PROPOSITIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF MARKETERS' RELATIONSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Research on marketing integration related to mergers and acquisitions (M&A) has paid little attention to the combination of similar resources between two similar departments, particularly in the M&A context. Furthermore, existing research does not clearly demonstrate the role of relationship among marketers within the amalgamation process between acquirer and target firm. Hence, this paper addresses a few propositions that relate to strengthening the relationship effectiveness among the marketers in both firms, which at the same time uphold the M&A performance. Collaboration and interaction are proposed as drivers to increase optimistic relationship among the marketers. A quantitative research design is suggested as this method is not popular compared to qualitative methods such as case study, event-study and longitudinal approach in M&A. Drawing from the extant literature, propositions are developed and future directions are presented elaborating success factors to improve M&A integration performance.

Keywords: *Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A), Marketing Integration, Relationship Effectiveness.*

Introduction

Despite the substantial development of this mergers and acquisitions (M&A) phenomenon, much of the M&A literature is generally fragmented (Larsson & Finkelstein, 1999; Shimizu et al., 2004), scattered (Kish & Vasconcellos, 1993)**,** industry-dependent (Hopkins et al., 1999) and primarily has neglected the marketing perspective (Homburg & Bucerius, 2005). Furthermore, many studies concentrate on the phenomenon of M&A in the manufacturing industry in particular (Datta, 1991; Hakkinen, 2005; Harzing, 2002; Schweizer, 2005; Sorescu et al., 2007). Some studies are mixed looking at the manufacturing and service industries (Homburg & Bucerius, 2005; Larsson & Finkelstein, 1999) and others are cross-industrial sectors (Papadakis, 2005). Hence, this paper will contribute to the literature on M&A.

In terms of theory contribution, this discussion attempts to contribute to social-capital theory, which introduce interaction and collaboration that will enhance the marketers' relationship and the coordination required in order to achieve a smooth organizational amalgamation (Weiss & Hughes, 2005). By collaborating and interacting with a M&A integration, partners can gain benefits by exchanging knowledge and access that might otherwise be unobtainable or extremely costly to obtain, such as knowledge of economies, politics, culture and business customs. These exchanges allow both the acquirer and the acquired firm to put down strong foundations which could later be crucial to their growth in foreign markets. Moreover, interaction and collaboration are employed as mechanisms that influence interdepartmental integration, particularly when integrating marketing departments with other departments, such as manufacturing and research and development (R&D) (Kahn & Mentzer, 1998). This is also emphasized by Duysters et al. (1999), who look at how to establish combination capabilities through building business communities and how to improve partner selection, both of which improve the interorganizational relationships.

This study then, attempts to investigate particularly the connection between the marketing perspective and the M&A or what the implications to marketing development in M&A are. Few researchers have explored this area previously, namely Homburg and Bucerius (2005) and Capron and Hulland (1999). This potential study primarily intends to look at the perspective of marketing, particularly at the marketing integration process in M&A. Here, the main contribution is to propose factors that could facilitate and smooth the process of developing relationship among the marketers by underlining relevant antecedent factors that influence the success or failure of the marketing integration process in M&A, which suggest an interesting and promising field for academic researchers to go into.

A recent study by Homburg and Bucerius (2005) shows that within the marketing discipline, M&A-related research is almost totally absent. The marketing-related issues of post-merger integration, such as whether or not these two firms' marketing activities are integrated or how they affect the performance of the firms after the merger, have not been dealt with or studied before. However, their study was conducted only in the European countries. Nonetheless, this study is an inspiration to us to continue contributing to the literature on M&A and their relationships to the marketing function. The study will attempt to suggest antecedents to M&A, which extend the research of Homburg and Bucerius (2005). Furthermore, we also introduce another construct in the theoretical framework which contributes to the aspect of relationship outcomes after the integration process has taken place, which is also believed to affect M&A performance. The aspect of relationships in marketing integration was introduced by Guenzi and Troilo (2007). In the M&A literature, relationship effectiveness was proposed by Richey et al. (2008). Indirectly, this study will also contribute to the research on international business through M&A which is seen as likely to be neglected, especially in developing countries.

