

NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY
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<Course ID Number> RSH8961B	<Faculty Mentor> Dr. Kathleen Barclay
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Introduction

Marks and Spencer (M&S) is one of the best-known retailers based in the United Kingdom. For more than 100 years, their brand stood for reliability, value and the quality of their products (Oliver, 2002). The goal of public relations (PR) and human resource management (HRM) research studies includes the examination of factors and indicators for corporate success (Collins & Porras, 1997; Collins, 2001).

The media-led crisis that M&S faced in 1999 propelled a shift in the PR and HRM strategies to regain the public's confidence. There has been no study that focused on examining the process and the impact of this comeback. The intent of this research is to analyze the integration of PR and HRM strategies that were used in order to help them experience a comeback, as well as how these departments worked together to bring about the company's brand survival.

Since the media highly-criticized the company for not being able to change with the times, the research will analyze PR-HRM strategies that were used to investigate how the company addressed the crisis they have experienced. A qualitative case study research design will be employed in order to study the relationship between PR and HRM strategies of M&S and how it helped bring about success the company has experienced. Corporate success will be explored through a qualitative research method because of the need to present an interpretative worldview for the study of managed communication (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

Since research methods rely on the research questions, it will be beneficial to re-state the initially constructed research questions to serve as a guide for understanding and justifying the proposed methodology.

The following research questions will guide the research for a qualitative case study of the public relations and human resource management strategies of Marks and Spencer that enabled them to survive the 1999 media-led crisis:

1. What public relation strategies did Marks and Spencer employ to regain the confidence of the public for the brand?
2. How did the trend of HRM strategies from Marks and Spencer change as a result of the media-led crisis?
3. How does the interrelationship of PR and HRM strategies help Marks and Spencer survive the media-led crisis?

Qualitative Research Method

Strengths

A qualitative research design is selected because of it is the most appropriate design to address the purpose of the study. This research design employs a constructivist worldview, also known as interpretivism. This is known as an alternative to positivism, which utilized the quantitative method.

According to Alise (2008), the qualitative research design focuses on having a dialogue between research and the participants. Furthermore, this method provides a representation of the personal views regarding the phenomenon studied. Since a qualitative study employs interviews and focus group discussions with participants of the case study, the researcher will be able to have a more descriptive perspective of the phenomenon studied from the views of the company's employees. The constructivist worldview offered the researcher an opportunity to better understand the phenomenon, which is to explain how the PR-HRM strategies provided the company's survival amidst the 1999 media-led crisis.

The process of this research design included the multiple participant meanings that were generated throughout the research (Creswell, 2009). It is important to make sense of the

employee's perception of their social words and for them to express how shifts and changes affected how they functioned. Creswell (2009) pointed out how this approach is designed to generate theory, rather than verify it. It is focused on the subjective experiences of the people and less on external forces that determined their behaviors (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

Case study is the research method under the qualitative research design that is selected to achieve the objectives of this study. This research method is focused on studying a specific context or subject. Since the phenomenon analyzed is based in the specific context of how company, M&S, rose from a crisis, this research method is viewed to provide this need. In order to closely examine the connection of PR and HRM strategies, a case study is employed in order to observe principles, relationships and scenarios. This research design gives the researcher the avenue to analyze how events are related and how the strategies brought about the sustenance of the company's success despite its troubles.

An in-depth exploration of the PR and HRM departments within a specific social structure is a necessity for this research and this research design enables the research to conduct this (Pucetaite, 2004). This design also includes the examination of numerous variables within a narrow subject. Furthermore, it also allows answers for questions regarding how or why a certain phenomena happens (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The research can describe the integration of the two areas of research that will provide a foundation for this research study, which would ultimately share an awareness for what provided success for companies.

Creswell (2003) described qualitative researchers to collect data in the field where the participants experience the phenomenon. They are not examined or observed in a controlled laboratory that lowers the validity of the study. Being in the context by which participants functioned and seeing them behave and act this context represented a major characteristic of qualitative research.

Furthermore, researchers served as the key instrument in the research process. They collect data themselves and observe the behavior, as well as interview the participants. A significant strength of this research design involved gathering multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations and document analysis (Creswell, 2003). The researchers could make use of all these data to make sense of it and to organize them in such a manner that they could present themes that cut through these sources. This design builds their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up. They organize their data into more abstract units of information.

