Creating Technological Differentiation (Darktrace & DeepMind)

Through the introduction of advanced technologies pioneers reduce replacement threats because these innovations prove difficult for other companies to duplicate. Darktrace reached this milestone through its Enterprise Immune System whose operation replicates biological immune system functions to recognise and eliminate cyber threats. The innovative security approach of Darktrace represents a unique distinction in the market compared to conventional antivirus systems thus minimising substitution risk. The deep learning methods used in AlphaFold from DeepMind create such innovative technology that there are no existing substitutes. AlphaFold reached an exceptional level of accuracy in predicting protein structures at 98.5% thus reducing the attractiveness of competitive approaches to research institutions (King & Tucci, 2024). The constant pursuit of innovation coupled with superior results creates solutions from these companies which stay in a unique category thereby making substitutes unnecessary.

5. Supplier Power: Establishing Dominance in Supply Chain and Ecosystem (Graphcore & DeepMind)

Pioneering firms can boost supplier power by acquiring special terms which provide them with unique access to essential resources and connexions. The semiconductor manufacturer Graphcore secured exclusive partnerships which provide it with secure access to advanced fabrication technology needed for its IPUs. By forming connexions with Alphabet and major pharmaceutical organisations DeepMind secures unparalleled entry to vital research tools including computational power alongside laboratory facilities and medical data for AI development (Barberà & Coelho, 2020). The relationships between these companies provide them power over suppliers and continuous innovation because competitors have limited access to equivalent resources. The businesses have established themselves as primary players in their supply chains thereby getting control of their supply chain relationships in alignment with Porter's supplier power model.

The Advantages of Being a Follower Company

The follower companies can take advantage of pioneering firm experiences to create better products with fewer mistakes than the initial companies. Followers base their success on learning techniques which analyse both first-mover triumphs and shortcomings to transform their approaches through Organisational Learning Theory. Reducing market entry risks and uncertainties stands as one of the main advantages which followers gain from their position in the market. Open banking entry by Lloyds Bank followed the initial path made by digital-first banks Monzo and Revolut (Barberà & Coelho, 2020). The initial moving companies dealt with regulatory uncertainties as well as security concerns while managing shifting consumer trust levels. Lloyds Bank used direct observation of these problems to optimise its open banking system so it would avoid well-known limitations. Lloyds incorporated open banking features into its existing banking services to provide a digital-cum-traditional banking solution that greeted contemporary tech customers as well as established banking patrons (Lewin, Long & Carroll, 2021). Lloyds implemented this strategy to leverage proven market interests while minimising expenses related to pioneering new product development.

Marks & Spencer illustrates how follower organisations use early competitor performance and market developments to develop novel customer propositions. The online retail market had already been established when M&S began operating its e-commerce platform after the success of Amazon and Tesco. The evaluation of pioneer strategies revealed M&S's essential market deficiencies in quality control and customer assistance which pioneers were having difficulty addressing (Lewin, Long & Carroll, 2021). The fast-paced and broader approach of Amazon led customers to express frequent complaints about unstandardized items and insufficient personalised care. The weaknesses of its rivals provided M&S an opportunity to build itself as a premium online retailer which delivered high-quality items and first-class customer service combined with fashion and food products. The business strategies M&S developed specifically enabled the company to establish itself as a premium online retailer by creating passionate customers who valued excellence rather than excessive amounts (Jackson, 2022). M&S delivers better customer satisfaction results than mass-market competitors during online retail demonstrating how strategic learning creates competitive power for companies entering late on the market.

British Airways (BA) demonstrates how follower companies should use existing industry advances to successfully execute intricate innovation projects. British Airways chose to observe established biofuel and Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) practices at KLM and Lufthansa while the airlines battled regulatory uncertainties as well as limited supply chains and high production costs. BA used organisational learning to research these market difficulties before it discovered approaches that would optimise its sustainable aviation market entrance. BA initiated its biofuel programmes when it already secured key partnerships with biofuel manufacturers and research organisations which responded to changing global standards and technological progress. The organisation minimised their environmental impact and escaped the research expenses which pioneering companies paid through this method (Hao, Guo & Wu, 2023). The International Air Transport Association (2023) reports that British Airways established a 70% net emissions reduction target until 2050 as follows the lead set by initial sustainability trailblazers to reach significant environmental aims.

