

NEGATIVE PUBLICITY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: EXAMINING THE CONSUMER- COMPANY RELATIONSHIP AFTER A COMPANY FACES NEGATIVE PUBLICITY ONLINE

PhD in Management – Marketing and Reputation

Henley Business School – Department of Marketing and Reputation

CHRISTOS MICHAEL

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DECLARATION

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Christos Michael

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to explore the consumer-company relationship after a company experiences negative publicity online in order to provide recommendations to companies as to the direction they should take post negative publicity. Therefore, via two guiding theories, moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), this thesis examines consumers' emotions and cognitions after a negative event emerges and after the corporate response. This thesis adopts a qualitative approach and particularly a netnographic study is employed. This thesis specifically examines the case of Chick-fil-A that caused controversies online due to its beliefs and identity (BBC, 2019). The research examines comments that were posted in newspaper articles on Facebook regarding the protests that took place in Reading against the company due to the aforementioned reasons. A total of 2,973 comments were analysed. The findings of the study conceptualise online negative publicity. The findings further reveal that when a negative event emerges, consumers process the event both emotionally and cognitively. Moreover, consumers' positive or negative emotions, cognitions and subsequent reactions towards negative publicity are a result of consumers wanting to preserve and protect both their social and moral identities as they are both salient in such instances. Additionally, this thesis uncovers that a consumer-company relationship in cases of negative publicity is very fragile and even those who identify with the organisation can disidentify with it when the response strategy is weak. This thesis develops two theories for the relationship marketing literature, namely, emotional consumer-company identification/disidentification. These theories better help to understand the nature of the consumer-company relationship especially in cases of negative publicity. Moreover, this thesis presents a robust understanding of the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity considering both consumers' emotions and cognitions. Finally, this thesis provides strategies as to how companies can better deal with online negative publicity.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Mum

VASO MICHAEL

1960 – 2016

She was a genuine, giving, kind and hardworking individual and she would always put other people's needs above her own. She was a very special human being. Above all, she was a protective, supportive, loving and caring Mum. Her main goal as a Mum was to safeguard her two children. She was always by my side; either cheering me on or providing me with useful advice. She always wanted to see me healthy and happy, and would never let anything bring me down. She taught me so many things most importantly though to always be kind and caring. I will always cherish these things and will never forget them. She is much loved and much missed.



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'With the power of determination, you can achieve anything' – Christos Michael

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by addressing the research gap and explains the reasons for undertaking this research. Moreover, the context of the study is outlined along with a rationale for selecting the specific context. Furthermore, explanations are provided as to the theories selected to guide this study along with the methodology used in order to attain the research aim of the study. The aims and objectives are also presented in the introduction along with what activities the researcher undertook in order to achieve the aims and objectives of this research. Finally, this section ends with the theoretical and methodological contributions along with managerial implications of the study. An overview of each chapter is also presented at the end of this chapter.

1.2 Research Gap and Rationale

The first study to define negative publicity was Reidenbach, Festervand and MacWilliam back in 1987. This was the first definition that was created in regard to this phenomenon and has been cited by many researchers since then. Negative publicity is explained as the delivery of bad news associated with a firm or its products, which is usually spread via word-of-mouth or the media, and which are usually difficult for companies to reinstate (Reidenbach, Festervand and MacWilliam, 1987). This definition is considered outdated as it does not consider social media and the internet, which are elements that have only recently infiltrated the lives of consumers. The majority of the studies that have researched negative publicity focus on negative publicity that takes place offline (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000), omitting the role of social media and the internet. It is important to research negative publicity online as consumers are now more pro-active online as they disseminate their views and opinions online with other consumers (Heinonen, 2011). Consumers no longer just share their negative thoughts with companies as was previously the norm, they now share their negative experiences with other consumers online also (Rauschnabel, Kammerlander and Ivens, 2016). Sharing negative thoughts online is more detrimental for companies than sharing them offline as sharing negative views online translates to a wider reach of audience

and, thus, more consumers are more likely to be affected and boycott the company (Herhausen et al., 2019). Spreading negative views online can also have a detrimental effect on a brand's reputation and it may tarnish at a much faster rate (Herhausen et al., 2019). It is also apparent that many organisations are not aware as to how to respond to negative publicity online (Herhausen et al., 2019). Research highlights that 72% of companies are not fully prepared for negative publicity that hits online (Ethical Corporation, 2012 cited in Herhausen et al., 2019). This highlights the importance of researching negative publicity online as it is under-researched and companies do not know how to deal with negative publicity online. Thus, this study aims to better understand consumers' behaviours in regard to online negative publicity and how it affects the consumer-company relationship. These will also help to develop and provide recommendations for companies in order to respond more effectively to negative publicity online.

Additionally, the majority of studies focus on either how consumers respond to negative publicity (consumer-centric) or how a company should respond to negative publicity (firm-centric). Consumer-centric research mainly establishes how consumers react either cognitively to offline negative publicity (Einwiller et al., 2006; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009; Einwiller et al., 2019) or how they react emotionally to offline negative publicity (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Consumers' emotional and cognitive responses have not been researched in combination with one another previously and how these two responses together affect consumers' behaviours. This implies that consumers' reactions have not been researched from an alternative perspective, even though the aforementioned literature signifies that they are both important. Therefore, this suggests that the full extent of consumers' behaviours in the context of negative publicity is not fully known. Understanding consumers' behaviours from a different perspective is important as this aids in understanding the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity, and thus helps companies to deal more effectively with negative publicity online. Firm-centric research explores how a company should ideally respond to negative publicity and proposes various response strategies such as reduction-of-offensiveness and corrective action (Dutta and Pullig, 2011) amongst many strategies proposed. All these strategies only take into consideration consumers' cognitive responses

after an adverse event (Bradford and Garrett, 1995; Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006; Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009; Xie and Peng, 2009; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Hegner, Beldad and Heghusi, 2014; Wang et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2018). Therefore, this stream of research omits two crucial elements, the emotions consumers encounter during negative publicity and the relationship the consumers have with the company. The literature suggests that these two elements affect the way consumers respond to negative publicity (their emotions and their cognitions), however, both have not been considered when exploring corporate response strategies (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Einwiller et al., 2019). This highlights the fact that companies are not fully aware of the relationship that exists with the consumer after negative publicity and so they are not equipped in order to respond to negative publicity effectively. Thus, this research aims to address this gap by exploring consumers' emotional reactions to negative publicity online along with their cognitions.

It is important to research negative publicity and how companies can overcome it as it may have many adverse effects on companies. Previous studies suggest that negative publicity may ruin a brand's reputation and effectively how consumers view the brand overall (Hansen, Kuper and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Additionally, prior research also suggests that after a negative event the relationship a consumer has with an organisation may deteriorate (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011). This translates to companies losing out on consumers and a majority of consumers migrating towards competing companies (Monga and John, 2008). Thus, this signifies the seriousness of a negative publicity event and that effective strategies addressing both consumers' emotions and cognitions are needed to overcome this issue. Additionally, the literature suggests that correction strategies after a negative event are very costly for companies (Dutta and Pullig, 2011). For example, Pepsi, after a communication failure in one of their advertisements was forced to withdraw the advertisement (even though they had explained that the consumers had perceived the advertisement wrongly) and it was never used after the controversy it caused online (Smith, 2017). This signifies that companies may lose money simply because the intended message was communicated in a wrong manner.

It is therefore evident that there are a few gaps in the literature, which are addressed in this thesis:

1. Prior studies have only researched consumers' behaviours towards companies experiencing negative publicity from either an emotional or a cognitive perspective (Einwiller et al., 2006; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009; Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Einwiller et al., 2019; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). None of the current studies have explored both together, hence these two being researched together in order to understand consumers' responses to negative publicity from an alternative perspective.
2. Prior research proposes scattered strategies as to how companies should respond to negative publicity and mostly taking consumers' cognitions into consideration (Bradford and Garrett, 1995; Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006; Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009; Xie and Peng, 2009; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Hegner, Beldad and Heghusi 2014; Wang et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2018), thus not addressing consumers' emotions and the nature of the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity. Therefore, recommendations that address both consumers' cognitions and emotions are developed in this thesis.
3. Online negative publicity has received minimal attention in the literature, with the majority of the studies focusing on offline negative publicity (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000); hence, this thesis exploring the online setting.

1.3 Research Context and Rationale

The negative publicity literature declares that there are two types of negative publicity, 'performance-related', which entails a firm's 'functional qualities such as product failures', and 'values-related' 'involves social or ethical issues such as racial discrimination', which signify a company's 'ability to deliver symbolic benefits' (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas,

2006, p.529-530). This thesis explores a values-related negative event as the majority of past studies exploring negative publicity emphasise on ‘performance-related’ events (Liu et al., 2018), therefore underlining that ‘values-related’ events are under-researched. Thus, the researcher selected a values-related negative event and specifically Chick-fil-A is the organisation that is examined in this thesis as it is a company with a controversial identity and values. Specifically, Chick-fil-A is known in the USA as a Christian company (Parke, 2019). It started off with the founder Truett Cathy who was Christian and closed the restaurant every Sunday as a day dedicated for worship (Parke, 2019). This is a practice that is carried out by the organisation up until today (Parke, 2019). Alongside this distinct identity and values the firm holds, in the past the chief operating officer of the organisation expressed his disagreement with same sex marriages and his strong negative views against them (Aldridge, 2019). Recently, Chick-fil-A was accused by consumers for being a pro-Christian company and an anti-LGBTQ+ company due to the fact that it donated to Christian charities some of which were said to be anti-LGBTQ+ (i.e. Salvation Army and Fellowship of Christian Athletes) (Parke, 2019). As depicted in the diagram below (Figure 1.1), on the 10th October 2019, Chick-fil-A decided to expand to the UK and open a restaurant in Reading at the Oracle Mall (BBC, 2019). A day after their opening, a portion of UK consumers protested online about the restaurant as they disagreed with the firm’s values, beliefs and donations (BBC, 2019). They then further protested outside the restaurant (Knight, 2019). This subsequently caught the organisation’s attention and on 18th November they committed that they would no longer donate to those charities (Aldridge, 2020). The firm then decided it would cease to operate in the UK and closed down on 20th March 2020 (Sandler, 2019).

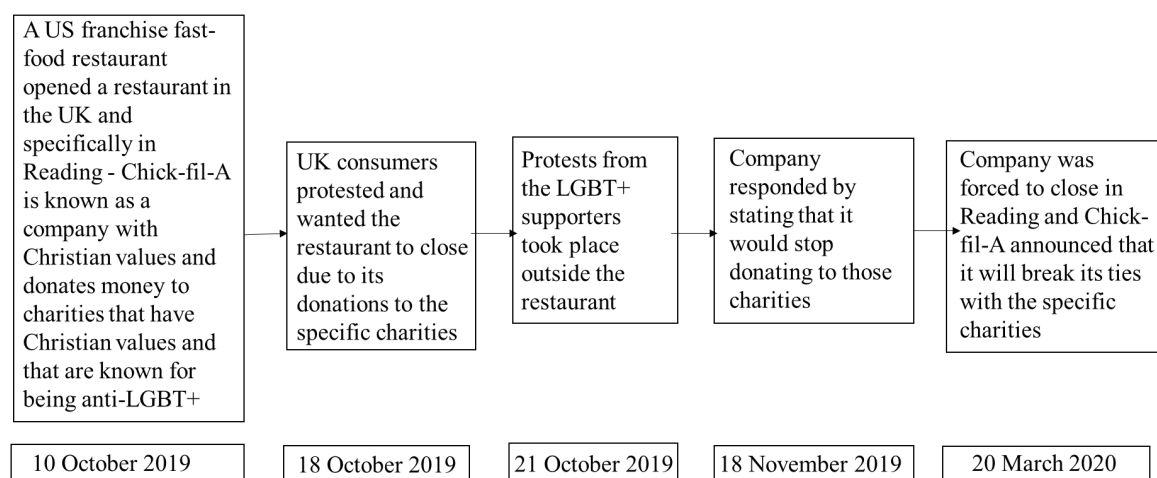


Figure 1.1: Chick-fil-A Timeline of Events

The importance of studying values-related negative events lies within many reasons. Prior research highlights that consumer behaviour is mainly guided by a consumer's values as opposed to a firm's functional qualities (Gonçalves, Lourenço and Silva, 2016), thus highlighting the importance of researching a values-related negative event. Moreover, the studies that research emotions in the context of negative publicity focus on values-related events signifying that moral emotions are more likely to emerge in a 'values-related' event as opposed to a 'performance-related' event scenario (Herhausen et al., 2019, Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Moreover, in prior research that focuses on values-related negative events, the events seem to mainly emerge from the organisation and are distributed by the media. For example, the Volkswagen (VW) emissions worldwide scandal where the company falsely stated the emissions that their cars were emitting and as a result was exposed for this by the media (Bowen, 2017). A similar event that caused a scandal in the UK was Tesco when it sold horse meat instead of beef to its consumers and when the firm had overstated its profits in their accounting records (BBC, 2013; Wearden, 2014). Both events were widely spread by all the media outlets (BBC, 2013; Wearden, 2014).

There seems to be a new phenomenon in which consumers are the ones who start the negative publicity on social media in response to a company's stance on social issues as the company's communication is not clear and effective. For example, when Donald Trump announced that he would ban refugees from entering the country, Starbucks responded by showing their support towards refugees stating that they would hire 10,000 employees who were refugees (Grigore and Molesworth, 2018). This soon backlashed as American consumers did not agree with this and formed protests online and urged others to boycott Starbucks (Grigore and Molesworth, 2018). Furthermore, another negative publicity event that emerged from consumers was that of Pepsi when they advertised Kendall Jenner (TV star) joining a protest on the streets and standing in front of the police offering them a can of Pepsi (Grigore and Molesworth, 2018). This immediately caused controversy as consumers linked this advertisement with Ieshia Evan and the Black Lives Matter Protest where she stood in front of policemen (Grigore and Molesworth, 2018). These types of communication failures along with consumers initiating negative publicity online have not been researched extensively before. This thesis focuses on a negative event that emerged from consumers online also and in which the organisation had failed to communicate its values appropriately.

This thesis explores the whole course of the event and specifically how consumers react online towards the company and how they react to the corporate response. Following a real-life event helps uncover consumers' actual and natural thoughts, emotions and behaviours and allows revealing the nature of the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity. This will allow providing recommendations towards companies as to how they can better respond to negative publicity online.

1.4 Enabling Theories Rationale

Furthermore, the two enabling theories selected for this study are consumer-company identification theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and moral emotions theory (Haidt, 2003). This is mainly because both moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) have been researched in the context of negative publicity but separately (either looking at moral emotions or consumer-company identification), thus their effectiveness when researching negative publicity is established. These two theories have not been researched together in order to uncover both consumers' emotional reactions and cognitive reactions to negative publicity, therefore this study aims to do this with the help of these two theories. They seem to be the most appropriate theories as the consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) theory focuses mainly on an individual's cognitions, and the moral emotions theory (Haidt, 2003) focuses mainly on an individual's emotional responses. Moreover, since the research examines values-related negative publicity, the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) is a perfect fit with the scope of the study as morality is an aspect explored in the study. Additionally, the theory of consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) is a perfect fit for this study as it involves a cognitive connection a consumer has with the brand and the study aims to explore the relationship of the consumer and the company from this lens. Using these two theories, this research can verify to what extent an individual's identity affects a consumer-company relationship in cases of negative publicity, as previous research suggests that the self affects how a consumer responds to negative publicity (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011). These theories are based on a consumers' identity, the moral emotions on an individual's moral identity (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification on an

individual's social identity (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003); thus, this can aid in uncovering the role of a consumers' social and moral identity in cases of online negative publicity.

1.5 Research Methodology Overview and Rationale

The methodology adopted in this research is qualitative and specifically a netnographic study (Kozinets, 1998; 2002; 2010; 2015; 2020). One of the main reasons a qualitative method was selected is due to the fact that it occurs in a natural setting, which allows for more realistic outcomes to eventuate (Hammersley, 1992). This is in contrast to quantitative methods that use artificial settings where most of the variables are controlled by the researchers (Hammersley, 1992), which translates to outcomes not depicting reality. Another reason a qualitative methodology was selected is the fact that qualitative studies attempt to find meaning behind behaviours in contrast to quantitative methods that focus on attitudes only (Hammersley, 1992). Since the aim of the study is to better understand consumers' behaviours in cases of negative publicity and uncover why they behave in the way they do, this method was a perfect fit for this study. Additionally, the majority of studies researching negative publicity have used quantitative methodologies, and specifically methods such as experiments and surveys, which examine fake scenarios, which highlights that pragmatic conditions have not been previously explored to a full extent (Hammersley, 1992).

Netnography was the qualitative methodology selected for this study. Netnography is a method whose principles are based on ethnography (Kozinets, 2015). The latest definition that the inventor of netnography has given this methodology is 'a set of general instructions relating to a specific way to conduct qualitative social media research using a combination of different research practices grouped into three distinct categories of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation and their six overlapping stages or 'movements'' (Kozinets, 2020, p.7). One of the reasons this method was selected is because it allows for intuitive behaviours to occur (Hammersley, 1992) as opposed to consumers recalling thoughts and emotions from memory such as other methods (Gupta, 2009). This translates to a study with limited bias and a method that helps uncover true consumer behaviours. Since the aim of the study is to uncover consumers' actual thoughts, emotions and behaviours towards an organisation encountering negative publicity and examine their real nature of their

relationship after negative publicity this method was assessed as appropriate for this study. Additionally, netnography allows for interactions to occur between participants, which can reveal behaviours and reactions that would not have been uncovered with other methods, and consumer online interactions help the researcher understand how consumers' behaviours and emotions are affected (Kozinets, 2020). Hence, the selection of this method as the aim of this thesis is to better understand consumers' behaviours to negative publicity in order to provide guidance for companies. Moreover, netnography also helps in understanding the role of consumers' identities in their purchase behaviours (Kozinets, 2020). As this is also a facet that the researcher explores in the study, how a consumers' moral and social identity affects their behaviours towards a company encountering negative publicity online was assessed as a compatible method.

1.6 Research Aim and Objectives

Taking into consideration the research gaps in the literature, how they need to be addressed and by using the aforementioned enabling theories and methodology, this study has one aim. To better understand how consumers respond both emotionally and cognitively to negative publicity online in order to understand the nature of the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity, and thus allow companies to address all of these facets and respond in a more effective manner.

For the research aim of this thesis to be achieved and to address the research gap, three important research questions are answered for this thesis.

Research Question 1: What are the emotions that consumers encounter when faced with negative publicity online and how does it affect the way consumers react towards the company?

The positive (i.e. compassion) and negative (i.e. anger, disgust, contempt) emotions that consumers experience when a company encounters negative publicity were examined in order to reveal how these emotions affect their behaviours. Specifically, the thesis used the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) in order to uncover the emotions that consumers

experience. The results of the study suggest that emotions affect the way in which consumers respond to negative publicity and, specifically, it affects the relationship the consumers have with the brand. Positive emotions, such as compassion, lead to supporting and protecting the company and fighting to maintain a relationship with the brand as a means of protecting their moral identity. Whereas negative emotions such as anger and disgust lead to consumers to attack the brand as a means of dissociating themselves with the brand and protect their moral identity.

Research Question 2: How do consumers' cognitions and identification with a company affect their actions towards a company encountering negative publicity online?

This research question wanted to answer how consumers process negative publicity on a cognitive basis and how this affects their behaviours and relationship with the company. Consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) is the enabling theory that helped reveal consumers' cognitions and subsequent behaviours. The results of the thesis highlight that the way consumers perceive their relationship with the company in such circumstances affects the way in which they respond. Those who have a close and communal relationship with the company (i.e. identified consumers) protect the brand as a means to protect their relationship with the company and their social identity. On the other hand, those who do not have a relationship with the company (i.e. disidentified consumers) state their dissociation with the company as means to protect their social identity.

Research Question 3: How does an immediate corporate response after a negative event affect consumers' emotions and behaviours towards the company and how can organisations better respond to negative publicity?

This research question reveals consumers' emotions and cognitions after the company responds to negative publicity and their subsequent actions. Again, the two enabling theories of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) helped to answer this. The results again suggest that consumers' emotions and cognitions affect how consumers respond to the company's response also. The identified

consumers turn to disidentified consumers as they believe the company has changed its values and beliefs and so experience disgust and turn against the brand. Those who initially disidentified still do after the corporate response as they believe nothing has changed so their emotions and behaviours remain unchanged and so does their relationship with the company. This thesis suggests some strategies for companies to respond to online negative publicity appealing to both consumers social and moral identities. Amongst them are to use CSR (corporate social responsibility) strategies, corrective action and a genuine apology along with an explanation.

1.7 Research Activities

In order to attain the above research questions, the following research activities were carried out.

1. The **initial research questions** were drafted to better help guide the research and be able to have in mind the aim of the study.
2. The first activity involved putting together a comprehensive and extensive **literature review**. The literature review focused mainly on areas that were relevant to the research aim and questions of the study. Both consumer-centric and firm-centric research in relation to negative publicity was examined and the relative sections were subsequently included. Online firestorms, which is a similar concept to online negative publicity, was also explored and included in the review in order to direct the scope of the study. Moreover, in order to understand consumers' emotions in regard to negative publicity, the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) was also researched and theorised. Previous studies that researched moral emotions with negative publicity were also examined. Furthermore, the literature of consumer-company identification and consumer-brand disidentification was extensively explored as this was the part that explored consumers' cognitions. It was also important to understand this concept as it was an enabling theory of this study (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Previous studies that used this concept in regard to negative publicity were also examined and included.

3. After examining all the respective literature, the **research questions were subsequently refined** in order to better meet the aim of the study.
4. The researcher then started formulating the **netnographic study** (Kozinets 2020). The company in which the research would focus on was chosen. Specifically, **Chick-fil-A** was chosen as it was an organisation that had faced negative publicity online and fitted with the scope of the study. Furthermore, the social media platform from which the comments were acquired from was also selected. This was **Facebook** due to the fact that this is a social media platform in which news sites posts their articles and consumers are able to comment on them. Therefore, this platform was selected as it would have allowed seeing consumers' interactions and how one individual communicates with another. Additionally, the newspaper articles were also selected. The researcher decided to choose articles that are reputable and are well known in order to avoid any articles that are not accurate and spread misinformation. Amongst the media outlets were: **BBC, The Guardian, Berkshire Live, Reading Chronicle, Daily Mail and Forbes**. Therefore, the information disseminated to the consumers was established and accurate and was not fake news.
5. The researcher **followed the negative event for 6 months**, from the moment the negative publicity event emerged online up until the corporate response to negative publicity and how consumers reacted to it.
6. The researcher initially read 23,413 comments that were related to the negative event in order to become familiar with the data, and then subsequently read 7,582 that were related to consumers' behaviours towards the corporate response. Out of the 23,413 comments relating to the negative event, only 2,088 comments were selected to be analysed as they were the ones relevant to the research questions posed. Out of the 7,582 comments related to consumers' behaviours after the corporate response, 885 were analysed as they were related to the research questions of the study. These comments were then **coded using Nvivo12**, which resulted in 61 codes.

7. After coding took place and in order to avoid bias and achieve reliability the researcher undertook an **‘inter coder reliability assessment’** (O’Connor and Joffe, 2020). So, the codes were checked with two other colleagues and the desirable score was subsequently achieved.
8. The data was then **analysed using thematic analysis** (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Five major themes emerged from the data. The data was analysed in accordance to the research questions of the study.
9. After the data was analysed and the findings were aggregated in the **findings section**, a **discussion section** was written in order to discuss the new insights that emerged from this study and how they compared to previous studies.
10. Finally, **methodological, theoretical and managerial contributions** were spotted and were discussed in the last section of the thesis.

The figure (Figure 1.2) below provides an overview of the research activities mentioned above. It outlines the activities that will take place in each chapter.

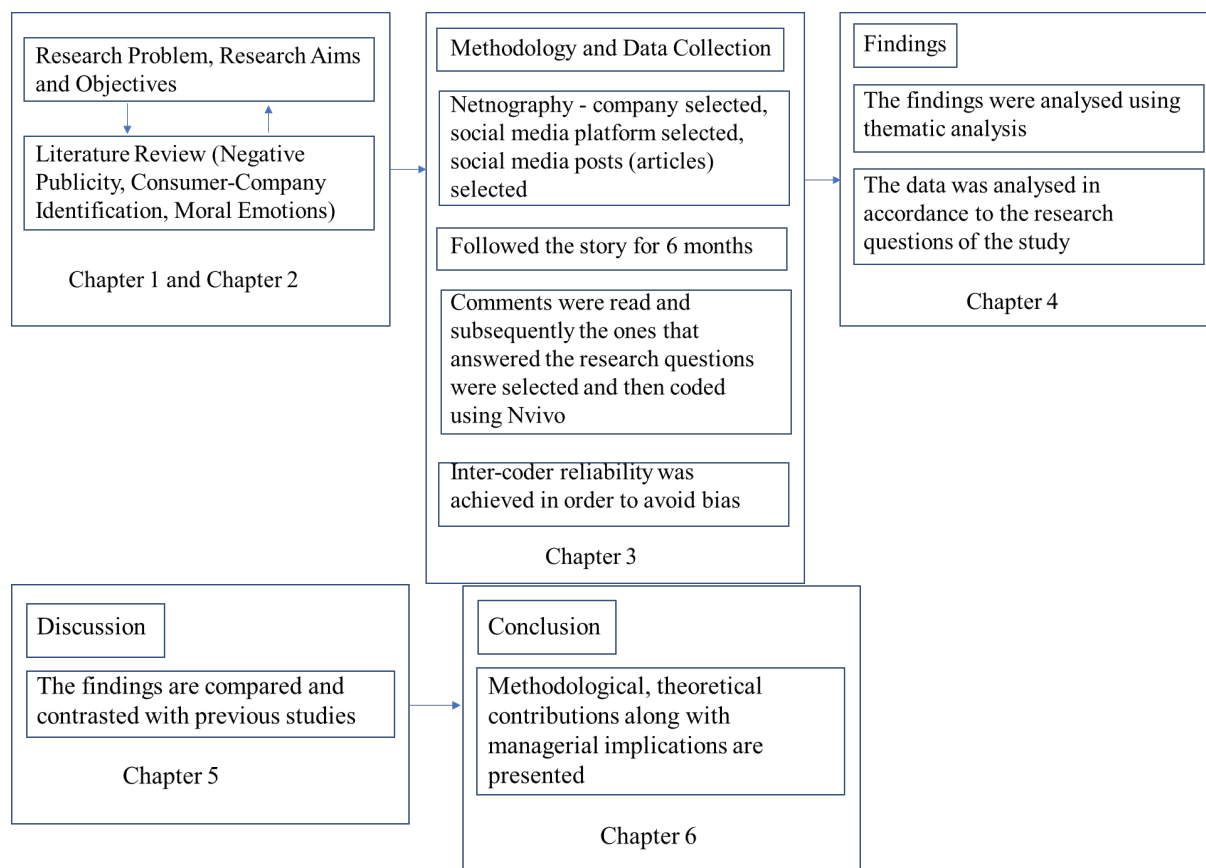


Figure 1.2 Research Activities' Overview

1.8 Theoretical, Methodological Contributions and Managerial Implications

1.8.1 Theoretical Contributions

One of the contributions of this thesis is to the field of negative publicity as it conceptualises online negative publicity and uncovers important aspects of it. Prior studies focus mainly on offline negative publicity, researching how consumers react to it and how companies respond to it (i.e. Bradford and Garrett, 1995; Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Monga and John, 2008). Online negative publicity has been neglected in the respective literature and, therefore, this thesis contributes knowledge to this area by defining it and establishing the difference between online and offline negative publicity. Moreover, this thesis also importantly highlights that consumers act upon both their emotions and cognitions in cases of online negative publicity. This is in contrast to prior studies that suggest consumers act upon either their emotions

or cognitions (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Monga and John, 2008; Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018).

Another contribution to knowledge is to the literature of relationship marketing as the theory of consumer-company identification is developed. Einwiller et al. (2006, p.192) recommend in their study to research the ‘emotional aspect of consumer-company identification’ as prior studies also suggest that there may be ‘an emotional component’ (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000 cited in Einwiller et al., 2006, p. 192), hence the gap within the literature and how this thesis contributed to addressing it. This thesis develops the existing theory of consumer-company identification developed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), which states that identification is a cognitive connection a consumer experiences with a company. This thesis suggests that there is an emotional connection with the company and not only a cognitive connection as prior research states and that the connection is based on a consumer’s moral and social identity. Thus, the theory in this thesis is renamed to emotional consumer-company identification.

The theory of consumer-company disidentification, which is an under-researched concept in the literature, is also developed contributing again to the literature of relationship marketing. The consume-company disidentification theory also states that the disidentification is based on a cognitive rejection a consumer experiences towards a brand (Wolter et al., 2016). The current thesis proposes that there is an emotional component to this theory and it involves both a cognitive and an emotional rejection a consumer experiences with an organisation. This thesis also suggests that consumers from identified consumers can turn to disidentified consumers, which previous studies have not detected. Both theories developed in this this thesis help better understand the nature of the relationship a consumer has with a company especially when a negative event emerges and why consumers decide to break ties they have with companies.

Furthermore, another contribution of this thesis is that it exhibits the emotions consumers experience during online negative publicity and why they experience them. Additionally, it indicates the role of consumer-company identification and the reasons behind consumers’ actions towards companies that experience negative publicity. Prior research has not explained how and why consumers experience certain emotions and why they react in the way they do in cases of negative publicity (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Previous studies

simply state the actions that follow after certain emotions and consumers' reactions to negative publicity (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019) suggest researching moral emotions in greater detail and looking at emotions such as compassion, contempt, anger and disgust and their effect on companies. Scholz and Smith (2019) also call for more research around consumers' behaviours on social media as it is under-researched. They state that academics and practitioners need more data in order to understand this topic to a greater extent (Scholz and Smith, 2019). Thus, the gaps addressed in the literature of negative publicity have been examined in this thesis as this study uncovers what emotions consumers experience and why and their reactions towards companies in an online setting. Moreover, another contribution to the field of negative publicity is the response strategies that are proposed in this thesis as they take into consideration both consumers' emotions and cognitions and the online setting that previous research has omitted. Previous research simply proposes response strategies to negative publicity online and takes into consideration consumers' cognitions only (Bradford and Garrett, 1995; Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006; Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Hegner, Beldad and Heghuis, 2014; Bowen et al., 2018).

1.8.2 Methodological Contributions

Although netnography is not developed as a methodology in this thesis, the current study uncovers the usefulness of using netnography when researching customers' behaviours. This method allows for natural behaviours to emerge from the data and, thus, it allows for more accurate theories to be built. In contrast to previous studies that have used quantitative methods that have used fake scenarios and thus their findings do not depict reality (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Einwiller et al., 2006; Monga and John, 2008; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). Additionally, this study reveals via this method that the consumers' responses are intuitive and therefore it reveals what truly bothers consumers in cases of negative publicity and why consumers behave in the way they do. This is again an element that previous studies using quantitative methodologies were not able to detect and highlights that netnography is useful as it allows finding the root cause of consumers' reactions and helps companies to address them.

1.8.3 Practical and Managerial Implications

The theory of emotional consumer-company identification developed in this thesis will help companies understand better why consumers want to form ties with them. This is mainly because prior theories have explored either the emotional connection a consumer forms with an organisation (Lastovicka and Gardner, 1978; Oliver, 1991; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Park et al., 2010; Malar et al., 2011) or the cognitive connection a consumer has with a company (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995; Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) when examining the consumer-company relationship. This thesis develops a theory which examines the consumer-company relationship taking both the emotional and cognitive aspects into consideration; thus, this will help companies form more meaningful relationships with their consumers.

Similarly, the emotional consumer-company disidentification theory developed in this thesis will aid companies in comprehending why consumers want to break ties with them. Previous theories examining how consumers' distance themselves from companies either examine the emotional rejection (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Johnson, Matear and Thomson, 2011; Park., Eisingerich and Park, 2013) or the cognitive rejection (Josiassen, 2011; Wolter et al., 2016) a consumer experiences against an organisation. The theory developed in this thesis examines both the cognitive and emotional rejection a consumer experiences against a company, thus, this will help companies gain a holistic perspective as to why consumers avoid their brand. Additionally, this will also help companies turn disidentified consumers to identified consumers.

Furthermore, the recommendations as to how companies should respond to online negative publicity that are explained in this thesis will help brands address negative publicity more effectively. Prior studies simply proposed scattered strategies and do not direct companies as to how they can be used and when (Griffin, Babin and Attaway, 1991; Bradford and Garrett, 1995; Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Vanhamme and Grobbs, 2009; Xie and Peng, 2009; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014; Wang et al., 2016; Scholz and Smith, 2019; Herhausen et al., 2019). This thesis

provides precise directions to companies as to how to respond to customers who identify with the company and those who do not identify with the company. It is not a one size fits all strategy, which is the direction provided to companies in the past.

1.9 Structure of Thesis

Chapter 1 states the research problem and the aims and objectives are set. Additionally, it provides an overview of the study and how the research objectives have been met, a brief overview of the enabling theories used and the methodology along with the context of the study are explained. Additionally, it addresses what actions were taken in order to meet the aims of the study and answer the objectives.

Chapter 2 provides a thorough critical review on the literature of negative publicity. It particularly looks at the consumer-centric research around negative publicity and also the firm-centric research. Additionally, online firestorms are also examined as to understand the nature of online negative publicity. Furthermore, the two enabling theories that are used in this thesis are explored and examined extensively. Both consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) theories are examined and their relationship with negative publicity is also evaluated.