Qualitative research also has a significant focus on words, rather than numbers (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). This is important because communication is a major discussion topic in the areas of PR and HRM strategies, especially since the issue sparked from the media. Instead of merely focusing on one or two isolated variables, this research design allows researchers to orient themselves in the wide range of interconnected activities, experiences and beliefs that people are situated in. This allows the researchers to account for multiplicity of dimensions and relationships in the given context (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

Researchers have a topic and agenda that fuels their research process. This research design could involve unstructured, adaptable and spontaneous research procedures that will allow the researchers to move according to the circumstance and the context of the company they are studying (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

Weaknesses

Social and health science researchers are often described to carry a certain level of complexity, thus making the use of either quantitative or qualitative studies inadequate (Creswell, 2003). Mixed method (MM) research designs make use of the strengths from both of these research methods. There are several research problems that specifically call for the

employment of MM. Overall, the use of MM will emerge from needs that failed to be address through the use of a single research design. One type of data can be insufficient to tell the complete story thus making the research lack confidence in the findings of his or her study. However, this would ultimately be according to the need for two research designs to be implemented; something that is necessary in some but not all of the research studies.

While data collection could be collected through interviews with the executives of the company, descriptive self-administered questionnaires for the employees could be necessary to be disseminated, if the researcher has no capacity or time to interview other employees in the research period. It would be tedious to analyze the questionnaires within qualitative research. Furthermore, there would also be a need to make sure interpretation of data is valid within a qualitative research approach.

Furthermore, despite the strengths of qualitative inquiry, it also has significant limitations. It is still described to be too subjective because of its impressionistic nature (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). There is a greater need to pay close attention for the reliability and validity of the research. There are also criticisms regarding the difficulty to replicate this design. In this research design, replicability is practically impossible because researchers served as the primary research instrument (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). There are also significant problems in the inability of this research to be generalized and the threat to be restricted in their conclusions.

Justification

It is important to work from an interpretative stance because of the necessity to understand social reality from the point of view of the context studied. It is important to understand the current context by which the company operated on based on the strategies that they have adopted to address the 1999 media-led crisis. This was something that was specific to the company; however it was something that could serve as a model for other companies'

PR and HRM processes since the context is still in the corporate arena. The inside point of view is significant to be the starting point for the unexplored area of the relationship PR and HRM strategies and its influence to maintain corporate success. The focus of this study is to analyze the experiences of the employees who also underwent the crises and implemented the change in their strategies.

A qualitative case study method will enable the research to see, hear and experience the change in the company. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), social reality is something that shapes people's actions. It is important to draw upon social constructivism to study public relations and human resource management strategies. It draws from the reality that the participants live in and work in as it builds up through communication and the interactions of different factors.

This evolves from the individuals that experiences individuals. Shared meanings are something that accomplished and shaped social reality (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). It is something that individuals accomplish together and shape their social realities. Interpretive researchers recognized that in order to understand the world of PR and HRM, they must engage in it before moving on to a state wherein they could interpret it (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). This enabled the researchers to enable them to conceptualize reality from the point of the view of the participants of that specific reality.

There is an overwhelming preference for qualitative research design over the quantitative approach (Mcgoldrick et al., 2002). PR and HRM researches had predominantly subjective data sources. Case studies are also already established as an empirical vehicle for the research. These research method in these areas of corporate communication indicates the strong preference for depth and richness of data, as well as texture and nuances, instead of presenting numerical patterns of statistical validity.

Since public relations and human resource management involved managed communication and practices, these disciplines are interested in the coordination of communication through relationships, which were developed and maintained by a dialogue of collaboration (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Since the media influenced the crisis that M&S experienced, it is important to frame the research from a methodology that will greatly analyze communication strategies, from PR and HRM perspectives.

This research approach is viewed to employ a mindful approach. Mindfulness can be understood as the readiness to shift the frame of references and an openness to new ways for seeing the world (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). It does not necessarily mean that one should agree with such an approach; the goal is to be able to understand where the participants are coming from. It is important to consider what the employees and leaders of M&S saw and why they chose to adopt changes.

Qualitative research offers PR and HRM significant value. The act of being mindful and understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants is the goal of qualitative researchers. This is the intent of this research. Since the research is designed to determine the strategies that were used, this inquiry is suitable because of the exploratory nature of the design. It is not constricted by statistical inquiries. Instead, it allows the research to take in as much data as possible in order to formulate a suitable representation of the context and the influence of the changes they have implemented.