A quantitative reseach design is suggested to assist this research due to a few related reasons. First and foremost, this research is based on previous research that pursued the same methods – please refer to Homburg & Bucerius (2005) and Capron & Hulland (1999). Secondly, studies on M&A have been massively conducted through qualitative approach as many researches in M&As focused on case study, event-study approach and longitudinal methods (Campa & Hernando, 2006; Meyer, 2008; Nam et al., 2005). Thus, this research will contribute to the discipline of quantitative research design.

Finally, the most important contribution of this study is the geographical area in which it has been conducted. M&A studies in South East Asia are difficult to find due to several reasons: there is a lack of objective data; M&A is still a new concept in the area; difficulties especially during the Asian financial crisis 1997; and it is difficult to obtain cooperation as M&A issues are still sensitive. In fact, most of the studies and literature about M&A are mostly from Western countries.

Conceptual Framework

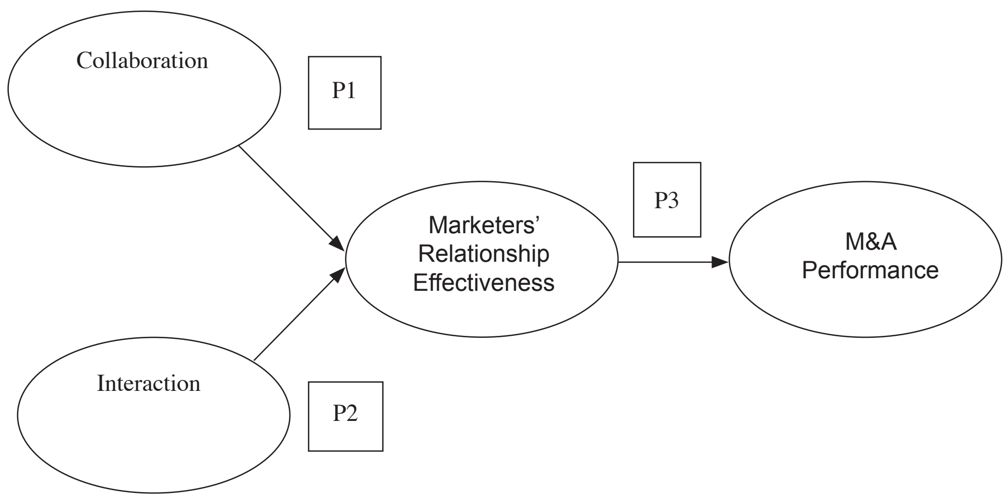

Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework for marketers' relationship effectiveness.

The proposed conceptual framework and corresponding propositions to be tested in this study are presented in Figure 1.1. In order to investigate the marketers' relationship effectiveness, two main predictors that are connected to social capital theory are proposed: collaboration and interaction. As mentioned by Adler & Kwon (2002), social capital reflects a primordial feature that a kind of social-tie linking is used for different purposes such as moral and material support, work and non-work advice.

Collaboration and interaction are in fact main variables that facilitate marketing department to be integrated with other departments, for example, the collaboration between the research and development department and the marketing department (Kahn & Mentzer, 1998). At the same time, these collaborations and interactions which in turn are expected to affect the marketers' relationship in which M&A performance will be improved. In terms of M&A performance, Zollo & Meier (2008) conducted a research to identify the concept of M&A performance that measured through three important dimensions: task level, transaction level and firm level. However, Colombo et al. (2007)

stated that five important M&A performance measurements are basically complete to unveil such phenomena in M&A integration. Therefore, collaboration and interaction are proposed as main predictors in the research model particularly in strengthening marketers' relationships which thereby facilitate M&A performance.

Propositions Development

M&A Performance

In general, research into marketing integration is classified into two main categories: conceptual and empirical (Moenaert & Souder, 1990). Both of these research streams take an interest in the outcomes of firm performance and new product development or product success (NPD). However, most of the marketing integration studies have concentrated on the outcome of improving NPD while, surprisingly, few have explored M&A performance. The discussion of these two research streams of M&A performance are discussed in the following subsections.

Furthermore, most of the studies that focus on M&A performance in the integration phase consider the perspectives of financial performance after the M&A (Homburg & Bucerius, 2005), subordinate employee performance and financial performance (Richey Jr et al., 2008) and acquisition performance (Margaret Cording et al., 2008). Exceptions which directly investigate M&A performance as a dependent variable are Capron and Hulland (1999), Zollo and Meier (2008) and Colombo et al. (2007).

