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Table of Contents

1. Organisational Context and Overview	3
2. External and Internal Environment Analysis	4
2.1 External Environment Analysis: PESTEL	4
2.2 Critical Success Factors and Strategic Challenges	6
2.3 Internal Environment: Resources, Capabilities and Core Competencies	7
2.4 VRIO Analysis	7
2.5 Internal Strengths and Competitive Advantage	8
3. CSR and Sustainability Objectives	9
4. Comprehensive and Holistic View: Balanced Scorecard.....	10
5. Strategic Choices and Implementation	15
6. Strategic Evaluation and Recommendations	17
6.1 Recommendations	18
Section 2: Reflective Account Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle.....	20
References	24

1. Organisational Context and Overview

Marks and Spencer (M&S) is a well-known retailer in the UK, which was set up in the years 1884 by Michael Marks and Thomas Spencer in Leeds. The company started as a market stall with the mission statement, “Don’t Ask the Price” and developed into a vertically integrated retailer with a reputation to be of quality, trusted and good relationship with their suppliers (Marks and Spencer, 2026). In the past, M&S had established its competitive strength on the production in Britain, own label goods, and a reputation. Nevertheless, with ease of increased competition and changing consumer behaviour since the beginning years of the 2000s, structural weak points have revealed themselves making a major alteration on the strategy.

The current mission of M&S is rooted in providing quality, innovative and sustainable products that result in trusted value, whereas the vision is to establish its position as a top omnichannel retailer in the field of clothes, home, and food (DCFModelling, 2026). Its model business is built more on its own-brand markets where it has more control in designing, sourcing, quality and margins. The corporation has two major business units, Food and Clothing and Home, the work of which is supported by an online platform and a strong strategy (in particular, in online retailing). The merging of physical stores with e-commerce is an indictment of a transition to an omnichannel approach with a view to enhancing convenience to customers and operational efficiency.

M&S is an international retail company based in the UK (both groceries and clothing markets), which is a very competitive market. It also competes with luxury grocers like Waitrose & Partners and the regular supermarkets like Tesco and Sainsbury in food retail (Global Data, 2026). Its competitors, in clothing, are value-driven fast fashion retailers (Primark), online retailers (ASOS) and high-end high street brands.

Market positioning wise, M&S has a mid-to-premium range, differentiated in quality, heritage and ethical sourcing as opposed to pure competition in terms of price (London Marketing, 2026). Though it has been experiencing a drop in market share in its clothing, its food division stands out as a good performer, which is a strength in enhancing brand equity. As a strategy, M&S aims to strike a balance between differentiating its products based on quality and sustainability with operation effectiveness to continue competition in the volatile and price sensitive retail environment.

2. External and Internal Environment Analysis

2.1 External Environment Analysis: PESTEL

An integrated PESTEL analysis illustrates the effects of the macro-environmental forces on the strategic orientation of Marks and Spencer (M&S). The application of the interaction between these external and internal capabilities in highly volatile retail markets is what defines the long-term competitiveness.

Political Factors

The political judgement around the UK retail industry has a lot of impact in terms of trade, taxes, labour laws, and food standards. An example of the customs checks and administrative load that have been imposed by post-Brexit trade deals includes those of imported clothes and food ingredient imports. In the case of M&S, a global sourcing network is needed, and it has been reconfigured to supply chain and stock, and suppliers have been diversified to reduce delays at the border.

Minimum wage policies and labour rights policies are some of the government policies that directly influence the labour-intensive store operations. Emerging demands in National Living Wage actions are impacting on the cost of operation, forcing M&S to pursue more rapid automation, store rationalisation and digital investment (Pestleanalysis, 2024). In addition, food retailers enjoy the obedience to agricultural subsidies and the food safety policies, which impact the procurement strategies. Politically, uncertainty has played a potential role in supporting M&S commitment to supply chain resiliency, domestic sourcing alliances, and operational effectiveness in a strategic manner.