Chapter 3 involves the methodology, it explains the ontology and epistemology behind this research. Moreover, the difference between quantitative research and qualitative research is addressed and specifically explains the reason a qualitative approach was selected for this study. Moreover, netnography which was the method chosen to conduct this research, which is also examined and explained and rationale is provided as to why this method was selected for this thesis. The data collection process is clearly explained via the 'Netnography Procedural Movements' (Kozinets, 2020) suggested by Kozinets (2009). Additionally, it also presents the data analysis method that the researcher selected for this study which is thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Chapter 4 explains the findings that are acquired from the netnographic study. Consumers' cognitive responses are closely examined and the role of consumer-company identification

and consumer-company disidentification is established. Furthermore, the emotions that consumers experience, such as anger, disgust, compassion, are also explained; therefore, consumers' emotional reactions and subsequent actions are also explored. This chapter highlights the connection between consumers' emotional and cognitive responses and how these affect consumers' behaviours. The role of consumers' moral and social identities is also explained in this section. Finally, consumers' emotional and cognitive responses are also explored after the corporate response. Again, the role of the consumers' social and moral identities is explored.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings and they are contrasted to prior studies. The key theories are advanced in this study and their advancement is explained. Namely the consumer-company identification and the consumer-company disidentification are advanced to emotional consumer-company identification and emotional-brand disidentification. They are mainly advanced as previous studies omitted the emotional element. Additionally, recommendations are provided as to how companies can better respond to negative publicity online.

Chapter 6 explains the theoretical, methodological contributions of this thesis and also managerial implications are also outlined. This chapter also presents the thesis limitations, how they were overcome and provides recommendations for future research.

1.10 Conclusion

In summary, it is evident that there are several gaps in the negative publicity literature, which this thesis addresses. The majority of the respective literature focuses on offline negative publicity and it either focuses on the cognitive reactions or the emotional reactions consumers have towards negative publicity (Einwiller et al., 2006; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009; Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Einwiller et al., 2019; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019), thus the consumer-company relationship is not researched from a holistic perspective, hence the aim of this study. Additionally, the strategies proposed for companies are solely based on consumers' cognitions (Bradford and Garrett, 1995;

Hoeken and Renkema, 1998; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006; Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009; Xie and Peng, 2009; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Hegner, Beldad and Heghusi 2014; Wang et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2018) and do not take into consideration consumers' emotions. Also, the strategies proposed have a one size fits all approach and do not provide guidance as to companies which strategy to use when and in what way. Therefore, in order to examine the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity and to provide guidance to companies as to how to better respond to online negative publicity, this study explores both consumers' emotional and cognitive reactions to negative publicity simultaneously. This is done with the help of the two guiding theories, moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), which focus on emotional reactions and cognitions, respectively. In order to achieve the aim of the study a netnographic study was conducted. This study focused on Chick-fil-A, a company that has caused controversy online in regard to its identity and values. Additionally, in order to achieve the research aim of the study, the researcher addressed three key research questions.

In the following chapter, the literature review is presented in regard to negative publicity which looks at the how consumers react to negative publicity and how companies deal with negative publicity. In addition to this, online firestorms are explored as they are a similar concept to online negative publicity. Also, the two theories selected for this study, moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), are thoroughly explained and also how these concepts relate to negative publicity.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to examine how consumers' moral emotions and cognitions affect their behaviours towards a company after it experiences negative publicity online and, furthermore, how these factors affect the consumer-company relationship. Thus, the following chapter presents a critical review of the literature of negative publicity and presents the concepts selected for this study. In section 2.2, the concept of negative publicity is presented along with previous research regarding negative publicity which is split into consumer-centric and firm-centric. Section 2.3 conceptualises the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and its relationship to negative publicity is also explored. Furthermore, section 2.4 conceptualises the consumer-company identification theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and its relationship to negative publicity is also examined. Finally, section 2.5 provides an overview of the literature review and clearly articulates the research gap.

2.2 Negative Publicity

This chapter offers an overview of the literature in relation to negative publicity. Prior studies on negative publicity are introduced to set the theoretical framework for the thesis. Negative publicity is described as the delivery of damaging news in respect to a firm or its products, either via word-of-mouth or through the media, which are usually difficult to reinstate (Reidenbach, Festervand and MacWilliam, 1987). This was a definition created in 1987, given that the internet was not popular then and social media was not invented, this seems to be an outdated definition and needs to be re-defined in the era of social media, hence the purpose of this thesis. Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas (2006, p.529, 530) verify that there are two types of negative publicity; 'performance- related' negative publicity which includes a company's practical characteristics for example failures that occur with the company's goods and 'values-related' negative publicity which incorporates a company's morality and values negatively such as conducting unethical behaviours such as child labour. The majority of the studies conducted in the context of negative publicity have focused on product-related negative publicity (Liu et al., 2018). This thesis focuses on 'values related publicity' as it is

under-researched and previous research suggests that consumer behaviour is mainly influenced by an individual's beliefs and values (as opposed to a company's functional qualities) (Gonçalves, Lourenço and Silva, 2016). Additionally, a values-related negative event was selected as previous research suggests that emotions are more likely to emerge in this type of negative publicity scenario (Herhausen et al., 2019, Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019).

Two streams of research exist in the context of negative publicity. One stream of research explores how consumers respond to negative publicity offline (consumer centric) and the other stream of research focuses on how companies should respond to negative publicity offline (firm centric). Firm-centric research has focused on how a company should respond to negative publicity and has suggested possible ways to overcome it; such as apologising, financial compensation and corporate social responsibility practices, amongst others (Klein and Dawar, 2004; Xie and Peng, 2009). However, all these studies do not take into consideration both consumers' emotional and cognitive responses and their relationship with the company, which may alter their behaviours to some extent and so companies may need to respond in a different manner. Consumer-centric research has neglected the emotions consumers encounter after negative publicity, their actions after these emotions are felt, and how their identification with the company affects their actions all together. Given this gap in the literature, it is important to explore this further as both emotions and identification play an integral role as to how individuals react to negative publicity (Einwiller et al., 2006; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009; Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Einwiller et al., 2019; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). As emotions and consumer-company identification have not been thoroughly explored in conjunction with one another in this line of research, the researcher aims to explore consumer thoughts, emotions and actions after negative publicity further in order to provide recommendations to companies as to how they might repair relationships that have been broken with consumers after a crisis. Thus, hoping to find a more effective solution to deal with negative publicity (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013).

2.2.1 Company Responses to Negative Publicity (Firm-Centric)

In order to clearly highlight the research gap, the following section reviews previous studies that have explored how companies should respond to negative publicity.

2.2.1.1 Corporate Response Strategies and Addressing Consumers' Cognitions

Previous studies have explored how companies should respond to negative publicity, however they have fallen short in acknowledging both consumers' emotions and reactions to these responses (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Einwiller et al. 2006; Monga and John, 2008; Huber et al., 2010; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009; Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018; Einwiller et al., 2019). Moreover, these studies have also mostly focused on how to respond to negative publicity in an offline environment, neglecting the online setting. Existing response strategies proposed in the offline context may not be applicable to an online environment; research around corporate responses to negative publicity in an online setting is scant. Hence the aim of this thesis which is to better understand consumers' emotions and reactions to negative publicity and the nature of the consumer-company relationship post online negative publicity; in order to also address what strategies are more suitable taking these elements into consideration. Additionally, all studies in this area have mostly applied quantitative techniques (the majority being experiments) (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani Grappi and Bagozzi, 2003; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019), which addresses the need for a qualitative study in order to achieve in-depth descriptions in regard to the phenomenon (Fisher and Smith, 2011).

The majority of studies that focus on how companies should respond to negative publicity look at the offline context and examine consumers' cognitions. These studies also make the assumption that all consumers are homogeneous. Amongst, the first researchers to explore how companies should respond to adverse corporate events were Bradford and Garrett (1995). Their research investigates different effective communication strategies after a company has been accused of unethical behaviour, suggesting the 'Corporate Communicative Response Model' that describes how effective corporate responses are (Bradford and Garrett,

1995). This model is based on various theoretical underpinnings, such as the impression management theory, which states that people form opinions about other people and reach to conclusive thoughts based on the information they are provided (Hastie, 1984; Schlenker, 1980 cited in Bradford and Garrett, 1995). The model also includes “the fundamental attribution error” which states that it is “a pervasive tendency for observers to attribute the responsibility for negative actions to stable personal dispositions of the involved actor” (Jones and Nisbett, 1971 cited in Bradford and Garrett, 1995). Furthermore, the ‘discounting principle’ was also considered which declares that a negative action may be discounted if additional information is given in order to explain the negative behaviour that occurred. Unethical behaviour in their research is explained as when corporations undertake actions in the sole interest of profit and do not take into account aspects such as morality or social norms (Bradford and Garrett, 1995, p.876).

Unethical behaviour in their research is explained as when corporations undertake actions in the sole interest of profit and do not take into account aspects such as morality or social norms (Bradford and Garrett, 1995, p.876). For their study, they conducted an experiment with a fictitious scenario of a product with a safety issue, particularly, the scenario stated that a company ‘Ardor Corporations’ was accused of unethical promotion of its new Destorel drug (Bradford and Garrett, 1995, p.880). Their study tested different ‘communicative responses’ (i.e. no response, denial, excuse, justification and concession) along with evaluative situations (i.e. commission, control, standards and agreement) and they examined how these two factors affect a firm’s corporate image (Bradford and Garrett, 1995). In regard to the ‘communicative responses’, ‘denial’ refers to repudiating that the event happened or that the company is at fault (commission situation) (Garrett et al., 1989). Furthermore, ‘excuses’ refer to providing statements to the consumers that the corporation is not at fault and the event occurred beyond their control (control situation) (Garrett et al., 1989). The third response is ‘justification’, which means that the firm communicates the fact that it is at fault, however, explains that the evaluations made by those who accuse them have been made inappropriately and incorrectly (standards situation) (Garrett et al., 1989). Finally, ‘concession’ concerns accepting that the company is at fault, had control over the event and that consumers are right to feel the way they feel (agreement situation) (Garrett et al., 1989). They also further assert that the company can take the no response path (which means that

the company should not come forward) (Bradford and Garrett, 1995). Focusing on consumers' cognitions and theories such as the impression management theory, the fundamental attribution theory and the discounting principle, their findings reveal that when a corporation does not respond to negative publicity then it has an adverse effect on their corporate image (Bradford and Garrett, 1995). However, in some instances, it may be better not to respond than to use an inappropriate response that does not match the situation (Bradford and Garrett, 1995). Corporate image seems to improve when a company responds in a manner that fits the situation (Bradford and Garrett, 1995, p.884). The most successful and appropriate response that seems to improve the corporate image across all four situations is the concession response (Bradford and Garrett, 1995). This study has one main limitation; it was conducted in the form of experiments. This means that the participants were answering questions based on fictitious events with low relevance to them (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). Hence, in this thesis netnography is applied to collect data from a real event (Chick-fil-A negative event), in order to study a company that participants have a connection to (as they have showed interest by commenting online).

On the other hand, Hoeken and Renkema's (1998) research is based on the 'belief perseverance effect' which states that people generally believe the first piece of information they receive about a situation and so any subsequent information is immediately refuted. Their study also focuses on consumers' thoughts post negative publicity and how they can be addressed by the company in order to repair their corporate image. They also used an experiment with three different values-related negative publicity events (e.g. bribery and corruption) and presented the participants with a subjective version (the company's side was not heard and had inaccurate information) and an objective version (both sides were acknowledged and factually correct) (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). Participants were further presented with a correction response written by the organisation (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). There were eighty-nine participants in the study and they were all from the Netherlands (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). They were asked, amongst other elements, to rate whether they believed that there were any illegal acts involved, views on the corporate image and how objective the article was (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998, p. 55). In contrast to Bradford and Garrett (1995) that state that the concession response is the most appropriate strategy, the findings of this study showed that after participants of the experiment read the

correction strategy, they ranked the company as more competent, appealing and trustworthy (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998, p.58). After the members had read the correction, they were unsure as to whether the firm had acted in an illegal manner and so had managed to change their initial beliefs (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998, p.58). However, as stated by Hoeken and Renkema (1998) their study does have various limitations. The participants of the study were not highly involved with the situation and therefore it is likely that the conclusions made are not based on accurate judgements (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). Furthermore, another limitation pointed out by the researchers is due to the fact that the study was done in the form of an experiment and that the time reading the adverse event with the corporate response is not based on a realistic timeframe (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). In a real-life setting consumers would not have been exposed to both of them simultaneously and so again the findings may not be as accurate. For this reason, the present study follows a longitudinal approach, following the whole negative publicity story. The researcher looks at consumers' reactions and emotions after the unfavourable event and after the corporate response within a realistic time-frame and, thus, the results are more relevant.

Moreover, Dutta and Pullig (2011) reinforce Hoeken and Renkema's (1998) findings that the correction strategy is effective and provides additional support, however, they also reveal other strategies that are equally robust. In their study, along with the corrective action response, they also explore various other response strategies (denial, reduction of offensiveness) and how these strategies can help to restore a brand's equity after a crisis. Denial is defined as arguing that the organisation is not at fault and has not caused the event (Aaker, 1991; Benoit, 1997 cited in Dutta and Pullig, 2011). 'Reduction-of-offensiveness' refers to not emphasising the damage caused (Dutta and Pullig, 2011, p.1282). Finally, 'corrective action' is where a corporation takes full responsibility for the event and offers a remedy for the situation (Dutta and Pullig, 2011). They administered an experiment where they used Adidas as a brand as it is a very familiar brand (Dutta and Pullig, 2011, p.1283). They used two different negative events as scenarios: one where the product was faulty (performance-related crisis) and one where the company used child labour to make their products (values-related crisis) and applied the three response strategies mentioned above to see the reaction of the participants (Dutta and Pullig, 2011). Their findings show that corporate responses play a vital role as to how consumers view the brand after the adverse

event (Dutta and Pullig, 2011), hence the importance of this thesis in an online context. They further highlight that the most appropriate strategy for product-related crisis is corrective action and this is due to the fact that this diminishes any concerns consumers may have about receiving faulty products from the brand in the future (Dutta and Pullig, 2011, p1285). As for values-related crisis, the best strategies are reduction-of-offensiveness and corrective action (Dutta and Pullig, 2011). This is due to the fact that corrective action addresses thoughts that are related to values internally whereas ‘reduction of offensiveness’ tends to reduce risks associated with social perceptions and how other people will view the consumers using the brand (Dutta and Pullig, 2011, p.1285). Denial seems to be ineffective in both instances (Dutta and Pullig, 2011). This article has one major shortcoming, the fact that it only focused on brand equity (Dutta and Pullig, 2011) which shows that they have failed to observe other important constructs in marketing, for example, the consumer-company relationship, which this thesis aims to address.

Vanhamme and Grobben (2009) in their study focus on ‘consumer scepticism’ in relation to companies using CSR strategies to respond to negative publicity, highlighting that they similarly explore consumers’ cognitions. The researchers define CSR as how organisations meet issues relating to external stakeholders’ expectations involving ethics, laws and economics (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009, p.273). In their study, they test whether a previous CSR history (long or short) has an impact on the subsequent use of CSR after bad publicity (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009). The model developed in the study examines different concepts such as company legitimacy and consumer scepticism (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009). Similarly, an experiment was undertaken; an imaginary cosmetics company was employed with two different statements. The first one was a press release stating that the company is due to expand in the Netherlands and explained what the company was all about along with its CSR undertakings (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009). The other statement was a newspaper article which was about a cosmetics firm being accused of animal testing (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009, p.536). Participants were also informed of two different conditions: that the organisation had a long history of CSR (10 years) and, in the other case, it had just started to incorporate CSR practices that year (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009, p.536). The research findings emphasise that an organisation with a short CSR history (meaning that it was initiated after the unfavourable event) raises scepticism as to why the

company has decided to act upon it only after the negative event and, thus, doubts about the company's morality occur (Vanhamme and Grobбен, 2009). The consumers seem to be less suspicious when companies with a long CSR history undertake this avenue (Vanhamme and Grobбен, 2009). Similarly, Klein and Dawar, (2004) declare that when a company responds in this manner, consumers perceive this as dubious and that the company is doing it for reasons other than the ones stated. Therefore, this strategy does not seem to a suitable way to respond to negative publicity as researchers suggest. However, these studies have not taken into account what happens when the adverse event takes place online and how consumers respond emotionally to it, which is the goal of this thesis, thus discovering alternate findings.

Wang et al. (2016) similarly look at how consumers' cognitions affect the way companies should respond to negative publicity but they take a different approach and take into account consumers' thinking style as opposed to assuming that all consumers are homogenous, as in previous studies. Their research investigates how an individual's thinking style (holistic or analytic) can affect the way a consumer perceives a company's apology (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1263). Holistic thinkers are defined in their study as people who 'tend to pay more attention to the relations between the object and its context; pursue a compromised middle ground; pay more attention to the interaction between the performer and his context; and view a phenomenon as non-static and expect the existence of constant change' (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1265). Additionally, they are more congruent with a 'why framing' as they 'correspond to a high-construal level' (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1268). Whereas, analytic thinkers are perceived as people who 'tend to focus more on the object itself; resolve contradictions by choosing one of the two opposing propositions rather than the middle ground; and mainly consider the performer's traits independent of the context and think the essence of an object does not dramatically change over time' (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1265). They tend to have 'how framing' and 'correspond to a low-construal level' (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1263). The study uses Rogers (1975) 'protection motivation theory', which clearly states that individuals behave the way they do due to how they assess the success in order to acquire the expected result (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1268). Three experiments were undertaken (Wang et al., 2016). Findings highlight that the holistic thinkers respond better to the 'why' remedial solutions and have a positive attitude towards the brand, on the other hand analytic thinkers respond better to the 'how' remedial solutions (Wang et al., 2016). The protection

motivation theory was also verified as the findings emphatically suggest that when a brand is perceived as able to respond to a crisis, ‘this mediates the interactive effects of remedial solution framing and thinking styles on evaluation improvement’ (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1282).

Wang et al. (2016) do mention that their study does withhold limitations, for example, they do not explore actual behaviours but instead self-reported behaviours, which may to some extent involve inaccuracies. The aim of this thesis is to acquire actual behaviours from consumers after exposure to negative publicity, therefore negating any previous studies limitations. Additionally, Wang et al. (2016) mention that they used a hypothetical situation in order to avoid the interference of constructs such as commitment to the brand. This means that the emotional aspect is absent and the consumer-company relationship is not explored and so their study does not manage to explore this aspect, hence the aim of this thesis.

2.2.1.2 Mitigating Negative Publicity

Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas’s (2006) take an alternative stance and examine how firms can mitigate negative publicity rather than respond to it. They examine how companies can correctly position their brands in order to protect them from adverse publicity. They similarly explore consumers’ cognitions however their theoretical underpinning is based on Pham and Muthukrishanan’s (2002) ‘search and alignment model’ (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). This model states that when people are exposed to new information that contrasts previous actions they personally experienced, they seek details from memory that may support their previous attitudes (Pham and Muthukrishanan, 2002 cited in Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). They explore both performance-related and values-related negative publicity, and look at different factors that affect consumers’ judgements of the company; ‘brand attitude positioning, alignment of positioned brand image and attitude certainty’ (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006, p.529,530). ‘Brand attitude positioning’ refers to the creation of brand associations in the minds of consumers, (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980 cited in Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas (2006, p.529), this in turn highlights what meaning consumers make from brands (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). ‘Alignment of positioned brand image’ includes the compatibility of adverse publicity with prior brand attitude positioning.

In other words, how consumers process new negative information according to what is stored previously in the memory about the brand (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006, p.528). Moreover, attitude certainty refers to how confident an individual is in regard to his/her attitude being accurate (Gross, Holtz, and Miller, 1995), and therefore this in turn would affect how consumers perceive harmful publicity as they make their decisions based on high or low certainty of prior corporate perceptions (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). In order to test these variables, they conducted two different quantitative experiments with 188 students. Findings from Study 1 highlight that ‘when prior brand attitude [is] held with high certainty and brand positioning aligned with negative publicity’ the perception of the brand has no major change in the mind of the consumer (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006, p.535). Study 2 reveals, however, that multiple brand positioning protects how consumers perceived the negative publicity events (both values-related and performance-related) even in the case of low certainty (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). Therefore, findings clearly suggest that companies should have a multiple positioning strategy (both values-related and performance-related) in order to buffer the effect of unfavourable publicity (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). Therefore, clearly highlighting that an organisation should carefully think about their positioning as this helps in cases of negative publicity.

This contrasts previous studies as they all take into consideration how to respond after an unfavourable event and not whether there is anything an organisation can do prior to any media backlash. Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas (2006) have however failed to address a very important issue that is examined in this thesis extensively, the cognitive connection and relationship the consumer has with the company and the emotions the consumer feels throughout the whole journey. Furthermore, although two experiments were undertaken there is a lack of extensive explanations from participants. This is why more qualitative research is needed to address this. Therefore, this thesis used a qualitative methodology (netnography).

2.2.1.3 Corporate Response and Addressing Consumers Emotional Responses

Menon, Jewell and Unnava (1999) similarly investigate different corporate responses after adverse publicity however they take into consideration consumers’ emotional responses when examining corporate responses. The study’s theoretical lens lies in the reactance theory and

commodity theory (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999). ‘Reactance theory’ affirms that reactions are instinctive and so there is not much thought involved, the reaction is almost automatic and involves an adverse emotional response (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999, p.326). The researchers state that failing to respond to negative publicity may cause consumers to respond with reactance (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999). The commodity theory explains that when people are not provided with enough information it then makes information more attractive, therefore in cases of negative publicity if the appropriate information is not provided it may lead to negative consumer attitudes (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999, p.326). They also conducted experiments with 88 students and used a fictitious company and scenarios. The event used for the experiment was that buyers could develop arthritis from wearing the shoes from the made-up brand ‘Northstar Running Shoe’ (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999). The four response conditions were “no comment, no comment due to pending litigation matters, weak response (defensive), and a strong response (providing clear and truthful explanations)” (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999, p. 326). Both the reactance theory and the commodity theory were affirmed (Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999). Their findings highlight that customers are less forgiving when the organisation does not respond at all, does not respond for legal reasons or when they respond very poorly. Additionally, findings underline that weak responses have a negative effect on the brand image. Menon, Jewell and Unnava (1999) reveal that the most effective strategy seems to be a strong response as the firm is perceived in a more positive light when clients are offered explanations. In addition to this, Griffin, Babin and Attaway (1991) attest that corporate responses can affect consumers’ attitudes and similarly claim that the greatest response is to address the issue and provide consumers with information, as denying or not responding to the event may have negative consequences on consumers’ attitudes. This study however focuses only on consumers’ emotions and omits consumers’ cognitions.

Taking a different approach to looking at how consumers respond emotionally to negative publicity and how companies can respond to it, Hegner, Beldad and Heghusi (2014) explore how a company’s response to a crisis affects its brand equity and consumers’ trust. Their research considers that brand equity has ‘four main dimensions and this is brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations’ (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993 cited in Hegner, Beldad and Heghusi, 2014, p. 423). Brand trust is defined as the inclination

of a consumer to believe that the brand will perform as promised (Park and Lee, 2013). They also conducted their research in the form of experiments with 187 Dutch people who were acquired via snowball sampling (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014). The researchers used a fake scenario in which a firm (in the Netherlands) was to blame (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014, p. 434). The scenario stated that the t-shirts they produced had chemicals that caused cancer (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014, p. 434). Six different company response scenarios were presented to the participants: 'denial, diminish, bolstering, rebuild, no-response and a control group' (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014, p.434). In the 'denial' situation the corporation took no responsibility and in the 'diminish' situation the brand tried to explain that it was not involved in the incident (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014). Furthermore, in the 'bolstering' situation, the organisation emphasised its previous good acts. In contrast in the 're-building' scenario the organisation asked for remorse and accepted responsibility (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014). The 'no-response' solely reported the event without a response from the brand and, finally, the 'control-group' was not exposed to the damaging event at all (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014). Agreeing with Dutta and Pullig (2011), results suggest that the worst response strategies that diminish brand equity are the no response and the denial response especially if the brand is at fault. Additionally, the data further suggests that an appropriate response strategy does not tarnish the brand equity (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014). Data also indicates that when a company has a prior positive reputation and consumers tend to trust the company, it may act as a buffer effect and may not damage consumers' perceptions to a great extent (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014). This article has one major shortcoming, the fact that it only focused on brand equity and trust (Hegner, Beldad and Heghushi, 2014) which shows that they have not observed other important constructs in marketing, for example, the consumer-company relationship, which this thesis aims to address.

Xie and Peng (2009) also explore how companies should respond to negative publicity; they similarly take into consideration how to repair consumers' trust. Trust is defined in their study as how consumers evaluate a company's integrity (Xie and Peng, 2009, p.572). They explore three different repair strategies 'informational, affective, and functional' and how these affect three elements that involve trust which are integrity, benevolence and competence (developed by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995) and subsequently trust and

forgiveness (Xie and Peng, 2009, p.572). The three strategies examined, affective, functional and informational, each has a different purpose. Affective refers to apologising to the consumers and the general public in order to show regret, functional response involves financial compensations such as coupons, and informational includes communicating with the public and informing them continuously of how the company aims to address the issues (Xie and Peng, 2009, p.572). The three trustworthiness factors of their study, as mentioned above, are competence, benevolence and integrity. Their study was conducted using an experiment with a company that does not exist, using two different negative publicity types, product-related and values-related; they examined how participants responded to the three aforementioned response strategies using high functional and low functional responses (e.g. high monetary compensation vs low) (Xie and Peng, 2009). The sample included 220 Chinese students (Xie and Peng, 2009). The results underline that all three strategies make the organisation look as more trustworthy in the eyes of the consumers, thus achieving consumer forgiveness (Xie and Peng, 2009). The affective response had a greater impact on benevolence and integrity, the informational response affected greater corporate competence, however, the functional repair strategy seemed to be the weakest out of the three; it only impacted competence slightly (Xie and Peng, 2009). Therefore, affective and informational are the two most successful strategies proposed (Xie and Peng, 2009). Findings also reveal that in order to build again a trustworthy image repairing trust and achieving consumer forgiveness are necessary steps (Xie and Peng, 2009). The data suggests that if the company is able to show their integrity, competence and benevolence whilst the adverse event is ongoing, then trust is more likely to be achieved (Xie and Peng, 2009). As their very own study highlights one of the limitations is the fact that they use an experiment based on a scenario that restricts external validity of the findings, thus they suggest that subsequent studies use real negative publicity scenarios (Xie and Peng, 2009, p. 587). Ergo, this thesis overcomes this limitation by using a real company in order to obtain external validity. Moreover, Xie and Peng (2009) fail to explain why clients decide to forgive companies and, thus, it would be worthwhile to conduct a qualitative study to answer these questions as intended.

Bowen et al. (2018) also explore the role of trust in a company's response and additionally looks at consumers' intentions and reveal similar findings to those of Xie and Peng (2009),

signifying the importance of trust in such instances. They use the commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), 'the commitment-trust theory considers trust as a mediator between an organisation's communication and relational outcomes, such as relational conflict or intention to leave' (Bowen et al., 2018, p.225). The study explores various variables in its conceptual model such as which responses are more suitable in crisis situations, how trust is affected, and consumers' intentions in regard to revengeful and avoidance behaviours. 'Avoidance intentions' refer to consumers wanting to stay away from the firm and 'revenge intentions' refer to consumers wanting to seek retaliation from the company (Gregorie and Fisher, 2006). Trust is defined in their study as how individuals expect a company to act and is based on integrity and reliability (Bowen et al., 2018, p.226). This was a cross-cultural study and explored both consumers in the USA and Germany who owned a Volkswagen (VW) car, since the VW emissions scandal was used as a negative publicity event in the survey questions (Bowen et al., 2018). The VW emissions scandal involved the owners of the company lying about the emissions output of their cars, therefore causing more pollution than stated (Bowen et al., 2018). Bowen et al. (2018) findings highlight that the greater the trust towards the company, the lower the intentions for revenge and avoidance, thus signifying the importance of trust in such instances. Their study does have a drawback, it looks at consumers' intentions and not actual behaviours. Research suggests that intentions in regard to ethical behaviours rarely translate to real ethical purchases (Follows and Jobber, 2000; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Belk et al., 2005; Auger and Devinney, 2007), and suggests that the findings of the study may not be as accurate and so actual behaviours need to be studied which is the intention of this thesis.

2.2.1.4 Corporate Response to Online Firestorms

Existing studies also explore how companies should respond to online firestorms and take into account either consumers' cognitive or emotional responses. Online firestorms are a recent topic that has emerged in Marketing and very few studies have explored this phenomenon. Online firestorms are defined as a mass amount of negative comments posted on social media platforms by consumers against brands (Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley, 2013). Online firestorms are thought to be similar to negative publicity; however, this is the term used for social media. All the studies examining online firestorms, although mentioning the

fact that consumer-to-consumer interaction is an important element, omit to examine these diverse interactions. All the studies mentioned below just focus on the interactions between the company and the consumer only and forget to see how consumers interact between each other, and how this in turn affects the brand and how brands can use this to their advantage. Therefore, this is an element that was taken into account in the analysis stage of this thesis. Moreover, another factor that is omitted in these studies is the fact that they solely address either how consumers respond to the corporate response after negative publicity or the consumers' initial reactions after the negative event. It may be of importance to examine both together as it can provide insights behind a more effective strategy to deal with consumers. Hence, this thesis focuses both on consumers' emotions and reactions after the negative event and after the company response to the negative event.

The first paper to explore online firestorms and clearly focused on the response strategies only was Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014), who look at how negative word-of-mouth (WOM) spreads online, how firestorms are caused and how companies should respond to them. Social media is broadly defined as 'a group of internet-based applications that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014, p.205) declare that, according to Bampo et al. (2008), there are three factors that determine firestorms, 'network structure, behavioural characteristics, and information characteristics'. The 'network structure' is the connection that exists between members on social media platforms. There are three types; 'hubs' refers to people who have online connections, 'members' are those people who are connected online that otherwise would not have been connected and, finally, 'fringes' are the members that rarely connect (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). The other factor, involves attitudes, which include an individual's prior thoughts in contrast to the distributed information and how consumers decided to interpret the information (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1973; Homoburg and Krohmer, 2006 cited in Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014, p.206). They detect that there are two groups that form positive and negative attitudes; the 'detractors' show negative attitudes due to dissatisfaction (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). The opposite occurs with 'promoters' who are satisfied consumers supporting the brand (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). The third factor is 'diffused information', which refers to how likely consumers are to share the negative information (Bampo et al., 2008),

which is mainly guided by emotions felt (Berger and Milkman, 2012). Their research was conducted via an observation and looked at comments online, which looked at the interaction that occurred between the members (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014, p.210).

The findings of the article uncover that the ‘detractor’ networks have greater negative attitudes than positive and the opposite occurs in the ‘promoter’ network (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). The neutral networks tend to also have more positive attitudes than negative, which means that firestorms are more likely to emerge in neutral or detractor networks (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). The findings further reveal that when ‘hubs’ and ‘bridges’ have negative attitudes, the adverse activations rise greatly; this highlights that when hubs and bridges initiate negative WOM, it can lead to a firestorm (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014, p.214). Thus, the social status of the members seems to be a key influence in a firestorm (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). Furthermore, the study underlines that a counter-response to reduce the negative impact in a negative environment with negative attitudes is not effective unless members, such as hubs or bridges, are used in order to employ positive word of mouth in order to exceed the negative comments (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). Finally, Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014) suggest that response time is critical and counter-response strategy should be employed promptly in order to avoid a very serious firestorm (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). One very important limitation of their study is the fact that it does not emphasise on one specific event and does not provide clear explanations as to what events were researched (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). Hence, this thesis has a clear context (Chick-fil-A) making the reader aware that this research focuses on a specific company transgression. Additionally, their study mentions that it examines consumers’ positive and negative attitudes, however, it fails in the findings to address what these positive and negative attitudes are exactly and just addresses what responses a company facing this problem should employ (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). If attitudes are not understood clearly then corporations are unable to deal effectively with the crisis. Hence, this thesis addresses specific behaviours in order to fully comprehend the consumer psychology around negative publicity to provide better recommendations for the companies that encounter negative publicity online.

Another study that examines how companies should respond to online firestorms is the one by Scholz and Smith (2019). Their study takes into account consumers' cognitions also. They define online firestorms in accordance to Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley (2013, p. 117) as a mass amount of messages on social media that typically contain negative content and expression of dissatisfaction towards a company or person (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1100). Scholz and Smith (2019) express that 'moral based firestorms' are under-researched as opposed to product-related firestorms, hence this research focusing on values-related negative publicity. Scholz and Smith (2019, p.1107) state that consumers in such cases attack brands due to the fact that the company attacks an aspect of their culture, which oscillates with them. Additionally, consumers that withhold opposing values usually fight one another in order to feel morally superior and to gain value within their identity and self (Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler, 2010). Scholz and Smith (2019) used netnography to conduct their study and they specifically looked at the negative incident that occurred with the company 'Protein World' where they launched a campaign stating 'Are you beach body ready?', which offended a wide range of consumers and caused negative behaviours and protests (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1107). They particularly studied the interactions between consumers and how consumers responded to the company's responses (Scholz and Smith, 2019). They did a non-participatory study and did not interact with participants as it may have led to bias (Scholz and Smith, 2019); hence, this research is also avoiding participation in the study. The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading the background stories and the comments made on Twitter (Scholz and Smith, 2019). They analysed the data manually using thematic analysis as they believe that analysis via automated means is not trustworthy as it cannot easily detect sentiment (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1111); hence the reason for selecting thematic analysis for this study also.

Scholz and Smith (2019) broke their findings into three phases as the company responded to the crisis in three different ways. The first phase analysed the 'deny strategy' where the company did not interpret the consumers' comments correctly and responded in an ironic manner, and instead of apologising they tried to promote their products by recommending them (Scholz and Smith, 2019). This strategy did not seem to work as it brought out more negative consumer reactions (Scholz and Smith, 2019). The second phase was the 'diminish strategy' whereby they highlighted the company values and what the company stands for

(e.g. achieving a healthy lifestyle and a fit body), its ideology of working tough to keep fit (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.114). This strategy did not seem to work either as the brand supporters did not engage to a great extent and did not feel the need to help out the brand, and other consumers were attacking the brand and decided to sign an online petition to express their dissatisfaction (Scholz and Smith, 2019). The final phase, phase 3, the 'escalation strategy' appeared to be the most effective strategy out of all the three phases (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1116). This strategy helped the company as it managed to turn the tables and make the consumers look bad and themselves good, and they insulted consumers who attacked them and stood strong on the company values and positioning (Scholz and Smith, 2019). The company's comments were insulting and told the people who were attacking them to stop being lazy, amongst other things (Scholz and Smith, 2019). They presented these consumers as not confident and who make excuses about exercising (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1118). This approach made company supporters more active and they supported the company even more as they followed the company's example (Scholz and Smith, 2019). They also used 'cultural jujitsu', 'which involves using adversaries' attacks against themselves' (Holt and Cameron, 2010 cited in Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1119). Although their study is very insightful and underlined the usefulness of using netnography as a method, it does incorporate a few limitations. Although it mentions how important morals and identity are to a consumer, it does not explore this element further and just focuses on the corporate response. Moreover, it mentions that the successful strategy proposed (i.e. escalation strategy) has the potential to strengthen the consumer-company relationship; however it does not examine this further either, hence the researcher conducting this research. Additionally, insulting consumers goes against what previous researchers have found in the area of negative publicity, where they state that the best strategies involve treating the consumer in a respectful manner such as offering apologies (Wang et al., 2016, p. 1263) and financial compensation (Xie and Peng, 2009; Herhausen et al., 2019). Since all these strategies have been heavily criticised for not being as effective in order to overcome negative publicity more research is needed in order to detect the most appropriate responses to negative publicity especially in an online setting.

