

Economics of Strategic Behavior

B8216 Fall Term 2021

PROFESSOR JACOPO PEREGO

Preliminary and subject to change

A. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Contact Information

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Required Materials

Bruce Greenwald and Judd Kahn (2005): *Competition Demystified* (CD)

Case studies, readings, and class handouts posted on Canvas.

B. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the underlying economics of successful business strategies, including:

- 1) The sources of long-run competitive advantage.
- 2) The dynamics of competition and competitive advantage.
- 3) Strategic interactions (competitive and/or cooperative) among firms.

Three characteristics distinguish our approach. First, we focus on fundamental strategic decisions that firms face rather than more detailed operation/managerial issues. Second, we seek broad principles that can be applied across many firms and markets, rather than anecdotal success stories or institutional details that apply only in limited cases or as a result of idiosyncratic factors. Finally, we develop these broad principles from the framework of microeconomic theory. As such, potential answers will be subjected to the rigor of economic analysis to test their validity and applicability.

The approach toward teaching and learning is primarily inductive. That is, you will learn the concepts and principles outlined above largely through examples – this is the essence of the case study method. The goal is to carefully study specific business situations and decisions with the goal of extracting broader principles about business strategy, which will then be available to you in a wide variety of managerial contexts. Class time will be split roughly 65/35 between case discussions and lectures.

Good cases are necessarily complex and ambiguous. In preparing for case discussions, you may find sorting through this complexity and ambiguity to be frustrating. The problems presented in the case discussion may not have one correct answer. However, there will generally be a set of insights and solutions that are better than others. And it is in working through the messy details to find these insights and solutions – both in your own preparation and in-class discussion – that the concepts and principles introduced in the readings and lectures will come alive and be enriched for you.

C. PREREQUISITES AND CONNECTION TO THE CORE

The learning in this course will utilize, build on, and extend concepts covered in the following core courses:

Core Course	Connection
Managerial Economics	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understanding market competition and equilibrium thinking (in the short-run)2. Market equilibrium thinking (in the long-run) and barriers to entry3. Strategic Interaction among firms and Nash Equilibrium4. Pricing with market power
Strategy Formulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Creation of value vs. value capture2. Competing firms

Students will be expected to have mastered these concepts and be able to apply them in the course.

D. COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topics Covered	Case Reading
Sept 9	Introduction, Competitive Advantage, Industry Analysis	Enterprise
Sept 16	Competitive Advantage, Platforms Markets	The Economist, LinkedIn
Sept 23	Competitive Advantage, Learning Curve	Aldi, Capital One
Sept 30	Strategic Interactions, Shrimp Game	
Oct 7	Competition vs Cooperation, Guest Lecture I	Philip Morris
Oct 14	Price Wars, Horizontal Differentiation	Albert Heijn, General Mills
Oct 28	Guest Lecture II, Antitrust I	Pratt & Whitney
Nov 4	Strategic Entry	Red Bull, S Group
Nov 11	Strategic Entry, Antitrust II,	Microsoft
Nov 18	Strategic Entry, Bargaining Power	Tesla, Spotify
Dec 2	Bargaining Power, Wrap Up	Nintendo
Dec 9	Final Exam	

E. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The final grade will be based on:

Class Participation (40% - Individual/Type B)

Class participation is essential in order for you to get the maximum benefit from the course. To create proper incentives, your final grade depends on your class participation. Your class participation grade will be based on two metrics: (1) engagement and (2) contributions.

- (1) *Engagement*. During class and in-between classes, you will be asked to complete small tasks. The fraction of tasks that you complete determine your engagement grade. These tasks include:

Online Quizzes. For most sessions, there will be an online quiz posted on Canvas, to be completed *before* the beginning of the session. Questions are multiple-choice and/or require you to write a paragraph justifying your answer. Grading is based on the thoughtful completion of each of the quizzes. Your answers may be used in class and you may be called to discuss them.

PollEverywhere. During most sessions, students will be asked to answer questions via PollEverywhere. Your answers will be used in class and you may be called to discuss them. Your PollEverywhere answers are also used implicitly, to track attendance.

- (2) *Contributions*. Your in-class contributions are expected to be: *Relevant*: Are your comments related to the case and to the comments of others? Do they move the discussion forward? Do they bring clarity to the general discussion? *Fact-Based*: Have you used specific data from the case, from readings, or from personal experience to support the assertions that you are making?

Cold Calling. In addition to your voluntary participation, I regularly select a few students at random to open and/or lead the case discussion.

I ask that you deal with the cases as you find them; do not seek outside or post-case data on the firm or industry. Of course, if you already know things

about the case, from previous experience, this can be very useful in case discussions. Please let me know about it in advance, and I will make a point to call on you at the appropriate time.