Economic Factors

Consumer buying behaviour is highly influenced by the macroeconomic volatility. The UK inflation, cost of living pressures and the varying disposable incomes have made consumers to be price sensitive. Traditionally M&S has a mid-to-premium position, but the crisis is endangering discretionary spending on clothes, and there is a possibility that high-end food demand can be maintained on the basis of an affordable luxury brand image (MBA Skool, 2025).

The volatility in the exchange rates affects the cost of imports of textiles and the cost of raw materials. To address pressure on margins, M&S has lower cost levers, better demand forecasting, and volume supplier contract renegotiation. Moreover, the declines in the economies will push customers to transfer to economical retailers, smoothing the rivalry of value chains. As a result, strategic response of M&S has encompassed selective price investment in food that has been performing well, rationalisation of the stores that were not performing to the expectations, and the formation of partnership agreements to enhance online competitiveness.

Social Factors

Evidence on consumer lifestyle is a powerful driver to the strategic priorities of M&S. The consumers in the UK are coming out with high expectations of convenient products, ethical sourcing, healthy products, and omnichannel experiences (Li *et al.*, 2023). The demographics, such as ageing population and increasingly diversified urban consumers, need differentiated products.

Fast fashion in the clothing industry poses a challenge to the traditional positioning that M&S has had to face with and necessitates a faster design time and responsiveness to trends. The issue of sustainability and transparency in the social context has made ethical supply chains more significant, which has had a direct impact on sourcing strategies (Schäfer, 2023). The strategic plans of M&S, including reshaping food to healthier choices, adding more plant-based options, and exploring organic and responsible fashion sizing, signify responsiveness to social values.

Technological Factors

Retail is changing based on technological change that brings to life data analytics, AI-based prediction, digital marketing and e-commerce platform (Agboola *et al.*, 2023). In the past, M&S has been unsuccessful in terms of online integration but over the past years, digital transformation has been a core aspect of its turnaround strategy.

Rational investment in inventory made on data helps in enhancing precision and minimising wastage of food in businesses. Customer engagement and retention is improved through digital personalisation. Warehousing and distribution automation improves efficiency. Lack of technological adaptation poses a threat of being disadvantaged in competition with the digitally native retailers (Isharyani *et al.*, 2024). As such, the trend in the strategy of M&S involves more and more technology in the customer experience, logistics and decision-making processes.

Environmental Factors

M&S are greatly impacted by climate change, carbon reduction goals and environmental awareness among consumers. The retail industry contributes to carbon emissions, packaging waste, and textile waste (Violano and Cannaviello, 2023). Pressures from regulation and stakeholders will demand measurable commitments to sustainability.

M&S is a longstanding sustainability leader that incorporates environmental ambitions into the organisational strategy. The agricultural supply chains are also vulnerable to climate-related risks and this impacts the sourcing diversification and resilience planning. Innovation in reduction of packaging, sustainable materials, and circular economy efforts is offered by environmental pressures. Sustainability is not something that is just ethical but has a strategic connection with brand differentiation (Elg and Welinder, 2022).

Legal Factors

The retailers are obliged into strict compliance regarding consumer protection, product safety, employment law and data protection. The food retailing is subject to standards of food hygiene and food traceability. Failure to comply may destroy a good reputation and result in fines (Lin, 2022).

Digital strategy is influenced by the laws protecting data, especially, GDPR, as it involves safe management of customer data. Employment law has an influence on flexibility and cost of the workforce. The legal frameworks support the significance of governance, transparency and risk management in the strategic planning.

2.2 Critical Success Factors and Strategic Challenges

In terms of the external analysis, some critical success factors (CSFs) can be identified:

- **Good Brand loyalty and Reputation** - Critical in high quality food stores.
- **Profitable and Sustained Supply Chain** - To cope with Brexit and global disruptions.
- **Digital Integration and Omnichannel Capability**- Compete with online retailers.
- **Value Perception and Cost Efficiency**-Blue Ocean strategy balances cost and quality.
- **Sustainability Leadership**- The ability to meet regulatory and consumer expectations.

The major strategic issues are the fierce price competition, the decreasing high-street traffic, rising supply chain inflation and accelerated technological shift (Sundström *et al.*, 2025). More so, the pricing concept during economic downturn of being high end and affordable is always a challenge.