Taking a different approach, Herhausen et al. (2019, p.1) look at consumers' emotions and explore how to 'detect, prevent and mitigate online firestorms' in online brand communities,

however focusing on emotions and proposing other ways to responding to online firestorms. The researchers assert that the reason for conducting their study is due to the fact that managers have limited understanding as to how to address angered consumers (Herhasuen et al., 2019); which also highlights the importance of this research. Word-of-mouth is defined as emotional contagion, meaning that consumers capture other people's emotions and internalise them also (Berger, 2014). They examine emotions and their level of arousal as they argue that they play an integral part in how consumers respond; particularly, they suspect that online firestorms are more likely to occur when high arousal emotions are present such as fear, anxiety and anger as opposed to low-arousal emotions such as sadness (Herhasuen et al., 2019); which highlights also the importance of this research as it focuses on moral emotions and their role in negative publicity. They also examine the role of the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the messages as it seems to play a vital role in the unravelling of online firestorms (Herhasuen et al., 2019). Herhasuen et al. (2019, p.16) focus on the theory of 'emotion regulation strategies' developed by Gross and Thompson (2007) which suggest that there are two ways that firms respond to negative electronic WOM (eWOM); a disengaging and engaging approach. A disengaging approach refers to behaving in a manner that circumvents the engagement (Sheppes et al., 2011). This includes ways such as stopping an online conversation and asking consumers to take it offline and offering compensation (Herhasuen et al., 2019). The engaging approach refers to engaging with the negative online messages; ways such as providing consumers with an explanation and an empathetic response (Herhasuen et al., 2019). It is unclear as to whether an affective response (e.g. empathy) works better in an environment where affect is high (Herhasuen et al., 2019, p.4) as opposed to a cognitive response (e.g. explanation). Researchers argue that, in some cases, an empathetic response may not be enough as a situation may be too intense on an emotional level and so explanations in order to reevaluate the circumstances may be sought (Gross, 2002). Furthermore, Herhasuen et al. (2019) assert that in the context of negative publicity, it is not clear what strategy works best in an online setting suggesting a gap in the literature. Hence, the reason why this thesis is important and calls for more insights in regard to this topic. They investigated online brand communities on Facebook between 2011 and 2016 that firestorms had unravelled. The firestorms they looked at had occurred for only one day (Herhasuen et al., 2019). They analysed the text 'using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) text-mining dictionaries to derive the intensity of positive and negative emotion

words in each point'. They then 'applied the Stanford Sentence and Grammatical Dependency Parser to subdivide each post into sentences and identify dependencies between emotions words and negations' (Herhasuen et al., 2019, p.5).

Their study further emphasises that the closer the complaining consumer is the online brand community, the greater the virality of the negative message (Herhasuen et al., 2019). They also emphasise that high arousal emotion words are more contagious than low arousal emotion words and they have more power to go viral (Herhasuen et al., 2019). Herhasuen et al. (2019) find that a fast response to the negative comments helps a lot and that the best strategy to respond to both consumers who express high arousal and low arousal emotions are explanations. Additionally, they find that after offering explanations in order to mitigate the negative effect, compensation may help a lot in order to decrease the virality of the negative message (Herhasuen et al., 2019). An empathetic response also seems to be a good strategy but not as effective as offering an explanation and compensation (Herhasuen et al., 2019). Although, Herhasuen et al. (2019) used netnography, which aided immensely in uncovering insights, it does withhold quite a few drawbacks. For example, to analyse the comments it used the text mining technique. Marketing researchers argue that this may not be a suitable method to record information related to ewom as this method is typically used in psychology where participants express intense emotions, for example in cases where a sick cancer patient is asked express their emotions on paper as part of a therapeutic process (Tang and Guo, 2015). In antithesis to this thesis where the analysis of the comments is done manually using thematic analysis makes it easier for the detection of emotions in the comments and correct interpretations thus achieving more accurate insights. Furthermore, Herhasuen et al. (2019) do not examine specific emotions and leave it broad to high intensity and low intensity emotions (Herhasuen et al., 2019) which firstly means that consumer behaviour in the online setting is not studied extensively and is just studied broadly, which calls for more research to fill these gaps, hence the aim of this thesis. Secondly, this means that the strategies proposed may not be as accurate as consumer behaviour was discounted and was not taken seriously into consideration. Moreover, their study is based on an online brand community, which works quite differently to a traditional online setting and, thus, a more traditional online setting that is accessed by a wider audience needs to be examined as the findings may be

completely different (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018), hence selecting newspaper article posts on Facebook that are accessible to everyone.

As most strategies have been explored in an offline setting, this calls for more research as to how companies should respond in an online setting. Additionally, the majority of methods proposed have been accused of not being effective and, furthermore, they do not seem to be changing consumers' behaviours in a positive manner. Further research needs to be done in order better understand consumers' thoughts, emotions and reactions to negative publicity online in order to subsequently uncover how companies can better respond effectively to negative publicity in an online setting.

2.2.1.5 Summary of Firm Centric Research

This line of research focuses mainly on how companies should respond to negative publicity offline. It looks at consumers' emotional and cognitive reactions and how companies can respond in accordance to either of these two reactions. These studies look at consumers' cognitions via different theories and examine different response strategies. Additionally, most studies treat consumers as homogeneous. Bradford and Garrett (1995) focus on consumers' cognitions when examining corporate responses to negative publicity. They state that the most effective response strategy is the concession response (Bradford and Garrett, 1995). Looking again at consumers' cognitions in relation to how a company should respond to negative publicity and basing the research on the 'belief perserverance effect' Hoeken and Renkema (1998) declare that the most effective strategy is a correction strategy. Vanhamme and Grobben (2009) similarly explore consumers' cognitive responses to a company responding with a CSR strategy post negative publicity and state that if a company with a short CSR history employs a CSR strategy after the negative event then consumers may view the company as morally corrupt.

Wang et al. (2016) similarly research consumers' cognitions and how companies can better respond to negative publicity however their approach is somewhat different as they view consumers different and separate them into two groups (i.e. holistic thinkers and analytic thinkers). Via the protection motivation theory lens their research reveals that holistic thinkers respond better to the 'why' remedial solutions and analytic thinkers respond better

to the ‘how’ remedial solutions (Wang et al., 2016). A different approach is also adopted by Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas (2006) by examining what companies can do to mitigate negative publicity as opposed to responding to it. Examining again consumers’ cognitions and using as their theoretical underpinning the ‘search and alignment model’ they uncover that companies should have a multiple positioning strategy in order to buffer the effect of negative publicity (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006).

On the contrary, other researchers examine how companies should respond taking consumers’ emotional responses into consideration. Menon, Jewell and Unnava (1999) using the reactance theory and commodity theory as their theoretical lens state that the best way a company can respond to negative publicity is by offering explanations to consumers. There are also a few studies that look at the emotional aspect from the point of view of consumer trust. Hegner, Beldad and Heghisi (2014) examine how a brand’s equity is affected according to how a company responds and also examine the role of trust. They discover that a company’s positive reputation and consumers’ trust act as a buffer against negative publicity (Beldad and Heghisi, 2014). Moreover, Xie and Peng (2009) examine how to repair consumer trust after negative publicity and find that an affective and informational response are the most successful strategies in order to regain consumers’ trust. Bowen et al. (2018) use the commitment-trust theory to explore the role of trust in a company’s response, and discover that the greater the trust the lower are the intentions of consumers to seek revenge and avoid the brand.

There are also a few studies that look at how companies should respond to negative publicity online and again look at either consumers’ emotional or cognitive responses. Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014) explore how online firestorms unravel and how companies can respond to them. They uncover that a counter-response strategy is only useful when members such as hubs or bridges are used to employ negative word of mouth. Moreover, Scholz and Smith (2019) also look at how companies should respond to online firestorms taking into consideration consumers cognitions. The study uncovers that the best response strategy to online firestorms is the escalation strategy. On the other hand, Hehasuen et al. (2019) take into account consumers emotional reactions to online firestorms and how companies should respond in accordance to these. Having the ‘emotion regulation strategies’ as their theoretical

underpinning they discover that the best strategy to respond to both consumers who express high arousal and low arousal emotions are explanations and offering compensation (Hehasuen et al., 2019). This line of research examines how companies can respond to negative publicity either looking at consumers' emotional or cognitive reactions. Hence, this thesis examines both consumers' emotions and cognitions towards a company encountering negative publicity online in order to be able to provide recommendations to companies. These recommendations will focus on to how they can allieviate both consumers' negative emotions and thoughts and not one or the other.

2.2.2 Consumer Responses to Negative Publicity (Consumer-Centric)

In this section, the researcher aims to review previous studies on negative publicity and how consumers respond to it in order to clearly address and articulate the research gap within the literature on negative publicity and consumers' responses to it. Many researchers have explored different factors that affect consumer decision making in the context of negative publicity. Prior studies on negative publicity tend to focus on how different consumers respond to a crisis, and present consumers as either rational decision makers or making decisions based on emotions. In addition to this, the literature has given minimal attention to how consumers respond to negative publicity online, which calls for further research. The aim of this research is to investigate how the cognitive connection a consumer has with a brand in conjunction with the emotional responses to adverse online events affect the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity as these combinations together have received minimal attention.

2.2.2.1 Consumer-Company Relationship after Negative Publicity

Existing studies that examine the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity; omit certain important factors and hold various other limitations, which therefore calls for more research around this area (Huber et al., 2010). To begin with, one of the articles that explore the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity (from a cognitive perspective) is Huber et al. (2010). They study consumers' intentions to shop again after brand misconduct (Huber et al., 2010, p.1113). Huber et al., (2010, p.1113) define 'brand

misconduct' as when a company owner's actions manages to tarnish consumers' aspirations towards a brand that subsequently leads to adverse consumer reactions. They further attest that it involves aspects such as faulty products, bad service and unethical acts (Huber et al., 2010), which in fact aligns with previous definitions provided about negative publicity. The study focuses on various aspects one of which is the 'relationship brand quality' that involves aspects which aid in the solidity of a consumer-company relationship (Fournier, 1998). The 'brand relationship quality' depends on various factors such as partner quality and consumer-company congruity (Fournier, 1998). According to Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004) partner quality refers to the thoughts in regard to the quality of the relationship and the other party's behaviour. Moreover, the other concept explored is 'self-congruence', which is based on the 'self-congruence theory' developed by Sirgy (1982, 1986). This theory looks at the diversities and affinities in relation to the actual self and ideal self-compatibility; this is the similarity of the consumers' self-concept with that of the brand's personality (Sirgy, 1982, 1986). In marketing, a consumer's self-concept is the emotions and thoughts one withholds about oneself (Rosenberg, 1979, p.7 cited in Huber et al., 2010, p.1114). A brand's personality is further defined as the anthropomorphism of brands (a brand having a personality) (Aaker, 1997 cited in Huber et al., 2010, p.1114). It is declared that a consumer has two self-concepts; 'actual and ideal self-concept' (Huber et al., 2010). The 'actual self-concept' refers to how a consumer actually discerns himself/herself (Sirgy, 1982; 1986), so the brand in this case would fulfill a 'self-confirmation' need (Huber et al., 2010, p.1114). On the other hand, an 'ideal-self concept' refers to how a person would ideally like to be (Sirgy, 1982; 1986), and so a brand in this instance would be purchased as a 'possibility of self-extension' (Huber et al., 2010, p.1114). Moreover, 'functional congruence' is another element of the congruence a consumer has with a brand, which involves taking into account the functional qualities of a product (Sirgy et al., 1991). In order to test how these factors affect the 'repurchase intention', the researchers conducted an experiment with a sample of 219 people with a fake scenario of a jeans company that used child labour (Huber et al., 2010, p.1114).

The findings of this article reveal that that the 'ideal and actual self-congruence' indeed does influence the consumer-company relationship and, thus, they are significant constructs of the relationship (Huber et al., 2010, p.1117). Furthermore, the findings further reveal that

‘partner quality’ and ‘repurchase intentions’ are significantly affected by brand misconduct and it can lead to companies losing out on consumers and subsequently suffering financially (Huber et al., 2010). The study shows that overall that when a company acts unethically this deteriorates the quality of the relationship between the consumer and, the brand and therefore, the purchase intentions (Huber et al., 2010). This is especially true for relationships with brands that are long as opposed to shorter ones as they seem to be affected more negatively (Huber et al., 2010, p.1117). Although their study sheds light as to the importance of consumer identity in cases of negative publicity, it does not provide sufficient information as to the role it plays on consumers’ actual behaviours in such instances and so this calls for further research. Hence, this thesis focuses on consumers’ social identity and how it affects their behaviours. The limitation of their study lies within the fact that it does not clearly articulate as to why the dynamics of the relationship change and a reasoning behind why consumers feel the way they feel is not clearly provided, and so the aim of this study is to clearly articulate the nature of the relationship after negative publicity. Furthermore, another limitation that is also pointed out by the researchers is that it focuses on purchase intentions and not actual behaviours and so this may be an inaccurate measurement due to the fact that individuals rarely act upon the intentions they state especially around ethical issues (Mohr, Webb and Harris, 2001; Klein and Dawar, 2004). Thus, this study to overcome this limitation, this study examines actual behaviours.

2.2.2.2 Consumers’ Cognitive Responses to Negative Publicity

The following section aims to address previous literature as to how consumers respond to offline negative publicity and indicate how previous studies have presented consumers as either rational or emotional decision makers, classifying them into different categories. To begin with, Monga and John (2008) are amongst the researchers who present consumers as rational decision makers and divide consumers into holistic and analytic thinkers. The research suggest that a consumer’s thinking style is what determines how (s)he processes a negative publicity event and, furthermore, how it affects his/her attitudes. In their study, they explain holistic thinking ‘as involving an orientation to the context or field as a whole, including attention to relationships between a focal object and the field, and a preference for explaining and predicting events on the basis of such relationships’ (Nisbett et al., 2001, p.

293). Moreover, an analytic thought ‘involves a detachment of the object from its context, a tendency to focus on attributes of the object to assign it to categories, and a preference for using rules about the categories, and a preference for using rules about the categories to explain and predict the object’s behaviour’ (Nisbett et al., 2001, p. 293). They conducted three different experiments with BMW and Mercedes-Benz as examples of companies experiencing negative publicity under fictitious scenarios (Monga and John, 2008). The findings underline that analytic thinkers change their attitudes and beliefs towards a brand and perceive them in a more negative manner since they just consider the event alone; however, the opposite occurs with holistic thinkers who consider other factors also (Monga and John, 2008, p.326). Holistic thinkers are less likely to be affected by negative publicity rather than analytic thinkers (Monga and John, 2008, p.326). However, when ‘cognitive resources are [less] available for considering context-based explanations’, holistic thinkers are more willing to punish the company to the same level as those who carry an analytic thought (Monga and John, 2008, p.328). Monga and John (2008) argue that a consumer’s thinking style is key in cases of negative publicity as opposed to any emotional aspects and an individual’s identity. Therefore, they present consumers as rational decision makers and omit the emotional element, which further highlights that the research gap, and thus is one of the research objectives of this study.

2.2.2.3 Consumers’ Emotional Responses to Negative Publicity

Another study that presents how different typologies of consumers respond to offline negative publicity is that of Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava (2000). They particularly examine how different types of committed consumers (i.e. lowly committed and highly committed) respond to negative publicity therefore taking into account the emotional component. In the research brand commitment is defined in accordance with Lastovicka and Gardner (1978) as being emotionally attached towards a brand or a product. They conducted an experiment to see how lowly committed and highly committed consumers would respond to negative publicity; they used Nike and Mizuno as examples with fake adverse publicity stories (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000). They attest that highly committed consumers do not take into account adverse information in regard to the brand, however, the opposite occurs with lowly committed consumers who experience attitude changes

(Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000). The rationale behind this finding is that lowly committed consumers are more prone to the ‘negativity effect’, which means they find negative information more diagnostic than positive information (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000). However, Liu, Wang and Wu (2009) detected that when the unfavourable event is extremely serious both types of consumers are likely to change their attitudes negatively towards the affected organisation (Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009). It can be argued that amongst these two studies, the limitations are that although they examine ‘commitment’, which has an emotional element to it they completely disregarded the cognitive element in their studies (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009); hence the researcher examining both elements in this thesis. Moreover, another limitation for these studies is the fact that they were conducted in the form of an experiment with fake negative publicity stories regarding the brands chosen (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009). So, the relevance and connection of the participants to the company was not present, therefore failing to achieve actual reactions and responses, (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998), which this study intends to achieve.

2.2.2.4 Negative Publicity Online and Consumers’ Responses

One of the only studies to explore only how consumers react to negative publicity online, and specifically online firestorms, is the one of Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau (2018). They examine consumers’ perceptions after an online firestorm and for how long this perception last in consumers’ memories and, in turn, how this affects brands (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). They define online firestorms as a crisis that takes place online, which are usually comments that are spread on social media by consumers expressing negative emotions in relation to a brand (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018, p.4). The research argues that is important to research negative publicity in an online setting since it is very different to an offline setting; social media helps consumers to spread information online to a wider audience in regard to brands and their experiences (Labrecque et al., 2013). Thus, the reach and spread are greater online, which means that now more than ever consumers play a more critical role in how a crisis unfolds (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018, p.2), highlighting the different impact negative publicity online has to offline and the reason why the online setting needs greater research. Whereas, in the past consumers only expressed

their frustration with the company directly and with friends and family (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). They argue, however, that it is important to consider both settings since there may be transferable findings from the offline context to the online context (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). This highlights the importance of this thesis as negative publicity is very different in an online setting and since it is under-researched greater investigation around this area is needed. The study uses the Elaboration Likelihood Model as its theoretical basis, which states that elaboration is dependent on how able and motivated consumers are to process information (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018, p.5). The elaboration refers to what extent an individual thinks about a given situation (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). When ability, opportunity and motivation are all high, then consumers take a central route in processing information, which means high elaboration. On the other hand, 'low elaboration' takes place when all the factors mentioned are low and so a peripheral route of processing occurs (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). This theory is used in their study in order to determine the short term and long term effects of the online firestorm (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018).

Furthermore, other elements are taken into consideration, for example the failure type; as previously mentioned, there are performance-related crisis and values-related crisis. However, their study argues based on previous research that values-related crisis incorporate two different kinds. The first one is a 'social failure' which refers to instances such as the company having workers under poor working conditions (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). The second one is 'communication failure' for example a company using offensive language in their campaigns (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau (2018) declare that the personal relevance towards the event plays a critical role in cases of negative publicity and argue that values-related events are less relevant to consumers as opposed to product-related and so the effects on brands are not catastrophic (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Another factor taken into consideration is how vividly consumers remember events after a given time period, how much they are exposed to the negative event and the duration of the event (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). They initially adopted all their data online from Twitter, and used comments with the word 'shitstorm' along with big brands in Germany mentioned. Their criteria involved the company being mentioned about the negative event at least ten times,

they used big brands such as ‘Nintendo, Sony, Google, Yahoo, Amazon, McDonald’s, Burger King, Primark, Mango, Adidas, ING-DiBa, Ikea and HTC’ (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018, p.7). Subsequently, they surveyed the participants two years after they had made the negative comments online in order to see whether they remembered the negative event (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). They showed them the brand logo and asked them to state what they remembered about the negative publicity event they commented on about and what they remembered exactly (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). The study discovered that indeed product-related crisis seem to affect more consumers’ perceptions more as opposed to values-related crisis as the level of relevance is greater, which motivates consumers to process information to a greater extent and, thus, brand perceptions are altered (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018).

Additionally, consumers seem to forget the online negative event in the long-run and so its effects are not longstanding, except in cases where they are exposed to a video or a picture when they encounter the negative event and so the opposite occurs in these cases (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Furthermore, long-lasting firestorms with greater consumer engagement seem to be remembered more in the long-run and also seem to influence also brand perceptions negatively (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Thus, it highlights the importance of this thesis, as negative publicity online may have a long-lasting damaging effect on brands. Although Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, (2018) laid some groundwork for this thesis and shed light on why negative publicity online is a very important issue, values-related negative publicity is very under-researched in this article, and it needs further research in order to verify whether it is as insignificant to consumers as it states. Their study calls for more research around how consumers process negative publicity on an emotional level which was an element that was overlooked in their study (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018); therefore, being one of the main objectives of this thesis. Furthermore, the study does not emphasise on specific behavioural changes, it simply states that consumers have greater negative brand perceptions that provide companies with limited opportunities to make changes to the way they respond and the way they position their brands in general. Therefore, more research is needed to uncover how consumers react and behave towards this phenomenon and why they react in the way they do. This will aid marketing managers to understand how to respond to negative publicity online as it is very different and

more challenging to the traditional online setting as pointed out by Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, (2018); hence the usefulness of this thesis.

2.2.2.5 Summary of Consumer Centric Research

This line of research focuses mainly on how consumers respond to offline negative publicity, it examines consumers' emotional and cognitive reactions to negative publicity. The literature explores these two aspects via various lenses. Huber et al., 2010 examine the consumer-company relationship via the cognitive lens only, they examine consumers' purchase intentions after corporate misconduct. They uncover that a consumer-company relationship deteriorates after negative publicity and so do consumers' purchase intentions. Additionally, they uncover that ideal and self-congruence also affect the consumer-company relationship. Moreover, consumers' cognitive responses are explored by Monga and John (2008), they explore how a consumer's thinking style affects their attitude towards negative publicity. They separate consumers into holistic and analytic thinkers, hence this study not treating all consumers as being identical (Monga and John, 2008). This study uncovers that holistic thinkers are less likely to be affected by negative publicity as opposed to analytic thinkers (Monga and John, 2008). Another study that treats consumers as being non-identical is Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava (2000) however they explore consumers' emotional responses and how lowly and highly committed consumers process negative publicity. Their study reveals that lowly committed consumers do take into account the negative event that occurs however highly committed consumers do not (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000).

Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau (2018) examine the online context and look at consumers' perceptions after an online firestorm and for how long these perceptions last. Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model as the theoretical underpinning they discover that values-related events are more memorable as opposed to product related events. Additionally, consumers tend to forget negative events in the long run and they only remember them only when there has been greater consumer engagement. Thus, it is evident that consumer centric research presents consumers as either rational decision makers or taking decisions based on their emotions in cases of negative publicity and mostly focus on the offline context. Thus,

this study aims to look at these two together in order to examine how these two interact with one another in cases of online negative publicity.

2.3 Conceptualising Moral Emotions

This section aims to distinguish the difference between emotions that are based on cognitive appraisals and emotions that occur based on intuition. The intuitionist approach and why this thesis decided to use the theory of moral emotions is discussed, and also the importance of moral identity. The final part of this section examines how previous studies researched moral emotions in the context of negative publicity and addresses the research gap.

2.3.1 Emotions and Cognitive Appraisals

Emotions are popularly defined by Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer (1999, p.184) as ‘a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically (e.g. in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it.’ In the literature of emotions there has been a debate as to how emotions are generally formed (Zajonc, 1980, p.172). To begin with, one argument is that emotions occur as a result of cognitive appraisals that take place by individuals (as per definition above), basing this on the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus (1991) and a plethora of researchers (Zajonc, 1980; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985; Fridja, 1986; Roseman, 1991; Oatley and Jenkins 1992) have claimed that emotions eventuate after cognitive appraisals of either events or thoughts that take place, and they further state that these emotions as a first form are expressed physically and subsequently specific actions take place thereafter. The theory mainly posits that these emotions occur after evaluating a desired state of a situation with the actual state of a situation (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer, 1999). There are various components that are taken into account when examining cognitive appraisals and amongst the most popular are, goal relevance and goal congruence (Lazarus, 1991). Goal relevance refers to how much an event directly affects an individual (Nyer, 1997, p. 397). Goal congruence refers to how much an event matches a person’s needs and wants (Nyer, 1997, p. 397). It is

expostulated that positive emotions occur when desired goals are reached and negative emotions occur when the desired goals have not been managed to be attained (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer, 1999). Furthermore, 'attribution' is another component of appraisals, which is where an individual decides to attribute blame (on the self or another person), and thus subsequently decides to feel a certain way (Roseman, 1984). This highlights the fact that this theory has to do mostly with 'relevance to one's well-being' and mostly the self (Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer, 1999, p.185) as opposed to moral judgements against others and therefore, would not be a relevant form of emotions to explore for this study, although it is a very popular theory used for research in psychology.

Moreover, most of the studies that explore the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions have major setbacks, for example in some studies (Roseman, 1984; Fridja, 1987) participants are asked about hypothetical events as opposed to actual and lived experiences (Roseman, Spindel and Jose, 1990). This means these findings do not significantly establish whether emotions occur because of appraisals made. Additionally, most of the studies that have explored this theory have determined the variables examined to the participants (i.e. the scales) (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). This means that there is limited potential for any new discoveries to be made and participants are very restricted, therefore highlighting once again that it cannot be significantly established whether emotions are based on appraisal dimensions as, in such instances, participants are set in order to think with a certain perspective.

2.3.2 Moral Judgements and the Intuitionist Approach

Moral judgements are broadly defined by Haidt (2003, p.817) as judgements made based on an individual's values and culture in regard to another person's acts and behaviours. There are two different approaches around moral judgements that researchers argue over, and many researchers state that moral judgements occur after moral reasoning takes place (Galotti, 1989) and other researchers attest that most judgements are formed based on intuition and maybe a post-hoc reasoning (Haidt, 2003). Moral reasoning is defined by Galotti (1989) as making cognitive moral evaluations of people upon information provided. Bargh (1994)

further adds that due to the fact that it is conscious, the person making the judgements is aware of what is happening.

On the other hand, the intuitive lens in moral psychology proclaims that moral judgements are made based on moral intuitions (including moral emotions) (Shweder and Haidt, 1993; Wilson, 1993; Haidt, 2003). Moral intuition is broadly defined by Haidt (2003, p.818) as ‘the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgement, including affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion.’ Researchers argue that moral intuitions develop from childhood and childhood experiences and from various cultural norms and thus this leads to ‘emotional conditioning’, (Haidt, 2001, p. 1040). The notion that moral judgements are made intuitively was first developed by Hume (1777,1960) in philosophy who suggested that moral evaluations and aesthetic judgements are very alike; it is an instant feeling that arises from emotion and not reasoning. Similarly, subsequently psychologists such as Freud (1900, 1976) followed with this same view in regard to morality and feelings. Various researchers such as Wainryb (1991) tried to debate that moral judgements are made via reasoning and not intuition and that within this reasoning lay the thoughts individuals have as to the harmful consequences an act has. However, this notion was quickly refuted by subsequent studies (Haidt, Koller and Dias, 1993; Haidt., 2000; Haidt and Hersh, 2001) where they insist that affective responses are superior indicators of moral judgements. Additionally, a study by Haidt and Hersh (2001) uncover that participants themselves were astonished as to why they could not find supporting and logical reasons to why they felt the way they felt, leading to the intuitive approach gaining higher validity within the moral psychology and emotions’ literature. Haidt (2001) stresses that moral reasoning occurs after moral intuitions and moral emotions have taken place (post-hoc reasoning).

2.3.3 Moral Identity

Furthermore, researchers argue that another aspect that influences people’s moral judgements and thus their moral emotions and behaviours is an individual’s moral identity (Aquino and Reed, 2003; Xie and Bagozzi, 2014). Hart, Atkins and Ford (1998 , p. 515) explain moral

identity as the dedication an individual has to their 'sense of self' and operates in accordance to that. Aquino et al. (2009, p. 124) add to this definition and state that it is the idea an individual has in regard to his morality and character. Aquino and Reed (2002) in their study explore how central a moral identity is to the self and how it affects behaviours and whether moral identity and social identity are related constructs. The researchers suggest that due to the fact that moral identity incorporates a 'trait-based conceptualisation, it is presumed that a person's moral identity may have a social referent that could be a real membership group' (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Additionally, they further state that some moral characteristics may be more prominent in a person's sense of self as opposed to others (Blasi, 1984). The study was conducted using quantitative surveys and undertaken in three phases. In phase one they measured moral identity and the traits, in phase two they 'established trait validity', and in phase three they predicted 'psychological and behavioural outcomes' (Aquino and Reed, 2002). The study states that moral identity is one of the most prominent identities an individual withholds and, therefore, the study suggests that this form of identity is central to the self for some and peripheral for others (Aquino and Reed, 2002, p.1433). Additionally, those with a strong internalised moral identity have greater donating behaviours indicating that moral identity does play a significant role in moral behaviours (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Furthermore, the study suggests that a person's moral identity is separate to other social identities that an individual may withhold (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Moreover, Aquino et al. (2009) examine the role of situational factors and individual characteristics on moral identity and the self-concept and, in turn, how these affect moral behaviours. Their findings reveal that people who have a high moral identity have a greater sense to act morally. However, when moral identity accessibility is low people have the tendency to behave in a more selfish manner (Aquino et al., 2009). Moreover, they highlight that situational factors that involve morality (and therefore activate the moral self-schema) influence people's behaviours (Aquino et al., 2009). Finally, they underline that an individual who has an activated high central moral-self-concept, it is more likely that the moral identity is more salient, working with the self-concept and pertaining moral behaviours (Aquino et al., 2009). For example, someone who attends church regularly is more likely to have a salient moral identity and, therefore, more likely to help out non-profit organisations (Aquino et al., 2009). Whereas a person who works in an organisation that is pressured to achieve greater financial outputs for a company is more likely to have 'self-achievement-oriented facets of the identity continually

activated', which may mean that the moral identity is not salient and, thus, the individual is less likely to behave in a moral manner (Aquino et al., 2009).

In the context of Marketing and corporate unethical behaviour, Xie, Bagozzi and Gronhaug (2015) found that moral identity moderates an individual's reactions to corporate misconduct. Their findings highlight that individuals who have their moral identity as part of the core self are more likely to encounter adverse moral emotions when a company acts in an irresponsible manner (Xie, Bagozzi and Gronhaug, 2015, p.349), hence the reason for selecting these types of emotions to research for this study.

2.3.4 Moral Emotions

Moral emotions are synonymous with morality since morality according to Haidt (2008, p.70) is the 'interlocking set of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible'. Moral emotions are acknowledged by Haidt (2003, p. 853) as 'the emotions that respond to moral violations or that motivate moral behaviour.' Moral emotions are further defined by Haidt (2003, p.853) as 'those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent.' Furthermore, Haidt (2012) claims that moral emotions that emerge against moral transgressions are not based on reasoning but rather on intuition, as stated previously; this highlights the usefulness of this model for this study since it is exploring intuitive emotions emerging after negative publicity. Furthermore, moral emotions come along with two features, which are the disinterested elicitors and the action tendencies. Disinterested elicitors refer to what triggers the emotions to occur, which usually occurs when something good or bad happens to a person in which the self is somehow related to or in which there is an identification of some sort with the other party. Moreover, action tendencies refer to the action that occurs after the provoking event (Haidt, 2003, p.854). Haidt (2003) postulates that the actions are usually not enforced and there is simply an 'increased tendency to engage in certain goal-related actions (e.g. revenge, affiliation, comforting)' (Haidt, 2003, p.854).

Past research has treated emotions as basic with one emotion being separate to another and not having any kind of relationship between one another (Tomkins, 1962; Izard, 1977;

Ekman, 1992, 1994). However, the opposite occurs with moral emotions as they are grouped together in different families as it is argued that emotions come in different forms, and these variants are acknowledged in this theory as ‘family’ (Haidt, 2003, p.854). This study focuses on the other-condemning emotions (contempt, anger and disgust) and the other-suffering emotions (compassion/sympathy) as these are the emotions that have been found to emerge in cases of negative publicity and also in other negative contexts in marketing (e.g. service failures) (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012; Grappi, Romani, Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). The following table (Table 2.1) looks at the moral emotions theory developed by Haidt (2003). It focuses mainly on other-condemning family emotions (anger, disgust, contempt) and other-suffering family emotions (compassion/sympathy), what causes them, their respective action tendencies and examples from marketing practice as to how these emotions unfold and are subsequently acted upon.

Table 2.1: Haidt’s (2003) Moral Emotions – adapted from Mardon , Molesworth, Grigore (2018)

	MORAL EMOTIONS	ELICITORS	ACTION TENDENCIES	EXAMPLES FROM MARKETING PRACTICE (IN A TRADITIONAL MARKET)
Other-Condemning Family	Anger	Frustration, betrayal, insults and injustice.	Attack, humiliate or get revenge.	Customer retaliation occurs – consumers take revenge by humiliating the company online (Gregoire and Fisher, 2008) and embarking upon protests (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). E.g. When Nike appointed Colin Kaepernick (NFL player) as their face of their new campaign consumers found it offensive and they started posting negative videos on Twitter (e.g. burning and ripping Nike products) along with the hashtag #NikeBoycott (they found this selection offensive since Kaepernick kneeled down during the American national anthem back in 2016 to protest against racism – which people found disrespectful) (Sabur, 2018)
	Disgust	Hypocrisy, betrayal and cruelty.	Avoid contact with the offending entity.	When consumers feel disgust towards a company they tend to boycott the brand (Schmalz and Orth, 2012) E.g. When consumers found out that suppliers in China plucked live geese for IKEA’s products they felt disgust and wanted to boycott the brand (Schmalz and Orth, 2012)
	Contempt	Perceptions of moral superiority	Disregard, treatment with lack of respect.	Consumers now seek from brands to be more ethical and sustainable towards the environment thus failing to do this leads consumers to disregard brands (Newman and Trump, 2017) E.g. When Volkswagen failed to share the real emissions their cars were emitting and then a scandal arose consumers did not want to buy VW cars anymore and disregarded the brand (Kollewe, 2016)
Other-Suffering Family	Compassion/Sympathy	Perception of sorrow or suffering in another, particularly for those with whom one has a close, communal relationship.	Help, comfort, or otherwise alleviate the suffering of the other.	When consumers perceive that the company is not be blamed for a negative event that occurs, they tend to feel compassion and sympathy towards the company (Meyer, Hubber and Hubber, 2019) E.g. ‘McDonalds Hot Coffee Case’: A lady spilled a cup of extremely hot coffee on her in a McDonalds restaurant. McDonalds was subsequently forced to pay a compensation of \$600,000, which consumers who were not involved in the incident found outrageous since the woman was at fault and it was not the company’s fault – so they felt sympathetic towards McDonalds (Meyer, Hubber and Hubber, 2019)

2.3.5 Other-condemning Emotions

Other-condemning emotions (contempt, anger, disgust) involve negative emotions in regard to other people's (even people we have never interacted with) behaviours and actions. They are often confused in the literature of emotions, however, Haidt (2003) clearly distinguishes them via the elicitors and actions tendencies of each emotion. Negative emotions, such as anger, emerge as a way to externalise problems an individual encounters (Eisenberg, 2000, p. p.684).