Case discussion constitutes more than half the class time, so there will be ample opportunity for each of you to participate. If you feel that you are preparing well but that I am not calling on you enough, please let me know so that I can address the problem.

Final exam (60% – Individual/Type B)

Take-home, open-book exam. Date: **Thursday Dec 9th**. The exam must be submitted on Canvas **by Dec 12th, 12pm**. After our final session, on Dec 2nd, you will receive a case study. You will have one week to read it and review the class material. On Dec 9th at 2pm, you will receive the exam questions, which you will have to answer before Dec 12th, 12pm.

F. PREPARATION QUESTIONS

You can use these questions to prepare for class discussions.

Enterprise

- Analyze Enterprise's strategy and competitive position. Why has Enterprise been so successful?
- How attractive is the car-rental industry in terms of long-term profitability?

Aldi

- Discuss the main elements of Aldi's strategy. Does this strategy result in a cost advantage in the discount grocery segment relative to Walmart?
- Does Aldi have a (sustainable) competitive advantage in the US? Yes or no?
- How should Walmart react to Aldi's expansion? Should they imitate some of the key choices of Aldi's? Should they go to a price war to stop Aldi's expansion?

The Economist

- What explains the success of The Economist thus far? Why has it managed to succeed while so many other magazines are struggling?
- How was The Economist able to increase prices and circulation at the same time?
- What are the main industry threats that The Economist should be sensitive to? What are the main opportunities that it could take advantage of?

Capital One

- What, if any, competitive advantages does Capital One have?
- Are these advantages sustainable into the future?
- As head of Capital One, what would be your strategic priorities?

LinkedIn

- Consider the market in which LinkedIn operates. Who are the company's customers?
- For each set of customers that you have identified in the previous question, what affects their willingness-to-pay (WTP)?
- Describe LinkedIn's pricing strategy and its rationale? How is this market different from a "standard," i.e. one-sided market? Explain.

Microsoft

- What, if any, competitive advantages does Google enjoy in search? Are these competitive advantages sustainable?
- What, if any, are the strategic reasons for Microsoft to challenge Google in search?
- Does Microsoft have a competitive advantage in search? What market share do they need to be profitable? Do you think they will be successful?

Philip Morris

- Using data from the case, provide a comprehensive industry analysis of the tobacco industry during the 80s.
- Now compare this industry with the segment of the car rental industry in which Enterprise operated in the 80s. From a competitive perspective, how is PM's position different from Enterprise's? What is the first-order difference between these two industries?
- What accounts for Philip Morris' dramatic shift in strategy in April 1993? What are its goals?

Albert Heijn

- Using data from the case, provide a comprehensive industry analysis of the food retail industry in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 2000s.
- What kind of competitive advantage did Albert Heijn have at the beginning of the 2000s?
- In your opinion, what is the strategic goal (if any) in Albert Heijn's dramatic price cut in October 2003?

General Mills

- Provide an estimate of the cost of entry, namely initial investment in fixed costs to reach MES, for the RTE Cereal industry in the 80s.
- Using the framework developed in class, explain why the RTE Cereal industry has been profitable. Why has RTE cereal been such a profitable business in the 80s?
- Describe the role of the price leader in this industry. More generally, what industry problem does a price leader solve?

Pratt and Whitney

- Qualitatively describe the cash flow that is generated by a new engine program for a company like P&W. How come that competition drives engine producers to sell their products at a loss?
- How feasible do you think it is for P&W and GE to coordinate on a better industry equilibrium. Is cooperation so hard in this industry? Explain why.
- Assume PW has decided to go ahead with the GTF technology, how should it proceed?

S-Group

- What kind of competitive advantage does S-Group enjoy in Finland? Explain.

- How feasible would it be for S Group to replicate its business model outside of Finland?
- What barriers to entry does Amazon face in entering the market and competing with S Group? What can S Group do to increase these barriers in anticipation of Amazon's expansion into Finland?

Red Bull

- Describe Red Bull entry in the US market. What kind of strategy did the company adopt to successfully enter the market?
- Was it a strategic mistake for Coke to let Red Bull freely enter the US market? Did Coke have any competitive advantage to fight off the new entrant? If so, what were the sources of such an advantage?
- How was Monster able to catch up with Red Bull? Why didn't Red Bull react more aggressively to Monster's entry?

Tesla

- Should BMW expect Tesla to grow into a strong direct competitor like Audi (versus Tesla being either limited to a niche or a flash in the pan)? Is Tesla at a competitive advantage or disadvantage? How will that evolve?
- What do you think of Tesla's entry strategy? What barriers did it have to overcome? How did it manage to do so? Will other firms follow in Tesla's footsteps?
- How do you expect the industry to evolve?