

CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION

MASTER CASES



**The Royal Family,
...and they lived NOT so happily ever
after.**

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Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's Cases

The "Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's cases" is a case series for applying the case method of teaching and learning in higher education. The cases are relevant to brand strategists in private and public sector organizations, as well as academics and students at universities, business schools, and executive education.

The cases are written by groups of master's students as a course project. The specially developed case format is defined as: *"A management decision case describes a real business situation leading up to a question(s) that requires assessment, analysis, and a decision reached by discussion in class. The alternative approaches and recommendations from the class discussion are followed by a description of the choices made by the case company. This description is then discussed by the class."*

The student groups select the topics of their case providing updated and relevant insights into the corporate brand management. The cases can be used as "written cases" (handed out and read in advance, later to be discussed in class) and/or as "live case" (presented by the teacher following a discussion in class). Each case includes teaching notes, visuals with speaker's notes, learning objectives, board plans, and references.

The mission of the series is *"to develop cases for discussion providing insights into the theory and practice of corporate brand management and reputation, with the intent of bridging the gap between academic teaching and managerial practice."*

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers at the elective course Corporate Brand Management (BUSN35 – five-credit course/eight-week half-time studies), part of the master's program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The cases represent the result of the intellectual work of students under the supervision of the head of course.

Although based on real events and despite references to actual companies, the cases are solely intended to be a basis for class discussion, not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. The cases are free to be used and are to be cited following international conventions.

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WRITTEN CASE

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The Royal Family,

...and they lived NOT so happily ever after.

Once upon a time, in a kingdom not that far away, a royal wedding took place between Prince Harry of Great Britain and the American actress Meghan Markle. It had been love at first sight, and with high expectations of life as a married woman, Meghan entered her new family filled with joy for what the future might hold.

Unfortunately, however, being famous and a part of the royal family did not lead to the “happily ever after” portrayed through the lens of media, and behind the castle's carefully closed doors, lively discussions about unacceptable social behaviors aroused, turning this enchanting fairytale bad.

March 7th, 2021. Millions and millions of people around the world are sitting in front of their televisions to see the Oprah Winfrey Show. Because today, she is doing an exclusive interview with Meghan and Harry, where they are going to tell their side of the story, the “truth” about the royal family, and the reason why they left, the so-called *firm*.

I remember this conversation like it was yesterday, because they said, my heart goes out to you because I see how bad it is, but there's nothing we can do to protect you because you're not a paid employee of the institution. - Meghan Markle

Oprah: Why did you leave?

Prince Harry: Because of their lack of support!

Background

In 2017, the royal family of Windsor celebrated 100 years on the British throne, and February 6th, 2022 marked the 70th anniversary of the accession of Queen Elisabeth II, making her the longest-reigning monarch in British history. They are now the most famous royal family in the world, having prospered while other great dynasties have fallen. They've seen their relatives overthrown, murdered, and exiled, overcome family vendettas, fire, and betrayal. And through all that, they have followed one crucial rule: *survive*, whatever it takes, whatever the cost.

The history of the Windsor

The very first Windsors were King George V and his wife, Queen Mary. At their service stood King George's private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, who played a massive part in the re-branding of the royal family and in setting out the strategy for the future of the monarchy. In the early 1900s, Stamfordham, namely, started to indicate that the British monarchy didn't depend on the aristocracy, nor the middle class, but on the acceptance and approval and ultimately the love of the people. On that note, he encouraged King George and Queen Mary to do something British monarchs had rarely done before: to go out and meet the inhabitants of the kingdom they ruled over. If the top of the social ladder wanted to survive, the bottom step simply mattered the most.

The Windsor dynasty and this new monarchy model were tested twice during war and survived. It was also threatened by the rise of democracy and the danger of revolution and once again came through. And when Edward VIII, King Georeses's eldest son and the first monarch in British history to voluntarily abdicate due to "forbidden love," was becoming a dangerous alternative focus of the royal family, it was ruthless in cutting out the weak link.

The Windsors presented themselves to the world as a warm, constitutional monarchy, but their primary duty seemed to be ensuring their own survival, not allowing anyone to endanger that. There could be no place for personal passions or desires, tempering the seemingly solid *firm*, a phrase coined to represent both the present and future British Royal Family, who from now on, was all about duty and sacrifice. Indeed, a heavy burden to lay on the next generations to come.

The American dream meets the British Royal Fairytale...

