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Business Strategy and Development: Investigation of Strategic Actions Tech Firms Take to Increase Market Share

Abdulaziz AlShubaily
University of Liverpool

Abstract

Purpose:

The aim of this paper was to investigate best ways that tech firms could gain market share, focusing on the case of four tech firms — Apple, Google, Sony and Microsoft.

Methodology:

Answers were sought through one approach: evaluating the information available in secondary materials, such as journals, newspapers, and company reports, to complement the findings.

Findings:

It is established through secondary research that, first, the tech companies tend to heed to the call that many of the popular strategies are imperative to growth and survival, which they strive to implement. Secondly, despite the fact that all these strategies are perceived to be equally important, firms exhibit the tendencies to prioritize some strategies over others. Thirdly, while the decisions the management takes are deliberate effort to increase the market shares, they are not always popular because they have weaknesses.

Recommendations:

In light of the findings, the leading high tech firms may be largely seen as having weaknesses and strengths that are more or less comparable to the less competitive firms and that there is need to undertake measures to address the areas of weaknesses.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Companies operating in the contemporary market environment are faced with a myriad of issues that they must address to realize success. Indeed, Abouzeedan, Klofsten and Hedner (2013) give several examples of challenges that firms must consider. First, globalization has created a leeway for companies in different parts of the world to internationalize in a bid to exploit the market. In doing so, they have triggered increased competition that has threatened their survival, growth, and profitability. The second notable challenge is growing market regulations. Although many of these regulations are typically oriented towards harmonizing the market, they mean operating firms need to go an extra mile to fulfill the costly legal obligations. The third example is uncertainties in resource accessibility. Many firms rely on natural resources such as natural oil, whose sustainability has been questioned (Hedner, 2013). In this regard, such scenarios implyfirms should keep thinking about ways to overcome the sustainability issues.

Like any other businesses committed to realizing long-term growth, increasing the survival capacity, growing profits, and enhancing the capacity of survival, the decisions of adopting measures to enable the tech companies to rise above the challenges is even more critical than ever. Indeed, as highlighted by Bell and Loane (2012), the question of how contemporary firms can rise above the prevailing market environments' challenges is has been rendered a key subject for discussions.

Many discussions contend that firms need to develop strategies to ameliorate the market challenges (e.g. Yun & Mohan, 2012; Xiaobao, Wei & Yuzhen, 2013; Wynarczyk, 2013; Pisano & Teece, 2012). As it will be later elaborated in the literature review section, tech firms are presented with different operating strategies to embrace. It becomes intriguing to understand the strategies that these firms are embracing in a bid to increase their market share. For the benefit of practice, such a scenario only justifies the need to conduct a research to understand what it really means by adopting informed strategies to leverage edging competitive advantage, expand, and make profits, specifically focusing on the case of tech firms

1.2. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this paper is to investigate best ways that tech firms can increase market share., To fulfill the goal, it seeks to study the leading tech firms — Apple, Google, Sony and Microsoft. In the end, the research study hopes to provide recommendations to benefit practice.

1.3. Research Questions

The main research question states, 'what are the most appropriate approaches that the contemporary tech firms are adopting in a bid to realize their goals?'

The following sub-questions prove useful in addressing the primary question.

- What are the common strategies that tech firms are taking to increase their competitiveness, growth, and survival?
- Are such strategies always popular?
- What are the areas of weaknesses constraining the tech firms from achieving their goals?
- What can be done to enable the companies to increase the capacity of the firms to achieve their goals?

2. Literature Review

A review of literature on strategies to enable tech firms to increase market share is documented and can be broadly categorized into two: the nature of the tech market, and the strategies that can enable the firms to realize success.