2.3.5.1 Anger

Haidt (2003, p. 856) expostulates anger is 'a response to unjustified insults' and the anger occurs as this insult affects either the self or a friend. Haidt (2003, p.856) further states that other homogenous studies (Izard, 1977, Wotman, 1990; Shaver et al 1987 cited in Haidt, 2003, p.856) have found that anger occurs when an individual has been 'betrayed, insulted or treated unfairly'. Another study also found that 'unfairness and immorality' rank high as reasons as a result of anger occurring (Scherer, 1997 cited in Haidt, 2003, p. 856). The action tendencies of anger usually involve 'attack[ing], [humiliating] or get[ting] back at the person who is perceived as acting unfairly or immorally' (Izard, 1997; Shaver et al., 1987 cited in Haidt, 2003, p.856).

2.3.5.2 Disgust

For many years disgust was connected to revulsion and particularly in relation to taste (Darwin, 1965/1872) known as the contamination-based disgust (Giovanni, Pino and Peluso, 2018). However, gradually the concept of moral disgust emerged. Primarily, Miller (1997 cited in Haidt, 2003, p.856) suggests that moral disgust emerges from 'hypocrisy, betrayal, cruelty, and fawning'. Hunter (1991) and Lakeoff (1996 cited in Haidt, 2003, p. 856) further attest that it sometimes occurs because individuals want to 'impose, defend, or rectify particular moral order against perceived threats'. Elicitors of this emotion are said to mainly be 'hypocrisy, betrayal and cruelty' (Miller, 1997 cited in Haidt, 2003, p.857), which further lead to 'motivation to avoid, expel or break off contact with the offending entity'; often done as an act of purification and to remove any potential contact with the other party (Rozin and

Fallon, 1987; Rozin et al., 1993 cited in Haidt, 2003, p.857). Avoidance as a result of disgust is an action that occurs, as many other researchers argue that occurs (Curtis and Biran, 2001; Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla, 2007; Chapman et al., 2009; Tybur, Lieberman and Griskevicius, 2009; Hutcherson and Gross, 2011), supporting Haidt's (2003) theory that disgust leads to avoidance.

2.3.5.3 Contempt

Another emotion from the other-condemning family is contempt; this emotion involves looking down on the other party as one feels morally greater than the other (Izard, 1977; Ekman, 1994). Additionally, Haidt (2003) adds that it is synonymous to indifference and that people tend to feel that the other person is not so worthy of intense and negative feelings such as anger. This emotion mainly emerges when the other party acts in an incompetent manner (Hutcherson and Gross, 2011). This third emotion includes feeling superior in comparison to someone else (Izard, 1977; Ekman, 1994). Its action tendencies do not involve 'attack' or 'withdrawal'; instead the other party will be treated in a less inferior manner and with less respect in future encounters (Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1996 cited in Haidt, 2003, p.858). Other researchers, such as Fischer and Roseman (2007) and Ford et al. (2018), agree with Haidt (2003) that contempt leads to disregard of the other party, thus enhancing the actions tendencies proposed in this theory.

Other researchers propose that there are other action tendencies to these emotions (than the ones proposed by Haidt, 2003). Frijda, Kuipers and Ter Schure (1989) insist that negative emotions such as anger, disgust and contempt just have one action and this is retaliating against the miscreant. However, subsequent research by Haidt et al. (1999) proved that these three emotions should be considered distinct and treated separately and are not homogenous thus refuting any contradictory research that states that these three emotions are similar and have similar response mechanisms. Haidt et al. (1999), prior to the development of the theory of moral emotions, conducted research distinguishing the three other-condemning emotions. They base their study on previous research by Shweder et al. (1997) that proposes that there are three ethics that solve moral issues; community, autonomy and divinity. Community violations refer to when an act is considered as wrong as duties towards the community are

not carried out (Haidt et al, 1999, p. 575). ‘Duty, role obligation, respect for authority, preservation of the community’ are the factors one takes into consideration to decide whether the action is incorrect (Haidt et al, 1999, p. 575). Autonomy is anything that relates to ‘individual freedom/rights violations’ and it is incorrect because an action damages another individual; and includes aspects such as ‘harm, rights, justice, freedom, fairness (Haidt et al, 1999, p. 575).’ Finally, divinity violations refer to when someone does not respect religious symbols and degrades others; in order to make a decision whether the action is incorrect sins are taken into consideration (Haidt et al, 1999, p. 576). Haidt et al. (1999, p. 576) suggest that that contempt is linked to community violations as it is ‘linked to hierarchical relations between individuals and groups’. Furthermore, they link anger to autonomy as anger is triggered by ‘insults or rights violations’ and disgust is linked to divinity as it protects the soul from being devalued and degraded (Haidt et al., 1999, p. 576). They conducted four quantitative studies (involving experiments and questionnaires) and their findings reveal a direct link between the moral issues and the moral emotions and further, this is how the researchers set apart these three emotions (Haidt et al., 1999). Haidt et al. (1999) used words containing emotions and facial expressions (Haidt, 1999), which underlines the robustness of the findings as the majority of the studies around emotion just study self-reported emotions. Other researchers seem to have a contradictory view to Haidt’s (2003) moral emotions theory; for example Averill (1982) suggests that for anger, attacking the other party may not be an option and perhaps someone may decide to avoid the offending entity. However, this has been contradicted and understated by many moral psychology researchers, stating that the result of anger is revenge or attack (Pagano and Huo, 2007; Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009; Cronin, Reysen, Branscombe, 2012; Rothschild et al., 2013), supporting Haidt’s (2003) theory.

2.3.6 Other-Suffering Emotions

There is only one other-suffering emotion and this it is a positive emotion named compassion which generally means wanting to aid another person when (s)he experiences pain and suffering (Goetz, Keltner and Simon-Thomas, 2010).

2.3.6.1 Compassion

There is also a positive moral emotion that is incorporated in the other-suffering family; this is compassion. Haidt (2003) distinguishes empathy from sympathy and compassion (as the literature tends to use these terms interchangeably) and states that empathy is not considered an emotion and involves being able to feel what other people feel. Furthermore, sympathy incorporates feeling concern for another person (Eisenberg et al., 1991 cited in Haidt, 2003) and the ability to have congruent feelings (Haidt, 2003). Finally, compassion refers to feeling emotional towards another person who is suffering (Lazarus, 1991b) either a stranger or a companion (Batson and Shaw, 1991). Moreover, Haidt (2003) states that compassion occurs when the other party seems to be experiencing suffering or sadness (Haidt, 2003, p.862) it makes people want to ‘help, comfort, or otherwise alleviate the suffering of the other’ (Batson, O’Quinn, Fultz, Vanderplass and Isen, 1983; Eisenberg et al., 1989; Batson and Shaw, 1991; Hoffman, 1982b cited in Haidt, 2003, p.862). Additionally, other researchers support Haidt’s (2003) notion that compassion leads to helping and altruistic behaviours (Davis and Oathout, 1987; Batson et al, 1988; Eisenberg et al., 1990), which again underlines the validity of this theory.

2.3.7 Negative Publicity and Moral Emotions

There are a few studies that research the role of moral emotions in cases of negative publicity and amongst the emotions that are explored are anger, disgust and compassion, hence the reason for focusing on these emotions in this thesis. To begin with, Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2013) focus on consumers’ responses to irresponsible corporate actions, looking at negative emotions such as anger, contempt and disgust and further stating that there lies a need for such research as to provide greater managerial recommendations via theory based knowledge, hence the intention of this thesis also. The research focuses on two types of negative consumer behaviours, negative word of mouth and protests (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Negative word of mouth is explained as the expression of anger and dissatisfaction against companies with the motive to punish (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Furthermore, protests involve taking actions against companies that are behaving unethically (i.e. boycotts and protests) (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Proposing that

corporate irresponsible behaviours are seen as moral transgressions, they focus on ethical transgressions and social transgressions (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). They define ethical transgressions as harm imposed upon other individuals from companies, violating human dignity, and social transgressions are described as when a firm causes damage to a community (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). These two transgressions are closely linked to the emotions of anger, disgust and contempt (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). They conducted quantitative experiments using fake companies and fake negative events. For the ethical transgression they used a brand called 'dark chocolate' and the event involved child labour (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). For the social transgression they used a brand named 'big retailer' and the negative event involved the company taking down a community centre to develop a shopping mall, which in turn meant that many local businesses that were in the community for years were under threat (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Their sample included 280 adult shoppers from Italy (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). The study reveals that negative word of mouth is a form for consumers to express their negative emotions towards other people, and protests are a form for consumers to express their dissatisfaction towards the firm expressing their anger via revengeful behaviours (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Furthermore, contempt, anger and disgust occur in cases where ethical or social damage is caused by companies and that the emotion experienced clearly depends on the ethical virtues a consumer holds (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013, p.1820). Their study does offer useful insights and further research is needed in order to explore motivations and reasons behind these emotions and actions, hence the reason for conducting this study. For instance, as the researchers state they conducted the study in the form of experiments with a forced stimuli, so the participants were forced into conditions and to notice and think deeply about the negative events, whereas this might not have happened in naturalistic conditions (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Therefore, the research carried out for this thesis is in the form of netnography to study a naturalistic environment and to examine consumers' natural reactions to corporate negative events. Additionally, although the emotions that emerge in such cases were outlined, it is not entirely clear from where exactly these emotions emerge, and thus this is studied further. Also, the emotional element is only examined with the cognitive aspect and the consumer-company relationship is absent from the study, hence the need for this gap to be filled in this thesis.

Another study that explores the consumers' reactions towards company social irresponsibility and the role of moral emotions is the one of Xie and Bagozzi (2018). They particularly explore anger and contempt. This study finds similar findings to the previous one (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013), that anger leads to boycotts; however, it uncovers additional actions that follow after anger and contempt. They firstly declare that there are three reactions towards corporate social irresponsibility and one is the 'intuitionist approach to moral behaviour' proposed by Haidt (2012) and Haidt et al. (1999 cited in Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). The second response 'are automatic evaluative responses which are good-bad reactions and come out of the attitude tradition' (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012 cited in Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). The third response includes 'social cognitive responses', which is how individuals interpret various lived experiences (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Therefore, one of the aspects that the research focuses on is how consumers react to corporate social irresponsibility emotionally and cognitively (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). This research also focuses on how corporate social irresponsibility affects violations to community and autonomy. Moreover, it addresses how corporate social irresponsibility affects consumers' attitudes and emotions and specifically emphasises on contempt and anger (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). In their study, this is tested by looking at four moderators referred to as social cognitions: 'moral identity, empathy, relational self-orientation, and collective self-orientation' (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018, p. 567). The 'relational self-concept' notes that it is how much individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships, and the 'collective self-concept' is the way people define themselves in regard to the groups in which they are a member of (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018, p.570). They employed an experiment and questionnaires using two groups that where one was experimental and one that was controlled (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018, p.571). In the experimental groups they were firstly provided with neutral facts about an offshore shipping firm in Norway and then provided with negative information about how the firm violated ethics of community and autonomy (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). The control group was provided only with neutral information (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). It was revealed via the study that when violations towards the community occur contempt seems to be the emotion that emerges, with moral identity, empathy and self-concepts play a moderating role in feeling this emotion (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). The people with greater central moral identities, with greater empathetic concern towards the misfortune of others within the community, and people who hold strong collective self-concepts feel

contempt and, in turn, negative behaviours towards the company occur such as negative word of mouth, complaints and boycotts (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). On the other hand, the only factor that seems to affect anger is empathy towards others affected by the corporate ethical transgression and the greater the collective self-concept, the greater the anger seems to be (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Furthermore, the stronger the anger, the more likely the consumers are to engage in negative word of mouth and boycotts (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Additionally, the study reveals that the greater the morality, the greater the empathy experienced, and the greater the relational self-concept, the greater the negative attitudes (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). The research underlines that morality, collective self-concept and moral emotions play a significant role in cases of negative publicity (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018), hence selecting these aspects to explore for this thesis. Although looking at these important elements, they have restricted the emotions studied to anger and contempt and also failed to address the importance of the collective self-concept, which are all objectives of this thesis. Moreover, Xie and Bagozzi (2018, p.580) proclaim that a limitation of their study is the fact that although they used real scenarios a fake firm was used and they call for additional research to use actual events in real firms, hence this thesis is using netnography and Chick-fil-A as a company. They also claim that is important to conduct other studies in other industries in order to make the generalisability of the study greater (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018, p.580). In order to address these two limitations, this thesis uses Chick-fil-A as a corporation that experienced negative publicity.

Another study that explores consumers' emotional response to corporate wrongdoing is by Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi (2013). The emotions explored are contempt and disgust and the actions that are associated with these emotions seem to be different to the prior studies mentioned (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). They particularly look at 'constructive punitive actions' and 'destructive punitive actions' by consumers and the role of moral emotions, specifically anger, contempt and disgust (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi (2013) describe constructive punitive actions as actions that have the purpose of trying to create organisational change by still keeping relationships with the organisation, which is mainly driven by anger and destructive punitive actions as they try to create an adverse image of the brand and subsequently avoidance which is driven by contempt. Their study is based on experiments; the first experiment used a

fictitious company with various real-life negative events experienced by other companies, and particularly they used a firm called 'dark chocolate' that used child labour (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). They used 145 university students as their sample (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). The second experiment used 167 participants from Porto Torres, using a corporation in the country that had a tanker oil spillage in the sea causing harm to the environment and the local community (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). In contrast to prior studies, this study uncovers that anger is more relevant to constructive punitive actions than to destructive ones and proposes that this leads to actions such as reconciliation (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013) instead of attack as suggested by Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2013) and Xie and Bagozzi (2018) above. Moreover, the experiment reveals that contempt leads to destructive punitive actions and disgust to none of the punitive actions discussed above (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi (2013) propose that other factors need to be studied alongside with emotions that are not studied in their own research, such as social identification or consumer-company identification. Therefore, in this thesis in order to fill this gap, emotions are studied alongside consumer-company identification.

In contrast to prior studies that explore consumers' negative emotions towards company encountering negative publicity offline, Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019) is the only study in the context of negative publicity that explores positive emotions. Specifically, compassion and its role when corporations face negative events is explored. They attest that compassion and actual helping behaviours towards corporations has not been explored before, except in contexts such as non-for profit organisations (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019), which also highlights the need for further research around this topic. The theoretical underpinning of the study is the deservingness theory (Feather, 1999, 2006; Feather, McKee and Bekker, 2011). They attest that after feeling compassion, actual helping behaviours depend on various factors such as self-efficacy, perceived blame, problem severity and company reputation (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Similar to Haidt (2003), they distinguish compassion from empathy and sympathy and define compassion as the emotion that occurs when an individual sees another person agonising and so this raises an urgency to help (Goetz et al., 2010). Self-efficacy is defined as the 'belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments', (Bandura, 1997, p. 3 cited in Meyer, Huber

and Huber, 2019, p.3); this means how much an individual believes will achieve the desired outcomes, which means that it is an important determinant of helping behaviour (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Furthermore, perceived blame is another antecedent of helping behaviour, according to the deservingness theory, and assigning blame towards the other party is a major determinant of compassion (Feather, 2006; Feather, McKee and Bekker, 2011). It is declared that when the other party does not deserve the suffering that is being caused, compassion is elicited as the sufferer is innocent and should not be blameworthy of the event caused (Nussbaum, 1996, 2003). Problem severity is another factor that is predicted to affect helping behaviour, stating that helping behaviour depends on how severe the problem is perceived (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Moreover, perceived company helplessness refers to how likely a situation is to change in the future (Mikulincer, 1986; Batson and Shaw, 1991) and how powerful an individual is to change a situation (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Corporate reputation refers to whether the firm has a good or bad reputation and, thus, worthy of help or not (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). The study's methodology is based on a scenario-based experiment in which 930 participants were asked to recall past experiences in which companies were a victim of negative accusations and to express the thoughts and emotions felt at the time (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019, p.8). The study uncovers that helping behaviours, such as positive word of mouth, are more likely to occur as opposed to spending money on the company as it is considered a smaller sacrifice, however this is only the case when self-efficacy is high (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Additionally, findings reveal that helpful behaviours are more likely in cases with companies with a higher reputation as it is of a higher status and also more self-relevant and so does not involve any threat to their social status involved (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019).

In relation to compassion, the study shows that when self-efficacy is high then it is easier to cope with the feeling of compassion. The findings further highlight that the compassion felt seems to decrease when the company seems to be at fault (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019, p.15). When perceived blame increases along with problem severity and low reputation, then consumers are less likely to feel compassion and help companies (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Perceived helplessness, along with increased problem severity, seems to be a factor that affects compassion and helping behaviours in companies with a high reputation (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). However, 'the positive effect of perceived helplessness on the

feeling of compassion decreases for high reputation companies when perceived company blame increases' (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019, p. 15). Amongst the limitations stated by the researchers of the study is the fact that they let participants retrieve emotions and thoughts from memory from their own experiences, which may have led to a form of bias in regard to the events (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Hence, in order to avoid bias, this thesis selected netnography and a neutral event in order to achieve more accurate and unbiased results. Additionally, they state that the experiment allowed for only intentions and not participants' actual behaviours, which they see as another limitation of their study (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Further, amplifying the need to study behaviours as opposed to intentions which this thesis has done. They also call for future studies to look at elements, such as brand attachment, in order to explore the bond and relationship between the company and the consumer, hence, this research looks at the concept of consumer-company identification to explore how this construct affects consumers' behaviours (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). They also call for future studies to explore other emotions in depth, like contempt and anger, and also discuss the net effect of all these moral emotions (including compassion) (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019); this is precisely one of the objectives of this study: how moral emotions affect consumers' behaviours. Finally, this thesis focuses on an event where perceived blame is subjective, and thus open to different interpretations from consumers, and which allows exploring a variety of emotions as opposed to compassion only.

2.3.8 Negative Publicity and Moral Emotions Summary

There are various studies that explore moral emotions, they look at negative moral emotions such as anger, disgust, contempt and positive emotions such as compassion. These studies also treat consumers in a homogenous manner. Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2013) explore how consumers respond emotionally to corporate irresponsible actions. They uncover that negative emotions such as anger, contempt and disgust occur after corporate irresponsible actions and that negative word of mouth and protests are actions associated with anger. Xie and Bagozzi (2018) similarly study moral emotions (anger and contempt) after a company acts unethically and reveal similar findings to Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2013). They similarly uncover that contempt leads to negative behaviours towards the company such as negative word of mouth, complaints and boycotts and anger leads to negative word of mouth

and boycotts (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi (2013) also explore contempt and disgust and the actions that are associated with these emotions after a company acts unethically. The actions revealed in this study seem to be different to the aforementioned studies (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi (2013) uncover that anger leads to actions such as reconciliation (which is considered a constructive action) this is in contrast to the findings previously mentioned that it leads to attacks (Romani and Bagozzi, 2013 and Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Additionally, the study reveals that contempt leads to destructive punitive actions and disgust to neither destructive or punitive actions (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013).

In contrast to the previous studies mentioned there is also one study that explores positive emotions consumers experience towards a company encountering negative publicity offline. Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019) explore how compassion affects consumers' reactions in cases of negative publicity and the theoretical underpinning of the study is the deservingness theory. The study highlights that when a company does not seem to be at fault compassion occurs, this leads to helping behaviours such as positive word of mouth. Additionally, when the company seems to be at fault along with the problem being severe and the company having a low reputation, then consumers are less likely to feel compassion (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). The above studies that examine consumers' moral emotions focus mainly on the emotions experienced and the consumers' subsequent actions in the context of offline negative publicity. Therefore, these studies neglect the relationship the consumers have with the company and consumers' cognitive reactions to negative publicity. Additionally, the online context in these studies is also neglected. Hence, this research examining both consumers' emotional and cognitive responses to negative publicity in the context of online negative publicity.

2.3.9 Moral Emotions Theory Rationale

As this research aims to explore consumers' emotions and cognitions after a company encounters negative publicity, theories involving these aspects had to be selected in order to guide this study. Examining which theory would help guide the emotional dimension of this research, a few theories involving emotions were considered. For example, the cognitive

appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991) which declares that emotions occur after cognitive appraisals have taken place (Zajonc, 1980; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985; Fridja, 1986; Lazarus 1991; Roseman, 1991; Oatley and Jenkins 1992) was considered. However, it was rejected as this study aims to explore consumers' emotional reactions online which means that instant reactions are examined and so this theory did not seem to be useful for the nature of this study. The moral emotions theory (Haidt, 2003) seemed to a more suitable guiding theory for this study as this theory states that emotions occur intuitively without any prior cognitive processing (Haidt, 2003). This theory will help better detect consumers' emotions online. Moreover, as the event that is explored in this study is values-related (which involves a company's morality and values) (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006) the theory of moral emotions seemed to be a more suitable theory to explore this type of event as this theory focuses on a consumers' morality (Haidt, 2003). Additionally, Xie and Bagozzi (2018) highlight the importance of moral emotions in cases of values-related negative publicity, hence selecting this theory. Moreover, previous studies that have explored values-related events have similarly used this theory which helped in revealing what actions are associated with each moral emotion (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019); hence the usefulness of this theory in revealing consumers' behaviours. Furthermore, previous studies have also found that a consumer's moral identity plays a role as to how a consumer reacts to negative publicity (Xie, Bagozzi and Gronhaug, 2015). As this study aims to explore the role of a consumers' moral identity in cases of negative publicity this theory seemed appropriate in order to achieve this (as consumers' moral emotions are experienced based on a consumers' moral identity) (Haidt, 2003).

2.4 Conceptualising Consumer-Company Identification

The following section clearly articulates and conceptualises one of the concepts that is used for this study, which is 'consumer-company identification'. The section explores how it is differs to other similar concepts (i.e. organisational identification), how previous studies have treated similar concepts and, additionally it explores a relatively new concept in Marketing: the consumer-brand disidentification. In Marketing, many concepts have been developed in order to explain the strong ties a consumer withholds with a company. It is important to distinguish the different concepts in order to clearly articulate the concept of consumer-

company identification (CCI) and clearly address the research gap and the rationale as to why this concept was chosen. Brand commitment, emotional brand attachment, brand love and brand loyalty are ideas that have been researched in the context of negative publicity (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Bowen et al., 2018) and refer to repeat purchase buying due to an emotional connection felt with the brand with the rational and evaluative component being absent (Lastovicka and Gradner, 1978; Oliver, 1999; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Park et al., 2010; Malar et al., 2011). However, all the concepts involving identification (i.e. organisational identification, consumer-company identification) mostly include the concept of identity and how consumers connect with brands via the cognitive route as opposed to the emotional route (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995; Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003); the emotional connection between the brand and the consumer has received minimal attention in the context of negative publicity. Therefore, connecting both consumer-company identification and moral emotions can help in exploring both the cognitive element and the emotional component when consumers make decisions upon encountering a negative event. Table 2.2 below distinguishes the difference of concept of consumer-company identification to other similar concepts such as brand commitment, emotional brand attachment, brand love, brand loyalty that mainly involve an emotional connection a consumer has with the brand (Lastovicka and Gradner, 1978; Oliver, 1999; ; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Park et al., 2010; Malar et al., 2011). Organisational identification is also contrasted to consumer-company identification as it is the premise of the consumer-company identification. Organisational identification differs to consumer-company identification as consumers in the case of consumer-company identification view the brand as the extension of the self (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Table 2.2. CCI Distinction

Constructs	Definition	CCI Distinctions	Respective Literature
Brand Commitment	This concept refers to the tie a consumer has towards a brand within a given product category	Brand commitment does not incorporate an evaluative component in contrast to CCI which is one of its core elements	Lastovicka and Gradner, 1977
Emotional Brand Attachment	The strong connection between the brand with the consumer which entails feelings towards the brand such as affection towards	This concept at its looks at the connection between the consumer and the brand based on feelings and not any rationalizations which CCI does	Park et al., 2010; Malar, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger, 2011
Brand Love	This refers to the emotional ties a company has with a brand	Brand love does not include a cognitive component whereas identification does include a cognitive component. Additionally, it is possible that consumers can identify with a brand without having actually used it before however this is not the case with brand love	Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006
Brand Loyalty	Brand loyalty is the devotion to a brand by buying their products on a constant basis irrespective of any situational influences	Loyalty does have an evaluative aspect but does not capture it fully and in the same manner that CCI does. CCI goes also beyond repurchase behaviours. CCI means that consumers supports a company when it is under scrutiny	Oliver, 1999; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003
Organizational Identification (OI)	This refers to when an individual feels like (s)he belongs to an organization and is a member of it	This is where a consumer feels like (s)he belongs in an organization, whereas CCI goes beyond membership and states that is is part of the extended self	Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002; Bhattacharya et al., 1995
Consumer-Company Identification (CCI)	An identification with a company that is mainly derived by to meet self-definitional needs		Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003

2.4.1 Organisational Identification

Organisational identification is defined as when the goals of the corporation and the consumer coincide (Hall, Schneider and Nygren, 1970, pp. 176-177). Mael and Ashforth, (1992, p.105) similarly state that organisational identification takes place due to social identification and because a consumer constructs their identity via formal ties with a company. In contrast to this definition other researchers argue that being a member is not a pre-requisite for identification to take place (Pratt, 1998; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Additionally, Caradador and Pratt (2006, p.177) suggest that this relationship is not personal and so there is no bond between the organisation and the consumer and it is just an outcome of sharing a common social group. Furthermore, Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) explain organisational identification as a ‘cognitive connection’ in which an individual’s self-concept seems to carry the same characteristics with an organisation’s identity.

2.4.2 Consumer-Company Identification (CCI)

Consumer-Company Identification is primarily defined 'as the primary psychological substrate for the kind of deep, committed, and meaningful relationships that marketers are increasingly seeking to build with their consumers' (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003, p. 76). CCI derives from two different theoretical foundations known in social psychology and organisational behaviour respectively; the social identity theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1985) and organisational identification developed by Whetten and Godfrey (1998). To begin with, social identity refers to cognitive procedures that allow mass actions (Turner, 1982 cited in Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p.26). Social identity theory is defined by Tajfel and Turner (1985, p.284) as how an individual perceives himself or herself according to various social groups he/she belongs to. A social identity an individual has is very different to a personal identity as the former refers to 'salient group classifications', for example demography, religion, education, culture, ethnicity and the latter includes 'idiosyncratic characteristics such as abilities and interests' (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995, p. 47). Tajfel and Turner (1985, p.284) argue that a social identity is important to an individual as 'they strive for a positive self-concept', which in turn increases their self-esteem. Additionally, differentiations between in-group and out-groups generate a form of inflated status (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). In order for individuals to achieve a positive social identity, they mainly join groups with positive associations and values (Tajfel and Turner, 1985, p.285). An individual's social identity appears to significantly affect their behaviour (Markus, 1977), hence highlighting the use of this theory for this study as it helps to better understand consumers' behaviours and actions in cases of negative publicity.

Previous research on identification states that identification with a company seems to occur due to a number of reasons, amongst them being identity attractiveness (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). Researchers have argued that individuals may find a corporate identity attractive for various reasons. Amongst them is identity similarity, which means a consumer identifies with a company that has a homogenous identity as it expresses their sense of self and who they are (self-congruity) (Pratt, 1998 cited in Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Mael and Ashforth (1992) discovered that organisational identification mainly occurs when an organisation has a distinctive identity and thus consumers are drawn to it due to the fact that

consumers feel a sense of uniqueness in their identity (self-distinctiveness). Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (1995) propose that people identify with organisations with a high prestige in order to enhance their own self esteem (self-enhancement), and they discovered that the greater the perceived corporate prestige the greater the identification. However, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) claim that 'brand prestige' does not highly affect CCI and it highly depends on the product category and as this is the case for luxury brands and products as opposed to conventional brands and products. Furthermore, Marin and De Maya (2013, p.655) further investigate consumers' motives for connecting with a company, how the identity of the organisation attracts the consumers and how salespeople affect the identification a consumer holds with a firm. Their model explores various antecedents of consumer-company identification, amongst the relevant for this thesis being 'need for affiliation' and 'identity attractiveness' and the moderating role of 'identity salience' (Marin and De Maya, 2013). They define 'identity attractiveness' according to Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen (2005) as the extent to which consumers are drawn to a company and maintain a relationship with it according to its attributes (Marin and De Maya, 2013, p.659). 'Need for affiliation' is explained as the need that an individual has to feel liked and approved by other people and the need to belong in a group (Heyns, Veroff and Atkinson, 1958). Using a questionnaire from a sample of four hundred consumers in the financial industry to collect their data, their findings reveal that identification with a corporation occurs due to the fact that consumers want to belong to a social group (Marin and De Maya, 2013, p. 668). On the other contrary, other researchers argue that attractiveness is not key to company identification but embeddedness is. They declare that identification eventuates when consumers find themselves compatible with the company in accordance to their social self (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003, p. 82). Embeddedness mainly eventuates when consumers take part in corporate activities that make them feel like members of the organisation (Ashforth, 1998, p.219 cited in Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

More recently researchers have looked at how corporate social responsibility (CSR) affects corporate identity attractiveness. Rives and De Maya (2007) state that consumer-company identification is widely beneficial to corporations as it increases consumer loyalty and so the reasons companies want to maintain this dynamic is known. However, they argue that much less is known as to why consumers engage in this dynamic. Conducting surveys of consumers

in the financial industry, they highlight that CSR and the way that these activities are portrayed to the consumers lead to corporate identity attractiveness (Rives and De Maya, 2007). Other researchers have attributed the reasons of corporate identity attractiveness to the fact that CSR may mean greater brand distinctiveness, differentiation and increased prestige (Perez, Bigne and Herrera, 2009). Lii and Lee (2012) take this notion further by examining what type of CSR strategies affect CCI. CSR is defined as company actions that fulfil social needs that and are willingly done without having any legal obligations (Angelidis and Ibrahim, 1993; Enderle and Tavis, 1998). They focus on three different type of CSR strategies, which are sponsorship, cause-related marketing (CRM) and philanthropy (Lii and Lee, 2012). In order to test which of the strategies affects CCI, they undertook a survey experiment with 492 students using telecommunication brands such as ‘SonyEricsson, Motorola, LG, Samsung, Nokia, HTC and iPhone’ (Lii and Lee, 2012, p. 74). They were presented with fake scenarios and campaigns with the different brands and the different strategies mentioned above (Lii and Lee, 2012). Findings highlight that consumers have better attitudes towards philanthropic campaigns than CRM and sponsorship campaigns and lead to a greater CCI (Lii and Lee, 2012). The propensity to help the firm is also greater (Lii and Lee, 2012). CRM campaigns were evaluated as the worst ones as they are viewed as suspicious as they are linked with corporate profits (Lii and Lee, 2012). On the other hand, it is also attested that consumers are 85keptical when it comes to CSR activities of companies as they may be hypocritical and not genuine so it is unclear as to how consumers process CSR activities when it comes to identity attractiveness and identification, which calls for more research around this area and which is one the facets that this study intends to further uncover (Rives and De Maya, 2007); hence choosing a negative publicity event that emerged from a company’s CSR activities.

Researchers have also discovered that a reason that organisational identification occurs is due to the interpreted external image. This refers to what an organisational member thinks other people who are not involved in the organisation think of it (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991 cited in Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail. 1994). The researchers infer that an individual’s well-being depends on both the attributes individuals assign to themselves by joining an organisation but also what others think of them when they are part of an organisation (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail. 1994). They go as far as expostulating that sadness or

anxiety may occur if they are negatively perceived as members within a negatively perceived organisation (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail. 1994). For example, when the Exxon oil spillage occurred, the employees were very worried about how outsiders would view them as employees of the company (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail. 1994). It is argued that when others think positively of the organisation then the members are more likely to enhance a positive social identity (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail. 1994). Other researchers declare that an interpreted external image may affect the social identity of an individual but it does not fully determine the identification a person will have with the organisation (Ahearne, Bhattachara and Gruen, 2005).

Another perceptive has been introduced in the CCI literature and this is the one of ‘other consumer effect’ (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011). Their study explores how other consumers affect identification and the role of CCI on corporate image (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011, p. 1417). They insist that both CCI and consumer-consumer interactions are extremely important due to the fact that they may add value to the firm and add a favorable corporate image to a firm; however, despite these benefits organisations do not tend to give them the importance and significance that are needed (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011); thus, the reason for conducting this study with this construct to signify its importance for companies. They distinguish corporate image with corporate reputation and state that corporate image is how consumers perceive the corporation based on their own thoughts, feelings and emotions (Bernstein, 1984; Barich and Kotler, 1991; O’Sullivan, 1983 cited in Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011). Whereas corporate reputation is the views all the stakeholders have about a company based on the picture the corporation has portrayed over the years (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990 cited in Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011, p. 1417). Since corporate image could not be examined without the use of specific companies, they used a fast food company and an automotive corporation to conduct their interviews, having a total of 389 respondents (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011). The study underlines that CCI leads to an increased positive corporate image (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011). Additionally, they highlight that the perceived similarity with other consumers also leads to a greater attachment with the company (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011).