2.3 Internal Environment: Resources, Capabilities and Core Competencies

The Resource-Based View (RBV) holds that sustainable competitive advantage is based on valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organised resources.

Tangible Resources	Intangible Resources
• Extensive UK store network • Established supplier relationships • Financial investment capacity • Distribution infrastructure (Marks and Spencer, 2026)	• Strong brand heritage • Customer trust and loyalty • Sustainability reputation • Data and customer insights
Capabilities	Core Competencies
• Product innovation in food • Quality control in own-brand products • Strategic partnerships • Supply chain management	M&S has one core competency; the innovation of own-brand food of premium quality and with the trusted quality assurance. This is facilitated by the fact that it can manage the design, sourcing and retail using a single brand, which increases differentiation (Marks and Spencer, 2026).

2.4 VRIO Analysis

Resource/Capability	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Organised	Competitive Implication
Brand heritage & trust	Yes	Yes	Yes (historical reputation)	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage
Premium own-brand food innovation	Yes	Moderately	Difficult (supplier	Yes	Sustained/temporary advantage

			network, expertise)		
Store network	Yes	No	No	Yes	Competitive parity
Supplier relationships	Yes	Moderately	Moderately	Yes	Temporary advantage
Sustainability leadership	Yes	Increasingly rare	Difficult (long-term investment)	Yes	Potential sustained advantage
Digital capabilities	Yes	No	No	Improving	Competitive parity

Brand equity and sustainability positioning have the best sustained competitive advantages according to the VRIO analysis. The physical stores are not able to bring about the rarity but the built-in omnichannel ability adds value.

2.5 Internal Strengths and Competitive Advantage

The strengths that M&S possesses internally are specifically the trust in the brand, the quality of the product, and the devotion to sustainability self-sacrifice, can be directly related to the differentiation strategy (Bhasin, 2024). However, unlike cost leaders M&S is competing on feel good value not a lowest price. It enables it to control its quality, margins, and innovativeness as it has a vertically integrated own-brand model.

Brand heritage will give the feeling of attachment and lessen the perceived risk of food buying. Long term loyalty is supported by sustainability initiatives as they increase reputational capital and appeal to socially conscious consumers (Agu *et al.*, 2024).

Nonetheless, internal strengths need to keep on developing. As an illustration, the digital capabilities are still at a developing stage, and there is no doubt that creating a long-term strength requires that technological investment sort of take place alongside previous brand equity.

It is the combination of the external pressures and internal capabilities that demonstrates that the strategy of M&S is best suited to a differentiation strategy supported by the selective cost management. The sustainable competitive advantage is an intangible concept whose foundation lies in trusting brands, possession of innovation ability and ethical positioning, which are backed by organisational alignment (Wu *et al.*, 2025).

3. CSR and Sustainability Objectives

The business model of Marks and Spencer has incorporated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability strategically, rather than treating them as marginalised philanthropic activities (M&S, 2026). The strategic concern of environmental protection, ethical sourcing, community impact and net-zero carbon are already observable in its long-term sustainability programme and “Plan A”. Compared to reactive CSR strategies, M&S has incorporated sustainability in procurement, product development and supply chain management and this indicates the orientation of ethical responsibility and competitive strategy.

The CSR activities can be seen as a contributor to differentiation within the context of strategic management of M&S. Responsible sourcing, minimised use of plastic packaging, responsible cotton manufacturing and net-zero emission promises increase brand trust and customer loyalty- especially among socially aware customers (Jayaisnghe, 2024). This aligns with stakeholder theory, which holds that long-term value creation depends on meeting the interests of various stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, and communities. M&S builds reputational capital, which is an intangible resource, which has been recognised to provide long-lasting competitive advantage solutions to the challenge of the Resource-Based View (RBV), by integrating sustainability into its value proposition (Kero and Bogale, 2023).

CSR implementation also entails trade-offs though. Carbon reduction and sustainable sourcing have high requirements of investment thus it can cost more to break in the short-term operation. There is a strategic tension in an affordable and ethical environment in retailing that is price sensitive. However, M&S has addressed this risk through branding sustainability as value-adding and not cost-free, and associating environmental effectiveness with waste cut and cost-saving in the long run.