Literature on the nature of tech market presents it as a vibrant one, and that is filled with opportunities to exploit. Nevertheless, it is also characterized by a myriad of threats that must be addressed for firms to leverage their potential. Holmes (2012) has cited these notable opportunities as including more prospects for the highly innovative firms and those seeking internationalization, and the bright future market driven by a growing reliance of society on technologies. On the other hand, the threats include competition, market downturns, currency inflations, and potential threats from new business entrants (Holmes, 2012); Yun & Mohan, 2012; Xiaobao, Wei & Yuzhen, 2013). In light of these opportunities and threats, it becomes interesting to question how well the firms are placed to leverage competitive advantage, survive, and expand. Literature has gone further to put forth several suggestions.

Considering the nature of the market, literature lauds different strategies as appropriate for the tech firms' survival and growth. The discussion revolves around the themes of employee engagement, training and development, the use of technology and innovativeness, diversity management, total reward management and risk management, corporate social responsibility and ethics, market research, branding and marketing, and internationalization.

Employee engagement, while it is critical, stands out as one of the strategies that the tech companies tend to lag behind (Manfred & Kets de Vries, 2013; Deslandes, 2014). Hughes (2012) observes that although employee engagement is a crucial humanistic approach of management that typically translates to profitability, many firms tend to perceive it as a costly obligations, opting to focus on acts that would enable the organizations realize fast growth.

Training and development has been widely discussed as one of the major sources of competitive advantage for firms striving to attain great heights of success (e.g. Yun & Mohan, 2012; Xiaobao, Wei & Yuzhen, 2013; Wynarczyk, 2013). In general, these authors have cited three reasons why training and development is important to the tech firms. Firstly, training and development increases the capacity for the staff to work efficiently, translating to company's productivity (Yun & Mohan, 2012). Secondly, it is way of assisting the employees to realize a work-life balance, leading to work satisfaction and retention (Xiaobao, Wei & Yuzhen, 2013). Lastly, it increases the capacity for employees to be innovative and fit into the technological revolution world.

The discussions on the role of technology and innovativeness are also notable in literature. According to Wynarczyk (2013), technology and innovativeness to tech firms are indispensable. The author discusses that for such firms, success in the marketis essentially a war of technology and innovativeness. Virgovic, Vidicki, Glassman and Walton (2012) have supported this view, explaining that technology and innovativeness are important because it does not only help to reduce the costs of operations, but also seeks to satisfy the consumer needs through constant improvement of value and design of new products. Idrissia, Amaraa and Landrya (2012) have cited that the tech firms happen to be the most innovative and high technology-reliant companies.

Literature has lauded the role of diversity management in supporting companies to increase their market share, too (e.g. Huang, Lai, Lin & Chen, 2013; Brunswicker & Ehrenmann, 2013). Huang, Lai, Lin and Chen (2013) notably mention that diversity management is a crucial strategy for recognizing employees and valorizing their differences. In return, this treatment begets organization harmony, cohesion, and openness, whichare necessary to support organization success (Holmes, 2012). Manfred and Kets de Vries (2013) have asserted that, while firms have popularly welcomed the concept, very few firms are considering it as a means to success. If present, diversity management only happens to come as a by-the-way strategy.

The total reward management has also featured in literature. Holmes (2012) has noted that the seeking to address the needs of human resource is a crucial strategy for enhancing firms' growth and survival. The total reward strategy acknowledges that staff is not like any other forms of non-human resource because it has additional psychological needs that should be addressed to enhance productivity. This strategy conforms with a shift in paradigm from the mechanistic to the humanistic models, which asserts that human resources have certain exceptional needs that companies must strive to fulfill to realize their full potential (Manfred and Kets de Vries, 2013). Gulshan (2014) has noted that the total reward strategy is appropriate because it focuses on critical issues such as the compensation issues, autonomy, job security, work-life balance, health, and safety.

Upholding corporate social responsibility is also another notable strategy. In the contemporary world, this strategy is considered an important in enabling companies to differentiate themselves from others (Deslandes, 2014). Gulshan (2014) observes that upholding social responsibility is no longer discretional, but obligatory. Indeed, corporate social responsibility is conceived as a means of self-regulation to enable the businesses to align with the needs of the society, appease the market, and avoid any penalties (Gulshan, 2014). There are different initiatives that companies are undertaking to be seen as socially responsible. These activities include giving back to the society through charity, observing laws and regulations, being transparent and accountable, and participating in conserving the environment (Manfred and Kets de Vries, 2013).