Other researchers declare that the most important factor is neither attractiveness nor embeddedness but ‘identity salience’. The literature states that a person has many identities at any given time, however, there is always one dominant identity that is prominent in a consumer’s identity and, thus, that particular identity is the one that identifies with the organisation (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Pratt, 2000; Scott and Lane, 2000). Chattman (1991) states that the main reason that identification occurs is due to the fact that the values portrayed in the organisations identity are congruent with the consumers’ values. Elbedweihy et al. (2016) explore how brand attractiveness and identification affect consumers’ values and the role of value congruence as a consequence. They define ‘consumer-brand congruence’ in accordance with Edwards and Cable (2009) as the similitude of the consumers’ values with the values of the company, which means that there is a similarity in identity between the two. Their findings reveal that consumers’ values play an important role when identifying with a company as it expresses their authenticity and distinctiveness, thus it is a reason as to why they decide to identify with companies (Elbedweihy et al., 2016).

2.4.3 Consumer-Company Identification and Negative Publicity

A study that examines both negative publicity and consumer-company identification is that of Einwiller et al. (2006); in their study they argue that consumer-company identification is an important construct when consumers evaluate negative publicity incidents. They define ‘consumer-company identification’ as how much a company’s identity matches a consumer’s identity (Einwiller et al., 2006, p.186). They test how consumers with low or high company identification respond to unfavourable publicity (Einwiller et al., 2006). In order to test this, they employed quantitative techniques and specifically questionnaires (Einwiller et al., 2006). They provided the participants with a fictitious negative publicity example of ‘Conscious Funds’, which was supposedly perceived as a highly corporate responsible corporation (Einwiller et al., 2006, p.186). This, however, does entail some limitations; for example, with a fictitious scenario interviewees may not be able to relate as much. The findings highlight that consumers who carry a high identification with a company do not take into account adverse information and have more positive intentions and attitudes towards the company as opposed to low identified consumers (Einwiller et al., 2006, p.186). The reasoning for this is due to the fact that highly identified consumers want to protect themselves and they are more

biased and want to reach their own desired conclusions (Einwiller et al., 2006, p.192). However, they also postulate that this is only the case when the adverse event is not extremely serious (Einwiller et al., 2006). In the event of an extreme negative publicity scenario, both types of consumers have the same adverse response; they are less willing to invest in the firm and both withhold unfavourable attitudes (Einwiller et al., 2006). In a similar vein, Liu, Wang and Wu (2009), who conducted an experiment with Carrefour as a fictitious negative publicity case study, declare that consumers who identify weakly with a corporation and those who have high sensitivity to corporate performance express adverse attitudes after negative publicity as opposed to strongly-identified consumers and low sensitivity consumers (Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009). However, they also proclaim that these behaviours are again subject to the event not being extremely serious (Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009). A serious event, for example, is considered as Carrefour changing the expiration dates on the products it sells, thus endangering consumers' health (Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009).

Both the Einwiller et al. (2006) and Liu et al. (2009)'s studies have elements that make them less robust, for example, they present consumers as highly rationalised and do not include 'an emotional component for the consumer-company relationship' (Einwiller et al., 2006, p.192), which is an important construct for such a study as emotions are a key determinant of one's actions (Bagozzi, 1995; Watson and Spence, 2007), therefore, it is an aspect that the current thesis focuses on. Additionally, they were both conducted in the form of an experiment; particularly Einwiller et al. (2006) asked their participants to imagine themselves in a scenario (Einwiller et al., 2006) and this resulted into not having naturalistic outcomes since they made participants imagine a situation. Therefore, this study conducted is based on a real case (Chick-fil-A) in order to better comprehend consumers' naturalistic reactions and behaviours towards adverse publicity.

Another study that explores negative publicity and consumer-company identification is Einwiller et al. (2019). In contrast to prior research that explores consumer-company identification due to a company's identity (Einwiller et al., 2006; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009), they explore consumers' identification based on a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and how this type of identifications affects consumers' behaviours (Einwiller et al., 2019). They attest that CSR involves mainly the morals of a company (Mishina, Block and

Mannor, 2011). The premise of this identification is based on how the company decides to position its brand for example Patagonia's positioning expresses their environmental concerns and values (hence CSR identification), whereas Alfa-Romeo focuses purely on corporate attributes (CA) identification by campaigning the excitement of driving (Einwiller et al., 2019). They argue that although consumers are more exposed to CA based identification, corporate social responsibility (CSR) based identification (morality based) has a greater effect on consumers and consumers who can relate more to this type of identification (Einwiller et al., 2019); hence indicating the importance of CSR-based identification and selecting this type of identification for this thesis.

Einwiller et al. (2019) employed two studies, the first one involved a firm called Ecoworld which were presented as a socially responsible company (testing CSR-based identification) and presented participants with a no negative publicity scenario, a negative CSR-related one and a negative CA-related one (Einwiller et al., 2019). The second study involved quantitative surveys and Volkswagen was explored as it was promoted heavily as an environmentally friendly corporation (potential CSR-related identification) and was caught up in an unethical emissions scandal in 2015 (the organisation faked the emission levels in the cars they were producing) (Einwiller et al., 2019). The study recognises that in contrast to previous findings CSR does not work as a buffer to negative publicity and only makes things worse (Einwiller et al., 2019). When consumers decide to identify with brands due to their CSR policies and ideology and the negative publicity event that emerges involves those very CSR principles, then consumers feel that their 'self-concept of morality' is under threat and it no longer aligns with the company's identity (Einwiller et al., 2019). Findings also reveal that when a company's identification is based on CA principles and the transgression is still moral, no changes to consumer behaviour occur (Einwiller et al., 2019). Additionally, identified consumers tend to feel a sense of betrayal and so decide to enforce negative word of mouth against the firm (Einwiller et al., 2019). Einwiller et al. (2019) mention that perceived betrayal may not be the only reason for these negative behaviours eventuating; and it may also be perhaps due to a form of disconnection from the corporation and that consumers may be thinking about how other people perceive them, and so this calls for more research around the area of disidentification, which is a concept which is further explored in

this study. Additionally, the emotional aspect is not present in their study either, indicating again a gap within the literature.

Lisjak, Lee and Gardner (2012) are amongst other researchers who explore the role of identification in cases of negative publicity. However, they adopt a novel lens, which is treating the company as part of the extended self and not as a friend or business partner (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011). They specifically examine how identified consumers respond to when a company is experiencing a crisis and so it is under threat (Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012). They focus on the extended self-concept that goes beyond the individual self and its attributes and incorporates other people, material objects and nonsocial material objects such as brands as part of the self (Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012). They conducted four surveys with various brands, such as Starbucks and Facebook experiencing negative publicity, and examined how individuals who identify with brands respond to adverse publicity and the role of self-esteem and self-activation (Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012). Two types of self-esteem are explored in the study, implicit self-esteem which includes how people intuitively make judgements about themselves according to implicit measures (Greenwald, Nosek, Banaji, 2003; Koole and DeHart, 2007) and explicit self-esteem which refers to how one reaches judgements in relation to the self-based on reasoning (Rosenberg, 1965 cited in Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012, p. 1122).

Furthermore, the self-concept refers to the activation of self and having the tendency to focus on evaluating the self and so typically one perceives information in regard to the self as more important than any other information (Duval and Wicklund, 1972; Carver and Scheier, 1981; cited in Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012). The sample consisted of a total of 365 university students (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, (2012) reveal that when a brand is under threat, then consumers who highly identify with a brand and have low self-esteem are more likely to defend it (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). This highlights that consumers who identify with the brand take the threat personally as they see the brand as part of their extended self and as if their own identity is under attack and so a defensive response is in place (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). A study conducted by Cheng, White and Chaplin (2011) reveal similar findings, again using experiments with a sample of students and using Blackberry as their company under scrutiny. The findings underline that consumers

who highly identify with a brand defend it when it experiences negative events due to the fact that the brand is seen as the extension of self and brand failure is perceived as a personal failure (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011). Stated simply, identified consumers defend brands to maintain their positive self-image and view (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011). Previous literature has identified the importance of consumer-company identification in cases of negative publicity and has highlighted the crucial role it plays; hence why this theory was selected for this thesis. However, this theory was studied alone and only the cognitive element was considered in these studies, omitting the emotional component, which is equally important in decision making; hence this study adding the emotional component. Additionally, this concept was explored in an offline context and so exploring this concept in an online context means that there are different elements to consider and so it can lead to an advancement of the theory.

2.4.4 Consumer-Company Identification and Negative Publicity Summary

There are various studies that also explore how consumer-company identification affects consumers in cases of negative publicity offline. These studies explore consumer-company identification from different angles. Einwiller et al. (2006) examine how lowly and highly identified consumers respond to negative publicity. Their study reveals that highly identified consumers do not take the negative event into account and their intentions and attitudes remain positive however the opposite occurs with the lowly identified consumers (Einwiller et al., 2006). They further declare that highly identified consumers do not take the event into account in order to protect themselves as they want to reach their own conclusions (Einwiller et al., 2006). The study also argues that when the event is extremely severe both types of consumers form negative attitudes against the company (Einwiller et al., 2006). Liu, Wang and Wu (2009) also unveil similar findings. Einwiller et al. (2019) also explore consumer-company identification but from a different perspective, they explore consumers' identification based on a company's CSR and how this type of identification affects consumers' behaviours. Their findings reveal that when a consumer identifies with a company based on its CSR principles and the negative event involves those principles they view that their 'self-concept of morality' is under threat and so enforce negative word of mouth against the organisation (Einwiller et al., 2019). Lisjak, Lee and Gardner (2012) also

explore consumer-company identification from a different perspective, treating the company as part of the extended self. Their study uncovers that when a company is under threat, consumers who identify with it defend it as a means of protecting their extension of self. Thus, it is evident that these studies emphasise on the cognitive connection a consumer has with the company and neglect the emotional aspect and the role of consumers' emotions in cases of negative publicity. Additionally, these studies focus on the offline context, neglecting the online element. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how both consumers' emotional and cognitive reactions affect the consumer-company relationship after a company encounters negative publicity online.

2.4.5 Consumer-Company Identification Theory Rationale

Prior studies exploring negative publicity have mostly examined the emotional connection a consumer has with the company for example brand attachment and brand loyalty (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Bowen et al., 2018). Thus, when looking at which theory would help guide the cognitive aspect of this study the researcher decided to explore the cognitive connection a consumer has with the company in the context of negative publicity as it is under-researched. The theoretical underpinning of consumer-company identification theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) is the social identity theory which refers to cognitive procedures that allow mass actions (Turner, 1982 cited in Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Additionally, Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) define organisational identification as a 'cognitive connection' in which an individual's self-concept seems to carry the same characteristics with an organisation's identity. Therefore, it is argued that consumer-company identification involves a cognitive connection a consumer experiences with a company. Thus, it seemed an appropriate theory to use in order to explore the cognitive aspect of this thesis. Moreover, the studies that explore solely the cognitive connection a consumer has with the company use the consumer-company identification theory (Einwiller et al., 2006; Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012; Einwiller et al, 2019); highlighting its usefulness for this study also. These studies uncover the importance of a consumers' social identity in cases of negative publicity (Einwiller et al., 2006; Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012; Einwiller et al, 2019). Therefore, it is expected to be a useful theory for this thesis also as this thesis aims to explore how a consumer's social identity affects consumers in cases of negative publicity.

Additionally, previous studies have used this theory when examining negative publicity in the offline context (Einwiller et al., 2006; Lisjak, Lee and Gardner, 2012; Einwiller et al, 2019), exploring this theory in the online context may uncover new insights regarding a consumers' social identity online, hence another reason for selecting this theory.

2.4.6 Consumer-Brand Disidentification Distinction

The consumer behaviour literature has also explored the weak and negative ties consumers have with brands. Early research has developed concepts such as aversion, brand avoidance, brand hatred, which are all constructs that focus on the emotional aspect of the self and the rejection a consumer has with a brand on an emotional level (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Johnson, Matear and Thomson, 2011; Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013). However, recently concepts such as consumer disidentification and consumer-brand identification have emerged that focus on the cognitive dismissal of the brand so these concepts are widely based on reasoning as opposed to emotion (Josiassen, 2011; Wolter et al., 2016). The table below (Table 2.3) distinguishes the concept of consumer-brand disidentification to other similar concepts such as attachment/aversion, brand avoidance, brand hatred, consumer-brand non-identification and consumer disidentification.

Table 2.3. CBD Distinction

Constructs	Definition	Disidentificaion Distinctions	Respective Literature
Attachment/Aversion	The detachment and difference perceived between the brand and the self	Aversion typically focuses on solely the distance between the brand and the self whereas CBD "focuses on a cognitive and active rejection of the brand"	Park et al., 2013
Brand Avoidance	This occurs as a result of negative events that the consumer has experienced with the brand and so then purposefully decides to reject the brand	The rejection of the brand in this cases is due reasons beyond the consumers' identity	Lee et al., 2009
Brand Hatred	This does not only refer to rejecting the brand but the consumer also wanting to damage it in some way	This concept is purely emotional whereas CBD is purely cognitive	Allsion, Matera and Thompson, 2011
Consumer-brand non-identification	Where a consumer cannot see themselves in a brand (lack of self-definition)	This is a state in which a consumer does not find themselves in the brand neither via association and disassociation and simply avoids it as a whole	Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004
Consumer Disidentification	"Consumers' active rejection of and distancing from the perceived typical domestic consumer"	"Consumer disidentification focuses on a typical domestic consumer whereas CBD focuses on a brand"	Josiassen, 2011
Consumer Brand Disidentification (CBI)	"A consumers' active, cognitive rejection of a brand"		Wolter et al., 2016

One of the first studies to explore the concept of disidentification was Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001, p. 393) and they specifically explored the consumer 'cognitive relationship with the National Rifle Association (NRA)'. Disidentification is known in social psychology as cognitively rejecting groups that do not define the self (Steele and Aronson, 1982; Brewer, 1991). Research in social psychology proposes that individuals do not want to be associated with groups that carry offensive stereotypes (Aronson, 1995 cited in Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 394). Furthermore, Fromkin (1980 cited in Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 394) propose individuals dissociate from groups that do have a distinctive character even if they seem to have a good reputation. Additionally, the research in social psychology states that when people who do not identify to a great extent with a group and a negative event emerges, they may disidentify with that given group as the identity of the group and their personal identity do not match and so they feel that their identity is under threat (Ellemers et al., 1999 cited in Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 394).

In light of this information, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) in their first study used focus groups in order to clearly define the concept of organisational identification; the other two focus groups were done in order to identify what leads to organisational disidentification (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). The NRA was the firm examined as it caused controversy as an organisation associated with topics in relation to violence and use of weaponry (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 396). According to their findings, they define organisational disidentification as how an individual perceives oneself on the basis that a consumer cognitively rejects their identity with the perceived identity of the organisation (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 397). This definition suggests that disidentification occurs because the consumer believes that the company's attributes and their personal attributes do not match (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). In addition to this, Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001, p. 397) distinguish disidentification with 'cognitive apathy towards the organisation' as the latter suggests that the individual neither associates nor disassociates with the organisation (i.e. nonidentification). The data highlights that identification and disidentification are not opposite concepts; however they are negatively correlated (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). Moreover, the antecedents relating to the 'identity enhancement and affirmation' of

organisational disidentification seem to be a perception of dissension in the values of the organisation and the individual and so disidentification occurs due to an incongruence of values (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 399). Furthermore, another antecedent is a belief that an organisation's reputation may affect the individual. In this case respondents expressed their disidentification with the NRA as it withholds a negative reputation and this would affect their social identity negatively and they wanted to keep a favourable sense of their self (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 400). Another insight from that the study reveals is that organisational disidentification occurs due to a lack of experience and interaction with the organisation (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). Finally, the findings revealed that boycotts, migrating to another company and public criticism are likely outcomes of organisational disidentification (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001).

Bhattacharya and Elsbach (2002) in their follow-up study in relation to organisational identification establish the differences between the two different groups of identifiers and disidentifiers. Bhattacharya and Elsbach (2002) expostulate that although identification and disidentification are understood via the 'same theoretical lens (i.e. social identity perspective)', they are two different concepts and identification occurs due to consumer-company similarity whereas the latter occurs due to consumer-company dissimilarity. They make an important distinction between 'organisational identification' and 'organisational disidentification'. They express that organisational identification occurs due the fact that an individual has the need to enhance their identity whereas disidentification occurs to both enhancement and to maintain their identity (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002, p.26). They explore various constructs and how they affect identification and disidentification such as the role of values, the role of personal experience a person may have with the organisation, organisational reputation and also how consumers react upon these (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002). Conducting a survey with 405 participants and using the NRA as a company reference, they similarly discover, as with their previous study, that disidentification is a way for consumers to express their extended self to the public and portray positive social identities (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002, p. 33). The revelation of their study is that value incongruence mainly occurs due to the perceived reputation the company has (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002). Although being a very insightful study for a new concept in Marketing, these studies do have some limitations which mean that greater research is needed around this

concept in order to be further developed. For example, their study focused only on an organisation's identity and did not look at specific events (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001), thus the researcher chose Chick-fil-A which encountered negative publicity events.

2.4.7 Consumer-Brand Disidentification (CBD)

The concept of organisational disidentification has been further developed by Wolter et al. (2016) and has been named 'consumer-brand disidentification' (CBD). They define CBD as a rejection made cognitively due to the fact that the brand's identity and values do not match that of the consumer and so the self is not portrayed correctly (Wolter et al., 2016). The purpose of their study was to explore this concept further, how it affects consumers and their relationships with brands and also what type of corporate attributes manifest consumer-brand disidentification. They conducted an online survey with 1,253 participants with different beer brands '(e.g. Budweiser, Bud Lite, Coors Light, Miller Lite, Heineken, Guinness and Corona)' as they wanted the respondents to be familiar with the product chosen (Wolter et al., 2016, p. 789). The analysis uncovered that disidentification is a way for the consumer to expel the brand, protect his/her social identity and further results in negative word of mouth (Wolter et al., 2016). Furthermore, the research highlights another reason disidentification occurs is that consumers consider the negative connotations a brand may have on their identity (Wolter et al., 2016). Their study focuses on products, hence why the researcher selected a company that provides services (i.e. Chick-fil-A), to allow additional insights. Additionally, as this is an underexplored concept, qualitative research seems to be more appropriate in order to advance the theory as qualitative research involves more in-depth descriptions (Fisher and Smith, 2011).

Social identity threat is an emerging concept in Marketing that is associated with consumer-brand disidentification so additional research is needed around this area to reveal additional insights around this notion. Identity threat is experienced when an individual's in-group is negatively criticised and so the status of that group is somehow compromised (Bartel, 2001). White and Argo (2009) state that important to social identity threat is the 'collective self-esteem', is this refers to to the extent a person sees themselves as a notable member of a social group and perceives the social identity as valuable and important to the self (Luhtanne

and Crocker, 1992). Their study generally revealed that consumers who have low collective self-esteem tend to avoid brands that may threaten their identity and people with high collective self-esteem tend to support the respective brands (White and Argo, 2009). Identity threat is also closely related to a threat in an individual's self-worth (White and Argo, 2009).

2.5 The Research Gap

Overall, the research gap seems to be apparent, in that cognitive and emotional factors have not been extensively researched together in the context of negative publicity online and, in turn, how these two together affect consumers' behaviours and the consumer-company relationship. Prior research that has explored negative publicity is mainly firm-centric and explores how companies should respond to negative publicity (Xie and Peng, 2000; Klein and Dawar, 2004), but fails to address how companies should respond to a crisis according to consumers' emotions and cognitions. Furthermore, consumer-centric research only focuses on how consumers respond to negative publicity (i.e. if they take into account the negative information (from the media) about the company or not) (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Einwiller et al., 2006; Monga and John, 2008; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009). Most studies have failed to acknowledge how consumers actually react to negative publicity, their thoughts and their emotions (e.g. anger, compassion, *schadenfreude*) and also their actual behaviours (e.g. revenge, avoidance, repair relationship etc.). Additionally, previous research classifies consumers according to different categories (e.g. analytic thinking versus holistic thinking, experienced versus inexperienced consumers, highly committed versus lowly committed consumers); (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Einwiller et al., 2006; Monga and John, 2008; Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009) and thus presenting consumers as either rational decision makers or taking making decisions according to emotions felt, failing to acknowledge both together. Highlighting again the need for both to be further explored in this area.

Therefore, the researcher uses Haidt's (2003) moral emotions theory in conjunction with the consumer-company identification theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) in order to better comprehend how consumers feel and react towards negative publicity. These two theories were mainly selected as they have been examined in this context previously and have aided in

uncovering novel elements in this area; however, they were examined on a separate basis (emotion and cognition were treated separately) and so on this basis the end actions may vary when both elements are considered. Additionally, the role of social identity and moral identity are both neglected in the aforementioned studies, although they have been proven to be an important basis for an individual's behaviour (Markus, 1977; Aquino and Reed, 2002). Given their importance, and that both consumer-company identification and moral emotions theories have these two identities as their theoretical underpinnings, they were assessed as suitable in order to fill the aforementioned research gap (Xie, Bagozzi and Gronhaug, 2015). Finally, as presented above, all the studies that have explored negative publicity have only used quantitative methods and specifically experiments, failing to acquire in-depth descriptions from consumers and also failing to achieve findings based on reactions towards a real event. For this purpose, the researcher conducted this study using qualitative methods, and specifically netnography, thus acquiring more in-depth findings. The findings are expected to be particularly useful to public reputation managers, crisis communications managers as the researcher intends to provide recommendations to companies as to how they might repair relationships that have been broken after negative publicity. Furthermore, the findings may be of particular interest to academics in marketing, sociology and psychology as moral emotions and consumer-company identification have received little attention in this context and there may be additional insights that have not emerged before in prior research. The figure below (Figure 2.1) addresses the research gap. The literature that is examined in the context of negative publicity is highlighted. Additionally, the research that has combined negative publicity and moral emotions and negative publicity and consumer-company identification is presented. The diagram clearly indicates that moral emotions and consumer-company identification have not been researched together in the past, and also negative publicity along with these two concepts have not been researched all together in the past, hence the research gap of this thesis. It is, therefore, evident from the diagram that it is not known how consumers' moral emotions along with the level of identification with the company affect consumers in cases of online negative publicity and the relationship the consumer has with the company post negative publicity, hence the aim of this study.

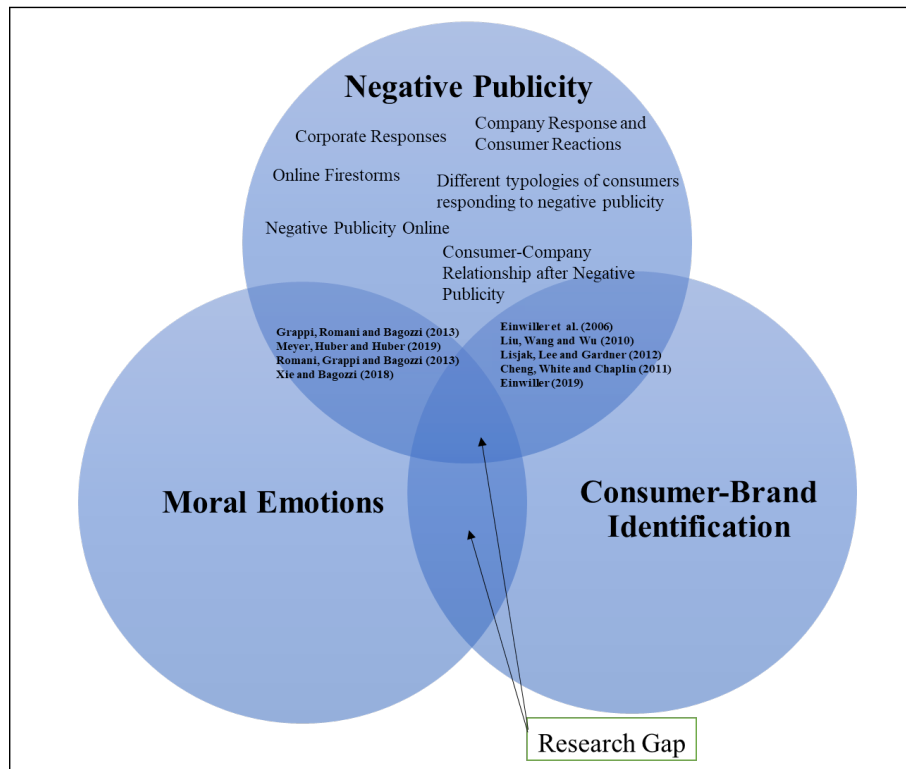


Figure 2.1. Addressing the Research Gap

2.5.1 Research Aim and Research Questions

Taking the above into consideration, the following research questions were crafted.

The overall aim of this study is:

This research aims to better understand how consumers react to online negative publicity, both cognitively and emotionally and also understand the nature of the consumer-company relationship after the negative event. This can help companies to respond more effectively to negative publicity created online (and perhaps with different strategies as they would use offline). In order to achieve this aim the researcher acknowledged previous research that was conducted in an offline setting and found emotions (emotional) and consumer-company identification (cognitive) to be key concepts in such circumstances, and so the researcher decided to explore these aspects together in an online setting as these two theories have not

been researched together before.

In order to achieve this research aim and address the limitations of previous work, the following research questions have been identified for this study:

Research Question 1: What are the emotions that consumers encounter when faced with negative publicity online and how does it affect the way consumers react towards the company?

In order to answer this research question, the researcher explores the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and the role of an individuals' moral identity, which is where the theory derives from. Negative emotions such as anger and disgust and positive emotions such as compassion are explored in order to see their impact and to what extent these emotions affect consumers' reactions and behaviours.

Research Question 2: How do consumers' cognitions and identification with a company affect their actions towards a company encountering negative publicity online?

This research question seeks to find out the role of consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) in cases of negative publicity and how it affects consumers' behaviours. Additionally, the role of social identity is also key as it is the basis of the consumer-company identification theory. The researcher aims to discover how a consumer's cognitions along with moral emotions affect his/her final actions after a negative event occurs.

Research Question 3: How does an immediate corporate response after a negative event affect consumers' emotions and behaviours towards the company and how can organisations better respond to negative publicity?

Taking into consideration the two main concepts stated above, moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), this research question aims to answer how these affect consumers after a company has responded to negative publicity. Thus, the aim is to achieve better clarity as to which response strategies work more effectively in cases of negative publicity created online.

2.6 Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has reviewed and criticised three different streams of literature, namely, negative publicity, moral emotions and consumer-company identification. The two key theories that are used to guide the data collection and the analysis, consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and moral emotions theory (Haidt, 2003), are also reviewed. In this chapter, the gaps within the literature have been identified and the researcher clearly points out how this thesis aims to address them. It is evident from this review that consumers' emotions and cognitions have not been extensively researched in conjunction with one another in the context of negative publicity before. Thus, it is not clear how consumers fully process negative publicity and the nature of their relationship with the company after a negative event emerges; hence, the aim of this thesis. The following chapter explains the methodology approach this research followed in order to conduct the study.

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology undertaken in this research. Firstly, in section 3.2 the research philosophical grounds are set and the epistemological and ontological considerations are explained and articulated. Section 3.3 follows where a discussion as to why a qualitative method was selected against quantitative methods. Netnography, which was the research method selected for this research is explained and justified and the process the researcher went through to undertake the study is thoroughly demonstrated. The method of analysis, thematic analysis, is clearly articulated and the validity of the research is also justified. Finally, section 3.5 provides a summary of this chapter and outlines the following chapter.

3.2 Research Philosophy

3.2.1 Epistemological Considerations

Epistemology refers to what is considered justifiable knowledge in accordance with the researcher's views (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). There are two main epistemological considerations, and these are positivism and interpretivism (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 15). Positivism affirms that robust data emerges via only phenomena that are observed and mainly focuses on 'causality, law-like generalizations and reducing phenomena to simplest elements' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.140). Furthermore, the researcher is required to be distant from the subject observed and collect and analyse the data via an objective lens (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.29). Additionally, it is argued that positivism is mainly deductive, and thus the purpose is to falsify or verify existing theories (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Positivism is guided by established theories (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012) and uses theories in order to construct hypotheses that are examined and then evaluated (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 15). Therefore, a positivist approach is usually utilised for quantitative studies in order to generate theory (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012). Subsequently, it is attested that the most common methods to achieve this is via surveys and

experimental designs (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012). The fact that under this epistemology the researcher requires to have limited contact with the subject observed although it signifies objectivity (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.29), it means that the researcher cannot immerse himself in the data and cannot observe how consumers feel, and most importantly, observe why they feel they way they do (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Thus, this epistemology was rejected for this thesis as these aspects are important for this thesis. Another reason this epistemology was rejected was because positivism calls for a deductive approach, which means the researcher needs to verify or falsify a theory (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012; Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012). The aim of this thesis is to provide new insights as to how consumers react to online negative publicity and inductively generate theory from the data, thus allowing for new insights in regard to this topic to emerge. Additionally, all the studies in the context of negative publicity mentioned in the literature review have used a positivistic approach since they used the theories in order to generate a hypothesis and the studies were conducted in the form of experiments and surveys. Hence, highlighting the need for an alternative approach (and in this case an interpretivist one) in order to uncover new insights in regard to this topic that have not been considered previously. Via this epistemological lens, new data is expected to emerge in regard to the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity online. Additionally, positivism carries many disadvantages and has accepted criticisms from researchers as to why it should not be the angle a researcher views and sees his/her work. Some researchers argue that this perspective forces researchers to 'either modify their philosophical criteria and/or to cite in extenuation, some feature of the social world to account for this gap between philosophical theory and substantive practice' (Bhaskar, 2016, p.124). Therefore, underlining the usefulness of interpretivism as it is not so restrictive and allows for more data to emerge.

Interpretivism is inductive and thus a theoretical framework is mainly used to help the researcher build on existing theories as opposed to guiding the research and validating/falsifying a theory (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Additionally, in interpretivist studies the issues that the study focuses on usually emerge from the data, important themes are identified and then analysed (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012). Interpretivism declares that the role of the researcher is to articulate how humans interact, identify their similarities and differences and establish their role in the

society, which mainly includes understanding human behaviours (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.137). As opposed to positivism, interpretivism emphasises on subjectivity, extensive details of a circumstance and underlying reasoning behind these details (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.137). Furthermore, interpretivism provides greater explanations as to what is going on, in contrast to positivism that does not allow this and limits a research design (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Additionally, the main data collection method used with this approach is the qualitative method (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Due to the fact that this epistemology focuses on human interactions and establishes their similarities and differences, this emphasises the usefulness of the use of this epistemology for this research as it mainly focuses on consumers' emotions and behaviours towards a company after it encounters negative publicity. Moreover, as the objective of this study is to understand the reason consumers behave the way they do and by researching their emotions and their actions, this epistemology seems appropriate as it emphasises on underlying reasoning and extensive explanations. Finally, this epistemology is compatible with qualitative research, hence the use of a netnographic study for this thesis. One of the stated drawbacks of this epistemology is the fact that it is known to be subjective as the researcher is immersed in the data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.140). In order to avoid any kind of bias and establish validity, the data was measured via inter-coder reliability (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020) meaning that the codes and themes were also checked by colleagues in order to achieve objectivity within the interpretation of the data.

3.2.2 Ontological Considerations

Ontology refers to 'the nature of reality' and how researchers view the world and the way it works (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.130). Two main ontologies were considered for this thesis; naturalism and constructionism. Naturalism emphasises on the facts of the phenomenon being studied and are presented in an objective manner (Silverman, 2000, p. 137). It consists of getting involved in the setting, building rapport, document observations and then presenting the findings objectively (Silverman, 2000). Gubrium and Holsten (1997 cited in Silverman, 2000, p. 137) argue that researchers who adopt this approach 'lose sight of the border as a region where reality is constituted within representation'. This suggests that naturalists do not take into consideration how individuals make meaning of their actions in

life and they are simply viewed as data origins with lack of interpretation (Gubrium and Holsten, 1997 cited in Silverman, 2000, p. 137). Consequently, this ontology was rejected as it was not seen as suitable for this thesis, as it is equally important to understand why consumers behave the way they do and not just how they behave. In order to achieve this, constructionist ontology was assessed as a more appropriate approach to undertake this research. In contrast to the naturalistic ontology that seeks to answer what is happening in a social reality, the constructionist approach seeks to answer questions in regard to how social realities are constituted and maintained (Silverman, 2000, p. 137). Additionally, instead of getting into a social reality, a constructionist perspective means that a researcher solely describes the reality and is not a part of it (Silverman, 2000, p. 137). Hence the choice of this ontology, as the researcher of this thesis just observed the comments and immersed himself in the data and did not take part in the interactions going on online. Constructionism has many characteristics, which make it a useful ontology for netnographic studies and qualitative studies in general. The constructionist ontology appreciates the ontological perspective of naturalism and the need to find out what is happening, however, it takes this a step further by understanding ‘how these what’s are sustained as realities of everyday life’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). Additionally, it aims to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). Also, its main focus is human interaction and trying to make sense of the exchanges between individuals (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008), which is one of the elements that this netnographic study emphasises, looking at the interactions between consumers online. Overall, this ontology mainly involves understanding humans, their behaviours and their interactions with one another (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). Therefore, this ontology seems a perfect fit with the aim of the study, which is to better understand consumers’ emotions and reactions after online negative publicity and the nature of their relationship with the company after the negative event.

3.3 Research Methodology

3.3.1 Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research

The following section discusses the differences between qualitative and quantitative research and why a qualitative approach was adopted for this thesis. Quantitative research is broadly

defined as a research method that is heavily based on statistical analysis and seeks to make meaning of data via quantifiable measures (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012, p.187). A quantitative approach entails examining existing theories and testing variables and the relationship amongst them (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018, p. 4). The variables are tested and numerical data is analysed via statistical methods (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). In quantitative research, theories are typically tested deductively; objectivity and avoiding bias are key components and a researcher should ensure the data can be generalised and replicated (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). Quantitative research has issues that cannot be easily tackled and, therefore, qualitative research in such cases seems to be a superior method to use.