One pioneering piece of research which incorporates the M&A setting in the marketing integration phase was conducted by Capron and Hulland (1999). In this study, they employed consolidated business performance as the dependent variable, which comprised components of M&A performance such as market share and profitability. In fact, they added some components that described the impact on product quality, product cost, product line and geographical coverage. Their results show that the redeployment of marketing resources to the target firm has no effect on either market share or profitability. Additionally, redeployment to the acquirer has a negative effect on both.

Another striking study by Colombo et al. (2007) highlights five components of M&A performance, namely market share, profitability, competitive positioning, market coverage and customer satisfaction. This study that looks at M&A performance is more specific compared to the study conducted by Capron and Hulland (1999). Their study does not directly investigate the marketing integration environment but it does nevertheless, test the scope of integrating through cross-border M&A. The purpose of their study is to examine the factors that could influence the processes of resource redeployment and to consider the issues of planning, forecasting and also cultural distance as independent variables affecting M&A performance. According to their results, managerial resource redeployment and organizational climate have positive and significant relationships with M&A performance whereas temporal lag has the most negative impact on M&A performance.

Next, the most recent study to emphasize M&A performance was carried out by Zollo and Meier (2008). This study attempted to discuss the dependent variable, specifically the measurement of M&A performance from empirical studies. Overall, they gathered and analysed 88 articles using 12 different approaches to measure M&A performance. From these findings, they justified two main dimensions, namely the level of analysis and the time horizon. They then divided the level of analysis into three main levels: task level, transaction level and firm level. Meanwhile, the time horizon was divided into two: short to medium and long term. Their results showed there was no single measurement which could represent M&A performance. Consequently, they proposed three levels of measurement of M&A performance. All of these three levels are clearly distinguishable and show different outcomes and perspectives of M&A performance.

Hence, the present study attempts to highlight the role of social drivers, collaboration and interaction, that could rejuvenate the marketers' relationship in M&A integration thereby improving the M&A performance.

Collaboration

Generally, collaboration is associated with strategic alliances, and is also used by many organizations in international joint ventures to access rare tangible resources. However, it is becoming increasingly popular, specifically in the context of M&A, as a way of gaining access to know-how and other forms of knowledge-based resources (Ring, 2007). Furthermore, collaboration with foreign partners can provide firms with knowledge and strategies that might be extremely costly and difficult to obtain via other cross-border entry modes such as joint ventures and other non-equity alliances (Shrader, 2001).

On the one hand, collaboration through M&A will be much easier in terms of control issues, particularly in acquisitions as the acquiring firm will have more say in the making of important and final decisions. However, this does not mean that the acquiring firm will have absolute power to manage the firms as there are other factors to consider, such as the willingness, motivation and attitudes of the acquired employees to collaborate in the integration process (Faulkner et al., 2002). In integration, collaboration is always described as a process which involves 'teams' that work together by sharing resources through interdepartmental connections (Weiss & Hughes, 2005).

Meanwhile, in the context of a marketing integration, Kahn and Mentzer (1998) define collaboration as an effective and volitional process where departments focus on working together, having mutual understanding, having a common vision, sharing resources and achieving collective goals. Similarly, a study conducted by Stank et al. (1999) that looked into the integration of marketing and logistics departments found that the more frequently collaborative behaviours took place, the better the performance. Subsequently, this led to the enforcement of improvements in the effectiveness of interdepartmental relationships. Therefore:

Proposition 1(+): The greater the collaboration, the greater the marketer's relationship effectiveness

Interaction

In terms of interaction between departments, Kahn and Mentzer (1998) emphasize that interaction between two departments creates synergy by emphasizing the use of communication in the form of meetings and information flows (Kahn & Mentzer, 1998). This not only facilitates communication but also improves collaboration and coordination in intense environments especially in integrations. In other words, performance improves when people communicate with each other, (see also Ellinger et al., 2000).