Lastly, the discussions on research, development, and internationalization are also evident in literature. Several authors espouse to the view that research and development are pivotal components of success (Brown & Mason, 2014), while internationalization is also crucial because it seeks to expand the market (Hughes, 2012).

In light of this discussion, it can be inferred that literature suggests the need for tech firms, by nature of their market situation, should cultivate vibrant employee engagement, training, and development, technology and innovativeness, diversity management, total reward management, risk management, corporate social responsibility and ethics, market research, branding and marketing and internationalization strategies. In light of this urge, it will be of particular interest to ascertain whether this suggestion is well heeded by the leading tech firms.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present methodological approach is guided by the Onion Research Model (Silva, Grande, Martimbianco, Riera, Carvalho, 2012). The chart below summarizes the steps that the present study adopted.

Philosophy	Research Approach	Research strategy	Time Horizons	Data Collection Methods
• Positivism	• Deductive	• Experiment	• Cross sectional	• Sampling
• Realism	• Inductive	• Survey	• Longitudinal	• Secondary data
• Interpretivism		• Case Study		• Observations
		• Grounded Theory		• Interviews
				• Questionnaire
		• Ethnography		
		• Action Research		

In brief, this paper seeks to find the answers to the question by interviewing employees on the perceptions for the strategies that the tech firms adopt, complemented by evaluation of the information available in secondary materials, especially the peer reviewed sources. It is hoped that using the two sources of information would yield adequate and accurate information to benefit practice. To be able to find reliable results, the questionnaire is designed in the manner that is as objective as possible, centered on the strategies highlighted in literature. The questionnaire is attached at the Appendix (see Appendix A).

For convenience of time and financial resource, only 100 employees are interviewed. For every company, only 25 employees will be considered. While the number is not proportionate to the actual size of employees in these organizations, it is nevertheless expected to bring into light the perspectives of strategies that these firms are using.

4. FINDINGS

A look at the results creates the allowance to infer that the research was also inclusive to employees with different lengths of service, which communicates the reliability to feature diverse perspectives that might tend to vary with the exposure to organizations. Besides, the fact that several employees that had stayed for longer at the company implies a high reliability considering their ability to be highly versed organization strategies.

The research inquired about several aspects of firms' strategic actions aimed at, yielding varied responses. One of the areas investigated was the steps that the company has been taking to realize its goals. The steps can be broadly categorized into two: organization oriented, and market oriented strategies. In this case, organization-oriented activities are conceived as those taken to align internal processes and human resource with the goals, while market-oriented activities are the strategic initiatives aimed at appeasing the market and attracting customers. The notable organization-oriented activities include employee engagement, training, and development, technology and innovativeness, diversity management, total reward management, and risk management. On the other hand, market-oriented activities include corporate social responsibility and ethics, market research, branding and marketing. While many of these actions have been mentioned across the four companies, there are certain discrepancies in the number of times they were mentioned. The figure below summarizes the results relating to this case issue.

What can be discerned from the research is the noticeable differences on the importance that tech firms lay on different strategies. Training and development, and the use of technology and innovativeness, and marketing happen to be the areas that the four companies play a lot of emphasis, having been mentioned 81, 93 and 93 times respectively. Diversity management, total reward management and corporate social responsibility and ethics tend to be less important strategies, having been mentioned in 15, 30, and 35 responses, respectively. For Apple, risk management and diversity management are the least mentioned strategies. For Google and Sony, diversity management and total reward management are mentioned the least of times. For Microsoft, diversity management and market research are the least mentioned. This finding turn out to be an interesting discovery, and may be argued that different firms have varying strategies they lay emphasis upon.