Quantitative research was considered however it was rejected as qualitative research seemed more appropriate in order to meet the research aims of this study. It is argued that in cases of quantitative research the participants may not have high relevance or connection to the topic and which may not affect their everyday lives to a great extent thus data may not be as reliable (Bryman, 2016). Hence, netnography (a qualitative research method) was selected in order to allow accurate data to emerge from the participants. As the data is guided by participants, the chances of inaccurate data are minute. Additionally, netnography allows for more accurate findings as consumers comment online on a topic that is important to them and express their true views on the subject. Another reason that quantitative research was rejected is because it seems to be more artificial, the setting is generated by the researcher and the subjects and variables are mostly under the control of the researcher (Hammersley, 1992). Qualitative research methods (and specifically netnography) were selected for this research as netnography occurs naturally online without the researcher's presence (in most cases), and the researcher does not affect the research in any way and allows for instinct behaviours to occur (Hammersley, 1992). Additionally, it is attested that the fact that items are not established by the researcher in advance, it allows the research to emphasise on people's views about the issues explored (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.24). This is particularly important for research in topics around consumer behaviour such as the topic explored in this thesis, as it allows natural consumers' behaviours and not framed ones, hence the choice of this method for this study. Furthermore, the fact that qualitative research is not framed allows aspects to emerge that have not been thought of before and, thus, allows for new insights into a

phenomenon to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 24). Since the majority of studies in the context of negative publicity have used quantitative methods this did not allow for great insights to emerge regarding consumers' intuitive emotions and behaviours, hence selecting a qualitative method for this study. Additionally, previous studies have not looked in depth at the relationship between the consumer and the company after negative publicity, thus this thesis aims to achieve this with a qualitative methodology as it focuses on making meaning from behaviours (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Additionally, quantitative research typically focuses on just attitudes and behaviours and does not seek to find meaning behind these behaviours (Hammersley, 1992). Given that one of the research questions of this study is to understand how consumers respond to negative publicity online and further attribute meaning to these behaviours and actions, qualitative research was assessed as more suitable for this thesis. This is mainly because qualitative research seeks to find meaning behind consumers' behaviours (Hammersley, 1992).

Qualitative research is broadly defined as a method that is used to provide deep insights into a phenomenon; it is mainly exploratory and typically entails a small sample size (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012). Qualitative research is a way to explore and comprehend how people make meaning of phenomena and problems (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018, p. 4). It usually includes data collection in the respondents' environment, the data is traditionally analysed inductively, general themes are formed to shape the data, and then the researcher is called to make interpretations of the data (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). The focus of qualitative research is on how individuals attribute meaning and how they understand certain compound situations (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018, p. 4). Qualitative research emphasises on peoples' views about the issues explored, and thus it is more inductive (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.24). This is particularly important for this study as it wants to examine consumers' intuitive emotions after a company encounters negative publicity online, and thus examine consumers' natural behaviours and not framed ones. Furthermore, the fact that qualitative research is not framed allows for aspects to emerge that have not been thought of before, and thus allows for new insights into a phenomenon to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.24).

Another reason that a qualitative perspective was assessed as more appropriate for this thesis is the fact that qualitative research is helpful for following how events unravel with the

passage of time and connections are allowed to be made as to participants' interactions (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This means that it is easier to capture data over a longer period of time and make meaning of interactions between participants. This was an important element for this study as the researcher wanted to examine the negative publicity event over the course of time. Therefore, since the aim of the research is to discover how consumers respond to negative publicity online and provide insights as to the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity, this method was assessed as more appropriate.

The following section focuses on the sole benefits of a qualitative methodology and further supports the reasons this research method was selected and seemed compatible with the scope of the study. Qualitative research has many advantages which are difficult to find in quantitative research and these are the main reasons why qualitative research was selected. For example, qualitative methods can help determine the role of context in consumer behaviour, since it acquires a holistic idea of the context in which the phenomenon takes place (Malhotra, Birks and Wills, 2012, p. 190). Moreover, qualitative methods help unravel and explain the role of a participants' identity as to his/her actions and behaviours (Gummesson, 2006). This was particularly useful for this thesis as the role of a consumers' moral identity and social identity was examined and helped uncover new findings. However, criticisms have been identified regarding using a qualitative approach. One common critique is the fact that qualitative research is subjective and relies heavily on the researcher's own views (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This was overcome by measuring the inter-coder reliability (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020), meaning that the researcher's colleagues had a look at the data also and allocated relevant themes and an inter-coder reliability score based on the number of themes we independently agreed upon. In addition to this, another common critique is the fact that it is challenging to replicate the research as there are not any set procedures in place (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 15). In order to overcome this issue, the stages that this research has followed were stated precisely in order for future researchers to be able to follow a similar path. Another criticism is the fact that there seems to be no lucidity and it is not entirely clear how the data is analysed and how the researcher reaches certain conclusions (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 409). In order to overcome this issue, the data analysis procedure was clearly outlined in order to make the research transparent and make apparent the conclusions reached.

Many studies in management and marketing have used qualitative methods in order to help them uncover useful insights. Huy (2002) conducted a study using Servico as a case study and interviewed company employees in order to examine if in a time of a corporate transformation, if the level of productivity of employees changes when middle managers manage the emotional states of the employees. The interviews helped uncover useful emotion-regulation strategies and how managers can better handle employees' emotional states (Huy, 2002). This underlines the usefulness of qualitative methods and how via qualitative methods helpful implications for organisations emerge. Another study that helped uncover the usefulness of qualitative methods is the one of Mardon, Molesworth and Grigore (2018). The study used netnography to explore an online consumer tribe on YouTube named 'Beauty Tribe' and explores how emotional labour affects tribal entrepreneurship success; specifically the study looks at how moral emotions affect tribal entrepreneurs (Mardon, Molesworth and Grigore, 2018). Due to the fact that their study was conducted online helped to uncover new insights in regard to Hochschild's (1983) emotional labour theory (Mardon, Molesworth and Grigore, 2018), which highlights the usefulness of netnographic studies in advancing theories. Furthermore, netnography and the use of moral emotions theory aided in uncovering why consumer tribes behave in the way they do (Mardon, Molesworth and Grigore, 2018), hence the use of both netnography and moral emotions in this thesis also.

In the context of negative publicity, one of the very few studies conducted in a qualitative manner is the one of Scholz and Smith (2019). The table below (Table 3.1) helps to underline the key differences between two studies that were undertaken in the context of negative publicity; one being conducted quantitatively (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013) and the other being conducted qualitatively (Scholz and Smith, 2019). The table clearly outlines the usefulness of both methods; however, it is apparent that for this context a qualitative method, and specifically netnography, was more appropriate. This is due to the fact that Scholz and Smith (2019) uncovered useful practical implications as consumers' behaviours were analysed in depth and a real phenomenon was explored. Additionally, new concepts emerged in their study such as flyting (Scholz and Smith, 2019), which highlights the usefulness once again of this method in discovering new concepts and theories. Moreover, it helped identify the role of identity in online firestorms (Scholz and Smith, 2019), which highlights the usefulness of netnography for this thesis also as the role of a consumers' identity is an

important construct of this thesis. Finally, it allowed for greater diversity as many comments were captured online and provided a more accurate picture of reality (Scholz and Smith, 2019). Quantitative research cannot help in the aforementioned elements and additionally it cannot answer the question as to why consumers react and act in the way they do, hence making qualitative methods a superior method and more appropriate for this study as the main aim is to understand how consumers respond to negative publicity online and why.

Table 3.1. A comparison between a quantitative and qualitative approach of studies in the context of negative publicity (based on Braun and Clarke, 2013)

Quantitative (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013)	Qualitative (Scholz and Smith, 2019)
Research aims: Explores consumers' negative behaviours after a company is exposed to negative publicity and further aims to provide managerial implications	Research aims: Explore various strategies as to how companies can respond to online firestorms created by consumers and additionally acquire new insights as to "how brands are managed in the age of social media"
Sample: Random sample of "280 adult Italian shoppers"	Sample: 5,374 Tweets
Method of data collection: Quantitative questionnaire with "experimental and control conditions"; two fictitious companies (i.e. dark chocolate and big retailer) with real negative scenarios (i.e. social and ethical transgressions)	Method of data collection: Qualitative – Netnography.. The online firestorm which evolved on Twitter following "Protein World's 'Are You Beach Body Ready' campaign (which consumers found offensive) is examined
Method of data analysis: statistical – how an independent variable (X - social or ethical transgression) affects the outcome variable (Y - consumer actions) via the moderator (M- Contempt, Anger and Disgust) and "the effect of X on M and the effect of M on Y" and how they are conditioned by a moderator (W – other regarded virtues)	Method of data analysis: Coding followed by manual thematic analysis
Key Results: Theoretical Contributions - Negative word of mouth is a form to express negative emotions - Protests are a way to express dissatisfaction and their anger towards the company - Ethical and social transgressions are tied to negative emotions such as contempt, anger and disgust - Emotions experienced clearly depend on the ethical virtues a customer withholds Managerial Implications: - Alerting firms to be aware of the role of virtues in consumers - Suggests CSR as a response to negative publicity "Show empathy and attention to the problem" - A company which is not prepared can have adverse effects on a company's image and reputation	Key results: Theoretical Contributions - Companies can urge consumers who support the brand to participate in online firestorms by "establishing a moralistic framing of the controversy" - Companies can act as "provocateurs" and provoke firestorms on cultural issues in their favour - Negative voices may create positive outcomes - Flying – exchanging insults between the company and the consumer – this helps supporting consumers enhance their own brand identities Managerial Contributions: - Three key strategies examined of which the escalation strategy seems to be the most effective for online firestorms - Deny strategy – consumers react negatively towards it - Diminish strategy – ineffective and causes again negative reactions - Escalation strategy - most effective strategy for online firestorms – the company can turn the tables and use 'flying' (i.e. turn the tables and insult the consumer) in order for their supporters to enhance the identity and attack in the same manner
Conclusion: Consumer virtues play a key role in their actions	Conclusion: Online firestorms are difficult to deal with and are relatively new and so additional research is needed however the key findings are that identity plays a vital role in online firestorms and the best way to respond is the escalation strategy
This type of research can show: The variables that are important in cases of negative publicity – the significance and importance of emotions and virtues is highlighted (but not fully explained)	This type of research can show: - Practical implications seem more apparent in this type of research as consumer behaviours are analysed in depth - New concepts and ideas can emerge (i.e. the concept of 'flying') which can be very valuable to theory - Key ideas and elements are uncovered which cannot be easily acquired with quantitative data as pre-determined scales are used – e.g. this research uncovered the importance of identity as to how consumers respond to online firestorms and thus how companies should respond - In depth information in regards to real-life experiences and therefore results that depict reality - Diversity and patterns in the data due to the fact that many comments are analysed – greater sample thus a more accurate picture as to provide greater practical and theoretical contributions - Deep understandings in regards to online firestorms
This type of research cannot show: - Cannot show realistic findings and managerial implications as it is based on experimental data and so "there is a lack of naturalistic conditions" - It cannot explain why consumers feel the emotions and why they respond to these emotions in the way they do as the research is based on pre-determined scales and is unable to uncover new findings and insights from participants	This type of research cannot show: Cause and effect cannot be examined in this type of research

3.3.2 Ethnography and Ethnography Online

The following sections outline the premise of netnography, its origins and explain how ethnography differs from ethnography online and netnography. Ethnography first emerged from scholars in anthropology and was mainly used to ‘expose human systems that are taken for granted and to offer implicit or explicit critiques of dominant systems and understandings’ (Murchison, 2010, p.5). The societies are observed while they take action in a natural environment and, in contrast to many other methods, it requires the researcher to be involved in the research and not to be detached (Murchison, 2010). One of the first researchers to evolve the concept of ethnography was Christine Hine (2000) who proposed virtual ethnography. Hine (2000, p.1058) attests that ethnography is the premise of virtual ethnography and that virtual ethnography is a useful method for examining interactions via people. Hine (2000) developed principles of virtual ethnography and outlined the similarities and differences between online ethnography and ethnography. Hine (2000) posits that a researcher’s presence and how (s)he interacts with the environment is key to ethnographic research and adds that virtual ethnography and the internet help advance the way the researcher interacts with the environment, which allows for greater interpretations. Additionally, Hine (2000, p.1058) argues that the online environment has a greater flexibility in regard to interpretations as opposed to ethnography. Moreover, Hine (2000, p.1058) insists that mediated interaction is key in ethnography and location has no importance, she proposes that a community is not solely in a physical space or place and, therefore, neither is ethnography. She proposes to focus on the connections between the individuals as opposed to the place, when it comes to virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000, p.1058). Moreover, she posits that there are no prior restrictions and everything is examined whilst the ethnography takes place and similarly virtual ethnography has no boundaries in place and insights are to be explored throughout the research (Hine, 2000, p.1058). Additionally, she mentions that in both cases it is difficult to achieve an overall description from participants however in the case of virtual ethnography the interaction and engagement that takes place acquires greater insights and so the previous setback is not of great importance (Hine, 2000, p.1058). Finally, Hine (2000, p.1058) explicitly declares that immersion cannot be fully achieved via online ethnography as there is ‘spatial dislocation and temporal dislocation’.

Other researchers disputed Hine's (2000) definition of virtual ethnography and renamed it to 'digital ethnography' (Murthy, 2011). Murthy (2011) specifies that Hine's (2000) definition of virtual ethnography it is solely online and does not include any face-to-face interactions. However, digital ethnography involves ethnography that takes place on the digital landscape and the data can occur both online and offline (Murthy, 2011, p. 159). Similarly, Pink et al. (2016) express digital ethnography can be conducted away from the digital space and should let the research questions guide the space in which the research should be conducted (Pink et al., 2016). The principle is that the digital aspect is not a core element and researchers may need to conduct the study in a place outside the digital world in order to understand it better (Pink et al., 2016). They reveal that amongst the disciplines of digital ethnography is the fact it responds to very distinctive research questions and it is mostly guided by theoretical frameworks (Pink et al., 2016). Other researchers who attempted to develop the concept of ethnography conducted online were Horst and Miller (2012) who decided to name it 'digital anthropology'. They declare that the digital landscape can help determine human behaviour, which is the epicentre of anthropology (Horst and Miller, 2012, p.150). They outline basic principles for digital anthropology; firstly, they attest that 'digital itself intensifies the dialectical nature of culture' (Horst and Miller, 2012, p.150). Furthermore, they assert that digital is not what defines humanity but the digital element allows better understanding of people and aids in understanding a pre-digital life and culture (Horst and Miller, 2012). Moreover, they assert that in the discipline of anthropology, the emphasis is on life and the way people live as opposed to simply individuals and how their mind operates (Horst and Miller, 2012, p.150). Digital anthropology gives the opportunities for all views to be shared even those that are marginalised (Horst and Miller, 2012, p.150). Finally, digital anthropology allows exploring the role of materiality in the digital age as it can help uncover what being human means in a digital world (Horst and Miller, 2012, p.150).

Murthy (2011) and Pink et al. (2016) state that digital ethnography is not purely digital and can be conducted away from the digital space. This method does not fit with the scope of the study as the aim of the study is to examine consumers' emotions and reactions to negative publicity online. The online element is particularly important for this thesis, thus netnography was assessed as more suitable for this thesis. Additionally, all these various forms of conducting ethnography online were rejected as they just have principles in place and no

guidance as to what each method entails and what the researcher needs to do in order to conduct a study with such a method. Due to the lack of guidance for these methods, they were rejected and so the researcher of the thesis decided to conduct this research using netnography by Robert Kozinets who clearly outlines the procedures that a researcher needs to go through in order to conduct research via this method (Kozinets, 2020). Additionally, netnography differs from other online methods as it emphasises ‘online traces, interactions, and socialities’ (Kozinets, 2020, p.19), thus another reason for being selected as opposed to other methods.

3.4 Netnography

Kozinets (1998, p.366) first defined netnography as ‘a written account resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from online, computer mediated, or internet-based communications, where both the field work and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology’. This first definition of netnography focuses on the fact that it is a fieldwork, it is mainly used to study online cultures and communities and it has a cultural anthropological lens. Furthermore, Kozinets (2002, p.62) defined netnography as an advanced method to studying online behaviours adapted from ethnography in order to be able to study online cultures. In this later definition, he moves away from cultural anthropology and focuses on the fact that it is a method used for qualitative research, is based on ethnography and again the fact that it is used to study online cultures and communities. In his next book, Kozinets (2010, p.60) reveals that netnography is observing participants in an online setting; here he adds the fact that participants are being observed and, as in previous definitions, mentions that online fieldwork takes place and a connection to ethnography is made. The next explanation he provides in relation to netnography Kozinets (2015, p.79) attests that netnography is ‘a specific set of related data collection, analysis, ethical and representational research practices, where a significant amount of the data collected and participant-observational research conducted originates in and manifest through the data shared freely on the internet.’ The emphasis on this definition is again the element of observing participants; however, it mentions that the data is acquired from the internet and states that there are research practices in place. The up-to-date definition of netnography that Kozinets (2020,

p.7) provides is that netnography is a guide as to a particular way in order to conduct online qualitative research and follows specific practices and stages in order to acquire and analyse data. The final definition again focuses on the fact that it is a qualitative social media research method and the main distinction is that this method has specific procedures and practices in place as opposed to previous online ethnography methods previously mentioned.

As stated in the definitions above, netnography is based on the principles of ethnography (Kozinets, 2015). Netnography is very similar to ethnography and has the same premise, which is to find out how individuals see the world and how this world can then be understood (Kozinets, 2020). They both focus on understanding cultures and how humans make sense of their experiences (Kozinets, 2020). However, there are characteristics that make these two methods different and why netnography needs to be distinguished from ethnography. The main distinction between netnography and ethnography is the fact that netnography takes place online and involves ‘investigation, interaction and immersion’, which means that the ‘cultural experiences can be engaged with, communicated through, and then reflected upon’. (Kozinets, 2020). On the other hand, ethnography entails solely looking at the data and interpreting it, immersion is not a requirement in ethnography (Kozinets, 2020). Another distinction is the fact that netnography focuses on online traces and these online traces can be found anywhere on the internet (i.e. social media, online forums) and come in many different forms (i.e. text, photo, video) (Kozinets, 2020). Whereas ethnography requires a physical presence, netnography focuses on online traces and data that can be acquired online (Kozinets, 2020). Furthermore, there are different procedures in place when it involves data collection, analysis, and ethics and as netnography is conducted online there are different ethical codes to conducting the research offline (Kozinets, 2020, p.17).

3.4.1 Types of Netnography Research

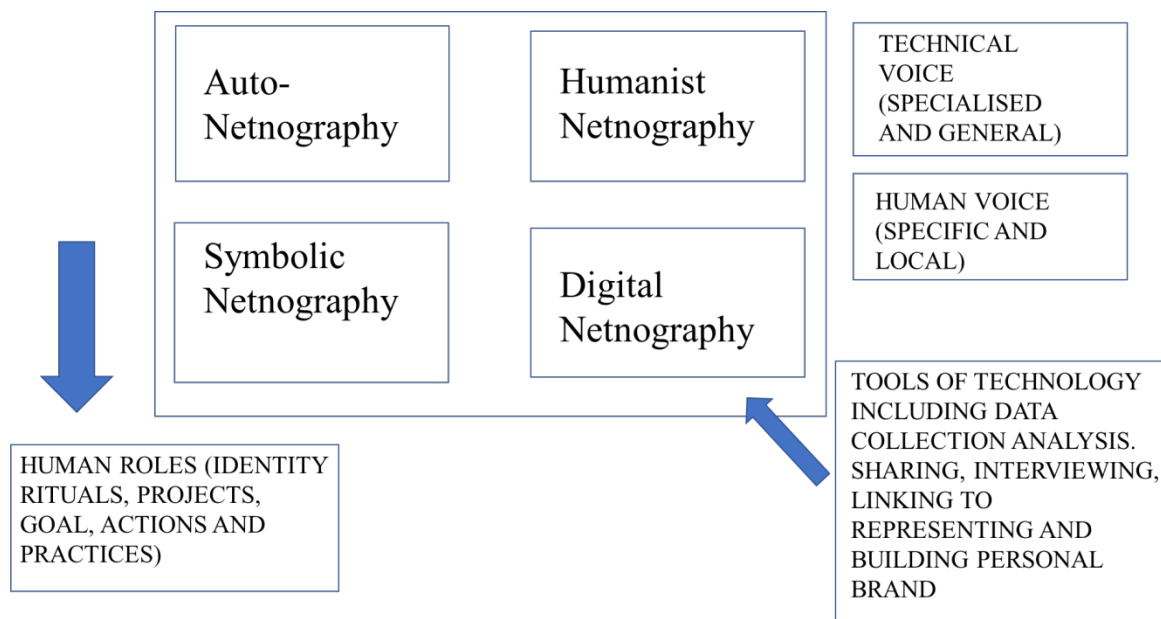


Figure 3.1: Four Types of Netnography

Source: Kozinets, 2015

There are four different types of netnography research, symbolic netnography, digital netnography, humanist netnography and auto netnography (Kozinets, 2015) as depicted in the figure above. Symbolic netnographies ‘seek out and find interesting sites, cultures, groups and people and translate their meaning systems as values, practices and online social rituals’ (Kozinets, 2015, p.245). Symbolic netnographies look at how people interact online, explore how identities are formed and make meanings of the data (Kozinets, 2015). This method is very similar to ethnography and other qualitative methods (Kozinets, 2015). Digital netnographies mostly use statistical analysis and technology to describe data (Kozinets, 2015, p.250). Digital netnographers use software in addition to their human perspectives to reach deductions. It is a method of netnography typically used for quantitative studies (Kozinets, 2015). Furthermore, auto-netnography is another type of netnography that involves the researcher recording his/her own experiences, thoughts and feelings while observing data online (Kozinets, 2015). Finally, a humanistic netnography involves the researcher being immersed in the research and becoming a part of it and observing it as a participant. This mostly happens in cases where social issues (e.g. ‘unprecedentedly virulent disease spread’) are involved and the researcher seeks to solve them by exploring them from within as there

are no other means (Kozinets, 2015, p. 275). For this research, the most appropriate netnography was symbolic netnography as values and identities were key elements of this study and thus this type of netnography helped the researcher to answer the research questions. Digital netnography was rejected as it is mostly used for quantitative research. Moreover, the researcher's own perspectives were not relevant for this study so an auto-netnography was also rejected. Similarly, a humanistic netnography was rejected as the researcher wanted to keep the role of the researcher only.

3.4.2 Reasons for Choosing Netnography

Netnography was selected over other qualitative methods and quantitative methods as it involves immediate data and uncovers real time thoughts and feelings, as opposed to other methods, such as interviews and surveys, where participants are typically called to recall thoughts and feelings from memory (Gupta, 2009). Thus, netnography was assessed as the most superior method as the study focuses on emotions which are intuitive and the research would lose its robustness if any other methods were used. Furthermore, netnography is generally considered as a very useful method as it provides a deep and novel understanding into a consumers' world (Fisher and Smith, 2011, p.345). Therefore, due to the fact that the research aims to uncover how a consumer thinks and feels in regard to negative publicity online, this method was assessed as compatible. Additionally, the interaction between participants can help reveal behaviours that would not have been revealed in other contexts and so the use of social media and netnography is useful in discovering the role of consumers' interactions online and it how it affects their emotions and behaviours (Kozinets, 2020). Furthermore, another reason netnography was selected over other methods is the fact that it has the characteristic of being able to understand individuals' identities and how they are shaped, formed and affect behaviours (Kozinets, 2020). As identity is an important element for this thesis, this was considered a superior method to the rest as it would help the researcher understand consumers' identities online and how they affect their emotions and reactions. For instance, Heinonen and Medberg (2018, p. 663) conducted a study and looked at 321 articles that had used netnography as a data collection method. They found that 17% of the papers involved consumer identity and their study revealed that netnography is a useful method which involves individual's identities and consumption habits. It is argued that the

online world encourages people to evolve other identities also, thus it helped to further develop the concepts of moral identity and social identity (Kozinets, 2015). Netnography helps unveil consumers' values and beliefs (Kozinets, 2015), therefore, since values are a very important aspect of this thesis it was considered an appropriate method to answer the research questions of the thesis. In addition to this, netnography is useful for theory development (Kozinets, 2015), which is one of the aims of the study, to develop the theories of moral emotions and consumer-company identification.

Many studies have used netnography as their research method and aided them in achieving great findings and revelations. Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman (2017) conducted a study about sharing food images online they used Deleuze and Guattari's desire theory and via their netnographic study managed to develop it further and extend it, highlighting the method's usefulness. Moreover, De Valck, Van Bregen and Wierenga (2009) attest that netnography helps in the development of new strategies for businesses, and as this study also aims to provide managerial implications and provide insights to companies as to how to respond to negative publicity online, it was assessed as a suitable method. Furthermore, Kozinets et al. (2010) undertook a study to examine the word-of-mouth in online communities and explored the interactions between participants. This netnographic study aided in developing four social media communications strategies, which highlights the usefulness of this method in order to develop concepts and provide useful managerial implications, hence why the researcher selected it as these are part of the thesis. Another reason this method was selected was due to the fact that longitudinal information can be captured via this method and also information can be obtained via different sources that can help in unveiling new insights into a phenomenon and develop theory (Kozinets et al., 2010). The benefit of longitudinal studies is the fact that it can capture any changes in consumer behaviour and also understand better why these changes occur (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Since, the aim of the study is to develop theory and to identify any changes in consumer behaviour after negative publicity, a longitudinal netnographic study seemed to be compatible with what the researcher wanted to achieve. For this research, the negative event was followed in real time for six months (between beginning of October 2019 and end of March 2020), i.e. from when the negative event started to when the negative event ended, exploring consumers' emotions and reactions at various stages of the event.

3.4.3 Overcoming Netnography Limitations

Netnography also has limitations that were considered by the researcher and were subsequently overcome. Ethics around overt and covert research is unclear and what seems as acceptable and what does not (Kozinets, 2002; Catterall and Maclaran, 2002; Langer and Beckman, 2005). In order to overcome this limitation, the guidelines set by Kozinets (2020) were followed and explained. Additionally, another limitation is that due to the fact that it is written text and not verbal communications, this may limit the interpretation of the data (Pearce and Wu, 2014). In order to minimise this and to be able to interpret the data accurately, the data was read three times in order to become familiar with it. Another limitation that is stated in the literature is the fact that offline identities may not be the same as online identities and so this may not lead to accurate results (Prior and Miller, 2012). However, due to the fact that research in the past has only focused on offline identities, this research helped distinguish and compare offline and online identities as this thesis compares and contrasts findings to past studies.

3.4.4 Netnography Procedural Movements

There has been controversy over the fact that any type of observation or analysis conducted online is being labelled as netnography and most of the studies that claim to do netnography do not state the process that the research has undergone (Tuncalp and Le, 2014; Pollok et al., 2014 cited in Costello, Wallace and McDermott, 2017). For the reasons explained above this study clearly outlines the process it has undergone to conduct netnography, specifically Kozinets' (2020) six procedural movements are explained. Kozinets (2020) six movements of netnography outline the process in order for a successful and an authentic netnographic study to take place. The figure below (Figure 3.2) depicts Kozinets (2020) six procedural movements of netnography which involve 4 types of operations. The four operations are as follows: research focus operations which includes initiation, data collection operations which involve investigation, interaction and immersion, data analysis and interpretation operations which entail integration and research presentation operations which involves incarnation.

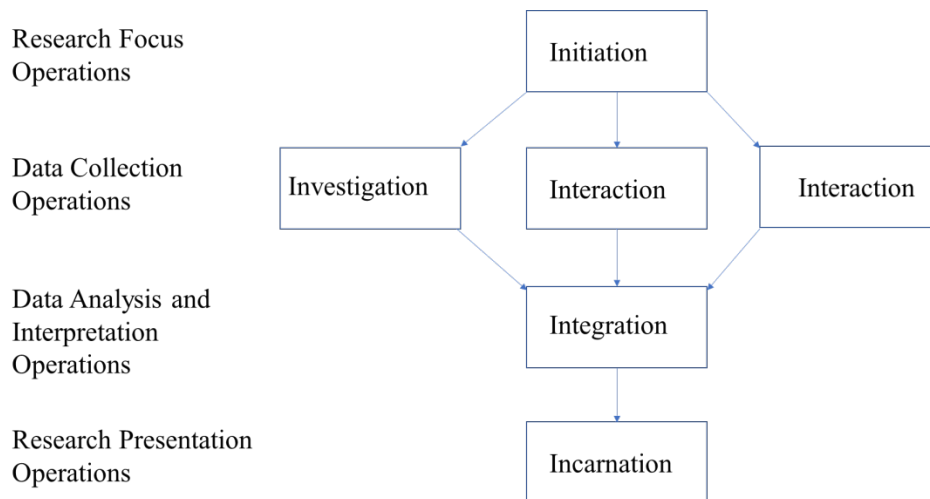


Figure 3.2: Six Procedural Movements of Netnography

Source: Kozinets, 2020

3.4.5 Research Focus Operations

Movement 1: Initiation

The first stage is called initiation, which is the stage where the researcher evaluates certain elements, such as the phenomenon being explored, the theories used, the research questions of the study and, finally, which sites to select (Kozinets, 2020).

Phenomenon and Context of the Research

The phenomenon chosen to explore for this thesis is consumers' emotions, reactions and actions towards a company that experiences negative publicity online. The firm chosen for this research was Chick-fil-A. Chick-fil-A and it was selected for this study as it is a company that has had many controversies over the years about its identity and values (Valle, 2019). Additionally, this thesis focuses on negative publicity that is based on a company's communication failure and the negative publicity was initiated from the consumers. Chick-fil-A failed to communicate its values and identity in a correct manner and the negative event was initiated by the consumers, thus making this company a perfect fit for this thesis. Chick-fil-A is known in the USA as a corporation with Christian values and beliefs (Parke, 2019).

The main reason for this is due to the fact that the founder, Truett Cathy, was Christian and he closed the restaurants every Sunday as a dedicated day for worship (Parke, 2019). This is a practice the corporation still follows today (Chick-fil-A, 2021). Chick-fil-A recently faced backlash by the public in the USA when it decided to donate via its foundation to Christian charities, such as the Salvation Army and Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which are charities known for their anti-LGBT+ beliefs (Parke, 2019). In addition to this, the chief operating officer of the company, Dan Cathy expressed strong negative opinions via the media stating that he is against same sex marriage (Aldridge, 2019). The figure below (figure 3.3) outlines briefly the timeline of events which led to Chick-fil-A facing negative publicity. In October 2019, Chick-fil-A decided to open its first restaurant in the UK and specifically in Reading at the Oracle Shopping Centre (BBC News, 2019). This led to an outburst on social media from the public expressing the fact that they do not want a firm that supports such charities in Reading (BBC News, 2019). Following this, LGBT+ supporters decided to protest outside the restaurant (Knight, 2019). Subsequently, the corporation responded by stating that it would no longer donate money to these charities (Sandler, 2019) and it led to the firm closing in Reading six months after it had opened (Aldridge, 2020).

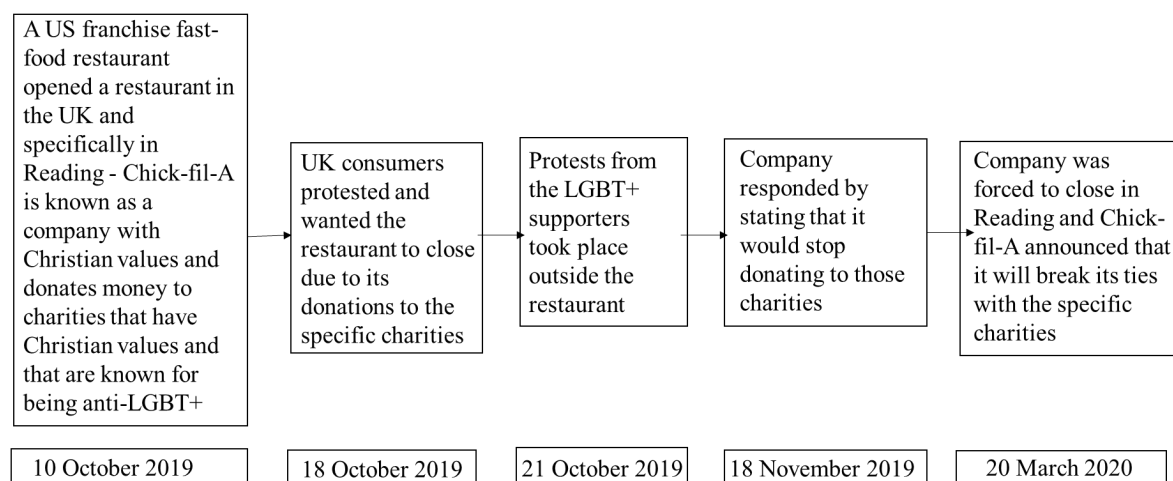


Figure 3.3: Chick-fil-A Timeline of Events

Enabling Theories

As mentioned previously, the enabling theories for this research are consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and moral emotions (Haidt, 2003), and these theories were selected firstly because they incorporate both cognition (consumer-company identification) and emotion (moral emotions), which have not been explored together extensively. Additionally, using both of these theories allows exploring both the social identities and moral identities of consumers and how these affect their reactions towards negative publicity online.

The theories selected for this thesis helped determine which aspects are important to examine for this research (i.e. moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003)) and subsequently they helped determine how the data was collected and how it was analysed. Specifically, the data that was collected involved consumers' moral emotions and actions and whether or not they identify with the company. Additionally, the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) helped in interpreting some of the emotions within the data as most consumers were not stating outright their emotions and so they were interpreted via the actions tendencies that are stated within this theory. Moreover, both theories helped analyse the data and make meaning of the data. For example, when analysing the data and consumers' emotions the moral emotions theory (Haidt, 2003) helped in revealing the different actions associated with each emotion (e.g. disgust and boycotting the company) and it also helped in interpreting the participants values and moral identity as their actions were tied to these. Moreover, the consumer-company identification theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) helped in interpreting the relationship the consumer has with the company. Additionally, it also helped in revealing the actions that are associated with a consumers' social identity.

Research Aims and Objectives

After considering the phenomenon and the theories, the researcher then crafts the potential research questions in order to eventually set the research design (Kozinets, 2020). Kozinets (2020) suggests some elements to consider when crafting the research questions in regard to

netnographic studies. For example, the researcher should consider how much a concept has been studied and if it has elements that have been presumed (Kozinets, 2020, p.151). Furthermore, a researcher should consider whether there is an opportunity to explore elements that have been previously bypassed (Kozinets, 2002, p.151). Moreover, Kozinets (2020) argues that there are different types of questions that can be asked in netnographic studies. ‘Where’ questions may want to guide the research if the researcher is ‘interested in locating people and topics in context, their locations in online sites’ (Kozinets, 2020, p.156). Answering questions relating to ‘how’ are related to describing a process (Kozinets, 2020). If the most important element in the research is the individuals who converse online and talk about various subjects and how these relate to their identities then ‘who’ questions should determine the research (Kozinets, 2020, p.156). Moreover, ‘what’ questions are seeking to find in-depth descriptions in relation to communication systems (Kozinets, 2020, p.156). Finally, ‘why’ questions in netnographic studies seek to explain, ‘underlying causal factors’ (Kozinets, 2020, p.156). Taking the above into consideration, the research questions were crafted (see section 2 above).