However, there is a situation of communication resistance in M&A of which the target company's employees simply refuse to interact with those in the acquiring company (Yeongsu, 2010). There are a few reasons why this phenomenon occurs while the M&A integration activities take place. Sinkovics et al. (2011) and Marks & Mirvis (2011) stressed that unstable emotions such as uncertainty, anxiousness and insecurity much influence the feelings of the employees in the target firm. Subsequently, effective communication, such as staff's interaction in their daily working environments, could prevent them from having miscommunication and being low in commitment. In fact, communication is important to make employees be less resistant to changes and stimulate sense of belongingness in the combined firms (Saunders et al., 2009; D. Schweiger, 2002).

Interaction refers to any contact or relationship that is directly implemented, be it with customers, staff or employees under a particular manager's supervision or those outside his supervision. As noted by Ruekert and Walker (1987), interactions are implemented in the marketing environment through the relationship of a marketing manager with his subordinates and how they play a coordinating role in dealing with the demands of customers and link with other departments in the firm that are capable of satisfying those demands. All of these transactions and communications must be applied during the integration process in order to develop staff relationships and to avoid potential conflicts between the acquiring and the acquired firm. In fact, most of the interactions come from information-exchanging activities including meetings, memoranda and the exchange of any standard documentation (Kahn & Mentzer, 1998). Interestingly, Kahn and Mentzer (1998) studied interactions in the integration of a marketing department with another type of department such as R&D or manufacturing. In this study we focus only on the interaction of two marketing departments.

However, in this situation the acquirer's marketing department will be more dominant than the acquired firm's marketing department. Thus, this piece of work will attempt to address this issue by looking at the type of marketing integration that is involved in a M&A. Besides this, there are only a limited number of studies that have discussed interactions within a marketing integration specifically in the M&A situation except two studies that specifically looked at marketing environments in M&A: Homburg & Bucerius (2006) and Capron & Hulland (1999). Therefore, this leads to the research hypothesis below.

Proposition 2 (+): The greater the level of interaction, the greater the marketers' relationship effectiveness

Marketers' relationship effectiveness

Another important outcome of the marketing integration process is close relationships between the marketers' of both firms (acquiring and acquired). The relationships between the marketers' are essential to avoid misunderstandings in communications and above all to ensure that the marketing activities are kept on track in order to allow an outstanding M&A performance. Additionally, this outcome would hopefully retain staff rather than encourage marketers' to move to other organizations. Losing marketing experts is not the only concern; there is also the potential risk of losing key customers attached to those marketing experts. The issue of relationships between marketing managers in the post-integration phase of M&A has been tested empirically in a study by Richey et al. (2008). They emphasize that marketing managers have a role to play in establishing, maintaining and growing inter-organizational exchange relationships, particularly in the marketing environment.

Even though the acquirer and the target firm have combined, relationship gaps between them will still exist. Staff attached to the target firm will always be vulnerable to any decisions made by the new owner of the combined firm. Therefore, quick action is needed to bridge this gap by enhancing good relationships in order to avoid the loss of dedicated staff and, more importantly, to eradicate feelings of discrimination amongst the staff. The acquirer needs to develop good flows of communication by having a lot of informal discussions and disseminating new information to all staff including those from the acquired firm. This is important to avoid irrational rumours which could cause the collapse of the newly-built firm.

According to a report by the Boston Consulting Group (2008), dealing with post-merger integration in developing countries not only encompasses dealing with the firm's valuation but also emotional elements. When employees' emotions are unstable, the relationships between them may be jeopardised. This can be addressed by improving the commitment to business relationships so that associates are ultimately made to feel important. Here, we follow a study that was conducted by Guenzi and Troilo (2007) on how the effectiveness of relationships between the marketing department and the sales department increases customer value and consequently boosts market performance. Relationship gaps among the marketers, particularly in M&A are not tangible, but need long-term attention as relationships take time to develop (Richey et al., 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize:

Proposition 3 (+): The more effective the marketers' relationship effectiveness, the better the M&A performance

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Most M&A studies are conducted in developed countries where there are large numbers of cases involved. In Malaysia, however, the number of M&A cases is limited. In fact, the data are limited to certain agencies such as the stock exchange agencies, for instance, Bursa Malaysia, Securities Commission (Malaysia), which monitor listed companies. Future research should extend the scope of the study to other Southeast Asian countries, for example, Singapore and Thailand. This will potentially improve the number of cases of M&A.