In response to the question of whether the employees perceived the strategies to be outright in enabling the company realize success, mixed responses were received. These could be broadly categorized into three: 'Yes', 'No', and 'I don't know'. The figure below summarizes the attitudes of the respondents towards the strategic actions undertaken by the organization management teams.

It is interesting to note that the responses conform to a certain, generalizable trends. First is that for each company, employees representing each view are present. Secondly, the number of employees who trust their managers in making strategic decisions is overwhelmingly large, followed by the number of those opposing, and lastly, the 'I don't know'. These results create mean the managers to these firms tend to get most of the strategies right, yet the presence of 'No' responses implies some cases in which they may have needed to act better exists. The results for this response do not seem to differ from the perceptions on whether other employees approved or trusted such strategies. Like the previous question, the number of employees who trust their managers strategic decisions is overwhelmingly large, followed by the number of those holding opposing views, and least by the 'I don't know' group.

When asked on whether they knew any other rivaling firms they could compared their strategies against those of the company they were working for, the respondents mentioned different tech companies and offered various contrasting features of these strategies. The corresponding responses can be essentially categorized into three: the strategies of other firms were superior, the strategies were inferior, and the strategies of other firms are comparable. The table below presents results on how the respondents felt the strategies of companies they were presently working for compared with those of the competitors.

It is worth noting that respondents cited other several tech firms, many of which happen to be firms relatively small-sized or less competitive firms. In other words, the results might indicate that the leading tech firms such as Apple, Google, Sony, and Microsoft might not have much competitive strategic actions to differentiate them from other 'ordinary' firms. Indeed, as can be noted, the numbers of responses that consider their strategies superior does not significantly differ from those that consider them inferior and comparable, combined. It became interesting to note the areas of strengths and weaknesses responsible for such an outcome. This question elicited a myriad of responses that are worth considering, and which are summarized in the chart below.

Another issue that was investigated was the risk management initiatives adopted by the companies. The responses revealed that the four tech firms adopt different risk management strategies, which can be generalized into four categories: avoiding, coping, resisting, and transferring. The commonly cited examples of avoiding including taking informed decisions, studying, and understanding situations before taking actions. For instance, before embarking on process of developing products, the respondents indicated the companies would always conduct market research and feasibility studies to understand what the decisions would hold, a move aimed at preventing loss of time and resources. The research also noted that the firms often use the coping strategy to deal with risks that are inevitable or those that would never have been anticipated. The scenarios in which coping strategies were noted to be useful includes dealing with adverse market challenges such as economic slump, fluctuating currency and growing competition. Resisting is often applied to the situations that are anticipated and which firms are in position to intervene to avoid adverse consequences. The examples of steps organizations take to resist include embracing technologies, being innovative, internationalizing, branding, training, and engaging employees, and promotions. Lastly, the respondents cited the reliance on insurance services as a means of transferring risks.

To test the comprehensiveness of strategies that the tech companies were using, the research also inquired about the perceptions of the respondents concerning certain comp may strategies mentioned in literature. The respondents were required to state whether a specified strategic activity was evident, vibrant or absent. The strategies inquired include employee engagement, training, and development, the use of technology and innovativeness, diversity management, total reward management and risk management, corporate social responsibility and ethics, market research, branding and marketing and internationalization. The table below summarizes the results.

Based on the findings, the high tech firms can be said to be faring well in embracing strategies perceived to be popularly, albeit some areas of weaknesses. Diversity management, total reward management, corporate social responsibility, and ethics were seen to be less vibrant. In fact, to certain extent, the strategies, especially diversity management and total reward management, were perceived so less vibrant that some employees felt they were non-existent. Interestingly, such research do not come by surprise — they conform and, therefore, validate the earlier findings reported that firms tend to prioritize certain strategies over others, and that such decisions are not always popular to all employees.

This point is further revealed in the research about a company’s effectiveness in adopting informed strategies to enable them realize competitiveness. The responses, categorized into four-point Linkert scale (poor, average, good, and excellent), are summarized as follows.