Site Selection

When selecting a site it is important to decide upon the nature of the site (Kozinets, 2015). There are four types of social experiences that take place on sites and these are ‘mingling, bonding, sharing and organizing’ (Kozinets, 2015, p.34). As seen in the figure below, there are two factors to take into consideration when categorising sites and one of them is the nature of the social ties (Kozinets, 2015). The social ties include *gemeinschaft*, meaning deep relationships based on ‘caring and sharing communal forms’, and *gessellschaft*, which are superficial and are ‘market-and-transaction oriented exchange’ (Kozinets, 2015, p.33). Additionally, the focus and orientation varies from being around a particular purpose or alternatively the location (Kozinets, 2015). Mingling media enthusiasm refers to social interactions that are informal and superficial and are usually just for the purpose of enjoyment and relaxation; the ties in this case are formal (such interactions occur in social media spaces such as Twitter) (Kozinets, 2015). Having social experiences are mainly for relational needs, there is no set purpose or interest. They are purely for creating strong bonds with other people (e.g. Tinder) (Kozinets, 2015). Furthermore, social sharing experiences

refer to interactions that occur due to a particular purpose or activity and the people involved have no formal ties between them and these are usually blogs or sites created by the media (i.e. Huffington Post blog or social media page) (Kozinets, 2015). Finally, there are the experiences that ‘create social ties between people as well as focusing on sharing information and intelligence about some central, unifying interest, project, theme or activity’. These are usually interactions that take place on platforms such as LinkedIn (Kozinets, 2015). As the ties between the individuals was an irrelevant construct for this research and the researcher wanted to explore responses to negative publicity online, the best type of social experience that was appropriate to explore for this study was ‘social sharing expressions’ (Kozinets, 2015, p.35). Therefore, the researcher decided to explore Facebook pages that are hosted by newspapers and that have covered the recent negative event that occurred when Chick-fil-A decided to open a branch in Reading. Facebook was particularly selected as it is considered one of the key social media platforms individuals use to share their voices and which people consider to be a powerful medium to do that (Kozinets, 2020). Additionally, it is a social media platform in which consumers can interact with one another on the comments and so their dynamics can be detected (Kozinets, 2020).

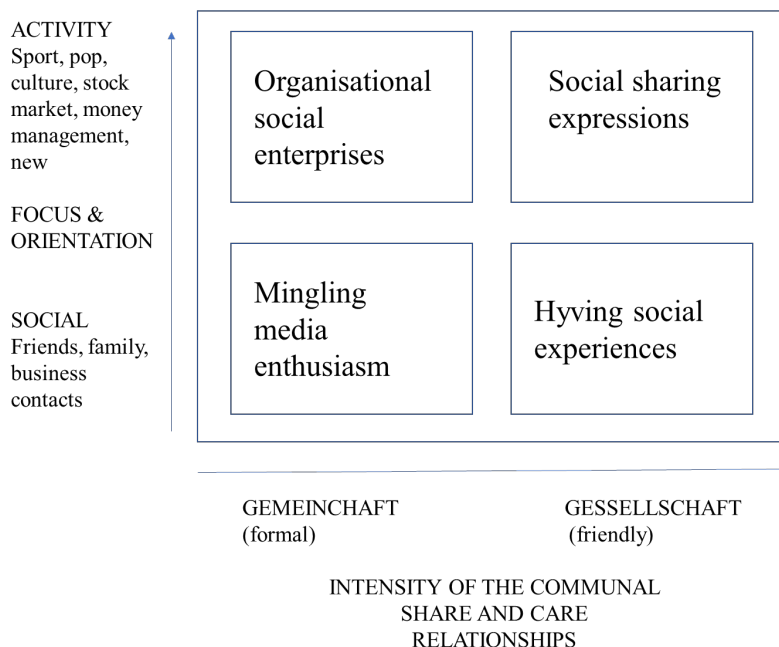


Figure 3.4: Four Ideal Types of Online Social Experience in Sites

Source: Kozinets, 2015

Moreover, at this first stage the research ethics are considered in order to acquire approval by a regulatory body (Kozinets, 2020, p.139). Part of ethics in netnography is familiarising oneself with the ethical considerations and relevant research ethics procedures of the netnographic research, attaining ethics approval from requisite regulatory bodies, and planning the study so that the type of data collected matches the research questions (Kozinets, 2020, p.139). The ethical considerations of the study are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

3.4.6 Data Collection Operations

Data refers to ‘informational raw material that are selectively either co-created, observed or collected’ (Kozinets, 2020, p.191). It is important to highlight the term ‘selectively’ as data collection means that specific information is collected in order to directly address the research question of the study; subsequently the data is interpreted in order to reveal the findings (Kozinets, 2020). There are three types of data to collect in netnographic studies as stated by Kozinets (2020) and depending on the type of data the researcher decides to collect, then there are different types of ethics involved. Firstly, investigative data, which is an ‘archival search and save’, in more detail, these are comments that have been created on social media and have been archived (Kozinets, 2020, p.178). The second type is immersive, which involves observing the data and making field notes in regard to this data (Kozinets, 2020). This type of research is considered ‘observational and passive’ (Kozinets, 2020, p.178). The third type is interactive, which includes interacting with the people and their comments they post online and perhaps even conducting follow-up interviews with them; this is considered as human-subject data in contrast to the previous two (Kozinets, 2020). Kozinets (2020) recommends as opposed to just observing the data (investigative), the researcher should also collect immersive data also as it allows for more in-depth analysis of the data, hence the researcher combining these two types of data. In addition to this, interactive data was not used for this study as the investigative and immersive were sufficient enough to answer the research questions of the thesis.

Research Ethics

As mentioned above, before the data is collected the ethics of netnographic data collection should be taken into consideration. In order for the ethics process to be correct, the researcher followed the guidelines provided from the University of Reading and sought ethics approval from the University by explaining the whole process (see Appendix 4). Kozinets' (2020) ethics procedures were also taken into consideration upon seeking the ethical approval from the University. As seen on the map below, there are different paths for each type of data collected. To begin with, investigative data involves considering elements like whether the site is public or private. Kozinets (2020, p.197) affirms that a private site usually needs an individual's details and password in order to log in whereas registration is not vital on a public site. However, it is argued that although details may be needed to access sites such as Facebook and Twitter, you can join or access the site using a search engine (Kozinets, 2020). Since the information can be found via search engines, it means that they are considered accessible and thus public data (Kozinets, 2020). Therefore, since this is the case with this thesis also, it means that the information can be accessed via a search engine and also the data collected for this thesis is considered public.

The next question to ask is whether user rights are respected (Kozinets, 2020). As stated above the site is public, thus the user rights are respected and they are not violated in any way or form (Kozinets, 2020). Since user rights are respected, the next question to ask is whether there are any sensitive topics to be explored in the research (Kozinets, 2020). Sensitive topics are those considered to be emotionally distressing or involve controversial topics being discussed, and in some case illegal such as the use of drugs (Kozinets, 2020, p.232). The above criteria do not match the current research topic and so the research does not involve any sensitive topics being discussed (Kozinets, 2020). The next question to ask is to consider the sample and whether a vulnerable population is being studied (Kozinets, 2020).

Vulnerable people are those who are considered unable to make informed choices alone (Kozinets, 2020, p.232). Given that age, gender and ethnicity were not important elements to this research, there was no specified sample. The only element that was taken into consideration was the fact that the participants had to be over the age of eighteen in order for them to be considered non-vulnerable. In order to verify this, the researcher checked their

date of birth stated on the participants' profiles. Generally, the comments that were selected were comments that could answer the research question and hence comments that involved consumers' behaviours, emotions, general reactions to negative publicity and consumers' identities, and so purposive sampling was undertaken as suggested by Kozinets (2002). The next element that needed to be considered was data security (Kozinets, 2020). Kozinets (2020) attests that saving data on a laptop for data that is sensitive is not sufficient and other means of saving data should be used. Since no vulnerable populations were explored or sensitive topics discussed, the data was stored securely on the researcher's laptop only. The data will be kept for 5 years after the research has been finished and will be kept in a secure zip file, needing a password to access it.

The next route is immersive data. As seen on the map, when the data is immersive and no private interactions take place, no sensitive data is gathered and the data is anonymised, then the researcher can go through an ethics audit and obtain ethics approval (Kozinets, 2020). As field notes were kept in regard to the data only and immersion and investigation were sufficient to answer the research question, no interactions with any participants took place. As discussed above, no sensitive data was explored. As to data being anonymised, Kozinets (2020) argues that it is mandatory as the participants' identities need to be protected. Therefore, the researcher should provide participants with pseudonyms and not use direct quotes in order that the individuals cannot be easily traced and detected via search engines (Whalen, 2018). Similarly, Scholz and Smith (2019) who examine online firestorms followed these guidelines in their research and slightly altered the tweets they were examining, without losing their meaning and in light of trying to protect the participants' identities. Kozinets (2015) specifically proclaims that a quote can be traced back to an individual, and thus it should be avoided. For these reasons pseudonyms were used for this study and also their comments made online were paraphrased. Pseudonyms were given to the participants as opposed to letters or numbers as this humanises the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

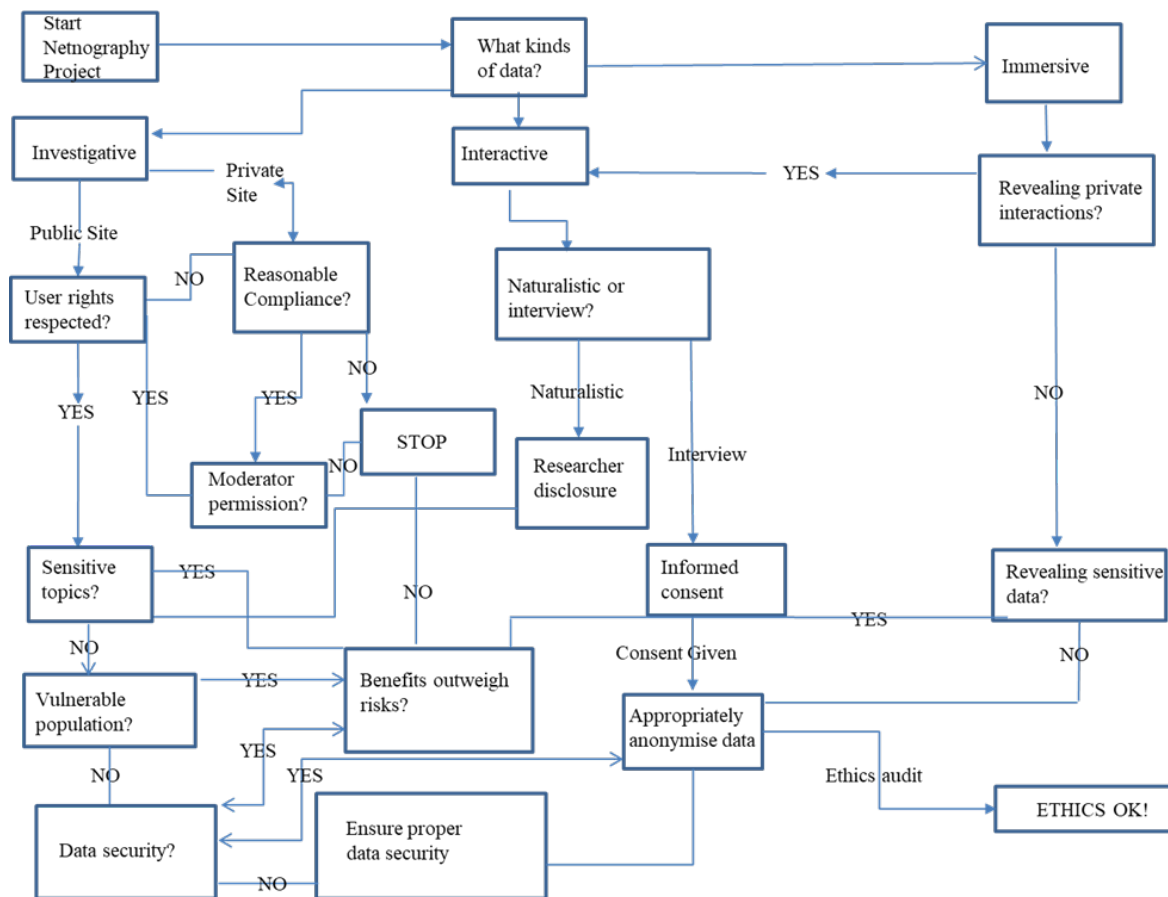


Figure 3.5: A Research Ethics Process Flowchart for Netnography

Source: Kozinets, 2020

As seen on the map, informed consent is only considered in the case of interactive data (Kozinets, 2020). There has been an ongoing debate as to whether information on social media is private or public and whether informed consent should be acquired by the individuals commenting online in all three types of data (Kozinets, 2020). Specifically, Morris (2016) argues that one of the five principles of research is autonomy and for researchers to make participants aware of the purpose of the research. However, Kozinets (2020) attests that immersive data is not considered ‘human subjects’ social research’ and informed consent should only be acquired in cases of ‘human subjects’ social research’ (i.e. interactive) and it is, thus, not necessary to acquire informed consent from the participants. It is further argued that data acquired from social media is public as it can be accessed even if you are not a member (Kozinets, 2020). For example, Facebook posts can be searched publicly on search engines and, thus, they are considered public sites (Kozinets, 2020).

Therefore, it is argued that since the data is publicly available no informed consent is needed. Additionally, individuals are made aware via Facebook of the fact that what they post or comment on pages or public groups are public as it is stated in Facebook's privacy settings (Facebook, 2021). Facebook (2021) explicitly communicates on their privacy settings: 'information from your profile and some things you share can still appear in search engine results...this includes things you share with the audience set to Public, posts and comments on Pages and public groups and posts in the Community Forum section of the Help Center'. Hence, no informed consent is needed. Additionally, Kozinets (2015, p.141) further attests that if the participants' identities are not revealed and are not traceable, there is no need for informed consent as there is no harm inflicted upon the participants. Goulding, Saren and Lindridge (2013) also claim that if the information is not sensitive and it is public then no informed consent is needed. Taking into consideration the arguments made above, the researcher did not seek informed consent from the participants.

Movement 2: Investigation

The second stage of netnography is called investigation that investigates the language used within the data (Kozinets, 2020, p.139). This is where the researcher specifies what types of communication were selected for the study (Kozinets, 2020). 'Investigative data operations' involve selecting data within the social media platform selected (Kozinets, 2020). This is done by examining the communications between people and further archiving the data (Kozinets, 2020). This type of data is not created by the researcher directly, they are created by various individuals and are further chosen by the researcher to answer the research questions of the study (Kozinets, 2020, p.193). Alavi, Ahuja and Medury (2010) expostulate that purely observing a community is very useful as natural interactions occur and it is free from bias as the researcher does not interact with the participants.

Kozinets (2020) proclaims that there are various stages when investigating data that are unique to netnography and these include simplifying, searching, scouting, selecting and saving. Simplifying entails taking into consideration the research question(s) and selecting which key words are appropriate to use for search engines (Kozinets, 2020). The next stage, searching, involves using these key words to search for content on sites or social media

platforms selected (Kozinets, 2020). The aim here is to uncover relevant data that can further be investigated (Kozinets, 2020). The research question of this study seeks to answer what are consumers' reactions and emotions towards a company encountering negative publicity. Given that the negative publicity event was an important construct for this study, the researcher investigated the forums that posted about the Chick-fil-A incident in Reading and typed 'Chick-fil-A Reading' on the Facebook search engine. Subsequently many articles were found and the pages were chosen based on article credibility, making sure that the articles posted were based on reality and were not fake news. Newspaper article pages on Facebook included papers from the UK and the USA (as the company is based in the USA); BBC, The Guardian, The Sun, The Reading Chronicle, Berkshire Live, Daily Mail, Forbes, Washington Post, Independent, NBC News, Fox News, NYTimes, Business Insider, Pink News, LA Times, Kron4, Dallas News and Advocate. Additionally, other elements that were taken into consideration upon choosing these pages were guidelines set by Kozinets (2002). For example, for high traffic on the posts and detailed data that is generated via member communications (Kozinets, 2002, p.63), all the above criteria were met and so the pages mentioned previously were selected. The table below (Table 3.2) presents the articles that were selected for this study (that were posted on Facebook) in order to examine consumers' interactions on these posts.

Table 3.2: Overview of Newspaper Articles and Posts Selected on Facebook

Newspaper	Author	Date	Title
The Reading Chronicle	Alice Knight	15 October 2019	Reading Pride organizing protest against Chick-fil-A surrounding homophobic claims
The Reading Chronicle	Tevye Markson	15 October 2019	Reading East election candidate backs The Oracle stay for Chick-Fil-A'
BBC	-	18 October 2019	Reading Chick-fil-A outlet to close in LGBT rights row'
Pink News	Pattrick Kelleher	18 October 2019	UK's first Chick-fil-A is set to close after immense pressure from LGBT right groups. It's been open just over a week
The Independent	Jess Glass	18 October 2019	UK's first Chick-fil-A restaurant announce closure eight days after opening following LGBT+ rights backlash
The Reading Chronicle	Isabella Perrin	18 October 2019	Reading Chick-fil-A will close over LGBT complaints
The Reading Chronicle	Elizabeth Mackley	18 October 2019	Chick-fil-A announces plans to close newly opened Reading restaurant
The Reading Chronicle	Alice Knight	18 October 2019	Opening of Britain's first ever Chick-fil-A in Reading met with backlash over homophobia claims
The Reading Chronicle	Isabella Perrin	18 October 2019	Labour Councillors question why Chick-fil-A ever came to Reading
Daily Mail	Raven Saunt & Joseph Laws	19 October 2019	First UK branch of US chicken chain Chick-fil-A will close after backlash over its owner's anti-LGBT stance
The New York Times	Derrick Bryson Taylor	19 October 2019	First Chick-fil-A in U.K. to close in 6 Months Amid Protests
The Sun	Debbie White	19 October 2019	First UK branch of US chicken shop Chick-Fil-A to shut just days after opening amid outrage over owner's anti-LGBT views
Pink News	Josh Milton	19 October 2019	Drag Race's Sum Ting Wong and around '150 protesters' tell UK's first Chick-fil-A to 'sashay away
NBC News	Tim Fitzsimons	21 October 2019	UK's first Chick-fil-A to close following LGBTQ protests
The Guardian	Harriet Sherwood	21 October 2019	'Cluck off': UK's only Chick-fil-A outlet to shut in LGBT rights row
The Reading Chronicle	Alice Knight	21 October 2019	GALLERY: Reading protests against Chick-Fil-A amid homophobic claims
Advocate	Trudy King	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A Still Isn't LGBTQ-Friendly, Despite Pledge on Donations
Berkshire Live	Tevye Markson	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A is 'best thing in Reading' says election candidate

Dallas News	Dom DiFurio	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A will end donations to Christian organizations with anti-LGBT values in 2020'
Forbes	Rachel Sandler	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A Stops Donations To Anti-LGBTQ Groups
Insider	Kate Taylor	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A is ending donations criticized by LGBTQ activists after years of backlash
LA Times	Samantha Masunaga	18 Novemeber 2019	Chick-fil-A says it won't donate to anti-LGBTQ groups — at least for now
The New York Times	Davd Yaffe-Bellany	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A Stops Giving to 2 Groups Criticized by L.G.B.T.Q. Advocates
Washington Post	Emily Heil	18 November 2019	Chick-fil-A drops donations that angered LGBTQ groups, and conservative leaders cry betrayal
Daily Mail	Luke Kenton	19 November 2019	Chick fil-A ends controversial donations to anti-LGBTQ charities and organizations after years of backlash
Pink News	Nick Duffy	22 November 2019	Trump ally Franklin Graham is thrilled that Chick-fil-A haven't abandoned their anti-LGBT beliefs
Pink News	Josh Milton	12 December 2019	Chick-fil-A is funding a group that hosts drag queen reading stories to children. Yes, really
Pink News	Emma Powys Maurice	13 December 2019	Chick-fil-A have donated millions more to homophobic and transphobic groups
Berkshire Live	James Aldridge	20 March 2020	Chick-fil-A closing its Reading restaurant
Berkshire Live	James Aldrige	29 March 2020	Reading Pride reacts to closure of Chick-fil-A

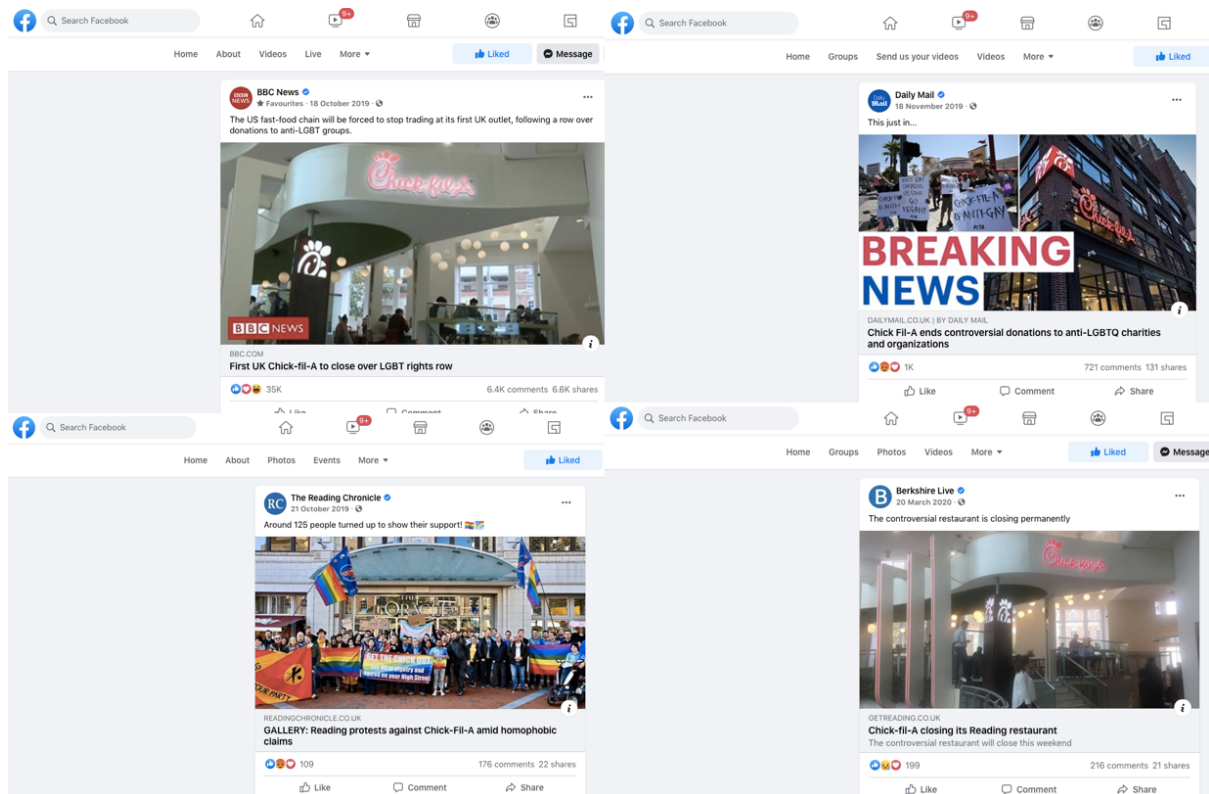


Figure 3.6: Sample of Newspaper Posts on Facebook

The next stage is scouting, which involves reading through the various data found in order to investigate it and to acquire a greater understanding of the culture (Kozinets, 2020, p.223). Additionally, this is where the data selection takes place. This research was split into two different phases, reading comments regarding the negative events and the comments in relation to the company's response. In the first phase the researcher read 23,413 comments and in the second phase 7,582. According to Kozinets (2020), the researcher may want to start an immersion journal at this stage recording relevant notes on data obtained such as which content is relevant and answers the research question. For this research, comments regarding the newspaper articles were examined and a record was kept of which posts were considered to be relevant content for this thesis. The next process is selecting; this includes downsizing the data in order to focus on the phenomenon of interest and to be able to focus on the details of the study (Kozinets, 2020, p.226). At this stage the researcher selected comments that were relevant to answering the research questions of the study. Kozinets (2020) states that there are different criteria to take into consideration when selecting data, which are: relevance, activity, interactivity, diversity and richness and he also stresses that the quality of data is more important as opposed to the quantity. Relevance refers to selecting

data relevant to the research question and focus (Kozinets, 2020). Activity refers to how active a site or page is in order for the information to be significant and current, especially if studying something current as opposed to archival data (Kozinets, 2020). Interactive, which is another criterion, involving the data that includes interaction between people, interactions and exchanges are important as a researcher can detect 'language, cultural exchange, emotion and the potential for communal types of relations' (Kozinets, 2020, p.228). Furthermore, diversity is a criterion that ensures that different perspectives and opinions are considered (Kozinets, 2020). Finally, richness relates to the data selected to be detailed and be able to provide the researcher with a wide array of information (Kozinets, 2020). In order to ensure relevance, the researcher mainly looked for data that included elements around consumers' behaviours, identities and emotions. Regarding activity, the researcher selected a negative publicity event that unfolded in real time in order for the emotions and reactions to be spontaneous due to the nature of the study. Consequently, the posts on which the people were commenting and were selected were active. Interactivity, was an important criterion for the researcher as the interactions between the participants were closely monitored in order to explore the language used to make meaning. In order to ensure this the researcher should reveal the different user names (pseudonyms) that were used for the study (Kozinets, 2020). In relation to diversity, the researcher made sure that different comments by different participants were collected in order to have diverse data. The researcher focused on ongoing conversations as they were more detailed and provided more information in regard to the subject studied.

In addition to the aforementioned criteria, Kozinets (2020) declares that it is not necessary for researchers to follow all the criteria stated above and they may also want to take into account their own criteria which are unique to their own research. A criterion that was very important in selecting comments was that they had to have an element of emotion to them. Due to the fact that participants were not stating outright their emotions and they were expressing their direct reactions, the researcher decided to use the theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) as to select comments that had an element of emotion to them. For example, the Haidt (2003) formulates that when an individual is angry, then a likely action tendency is to attack, humiliate or get revenge, so the researcher referred to the theory in order to excavate emotions. Overall, 2,088 comments were selected from the first phase (negative event) and

885 comments from the second phase (corporate response). Most of the comments were rejected as they were comments with just one word in them and which were tagging friends to see the post and so they were classified as irrelevant from the start. The final procedure of the investigative process is saving the data (Kozinets, 2020). This procedure is mostly preserving the information and storing it somewhere where they would last for a long period (Kozinets, 2020). There are various ways in order to save data and for this thesis the researcher chose scraping (Kozinets, 2020). This includes downloading a special program that captures and saves the data found online. For this thesis 'Capture' was the program selected to capture and save the data as it was compatible with NVivo12, which was the software that the researcher selected in order to analyse the data.

Movement 3: Immersion

The third movement is named immersion and it involves conceptualising the research and it is based on conceptualisation made in ethnography (Kozinets, 2020, p.136). Immersion in netnography entails becoming identities, values, value systems and beliefs and also the different dynamics between the individuals involved (Kozinets, 2020). As opposed to investigative and interactive operations which mainly involve collection, the immersive is making sense of the data and organising it (Kozinets, 2020). Immersion involves acquiring fieldnotes or keeping a journal (Kozinets, 2020, p.136). Kozinets (2020, p.392) claims that it is important to state the sites the researcher has visited for immersion and for how long the engagement occurred. For this thesis, the researcher engaged in immersion for a period of six months as both the negative reactions towards the firm opening in Reading and Chick-fil-A's response were considered. The researcher read the comments both in real-time in order to become familiar with the data and subsequently read them two more times and held an immersion journal the second time and followed the four immersive, as operations outlined by Kozinets (2020) and explained below.

There are 'four immersive operations', which include, reconnoitring, recording, researching and reflecting (Kozinets, 2020, p.283). The main purpose of immersive operations is to record ideas while collecting data and further reflecting upon it (Kozinets, 2020). 'Reconnoitring' refers to the continuous assessment of data and detecting what data is

relevant for the subject under study (Kozinets, 2020). At this stage Kozinets (2020, p.288) argues that the researcher should be looking for relevant data which refers to seeking for data that is attractive; which is a practice the researcher of this thesis followed. Furthermore, ‘recording’ entails describing all the information that is important to the researcher while observing the data. Fieldnotes exist in traditional ethnography and they are key to capturing human interactions, which differs in netnography (Kozinets, 2020, p.291). In netnography fieldnotes are records as to how the researcher experiences data read online; the researcher’s ‘dates, doings, data, decisions’ and evaluations of data (what is relevant and what is not relevant) (Kozinets, 2020, p.292). Kozinets (2020) argues that recording data and keeping fieldnotes is necessary and is what constitutes part of a netnography; otherwise, if data is simply downloaded and coded it is solely content analysis and not netnography. When keeping an immersion journal, Kozinets (2020, p.293) claims that the researcher may decide what to keep a record of and how (e.g. ‘physical notebook or save it on social media’). The researcher decided to follow Kozinets (2020) suggestions by recording data that is relevant to the research question only thus data that involved emotions, behaviours and consumers’ identities, and the method chosen to record this data was a physical notebook, which is also Kozinets’ (2020) preferred method. The next process is researching, which is where the enabling theories chosen (and perhaps other key theories) are considered along with the data and are recorded in the journal, this is the stage where the data is conceptualised (Kozinets, 2020). In the case of this thesis, the data was compared and contrasted with the two theories selected ‘theory of moral emotions’ (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). The final process is reflecting, which involves constructing reflective notes, making sense of the whole data set, providing deeper and meaningful meanings to the data, making connections between the data, understanding what the data means and what theories can be developed (Kozinets, 2020).

Movement 4: Interaction

The fourth stage involves engaging with the participants online (Kozinets, 2020). Kozinets (2015, p.98) expostulates that this is not a necessary step for all netnographies as for some netnographies ‘interacting with different field sites, searching them, observing them, downloading parts of them, writing analytic and observational fieldnotes about them’ is

suffice in order to meet the objectives of the study. Interaction takes place when some themes or topics are not discussed in depth online (or in some cases not discussed at all) or some concepts are not clearly articulated and so further interaction with the participants is needed (Kozinets, 2020). Additionally, interaction also occurs if the focus of the study is about understanding specific cultures and communications and they are crucial elements to the study (Kozinets, 2020). As the themes were discussed in detail online and the concepts were clearly articulated, the data was sufficient to answer the research questions. Thus, it was not necessary for any interactive data operations and investigation and immersion were sufficient. Additionally, interactions between the participants was a more critical aspect in this thesis as the consumers' dynamics and differences needed to be explored as opposed to receiving single accounts from participants. Thus, as participants' interactions were more important for this study, further interaction with participants also seemed out of the scope of this study.

3.4.7 Data Analysis and Integration Operations

Movement 5: Integration

The fifth movement involves integration, which involves coding, decoding, making meaning of the data, cross-coding and understanding the community culture (Kozinets, 2020, p.141). At this stage connections to the research questions are made, data is categorised and coded, and the data is interpreted, compared and contrasted to the existing literature and analysed, reaching integration where combining different views generates new findings (Kozinets, 2020, p.141). This is where representations are built in order to complete the project (Kozinets, 2020, p.141).

Kozinets (2020) distinguishes analysis and interpretation. Interpretation is explained as finding links between the data that provide an in-depth understanding and via these links meaning is created. It seeks to clarify how or why a phenomenon has occurred in a particular way (Wolcott, 1994). However, analysis is separate and the phenomenon is explored into different sections in order to make meaning of it and comprehend it better (Kozinets, 2020, p.311). The method of analysis that was used in this research was thematic analysis. Whalen

(2018) uncovered that thematic analysis is a popular method of analysis for qualitative data, specifically, 46% of publications in the field use it, which was also the method of analysis used for this study also. Thematic analysis is the type of analysis that manages to include ‘many of the operations of both data analysis and interpretation in netnography’ (Kozinets, 2020, p. 365). In thematic analysis themes and patterns are found within the data, starting with coding and categorising of the data followed by interpretations of the data (Kozinets, 2020). Additionally, thematic analysis is a method that has been used in prior studies conducting a netnography, for example, Scholz and Smith (2019) in their study that focuses on online firestorms used thematic analysis to analyse their data online. They examined tweets that related to the online firestorm against Protein World (Scholz and Smith, 2019). They particularly looked for ‘thematic patterns in the data’ and interpreted the data via coding and subsequent themes (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1111). Coding and thematic analysis particularly helped their study as they divided the data that helped them ‘differentiate between three different phases of the social media firestorm and understand how critics and advocates responded in each circumstance’ (Scholz and Smith, 2019, p.1111). Since the nature of the study is similar and this study aims to understand how consumers respond to both the negative event and to the corporate response, this method of analysis seemed the most compatible.