Meghan Markle was a famous American actress, passionate about feminist and humanitarian causes. Harry, whose great-great-uncle was the former and abdicated king, Edward VIII, was the insurgent Prince who turned soldier, also believed to be the world's most eligible bachelor. In the summer of 2016, however, the two were set up on a blind date by a mutual friend in London and immediately fell in love. For months they avoided the cameras, but on October 31, 2016, the news about their relationship leaked to the press. From that point on, the media was on the high lookout for the sounds of royal wedding bells - and they didn't have to wait long. In November 2017, Prince Harry got down on one knee and proposed to Meghan in their home in Kensington Palace. The newly-engaged couple shared their news in a candid interview with the BBC, seeming to brim with positivity for the future. In that same interview, they also announced that Meghan would step back from her acting career to instead focus on matters close to her heart, working alongside her soon-to-be husband.

"I know that she will be unbelievably good at the job part of it," - Prince Harry.

In 2018, the planning and preparations got underway for the May wedding in Windsor, and things began to steam within The firm, as it instantly became apparent that this royal couple wanted to do things differently. Of course, the wedding contained regular traditions such as a gorgeous dress, beautiful bridesmaids, and hearty vows. However, the gospel choir, the young black cellist, and a spectacular speech from Bishop Curry marked it out as a trendy, diverse wedding for a modern and mixed couple, pointing to an unknown future for the royal family.

And then the fairytale turned bad...

It wasn't long after the wedding bells stopped ringing that the projected fairytale took a dark turn. The newlywed couple revealed shocking allegations in an interview with Oprah Winfrey in March 2021. To briefly summarize the interview, the couple claims that the royal family has failed to protect them, both emotionally and financially since the beginning of their relationship. Meghan Markle shares that the royal lifestyle caused her to be suicidal and that the royal family denied her any help since it would reflect poorly on the institution. Furthermore, the couple also claims that Markle, as a biracial woman, was subjected to relentless racist attacks by the royal family, the Parliament, and the media. For example: While the couple was expecting their firstborn son Archie Mountbatten-Windsor, members of the family allegedly speculated on the color of the unborn baby-boys skin. In addition, Prince Harry explains that these events have strained his relationship with his father, Prince Charles, who he feels has let him down since the wedding. The couple explains that when they left the royal family, they were also cut off financially from the royal family, resulting in them fearing that they could not afford proper security to protect their family.

"You've said some pretty shocking things here."- Oprah

Hundred-twenty minutes have passed by, and people worldwide are left in shock after finally hearing Prince Harry and Meghan's side of the story about their lives inside The firm and under which conditions they left. As expected, this interview caused a global-scale media storm. The British Royal Family has enjoyed the comfort of solitude behind the castle doors for centuries. However, times have changed, and in today's social media-driven world, privacy is a virtue for the privileged few, the royal family included. Due to Meghan Markle's self-made status and background in communication, she has multiple tools and channels to spread information, and oh boy, did she? The status of the royal family makes it a global topic of interest, and gossip about The firm tends to travel fast within the streams of social media. One must also consider today's social climate, where racism is far less tolerated than it used to be. The royal family is both a political institution as much as a corporate brand with its own international old heritage-based brand. Considering The firm's long history, it is no surprise that it might be hard for them to find its position in this digital era. The media flood that followed the newlywed's interview caused the public to pick sides, standing either against or with the Family Firm.

Case Discussion

Real-life kings and queens, princes and princesses, could thus be more fairly described as key figures within a business-related firm than fortunate ones living the very fairytale, we all have been reading and dreaming about since a young age. As with any firm or corporation, scandals and crises in the form of uncontrolled communication can have a devastating impact on the reputation of one's corporate brand. The interview presented above is a clear example of such uncontrolled communication, having the capacity to deeply harm the royal family and its 100 years old brand heritage. The newlyweds' self-expressed brand narrative is arguably quite different from the one that the Family Firm themselves are telling the world about.

Is this interview a form of whistle blowing, or just a family feud gone viral?

The interview has now been released and people from around the world are waiting for a response from the other members of the royal family, The firm itself.

Which leads to the following case questions:

1. Place yourself in the role of senior advisor to the royal family. *How would you respond to the public after a massive scandal like this to secure the firm's long-built reputation?*

2. Imagine yourself as Prince William, i.e., Prince Harry's brother. *How would you respond to the media after the accusations made in the interview? After all, the issue still concerns one of your closest family members and his wife.*

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