Most importantly, CSR at M&S is not just reputational CSR contributes to risk management, regulatory compliance and resilience of the supply chain (Hong, 2024). Thus its sustainability goals are well aligned to long-term business performance strengthening ethical legitimacy and competitive advantage in an ever-growing ESG-oriented business environment.

4. Comprehensive and Holistic View: Balanced Scorecard

The Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) offers a complete structure that correlates the strategic goals with quantifiable outcomes both in the financial and non-financial aspects (Balanced Scorecard Institute, 2026). In the case of Marks and Spencer (M&S), the model is useful in aligning its mission to provide trusted quality-oriented with strategic priorities that are digital transformation, operational efficiency, and leading sustainability.

1. Financial Perspective

Strategic Objective:

Achieve sustainable revenue growth and margin improvement while funding long-term transformation.

KPIs:

- Revenue growth (Food and Clothing & Home)
- Operating margin
- Return on capital employed (ROCE)
- Cost-to-sales ratio

Targets:

- Consistent year-on-year sales growth
- Margin expansion through cost efficiency
- Improved ROCE reflecting capital discipline

Initiatives:

- Store portfolio rationalisation
- Supply chain optimisation
- Investment in higher-margin own-brand food innovation
- Strategic partnerships to strengthen online sales

Strategically, financial goals indicate the necessity to be able to maintain a balance of both short-term profitability and long-term reinvestment (Nurchayati, 2025). The emphasis on margin management is consistent with the competitive challenge and the inflationary problem in the UK retail.

2. Customer Perspective

Strategic Objective:

Strengthen brand loyalty and enhance omnichannel customer experience.

KPIs:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- Customer retention rates
- Online conversion rate
- Market share in premium food segment

Targets:

- Improved NPS reflecting service quality
- Increased active digital customers
- Market share growth in key categories

Initiatives:

- Digital platform improvements
- Personalised marketing through data analytics
- Expansion of sustainable product ranges
- Quality and innovation in premium food lines

The customer metrics are important, as the primary competition at M&S is done by differentiation, as opposed to price leadership (Tojiri, 2023). Improving perceived value and trust helps in long term competitive advantage.

3. Internal Business Process Perspective

Strategic Objective:

Improve operational efficiency, supply chain resilience, and sustainability integration.

KPIs:

- Inventory turnover
- Supply chain lead time
- Food waste reduction levels
- Percentage of sustainable sourcing

Targets:

- Reduced stock wastage
- Faster replenishment cycles
- Increased proportion of responsibly sourced materials

Initiatives:

- AI-driven demand forecasting
- Automation in distribution centres
- Packaging reduction programmes
- Strengthening supplier partnerships

Financial performance and customer satisfaction are directly provided by internal process improvements. Indicatively, effective stock management minimises expenses, and still, there is availability of the products, and the brand exudes confidence (Alyahya and Agag, 2025).

4. Learning and Growth Perspective

Strategic Objective:

Build organisational capability, digital expertise, and innovative culture.

KPIs:

- Employee engagement scores
- Training hours per employee
- Digital skill development metrics
- Staff turnover rate

Targets:

- Higher engagement and retention
- Increased workforce digital competency
- Leadership development pipeline strength

Initiatives:

- Digital upskilling programmes
- Leadership transformation initiatives
- Diversity and inclusion strategies
- Performance-based reward systems

All other perspectives are facilitated by learning and growth. Digital transformation and sustainability objectives will not be managed efficiently without competent employees and agile leadership (Chukwunweike and Aro, 2024).

Strategic Integration

Balanced Scorecard shows cause-effect relations: an investment into the learning process extends to internal processes; better processes result in customer satisfaction; customer loyalty leads to the financial performance. In the case of M&S, this all-inclusive alignment makes sure that the objectives of sustainability, innovation and efficiency are not separately listed as part of competitive strategy; these three components are interrelated (Morgan, 2022). The Balanced Scorecard, therefore, reinforces strategic coherence so that M&S would be able to map its mission and the long-term transformation agenda onto measurable and actionable outcomes in terms of performance.