A look at the data shows that, despite the vibrancy of the tech companies in the market, many employees can only rate the strategies to be good. Microsoft happens to be the only outstanding company with the largest number of responses that consider its strategies to be excellent, followed by Google, and then Sony. Several reasons were mentioned for the company’s different ratings. The table below summarizes the notable reasons.

The results reveal certain areas of strengths that the company may pride on, as well as the areas of weaknesses may need to be resolved. Indeed, when asked on the steps that should be undertaken by the tech firms to increase competitiveness, several points were mentioned, which also happen to correspond to various reasons mentioned as the reasons for poor rating. The common suggestions include the urge to address the management, improve the total reward management, and enhance employee engagement.

5. Discussions

A review concerning the strategies that the high tech firms are taking has presented different perspectives to help conceptualize and generalize the market expansion and survival tendencies. Concisely, several points are discernible from these findings

First is that the companies tend to heed to the urge that specified strategies are imperative for growth and survival, which they strive to implement. Some of the notable areas of focus include employee engagement, training, and development, the use of technology and innovativeness, diversity management, total reward management and risk management, corporate social responsibility and ethics, market research, branding and marketing and internationalization. Secondly, despite the fact that all these strategies are perceived to be equally important, firms exhibit the tendencies to prioritize some strategies over others. For instance, although human resource and corporate social responsibility are crucial component of success, many firms tend to focus much on other strategies that count significantly to company’s growth and profitability such as innovativeness, technology and branding. Thirdly, while the decisions the management t to increase the market shares are always objective, they are not always popular to some employees. Indeed, the results have shown that for each company, there are certain groups of employees who feel there is more that needs to be done. The reasons happen to be significant and pinpoint the areas of weaknesses. Lastly, in light of the findings, leading high tech firms may be largely seen as having weaknesses and strengths that are more or less comparable to the ’ordinary’ firms. This information hints that even the leading tech firms cannot be spared from the urge to continue undertaking additional strategies to remain competitive.

An exploration of literature presents an array of discussions that would support these findings. Literature particularly lauds the importance of various highlighted strategies, acknowledges the general weaknesses and strengths in the firms’ activities in operationalizing these strategies, and call for rethink of their strategies. These views are discussed under the corresponding subheading as follows.

Employee engagement

Holmes (2012) has noted that although many firms acknowledge its critical importance, they only turn to employee management as a discretional obligation that comes after other missions.

Training and development

Feitzinger and Lee (2013) have recognized different multinational companies that use training and development to leverage competitive advantage. The author mentions Apple, Google, Sony, and Microsoft amongst the companies that have particularly relied on training and development to safeguard their top positions on the market.

Technology and Innovativeness

Farrell and Katz (2012) have cited that the tech firms happen to be the most innovative and high technology-reliant companies. Indeed, Apple, Google, Sony, and Microsoft are cited as the most notable examples of the leading companies that cherish technology and innovativeness. The author infers from the strategic plans of these companies that the use of technology and innovativeness are a critical component of success. Gawer (2012) has further noted that these firms are striving to enhance their technology and innovativeness capacity by hiring employees based on skills experiences, yet they are also going extra miles to train and develop their staff. Certainly, such approaches are outright in enabling the firms to stand out as technologically strong and innovative firms.

Diversity management

Gawer (2014) has noted that while firms have popularly received the concept, very few firms are considering it as a path to success. If present, diversity management is only oriented towards satisfying the minimal standards of affirmative actions to avoid penalties. In expounding this point, Holmes (2012) has highlighted a discrepancy in the gender representations in top positions among the leading tech companies, especially Google, Apple, and Microsoft. In tandem with this observation, Xiaobao, Wei and Yuzhen (2013) have mentioned that, while many leading tech firms acknowledge the position of diversity management, and have even sought to embrace them, there is still more that needs to be done. Indeed, I the past, Google and Microsoft have particularly faced negative publicity over its non-inclusive diversity management practices.