There could perhaps even be a regional study across Southeast Asia. Furthermore, this extension of the geographical area will enable the study to focus on certain industries that have many cases of M&A. Specific industry studies will provide more in-depth findings and a better understanding of certain business phenomena which will ultimately lead to improved business strategies and allow us to learn from previous lessons as has been done, for example, in the case of certain phenomena of M&A in the banking industry (see example Kim & Finkelstein, 2009; Lambkin & Muzellec, 2008). A cross-country comparison is also a prospective study which could lead to interesting comparison results. For example, the study conducted by Harris and Carr (2008) revealed that national values influence business directions and explain management behaviour which signals the true behaviour of international managers. Although most firms today are owned by local stakeholders nevertheless the people who manage them mostly come from other countries. Therefore, an in-depth study is needed to unveil this phenomenon.

Secondly, the scope of the marketing integration process in M&A is limited to the marketing environment, which cannot be used to generalize other departments such as manufacturing, logistics, human resources or R&D. This investigation focuses on how the marketing departments of two firms combined to improve and to utilize the marketing resources from two different countries. Thirdly, all of the instruments that were used in this study were adapted from previous studies. Future research should explore the use of new instruments in order to look deep through many lenses into the marketing integration perspectives, following the procedure for developing better measures for marketing research suggested by Churchill Jr (1979). This is important as it will potentially contribute to the development of marketing research in M&A.

There would be a greater contribution if the factors were pursued in a more in-depth study, especially in terms of human factors related to the marketers involved in the M&A integration. In fact, many researchers have found that the interaction of human factors is vital to the success of M&A integrations (Cartwright & Cooper, 1990; Schweiger & Weber, 1989). In this particular study, the focus would be on the marketers' interactions. For instance, in the integration of the marketing and sales departments, Rouzies et al. (2005) proposed integrating mechanisms that encompass organizational structure, process, culture and people. On the other hand, Garrett et al. (2006) proposed four mechanisms: formalization, centralization, role flexibility and interfunctional climate which boost the integration of a marketing department with a R&D department, which eventually improves new product development.

Finally, our focus on limitations shifts to the dependent variable, which is the M&A performance. In our study, the M&A performance measures were all basically described in terms of general performance such as customer-services level, return on investment and others, which were mainly from the perspective of perceptual measures. Further research should explore two levels of dependent variables: financial performance and non-financial performance. Instead of focusing solely on M&A performance, future studies could look at financial performance, for example acquirer performance (Laamanen & Keil, 2008), operating performance (Cornett et al., 2006) and financial performance, accounting returns and investor returns (Fowler & Schmidt, 1988). On the other hand, in terms of non-financial performance, we would suggest that the future studies look at the marketing performance in the M&A context. Marketing performance will provide more insights into the marketing discipline and moreover, this study initially explored the marketing field particularly marketing integration. By employing marketing performance, future studies will be able to identify specific marketing aspects that prevail in the M&A context. Further details about marketing performance can be explored through articles by Ambler and Roberts (2008).

Concluding Remarks

The integration process in M&A is a very crucial podium, as it determines whether the combined firms will improve their organizations' sustainability and growth, particularly at the international level, as most of the cases studied failed to prevail. Most importantly, the development of the combined firms will not only be targeting generating more profits or penetrating better market shares but also helping to establish reputable bilateral relationships between two countries, which eventually creates a strong base for structured and organized corporate governance, which stabilizes the combined firms in the long run.

The marketing integration process is the first hurdle that managers must face, particularly in organizing marketing resources in M&A, as it is likely to guarantee better outcomes, be it through the firm's performance or new product development. This hurdle must be supported by using appropriate stimulating factors to ensure smooth integration and to avoid conflict among the staff, especially the marketers. In fact, the marketers are the ones who generate sales and income through various ways of selling products and services. They are the team that is directly engaged in convincing either the existing customers or future customers who will eventually drive the liquidity of both the acquirer and the acquired firm. Hence, maintaining the right marketing people is the best way to sustain the future of the combined firms.

Finally, we sincerely hope that the propositions of this paper offer a clearer understanding of how marketing integration supplements the M&A integration process, particularly in terms of achieving a better marketing strategy that will enhance the corporate sales and revenues of the combined firm through comprehensive close relationships between marketers, all of which will stimulate the integration process and thereby boost the M&A performance.

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