5. Strategic Choices and Implementation

Strategy choice is positioning based on the most suitable competitive position and the path of growth to realise sustainable advantage. In the case of Marks and Spencer (M&S), business-level and corporate-level strategies must respond to the challenges of severe competition, digital disruption, and changing consumer expectations.

Business-Level Strategy

At the business level, Porter has formed three generic strategies, which are cost leadership, differentiation and focus (Acar, 2024). Pure cost leadership is structurally difficult in the case of M&S. Groceries and clothing markets within the UK are full of mass-based price competitors like Tesco, and fast-fashion retailers like Primark. Price may be the most critical competitiveness factor to use as it would negatively affect the premium brand positioning of the M&S and would eliminate margins.

Differentiation is thus the best alternative that can be used. The differentiators of M&S are quality, own-branded food innovation, ethical sourcing, and brand heritage. It is in accordance with the Resource-based View (RBV) because its brand trust and sustainability image can be considered valuable and hard to replicate (El Nemar *et al.*, 2025). But the process of differentiation should be backed by cost selectiveness to be competitive despite economic downturn.

A differentiation strategy, which focuses specifically on mid-to-premium-quality-seeking, and sustainability-seeking consumers, seems to be strategically consistent. To enhance this strategy, it is advised to being more to the point and investing in product innovation, health-conscience food line, and sustainable fashion line. The rivalry based on perceived value instead of price safeguards brand equity and contributes to its long-term profitability.

Corporate-Level Strategy

At the corporate level, M&S has several strategic options:

1. **Related Diversification** – Expanding into complementary categories such as financial services or home products.
2. **International Expansion** – Increasing presence in growing markets.

3. **Strategic Partnerships and Alliances** – Enhancing digital and distribution capabilities (Mutambik, 2024).
4. **Portfolio Rationalisation** – Divesting underperforming units.

Traditionally, M&S have tried to go international with a mixed success as it has been experiencing problems in terms of cultural misalignment as well as high costs of operations. It is likely that global expansion in an aggressive way may take the risk higher when considering the present resource limitations and high domestic brand equity.

Change Management and Strategic Implementation

M&S has gone through a radical change during the last 10 years including the closures of stores, restructuring of the supply chain, new leadership and digital investment. These initiatives have some aspects of planned change that are in line with the change model of Kotter, which includes creating urgency, restructuring operations, and strengthening new practices (Mouazen *et al.*, 2024).

It is therefore financially disciplined and strategic in its rationalisation of stores that were under performing. Moreover, the enhancement of digital integration demonstrates the advancement of overcoming technological vulnerabilities of the past.

The clothing division has had a decade of difficulties in brand relevance and inventory shortages which mean that there was resistance in quick adaptation in the past. Very beginning stage decrease was brought about by cultural inertia and legacy systems.

More importantly, the recent food performance and the online expansion have shown improvements thus providing an indication that the leadership has enhanced the organisational alignment (Pai *et al.*, 2024). Effectiveness of implementation has been enhanced via investment in employee engagement and digital capability.

Change management of M&S can be evaluated as responding to change instead of proactive and slow. Even though transformation has brought operational gains, previous strategic drift in clothing provides the dangers of unresponsiveness in dynamic markets.

6. Strategic Evaluation and Recommendations

To critically evaluate the current strategy of Marks and Spencer (M&S), a combination of SWOT analysis and Ansoff's Matrix provides insight into strategic fit, growth direction and competitive sustainability.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Strong brand heritage and trust in premium food
- Established supplier relationships and quality control
- Sustainability leadership and ethical sourcing
- Growing digital integration

Weaknesses:

- Historical underperformance in Clothing & Home
- Higher price perception compared to discount rivals
- Legacy store estate with high fixed costs

Opportunities:

- Growth in online retail and data-driven personalisation
- Expansion of plant-based and health-focused food ranges (Global Data, 2026b)
- Rising consumer demand for sustainable fashion
- Strategic partnerships to enhance reach

Threats:

- Intense price competition from value retailers
- Economic downturn and reduced disposable income
- Supply chain disruption and cost inflation

- Rapid technological change

The SWOT analysis suggests that M&S's strengths lie primarily in differentiation capabilities rather than cost leadership. However, weaknesses in agility and cost structure limit flexibility. The strategic challenge is leveraging strengths while addressing structural inefficiencies.