Total reward management

Holmes (2012) has noted that, in general, there is substantial evidence that tech firms are striving to fulfill the needs of the employees using total reward methodologies, but employees are still stressed about work and returns and would want more considerations (Gawer , 2012; Pine, 2012).

Corporate social responsibility and ethics

Holmes (2012), based on various corporate social responsibility reports, has noted that many tech firms are playing along well in fulfilling their social responsibility obligations. Environmental sustainability, funding education for the needy, supporting infrastructural growth, and funding research and development happen to be some of the common initiatives that the tech firms are taking to support sustainable development (Gawer, 2014; Parker and Van Alstyne, 2012).

Research, development, and internationalization

Farrell and Katz (2012) notes that successful tech firms such as Apple, Google, Sony, and Microsoft are utilizing these strategies as their sources of competitive advantage, although the level of commitment in upholding these strategies tend to vary from one firm to another (Rechtin & Kranz, 2013).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

A look at the findings and their synthesis creates the allowance to highlight certain areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that the tech firms must consider to align their practices with market demand. The four tech firms — Apple, Google, Sony and Microsoft — happen to command certain market features that can altogether be generalized into a SWOT analysis table as presented below.

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Emphasis on technology and innovativeness State-of-the-art branding strategies Market monopoly Market research	Weak corporate social responsibility practices Weak employee engagement Weak total reward management systems
Opportunities	**Threats**
More opportunities for innovative firms Internationalization Growing reliance on technologies which lends itself as a promising market	Competition Market downturns Currency inflations Threats from new entrants

Based on the SWOT table, the tech industry is still presented with myriad opportunities to exploit, including more prospects for innovative firms and those seeking internationalization, and the promising market because of the growing reliance on technologies. At the same time, tech firms command certain strengths by virtue of their vibrant strategies such as the use of technology and innovativeness, reliance on the state-of-the-art branding strategies, market monopoly, and use of market research. However, the ability for the firms to exploit the opportunities is threatened by high competition, market downturns, currency inflations, and threats from new entrants. To be able to meet their obligations, the tech companies will certainly need to address the forms of weaknesses, which would include addressing the weak corporate social responsibility practices, employee engagement, and total reward management systems.

The most appropriate approach to this is by utilizing integrated management approaches, which will ensure that every component of success is taken into consideration. Success will also rely on the commitment from leadership, considering this has been the primary challenge (Gawer, 2014). The change implementation process should be systematic, guided by the popular change management models such as Kotter and Lewin. It is hoped that, if the tech companies can adopt these approaches, they will be best placed to attain great heights of success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to investigate best ways for tech firms to increase the market share, focusing on the case of four tech firms — Apple, Google, Sony and Microsoft. Answers were sought through two approaches: interviewing employees to understand their perceptions for the strategies that the firms adopt, and evaluating the information available in secondary materials, such as journals, newspapers, and company reports, to complement the findings. For every company, only 25 employees were interviewed. Literature was first reviewed to identify the popular strategies recommended for tech firms, and questions posed on whether the strategies of the four leading tech firms reflect the salience of such strategies. The strategies included employee engagement, training and development, the use of technology and innovativeness, diversity management, total reward management and risk management, corporate social responsibility and ethics, market research, branding and marketing, and internationalization.

It is established that, first, the tech companies tend to heed to the call that many of the popular strategies are imperative to growth and survival, which they strive to implement. Secondly, despite the fact that all these strategies are perceived to be equally important, firms exhibit the tendencies to prioritize some strategies over others. Thirdly, while the decisions the management takes are deliberate effort to increase the market shares, they are not always popular because they have weaknesses.

In light of the findings, the leading high tech firms may be largely seen as having weaknesses and strengths that are more or less comparable to the less competitive firms and that there is need to undertake measures to address the areas of weaknesses. The change implementation process should be systematic, guided by the popular change management models such as Kotter and Lewin. It is hoped that, if the tech companies can adopt these approaches, they will be best placed to attain great heights of success.

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