The research questions are presented in the earlier section of the paper. The need to approach the research problem from an interpretative worldview in the specific context for the experiences and perspective of the employees of M&S during and after the media-led crisis highlights the need for a qualitative case study method. This is a method that specifically addresses the needs of the research at an appropriate level that there is no need to adopt a second research design or to consider an alternative research method.

Argument against Alternative Methods

Despite the fact that this method is described to be too subjective, research requires subjectivity from the perspective of M&S and how their shift in PR and HRM strategies influenced their success. Participant viewpoints are important in this research endeavor. Furthermore, replication is not the primary goal for this study. Instead, the commitment of the qualitative researchers is to be committed to the integrity of their findings (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). The provision of rich descriptions also illuminates important issues in a specific context regarding a particular group of people despite threats against generalization.

Since there is a need to explore evidence before providing an interpretation for it, this research design is selected over the others. The quantitative research approach embraces the realization that concepts and theories emerge out of data. Since the integration PR and HRM strategies have not be studied before, it is significant to start from the exploration of themes and the creation of theories. This research will serve as the first step towards the formation of studies for the integration of PR and HRD strategies.

A quantitative research design functioned to verify theory. It uses instrumentation that was fixed and controlled. This research approach could limit the exploration of the strategies that M&S employed to survive the crisis. There is a need to discover a theoretical framework behind the integration of PR and HRM strategies before future research could verify such effects. So far, there are no existing frameworks that exist for the integration of PR and HRM strategies and the success of a company.

A mixed method approach provides a wholistic approach in the study. However, this research approach is too complex to address the research objectives. This method should only be employed if one research design is insufficient. However, in these cases, the qualitative research design is adequate to address the research questions. This is still because the research intends to lay down the groundwork for the exploration of the PR-HRM integration.

Since there are no models and theories that addressed this integration, there would be no models that will be verified. Furthermore, the research purpose does not need to go as far as measuring the influence, as it is focused on determining what strategies and the manner by which these strategies influenced the survival from the crisis.

A qualitative case study allows the research to appropriately address research questions that this study will present. The expected participants of the case study are likely to have many exchanges with others, in a direct or indirect manner and as a company and as individuals. Such interactions will also contribute to the positions adopted and provide explanations as to why different practices are employed in different contexts (Gold et al., 2002).

The need to understand the context of the company and the interactions that occur within the company cannot be sufficiently measured by a quantitative approach since there is no fixed strategy or factor to be examined. If themes and variables are not yet identified; furthermore, if the research purpose is to identify possible variables and themes for the success of M&S in the context of PR and HRM strategies, the quantitative research approach turns out to be an inadequate and inappropriate approach to be undertaken.

The quantitative approach offered a limited potential for exploring a vast range of exchanges and relationships, which could provide a basis for the ongoing construction of social realities. The inflexibility of a quantitative research wherein questions are pre-determined and tick-box responses provide data for the researchers represent a major weakness in this research design (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

A qualitative approach offers “‘nets of collective actions’ where meanings are constructed through exchanges between people and within which actions are taken based upon such constructions” (Gold et al., 2002, p. 168). A quantitative design required the researcher to limit their exploration within variables that must be measured by statistical data.

Since there are numerous of nets within a workplace, it will be difficult to provide instruments that will validly measure this. This limits the net of collective action that is needed in order to determine the strategies that were used to survive the M&S crisis.

A qualitative research design presents itself to be better than other alternative designs because of the broad version of reality that this design presents. It allowed for the inclusion of the values and interests of the participants that have a wide impact on their decisions for change. According to Gold and his colleagues (2002), “change agents are likely to form an abstracted version of practice within nets, meaningful and sensible only within the context of their own net” (168).

Conclusion

The connection between PR and HRM strategies requires significant focus and exploration. In order to understand this, behaviors, regulations and effect of consumer interests need to be determined. The strategies implemented before the M&S downfall were unable to prevent the media-led crisis from attacking the company. There are no explanations as to why these strategies failed and why new strategies were in place. There are also no studies that presented why the new strategies are selected and how they functioned to bring about the company to its survival and recovery. Given the research gap, a qualitative case study is the most appropriate and adequate method that will be employed to explore and understand the phenomenon of the M&S survival. This research has a significant potential to give practitioners from the field of PR and HRM a model, wherein these models could find an optimal level of integration to establish corporate stability and success through managed communication activities.

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