Ansoff's Matrix Evaluation

Using Ansoff's Matrix, M&S's current strategy reflects a combination of **market penetration**, **product development**, and selective **market development**:

- **Market Penetration:** Strengthening food sales within the UK through loyalty initiatives and pricing adjustments.
- **Product Development:** Expanding plant-based ranges, sustainable clothing lines and premium ready meals (Jones, 2023).
- **Market Development:** Limited international presence with cautious expansion.

Diversification beyond core capabilities has historically been less successful. Therefore, the company's current cautious growth strategy reflects learning from past overexpansion.

Strategically, M&S is prioritising lower-risk growth options (penetration and product development), which align with its resource base and competitive positioning.

6.1 Recommendations

1. Deepen Differentiation through Sustainable Innovation

Drawing on Porter's differentiation strategy and the Resource-Based View (RBV), M&S should further integrate sustainability into core product design rather than treating it as an add-on. Expanding circular fashion initiatives and carbon-neutral food lines would reinforce rarity and inimitability. Retailers that embed sustainability into their brand identity strengthen long-term customer loyalty and mitigate regulatory risk (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2025). For M&S, sustainability can function as both reputational capital and operational efficiency driver.

2. Accelerate Data-Driven Omnichannel Integration

Digital capability currently offers competitive parity rather than advantage. M&S should intensify investment in AI-driven personalisation, predictive analytics and seamless store–online integration.

From a Dynamic Capabilities perspective (Teece), competitive advantage in volatile markets depends on sensing and responding to change. Enhanced digital analytics would improve inventory accuracy, reduce waste and enhance customer targeting. Leading omnichannel retailers integrate click-and-collect, personalised promotions and real-time stock visibility to enhance customer experience and retention (Yiğit, 2025).

3. Rationalise and Optimise Store Portfolio Further

Given high fixed costs, continued portfolio optimisation is essential. Underperforming locations should be converted into smaller food-focused or convenience formats aligned with changing urban consumption patterns (Saez-Gonzalez *et al.*, 2024).

This aligns with cost efficiency principles without abandoning differentiation. Leaner operations will improve operating margins and resilience during economic downturns.

4. Strengthen Clothing Division through Brand Clarity

Clothing remains strategically vulnerable. M&S should refine segmentation, reduce SKU complexity, and emphasise quality, durability and sustainability rather than competing with fast fashion.

This approach aligns with focused differentiation and avoids direct price wars with low-cost retailers.

Section 2: Reflective Account Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

The reflective account utilises the reflective Cycle introduced by Gibbs (1988) to assess the process I used in preparing, analysing and researching upon the strategic management report on Marks and Spencer (M&S). The model by Gibbs has six steps which include Description, Feeling, Evaluation, Analysis and conclusion and action plan (McLeod, 2025). This organised plan has helped me to evaluate critically what I have done, and how I have been effective in relating to the theory of strategic management and academic anticipations.

1. Description

This assignment needed a complete strategic examination of M&S, internal and external environments, CSR, utilisation of balanced scorecard, strategic decision-making and assessment models. I chose M&S as my first since it is a highly competitive retail business in the UK and thus could be used to implement models like PESTEL, VRIO, SWOT, Ansoff Matrix and Balanced Scorecard.

I started with the analysis of annual reports, the presentations given to investors and literature on strategic management theories, such as the Generic Strategies by Porter, the resource-Based View (RBV) and the Balanced Scorecard developed by Kaplan and Norton. I have organised the report as per the assessment guidelines where each section related specifically to the module learning outcomes that are: synthesising internal and external environments, evaluating competitive strategies as well as strategy implementation. As I did throughout the process, I wrote each part separately, and then revised it so as to achieve a theoretical integration, and not descriptive analysis. I also took a specific attention to draw a critical connection between theory and actual organisational practises instead of parroting models.