Followers reach operational advantages as well as cost efficiency by learning from pioneers' existing triumphs alongside their experienced failures. The cost efficiency of Lloyds Bank increased as they chose to implement existing fintech technologies instead of creating new proprietary systems. M&S refined its supply chain management system through careful analysis of the problems Amazon encountered when delivering products and managing warehouse storage spaces. British Airways decreased its research and development costs by acquiring refined biofuel technologies which their competitors had previously validated. Strategic learning helps follower companies enter markets using better-cost-effective and customer-orientated solutions that give them a competitive advantage against original market participants who paid development costs historically. The last benefit followers obtain is their ability to make ongoing adaptations through incremental innovations which allows them to adapt peacefully to market changes beyond what early adopters endure. Through observation of consumer needs Lloyds Bank advances its open banking platform by adding sophisticated analytical methods along with AI-powered tools (Quinn & Hilmer, 2024). M&S has extended its online business with eco-friendly and plant-based product ranges to meet current consumer market trends. British Airways uses the findings from its past biofuel projects to expand sustainability efforts by joining international collaborations for massive SAF manufacturing. The principle behind Organisational Learning Theory demonstrates that effective organisations adopt continuous learning as a process that keeps them innovative while remaining competitive rather than taking all potential risks of being pioneers.

PLC Strategies in the Growth and Maturity Stages

The Product Life Cycle (PLC) system helps businesses track product development through all phases starting from launch through termination. Companies must modify their plans throughout the growth and maturity periods to keep market supremacy and develop fresh innovations while achieving fiscal stability.

Companies in the growth stage target operation expansion as well as market share growth and enhanced product development through customer feedback. DeepMind has demonstrated successful expansion of its product range throughout its growth

development period (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 2018). DeepMind achieved a remarkable breakthrough with AlphaGo when the program won against the world champion in the game of Go. DeepMind capitalised on its AlphaGo achievement by developing healthcare and drug discovery applications. The company maintained continued market expansion because it used its focus on AI solution-based approaches for resolving real-life challenges.

During the growth stage followers should seek market share by giving customers improved alternatives to existing services. EE launched its 5G services in the market after Verizon and T-Mobile started establishing their 5G networks (Robinson & Min, 2022). EE gained superior user satisfaction by enhancing network quality while improving customer service combined with low-cost plans. EE succeeded in establishing a strong position in the developing 5G market by offering customers a superior service that surpassed competitive capabilities.

When the market reaches the maturity stage the pioneers along with their followers need to differentiate their services to keep a competitive advantage. The growth of Tesco and Sainsbury's stores alongside Amazon Fresh has intensified competition for Ocado which operates as an online grocery retailer (Ottman, 2021). Ocado keeps its position by spending money on product variety expansion while improving its delivery system alongside launching subscription-based meal packages. Ocado retains its competitive advantage in the established online grocery market through continuous refinement and innovation of its customer solutions.

During the maturity stage, followers must concentrate on keeping existing customers and providing unique service options. British Airways separated its biofuel services through strategic airline partnerships and environmental initiative backing (Seybold & Marshak, 2020). Through its dedication to biofuel use in multiple applications, British Airways positions itself differently from airlines in the mature market while sustaining its biofuel-based branding as a major competitive advantage (Jackson, 2022). Companies during their growth period together with the maturity stage need to monitor changing consumer sentiments and marketplace conditions. To respond to growing customer interest in plant-based products Marks & Spencer extended its offerings of meat

alternative selections. The alignment of Marks & Spencer with customer concerns about sustainability and health ensures its significance in the competitive online retail market.

Conclusion

Selecting pioneer or follower status in a market sets crucial points for future business growth and achievement. Through their precedence in market development Darktrace together with Graphcore and DeepMind created new industry segments and became market-leading players while attracting loyal customer bases. The practice of pioneering brings along risks that include the expensive nature of innovation unpredictable market conditions and continuous requirements to stay adaptable (King & Tucci, 2024). Lloyds Bank together with Marks & Spencer and British Airways gain advantages through market entrance after demand development because this helps them minimise risks and perfect their services. Following proven pioneer strategies provides followers an opportunity to develop superior products which helps them achieve better market recognition. The competitive environment demands follower companies to distinguish themselves through innovation and branding activities. Both pioneers and followers must apply strategies according to the stages of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) model while the market expands and matures. Competing groups need to innovate their product offers differentiate carefully and adapt their strategies to adjust to shifting consumer needs to achieve long-term market success in dynamic markets.

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