2. Feelings

Initially, I was confident I knew the specific strategic model when we started but felt rather insecure because of the demand to incorporate several models and make them all work together in one report. The number of words and preliminary anticipation of critical analysis (not description) caused the pressure at the beginning.

Nevertheless, most of the time, as I went along and continued, I was more sure of the theory-to-practise application. Evaluation of the M&S turnaround strategy made the evaluation of the

company more interesting with sustainability efforts and digitalisation (Moghrabi *et al.*, 2023). I was particularly motivated in the course of associating the Resource-Based View with the M&S brand heritage and sustainability reputation, because it proved to be a higher intellectual thought process. Later on, as I was nearing the end I felt more confident that my report went past the hollow superficial analysis and was more indicative of a big picture strategy.

3. Evaluation

My approach had several strengths. First, the report had been broken down into parts systematically to match the assessment brief which made the report clear and logical. Secondly, I would always incorporate theoretical frameworks to make arguments (Hiebert *et al.*, 2022). As an example, I related PESTEL analysis with internal capabilities using VRIO analysis, too, which showed strategic fit.

Discussing trade-offs critically, i. e. tension between sustainability investment and cost pressures, was also another strength. This enhanced critical insight. But there are also some aspects to be enhanced. Sometimes, I concentrated on detailing the activities of M&S and I was critical only after. I needed to rewrite passages to make sure that I was doing the why and how effective and not just what. Also, the repetition of multiple synthesised frameworks had to be edited well.

4. Analysis

The Gibbs model allows analysing my learning process more profoundly (Praveena *et al.*, 2025). This evaluation allowed me to gain greater proficiency in internal and external analysis synthesis that directly correlates with the learning outcome of the module. I started looking at PESTEL and VRIO in a new perspective as to how the macro-environmental pressure affects the value and rarity of internal resources.

As an example, the pressure created by sustainability (external) makes the ethics sourcing capabilities of M&S (internal) hold more strategic valence. This shows dynamic interaction as opposed to analysis of the static. Such an understanding portrays that descriptive thinking is being changed to strategic thinking. The application of the Balanced Scorecard has also contributed to the improvement of my knowledge of implementation (Mio *et al.*, 2022). I realised that the concept of strategy is not only about positioning but also goals and organisational alignment that can be

measured. Connexions between financial objectives and learning and growth programmes showed relationships of cause and effect as outlined by Kaplan and Norton.

Moreover, a critical analysis of the business and corporate level strategic decisions enhanced my conceptualization regarding the concept of competitive positioning. I also got to know that, advising cost leadership to M&S would go against its own resource base and brand positioning. Thus, strategy should be consistent with organisational capabilities- an evaluation based on RBV theory. All in all, the assignment provided me with greater power to support or oppose competitive and development strategies within modern settings and especially in unstable retail markets.

5. Action Plan

I will further enhance my strategic analysis skills by:

- **Enhance Critical Writing Skills:** Get used to writing shorter critical paragraphs that explicitly assess strengths and weaknesses of the theories, and are not prone to word description.
- **Deepen Academic Referencing:** Read more peer-reviewed journal articles to enhance the theoretical justification as well as increasing the level of academic rigour.
- **Develop Data Interpretation Skills:** Develop my skills in using financial and performance data to argue the strategy in a quantitative way.
- **Strengthen Time Management:** Further analyses should be commenced sooner to give sufficient time to revise and refine the analysis.
- **Apply Reflective Practice Continuously:** Further implementation of Gibbs Reflective Cycle in subsequent classes can help strengthen the aspect of self-awareness and academic development.

6. Conclusion

By looking back at the entire process, I realise a lot of academic growth. I developed my skills of synthesising different frameworks in a logical way, writing in a critical manner, and connecting theory with the evidence in the real world. I also was able to appreciate more the value of strategic management as a living and interactive science.

Nevertheless, early planning and drafting was also another critical element I discovered. Reflecting and revising takes time to have a critical analysis. Finding the right balance in keeping the variety (the models considered) and depth (destructive analysis) was a difficult task to perform but at the end it was worth the effort. This reflective practise has made me more confident in approaching complex strategic analysis jobs in future.

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