Thematic analysis involves finding, analysing and describing the patterns observed in the data (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.79). It is a way to classify and explain the data in depth (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and furthermore, it is useful for interpreting and finding new insights in regard to the topic being studied (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis ‘denies the active role of the researcher’, the data is presented passively (Taylor and Ussher, 2001, 2001 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). There are two approaches of analysing the data: the essentialist and the constructionist approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The essentialist approach focuses on human experiences and their realities and also their meanings towards these experiences, whereas the constructionist approach focuses on ‘the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81). The constructionist approach was adopted as ‘[unravelling] the surface of ‘reality’’ and is a key part of this research (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that there are six key steps to thematic analysis. To begin with, reading the data and familiarising with it. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it is important for the researcher to immerse him/herself with the data, which means reading the data more than once prior to coding. The researcher followed this and read the data prior to coding. The next step is coding across the whole dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding refers to discovering elements in the data that are connected to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Two main coding methods exist, 'selective coding' and 'complete coding' (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Selective coding is when the researcher only selects parts of an experience as opposed to complete coding where all the data that is relevant to answering the research question is coded (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.206). The coding strategy adopted for this research was complete coding in order to be able to answer the research question posed holistically, so elements like consumers' reactions, emotions, actions tendencies, views beliefs, and ideas were recorded. Code refers to a word or a phrase that describes the content of the data and this relates to why the researcher believes it is important for analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

After the coding process themes are subsequently formed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage the codes are examined and codes may be combined in order to form themes, and relationships between different codes and themes are examined at this stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After the initial themes are formed they are reviewed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This phase entails checking and refining the extracts to see whether they are compatible with the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes were cross-checked with two other colleagues in order to achieve inter-coder reliability and avoid bias (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). A theme usually is a central concept but entails many ideas within that very concept (i.e. sub-themes) (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The process of identifying themes usually includes trying to search for similarities and differences within the codes and organising a central concept (Braun and Clarke, 2013). A theme is created by identifying patterns that involve the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, there are two types of themes to consider; semantic themes and latent themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Semantic themes involve the themes that just seek to explore the

participants' surfaced views and opinions, whereas latent themes entail interpretation as opposed to description and seek to uncover 'underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.84). Since the core of netnography is interpretation, latent themes were assessed as most appropriate for this study. There are various elements to consider when identifying themes, such as if there is enough data to support the theme created, whether the themes relate somehow, how do the themes paint a whole picture, and whether the central concept is apparent in theme title (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) attest that good themes are the ones that make sense both alone and when combined. It is key that before finalising the themes, the researcher to produces candidate themes and see how these fit within the whole dataset and how they answer the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2013). They further propose that a researcher may want to produce 'overarching themes' which 'simply capture an idea encapsulated in a number of themes' and then produce themes that are the central concepts (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.231). They propose that having sub-themes may not be so ideal as it may over-complicate the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, they suggest that too many themes complicate the analysis and having between two to six themes is the ideal (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Subsequently, the themes are compared and contrasted to the whole dataset as their validity needs to be established (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91). In order to form the themes, and named a thematic map may be formed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The following stage involves naming the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage of naming the themes the researcher should make sure that the themes should explain how and why they are of interest (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.93). The themes should seek to answer the research question and should be connected to one another in some form (Braun and Clarke, 2006); the above guidelines were followed by the researcher when forming themes.

The final stage is finalising the analysis and writing it up (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After coding and organising the data into different themes the data is interpreted and analysed. In this process the researcher identifies key patterns within the data and writes up the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In order for the themes to have an accurate representation as to what they include, various extracts need to be chosen in order to explain what each theme includes. Braun and Clarke (2013) postulate that a wide range of extracts should be chosen in

order to show the diversity. Moreover, another process of the writing up of the analysis involves an ‘integrative approach’; this means the results are discussed along with existing literature and theory as opposed to just describing the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This approach is usually best when the researcher is seeking to advance the literature and theory in the respective field (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Since the researcher’s aim is to acquire a new understanding and advance theory, this seemed the most suitable method to write up the analysis and use an integrative approach to compare and contrast it to existing literature.

Most netnographies use a data analysis package such as NVivo to analyse their data instead of manually (Kozinets, 2020). Researchers argue that using a software like NVivo is more beneficial as it helps to organise the data and helps for more efficient coding and analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Moreover, it allows greater rigour for the whole process of coding (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Another benefit that was highly considered for this study is that may provide a development in theory (Konopásek, 2008), which is useful for this research as one of the aims is to further develop the theories selected. Software can also make the process more transparent and, therefore, allow for transferability if any other researchers want to research around this topic as it may facilitate visualisation and (thus) theoretical/analytic development (Braun and Clarke, 2013). One of the drawbacks of such software is the fact that it may lead to over-coding (Mangabeira, 1995), however the researcher managed to control this by coding the data that was relevant to answering the research question only.

Thematic analysis was selected as it is a method which aids in reflecting reality, and was the aim of the researcher to be able to depict reality and how consumers respond to negative publicity (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81). It is argued that it is also a flexible method of analysis, which allowed the researcher to uncover greater insights and was not restricted within the given dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Additionally, ‘thematic analysis’ is a flexible method, which can be easily adapted to many contexts and frameworks and can be analysed with many types of data (Clarke and Braun, 2017). This flexibility allowed the researcher to find a wider variety of findings and explore different elements. In addition to this, it can ‘be used with a theoretical framework to interrogate patterns within personal or social meaning around a topic’ (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p.297). Some researchers argue that flexibility is the disadvantage of this method, as it the analysis may become too broad and not be specific (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97). In order to overcome this issue, the researcher

ensured the research questions of the study were answered in order for a detailed analysis to occur. Furthermore, this method of analysis was selected because it offered deep representations of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Additionally, another reason this method of analysis was selected was because it aids in ‘psychological interpretations of data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97), and as consumers’ emotions is a key element of this research, this seemed to be a superior method to the rest to help analyse the data. Finally, it is argued that it can be a useful analytical method to help detect managerial implications (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and as one of the aims of the study is to provide companies with direction as to how to respond to negative publicity online, it was assessed as a valuable analytical tool. On the other hand, thematic analysis does have disadvantages, which were considered by the researcher and were mitigated. It is attested that if not accompanied with a theoretical framework, the interpretation of the data may not be as powerful (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97), hence the use of two enabling theories in order to accompany the data.

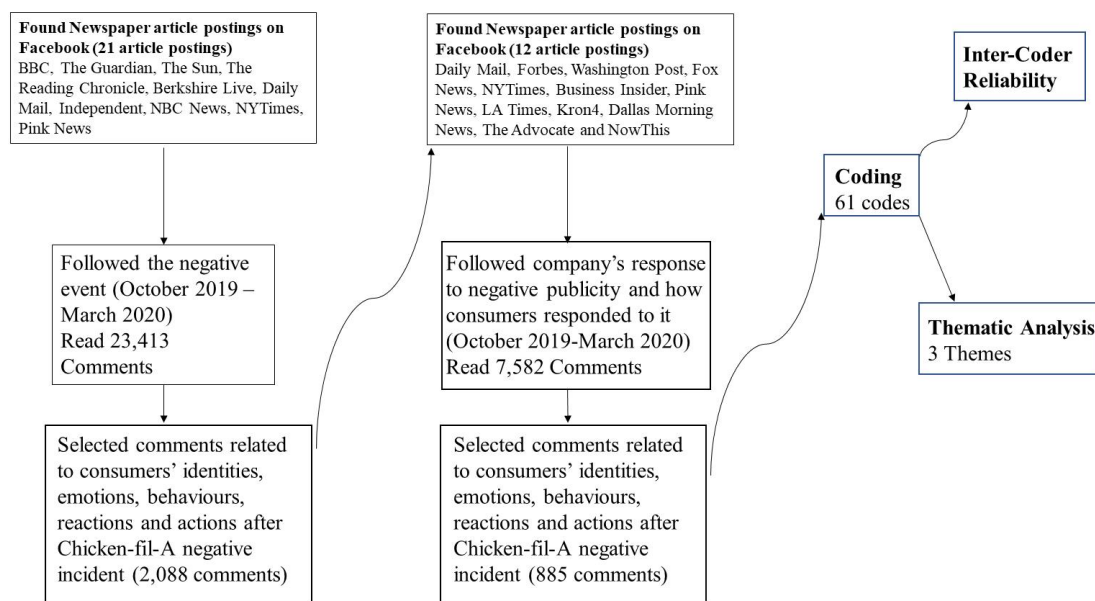


Figure 3.7: Data Collection and Analysis Overview

Overview of Codes and Themes

The table below depicts the 61 codes that were generated for this thesis followed by the eight second order and the three themes that were developed. As seen in the diagram below there are three main themes: moral emotions, consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification.

Table 3.3 Overview of Codes, Second Order Codes and Themes

Codes	Second Order Codes	Themes
Company Attackers • Values and self • Morality • Moral superiority • Support LGBTQ+ • Human rights	MORALITY	MORAL EMOTIONS (NEGATIVE EVENT)
Company Supporters • Values • Christian Identity • Moral exhibition • Blame media • Excuse company		
Company Attackers • Defend LGBTQ+ • Understand LGBTQ+ difficulties • Change opposing group views	COMPASSION	
Company Supporters • Support company • Values under attack • Protect values • Protect company and self • Defend CEO • Defend charities • Attack opposing group		
Company Attackers • Attack opposing group • Moral superiority • Identity threat • Revengeful behaviours • Help LGBTQ+ community • Protests	ANGER	
Company Supporters • Shame opposing group • Change society		MORAL EMOTIONS (CORPORATE RESPONSE)
Company Attackers • Boycotts • Unethical company • Disgust toward opposing group • Discrimination • Standing up for values • Support friends and family	DISGUST	
• Apathy • Myth of ethical consumer	MORAL APATHY	
Company Attackers • Boycotts	DISGUST	
Company Supporters • Boycotts		

Company Supporters • Self-congruence • Collective identity • Protect group • Protect company • Values congruence • Threat to social identity	SOCIAL IDENTITY	CONSUMER-COMPANY IDENTIFICATION (NEGATIVE EVENT)
Company Attackers • Self-incongruence • Company destroys lives • Values incongruence • Keep loved ones secure • Moral identity online • Degrade opposing group • Attack charities	SOCIAL IDENTITY	CONSUMER-COMPANY DISIDENTIFICATION (NEGATIVE EVENT)
Company Attackers • Forgiveness • Disbelief • Dishonesty • Trust • Insufficient response		CONSUMER-COMPANY DISIDENTIFICATION (CORPORATE RESPONSE)
Company Supporters • Betrayal of values		
Consumer Recommendations • CSR • Apology • Change identity • Detailed statement		

3.4.8 Research Presentation Operations

Movement 6: Incarnation

The sixth and final stage is incarnation and this is where the research takes ‘a concrete form’ and it is communicated to a wider audience. This is either in the form of an article publication, doctoral thesis, conference papers or presentations (Kozinets, 2020). In order to be communicated correctly, Kozinets (2020) argues that publications should entail clear and thorough descriptions of the netnographic process and operations, the dataset and how it was represented and analysed. Above all a netnographic study should answer the research questions of the study (Kozinets, 2020). The researcher has managed to do all the above and, therefore, is confident that he will be able to write an academic article as well as a doctoral thesis from this work.

3.5 Quality Criteria for Qualitative Data

The quality criteria of this research are clearly outlined in the following section. One of the first criteria to consider is reliability, which mainly involves being able to acquire the same

results when the same procedures are used by multiple researchers (Yardley, 2017). It is attested that in order to avoid bias in qualitative research, 'inter coder reliability assessment' is a way of achieving reliability (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). This entails two or more researchers coding data separately without prior communication and subsequently recording the agreed percentage (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991; Feng, 2014). Although there have been criticisms towards this method because it carries positivistic qualities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Madill, Jordan and Shirley, 2000), many researchers argue that inter-coder reliability is very useful (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). 'Inter-coder reliability' highlights that the data is robust and that anyone who would code the data would code it in the exact same manner (Potter and Levin-Donnerstein, 1999, p. 266). Additionally, it adds clarity and consistency as any disagreements are discussed and are subsequently resolved (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). O'Connor and Joffe (2020) attest that the coders should be independent and should not have to do anything with the research and additionally the minimum number should be two independent coders in order to establish reliability (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). Miles and Huberman (1994) proclaim that the inter-coder reliability is measured by 'the number of codes agreed divided the agreements and disagreements integrated'. Miles and Huberman (1994) articulate that the best percentage score is between 80-90 percent.

After having done the initial coding, the researcher consulted two colleagues in order to check the reliability of the coding and to ensure that the researcher was not biased and the coding was done objectively. The inter-coder reliability took place with two colleagues, a teaching fellow whose research interests include consumers' emotions and decision making, and a PhD Candidate whose research interests include service failures and consumer management. The first inter-coder reliability went well with a 68% and 63%, respectively. In order to achieve the desirable percentage indicated by Miles and Huberman (1994), discussions took place and a second inter-coder reliability score was calculated; 89% and 87% were reached, which were deemed as satisfactory percentages.

Table 3.4: Inter-coder Reliability Information

Coder	Coding Task	Data Coded	First inter-coder reliability	Second inter-coder reliability
Teaching Fellow Main area of expertise: consumers' emotions and consumer decision making	Free coding	Online Comments	68%	89%
PhD Candidate Main area of expertise: Service failures and customer management	Free coding	Online Comments	63%	87%

3.5.1 Validity

Ecological validity is most important for qualitative research and refers to whether the research conducted depicts reality (Braun and Clarke, 2013). It mainly seeks to ensure that the collection of data mirrors the real-life setting (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This was one of the reasons the researcher selected netnography to conduct the study as the data collected from netnography is real-time data and takes place in a real-life context. Thus, ecological validity was achieved via this method.

3.5.2 Generalisability and Transferability

Generalisability in research involves whether the results of the research are applicable to a wider population (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 280). Most researchers argue that generalisability is not relevant to qualitative research 'because of assumptions about the context-bound nature of knowledge in qualitative research and an interest in the detail of the phenomenon being investigated' (Johnson, 1997; Schofield, 1993 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 280). However, other researchers have proposed other ways to underline generalisability in a study, for instance 'vertical generalisability' (Stephens, 1982 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 280) and 'analytic or idiographic generalisability' (Sandelowski, 2004 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 280). This entails forming meaningful and deep

interpretative analysis, which adds new insights and contributes new knowledge to existing literature. In order to achieve this form of generalisability the researcher conducted thematic analysis, which involved a deep interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013), thus generalisability was achieved.

Transferability is another criterion used to ensure quality research in qualitative studies; transferability involves how the data can be transferred to other contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In order for transferability to be possible, the researcher should outline the whole process of the data collection and the data analysis in order for other researchers to be able to evaluate whether the results can be transferred to another context (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In order to achieve this criterion, the researcher of the thesis stated clearly the netnographic process stated by Kozinets (2020) and subsequently the process of thematic analysis as per Braun and Clarke (2013) guidelines.

3.6 Conclusion

To summarise, the research philosophy of this study lies within an interpretivist epistemology, conducting research inductively, therefore developing a theory based on existing frameworks: in this case, moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Additionally, the ontological position of this research lies within a constructionist approach, which observes realities and describes how interactions are socially constructed (Silverman, 2000, p.137). Given that this is a core element of netnography, it was assessed as an appropriate ontological perspective. The research approach of the thesis is a qualitative method since the majority of the studies in the context of negative publicity used quantitative methods to explore the phenomenon. This means that previous studies have not studied consumers' emotions and behaviours in depth and also did not allow for intuitive emotions and behaviours to occur. Moreover, previous studies using quantitative methods have not researched in depth the relationship of the consumer and the company after negative publicity. Therefore, the aim was to achieve these in-depth insights via a qualitative study and better comprehend the nature of the relationship between the consumer and the company after negative publicity. Additionally, qualitative

methods also help uncover participants' identities and behaviours which is a core element of the study (Gummesson, 2006).

The data collection technique for this thesis is netnography. One of the main reasons is due to the fact that netnographic findings provide insights into pragmatic issues, and thus findings can help address managerial implications, which is important for this thesis. Moreover, this method also helps unravel immediate emotions and reactions, which is an important element of the study in order to answer one of the research questions (Huy, 2002). The context of the study is negative publicity and explores emotions and reactions to a negative event that emerged at Chick-fil-A in Reading (United Kingdom). Furthermore, comments made on various Facebook posts created by online newspapers posts were examined. Additionally, the sample was purposive according to Kozinets' (2020) guidelines, and comments which included consumers' actions, behaviours, emotions and identities were selected. Finally, the data was analysed using thematic analysis as it allowed for connections to be made within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The following chapter sets out to present the findings, which are directed by the research questions of the study.

4 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the findings of the netnographic study conducted for this research. The first section 4.2 exhibits the emotional reactions consumers have towards negative publicity and specifically examines the moral emotions felt and how these affect their actions. Furthermore, section 4.3 exhibits the role of consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification in cases of negative publicity and how consumers respond cognitively to negative publicity. Section 4.4 highlights consumers' emotions, thoughts and reactions to the corporate response after negative publicity. The final section provides an overview of the findings and provides an outline for the subsequent chapter.

4.2 Emotional Responses to Negative Publicity

4.2.1 Moral Emotions

The data initially highlights the role of moral identity and moral values when consumers experience moral emotions in values-related negative publicity events. The consumers' views are split into two separate camps, those who support the company (i.e. company supporters) and those who do not support the company (i.e. company attackers), based on their ideological beliefs and values. Chick-fil-A is an organisation that has Christian values and beliefs and portrays this systematically to the public via its corporate purpose and the fact that they remain closed on Sundays to dedicate the day to worship (Chick-fil-A, 2021). The data suggests that consumers who support the company are the people who share the same values as the company and are, similarly, Christian (i.e. company supporters), so it is perceptible that Christianity is part of who they are and their moral identity. Additionally, these consumers want to establish that the organisation is outstanding; hence their values are ones to admire. In the comments below, the consumers explain that they support the company based on its values it has and also praise it.

I go to this establishment purely because they have good food and they have Christian beliefs. I go as often as I can. (Joanna, Chick-fil-A supporter #623)

I totally enjoy their food and support their corporate values and beliefs. It is a very good organisation. (Chandler, Chick-fil-A supporter #778)

The consumers seem to have a need to clarify what their religion has taught them and what they believe to be moral and ethical, and to provide explanations as to why the company should not be at fault in order to protect their religion and their values. In summary, they want to protect what is important to them. In an attempt to defend the organization, this group blames the media for how they broadcast the story and not the organisation. Thus, the consumers attempt to shift the blame elsewhere and try to restore the company's reputation to portray it in a more positive light again highlights their need to protect their values. In the comments below, the consumers assert that the media is to blame for distorting the story and that the company is innocent and should not be blamed for its Christian values it has. Additionally, they excuse the company for its actions by stating that the only reason they go against the community is due to their religious beliefs.

The CEO just said that he believes marriage should occur between a male and a female as his religion has taught him. There was no harm done to the LGBT group. The story has been distorted. (James, Chick-fil-A supporter #745)

The article is deceptive, the media are trying to distort a story again. Stating that the company is against the LGBT+ group is wrong, they are just following their religious beliefs that has very specific values. How is giving donations wrong? (Gloria, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,500)

The reason the company went against the LGBT community is because it comes into conflict with their religious beliefs. Religious freedom should be treated with equal respect as LGBT activism. They are a good example of an organisation that goes by its values and is not in any form restrictive. (Richard, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,634)

On the other hand, the data uncovers that consumers who attack the company are the ones who do not share the same beliefs and values with them (i.e. company attackers). This group of people seems to support the LGBTQ+ society and do not share the same Christian beliefs

as the company. Their values lie within equality and diversity. They make it explicit that their values contribute towards improving the wellbeing of others and improving society. They make it clear that they do not agree as to how the company operates as it discriminates the LGBTQ+ community and that their actions are shameful. The belief is the company is unethical and that consumers should stand by their morals and values and not support the company. In the comments below, they declare that they do not agree with the company's values and that the company goes against human rights.

They actively discriminate against the LGBT society, they refuse them basic human rights. They ensure that these people are not treated like humans and are treated in a very inferior manner. (Rachel, Chick-fil-A attacker #10)

They need to have the right to be able to marry. To live a life without having to think if they will get harassed or killed just because of who they are and who they love. They simply want to live and not be discriminated in society. (Dylan, Chick-fil-A attacker #146)

A human life and human rights are more important than anything else. It goes without saying that we should flee from companies that our values do not match and we hate. Why support a company and help them fulfill their discriminatory practices? (Mike, Chick-fil-A attacker #524)

Overall, the data indicates that consumers take their values into consideration prior to consuming a product or a service. This is evident as they state that although the quality of the food is good, they prefer to be ethical people and not buy from Chick-fil-A. Several participants even state that they did not eat from Chick-fil-A even when offered for free, which highlights the dedication and commitment these consumers have to adhere to their values. The consumers state below that the food is great, however they do not wish to support the company due to the values it has which they do not agree with.

I tried Chick-fil-A once even though I was aware of their views. To be honest, it was one of the most divine chicken sandwiches I ever had. Although it was nice, my morals will not be

compromised and I will never step foot in any of their restaurants. (Susan, Chick-fil-A attacker #90)

Our company buys us Chick-fil-A sandwiches every month. It's not me buying it, it's free but I still don't eat it. I don't want to support them in any way. My values are above a chicken sandwich. (Manny, Chick-fil-A attacker #478)

4.2.2 Compassion

Haidt (2003) argues that moral emotions derive from the values individuals have and their moral identity. One of the moral emotions identified in the data is compassion. Haidt's (2003) moral emotions theory states that when individuals feel compassion, they tend to want to help and alleviate the suffering of the other party. Due to the fact that the emotions of participants were not expressed outright in the majority of the comments, the researcher used Haidt's (2003) theory of moral emotions in order to deduce the emotions the consumers were expressing in the comments. It is evident in the data that the Chick-fil-A supporters empathise with the brand as they show their support by stating their intentions to continue supporting the company. The data suggests that compassion is felt due to the fact that they can relate with the values of the brand, and thus, want to continue to support it. The comments below highlight the help and support consumers want to provide to the company by continuing to buy food from the restaurant.

I will continue to support them, in fact I will get some food tonight from there with my wife. It's excellent food and they deliver it fast. Also, our branch here sponsors our local charity events which is great. (Jack, Chick-fil-A supporter #523)

I think that the company should be free to donate to whoever they want, it's no one's business. I love Chick-fil-A and will definitely be going again. I completely agree with their stance. I have rights to believe what I want, as everyone has. (Claire, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,434)

Compassion is further seen when the supporters defend the company by bringing arguments forward such as the fact that it is a human right to have one's own values and belief system. To some extent, the compassion felt is because they see that the company is under attack for their values and so they feel like they are under attack too, so they can relate with the company. This is evident when the company supporters claim that the other group is attacking them because of their Christian beliefs and values. Thus, the compassion felt towards the organisation leads to protecting it. This is mainly due to the fact that they can relate with the situation and also they feel that their values are being undermined. The compassion is evident in the company supporters' comments below where they defend the company and the CEO by stating that it is their right to have the values and beliefs they want.

How about our human rights? All the organisations have CEOs who are all allowed to have their values and beliefs. Can they not choose who they want to donate to? The LGBT group state that they accept all people..they cannot say that they accept all peoples' rights and then go against a group that has different beliefs to them! (Gill, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,609)

I do not like the way in which the people who support the LGBT+ community decided to spew hate against the company. If they don't agree with the organisations' values then they simply shouldn't purchase anything from them. The company serves anyone and does not discriminate. Stop spewing hate towards others who have a different opinion from you! (Joey, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,602)

Compassion is also felt for the charities that Chick-fil-A donates to, participants support the charities based on their Christian values and so try to defend it. The consumers again try to explain how the charities operate based on their Christian beliefs. They state that the way the charities think and operate is correct and they should not be blamed. They also intimidate the company attackers by stating that they should be ashamed for going against such charities. The fact that they support both the company and the charity shows that they are not protecting only an entity but they are also protecting their values and beliefs. Thus, they are looking to protect themselves and the threat imposed on their moral values. The comments made by the supporters below highlight their need to support their values as Christians and so they defend the Christian charities that Chick-fil-A donates too also.

The Salvation Army is completely righteous in stating that same sex marriage is not appropriate and wrong. Above all they are Christians and they aid a lot of people. (Phoebe, Chick-fil-A supporter #4)

The Salvation Army aids so many people from any background and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes is a religious charity which just has some regulations in place, the athlete must be straight and not to have intercourse prior to getting married. There is no discrimination - they are simply following their religious beliefs. I think you're thinking is quite outdated and if you don't like their beliefs then just don't encounter them. (Ken, Chick-fil-A supporter #203)

I used to work for the Salvation Army for many years and they help many people by providing food and a place to stay no matter the situation and they never have to state their sexuality. You should be ashamed for going against such charities that help so many people and it's sad that you are spreading negative news about them. (Alex, Chick-fil-A supporter #508)

On the contrary, the company attackers feel compassion for people who identify as LGBTQ+ and it is evident that they sympathise with them and seem to know how they feel. When defending them, to the opposing camp they question whether they can even understand how these individuals feel and ask them to walk in their shoes. This underlines the fact that these supporters can comprehend the difficulties this community is going through, feels compassion and, thus, wants to alleviate their pain (Haidt, 2003). They are trying to change the opposing group's thoughts and behaviours by explaining what these people are going through and are assuring them that it will have a huge impact on society if they change their behaviours towards the LGBTQ+ group. The comments below highlight the compassion these consumers have towards the LGBTQ+ society and attempt to explain the negative impact they have towards other people and the difficulties the LGBTQ+ society is facing.

Would you like it if people were saying you are a disgrace to society? Would you like it if someone wouldn't want you to exist? Would you feel nice to be treated inferiorly just because

you were born that way? How would you feel if your job and life were at threat just because of this? This company supports all those things. (Christie, Chick-fil-A attacker #34)

Accepting other people for who they are can change a lot for them and will not take-away anything from you. (Vaso, Chick-fil-A attacker #533)

The LGBT+ society aren't forcing their thoughts on you. All they are asking for is equality and live their life freely. How is that bad? They want to be treated like everyone is. (Tina Chick-fil-A attacker #276)

So if a restaurant contributed towards the fact that you cannot get married to the person you love, and took all your rights away as a citizen, would you buy food from them because it's really good? You sound like a bad individual full of spite. (Monica, Chick-fil-A attacker #904)

4.2.3 Anger

Besides feeling compassion towards the company, the corporate supporters express their anger towards the company attackers as they accuse them of being unethical. Haidt (2003) states when individuals feel angry they usually try to attack or humiliate the other party, which is seen in the participants' comments. The corporate supporters declare that the other party is trying to diminish Christians and that they are the ones causing problems, shifting the blame to them. Thus, this suggests that corporate supporters believe that they are under threat from the corporate attackers as they want to diminish them. The threat viewed is mostly against their religion and their moral identity and so the anger is expressed to protect their moral identity. They attempt to degrade the other group in order to diminish the threat imposed on their moral identity. In the comments, the consumers in the comments express their anger towards the company attackers by stating that they feel under attack for the values that they have and they also degrade them.

You are the ones who are trying to disparage us, not us! You are the ones that despise us! (Nick, Chick-fil-A supporter #734)

No. Wrong again. It's Christians who are being attacked, sued, bullied and intimidated for their beliefs. YOU want Christians to be forced by law to violate their beliefs. YOU demand that those who believe that homosexuality is a sin conform to YOUR beliefs. Fact. What beliefs do Christians/conservatives want turned into law?? How exactly are those organisations 'attacking' you? You sound ridiculous. (Mary, Chick-fil-A supporter #236)

The other group which are the people who support the LGBTQ+ society (corporate attackers) experience similar emotions but for different reasons. The emotion of anger is also apparent in this group as they attack the company and shame it (Haidt, 2003). They degrade the company by stating that helping others in disastrous situations is nothing significant, that it actively contributes to destroying other peoples' lives and violates basic human rights by abusing other people. The anger is perceptible in the comments below as they attack and degrade the company.

All the fast food chains help the community in times of need and in disastrous situations. Nothing special as to how Chick-fil-A helps people (Frank, Chick-fil-A attacker #55)

The company gives part of their profits to charities which contribute towards killing gay people in Uganda. It is not about having opposing beliefs or views. This is a human rights problem and whether you will actively contribute towards these atrocities. (Lilly, Chick-fil-A attacker #400)

The company abuses individuals - it is a very shameful company. (Ed, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,023)

The data further highlights that the anger expressed towards the organisation and revengeful behaviours against are due to the fact that the company contributes to the suffering of other people. Additionally, they feel angry about the damage that the company has caused to society and the LGBTQ+ community. They feel that taking revenge and effectively making the restaurant disappear will alleviate the suffering of their fellow LGBTQ+ allies. The

comments below exhibit the company attackers' disapproval of the company and state their reasons for boycotting the company.

This organisation is exactly what's damaging society at the moment. Marginalising individuals and imposing their beliefs on everyone. We should all stop eating there and make them go bankrupt. (Nicole, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,429)

You are aware of the fact that they donate to get gay people killed right? I can buy food from somewhere else where they don't abuse people - they deserve to crash and cease to exist. (Raj, Chick-fil-A attacker #502)

Although they serve tasty food, me and my family will not be going again, they destroy peoples' lives. (Patricia, Chick-fil-A attacker #325)

The company attackers also express their anger via protests, which is another form of attack. In order to urge people to stop going to Chick-fil-A, protests were carried outside the restaurant in Reading and online petitions were formed. By protesting, the company attackers show their actual and pragmatic support towards the LGBTQ+ society and they actively take action to create change for the LGBTQ+ society. Their anger made them want to help the community in a very active way in the offline world. The comments express the reasons that consumers decided to protest and that their intentions were purely to inform others of the company's actions and create a change in other people's behaviours.

The reason for the protest is to inform people as to where their money ends up. I believe that individuals will assess better and make careful decisions when they are aware of the fact that this company kills people like my friends. (Maggie, Chick-fil-A attacker #444)

You may believe that this establishment is open to all the people and so you are not aware of why we are protesting. So this is the reason for protesting, in order enlighten people as to the reasons of protests. (Lee, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,379)

I was present at the protest and I was cautious as to not impede on their business. We simply informed individuals before entering that by buying from this restaurant they kill people because of their sexual orientation. (Lucy, Chick-fil-A attacker #110)

We should begin signing an online petition, let's do anything we can about this situation. Please sign in the following link [Link provided]. (Marianna, Chick-fil-A attacker #78)

On a similar wavelength, the corporate attackers online on social media sites attack the opposing party (Christians) and accuse them of being unethical for supporting the company. Again, the emotion of anger is apparent but this time in the form of attacking the opposing party. The company attackers show that they are ethical and morally superior to the other group and try to shame them for supporting Chick-fil-A; stating that they should be ashamed of their support towards the company. In order to help out again their LGBTQ+ friends and to contribute to society, they shame the other group about their morals and are indirectly trying to make them boycott the company by attacking their identity and morality. This is highlighted in the ongoing conversations that the two parties have and the company attackers always stress that the other party is unethical and, further to that, question them whether they are aware of the fact that that they destroy peoples' lives. Their attack is a way to contribute positively to society by making the other group re-think their thoughts and actions. In the comments that follow, consumers state that the company is unethical and that consumers who support such a company are equally unethical. They also exhibit their moral superiority and express that they have morals and the opposing group lacks morality.

They donate to charities that motivate the killing of LGBT people. You can decide to be ethical or unethical. The company is unethical. (Eleanor, Chick-fil-A attacker #298)

Sponsoring money for conversion therapy is unacceptable. The company contributes to the suffering of the LGBT+ community. If you know all this stuff and still patronise the, then you have no morals. People with morality will definitely not give money to such companies. (Nicky, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,337)

I don't agree. I reject any companies that donate to charities that do such atrocities. It's not about being tolerant it's about having morals. You may not have morals but I do. (John, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,503)

They help in destructing LGBT peoples' lives just because of their sexual orientation. If you buy food from this place you are not a decent human being. People who have morals will not buy from this place. (Peter, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,573)

Are you aware of where their funds go? Is the chicken that good that you have to lose your values and morality over it? I prefer to go elsewhere where my morals are not tampered. This battle against them is not ridiculous. Many people who identify as LGBT have lost their lives because of unethical companies like Chick-fil-A. (Andrew, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,655)

4.2.4 Disgust

Moreover, disgust is another emotion that emerges from the data. According to Haidt (2003), when someone feels moral disgust they then avoid contact with the other party. The company attackers state outright that they also feel disgust against Chick-fil-A and that they will boycott the company. The disgust felt is mainly on the grounds that the company acts unethically, and it discriminates individuals. So, due to the values that they have that go against such practices, they feel disgusted by the company's actions. Their disgust is also directed towards people who support the company, which again highlights the fact that it is not the company they have an issue with, per se, it is the fact that they do not accept discrimination in any form. Furthermore, their disgust felt for the company also urges them to direct other people to boycott the company also; this signifies that besides avoiding contact with the other party, disgust also leads to wanting to cause damage to the other party. The consumers in the comments below state their disgust towards the company's actions and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community. They clearly state that they have different values to the ones of the company and that they want to boycott the organisation as an act of support towards the LGBTQ+ community.

If you are an LGBT+ supporter then you should definitely boycott Chick-fil-A. We should prioritise the LGBT group as opposed to sandwiches. (Becky, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,710)

I live in the USA and I have never entered a Chick-fil-A in my life and nor will I ever. After finding out that they fund charities that abuse LGBT members I was disgusted and even more disgusted that people still go and support them (Ross, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,700)

I congratulate the people from the UK for taking action against this company! I will continue to boycott this company as they discriminate certain groups. (Luke, Chick-fil-A attacker #789)

So what you are saying is that I should buy from a company in which I find their morals disgusting? The CEO donates money to places that I find revolting and I will never give any of my money to such a company. I will not support companies in which I do not agree with their values and their donations. (Janice, Chick-fil-A attacker #633)

Additionally, consumers feel disgust also as to the way organisations operate and contribute negatively towards society. They feel boycotting organisations in which their values do not align with is their way of changing society. The organisations are, therefore, used as a way in order for consumers to show what values consumers are fighting for. Additionally, consumers are standing against an anti-LGBTQ+ organisation and want to show that, if other companies are to do the same, the same behaviours are to follow. Thus, Chick-fil-A is also used by consumers as a way to signify to other organisations what follows if they act unethically. The following quotes highlight different opinions by consumers; they are attacking Chick-fil-A in order to create changes within organisations and signify to other organisations that discrimination in any form is punished by consumers.

Boycotting Chick-fil-A may be a way in order to force them to stop donating money to such terrible charities. It doesn't mean that I have to go to Uganda and protest, boycotting the restaurant says that I'm actually doing something. I cannot boycott products from Uganda since we don't have any of their products to buy so Chick-fil-A is my nearest way of protesting against the brutalities that happen in Uganda. (Jill, Chick-fil-A attacker #97)

We have the strength to fight big organisations when we do not agree with their values. We have the right to protest and boycott businesses. Our protests have led to the closure of the restaurant. Boycotts towards Starbucks have forced them to pay their tax owed. Not caring is never the solution if you want change. You accuse me of being wrong - maybe you should look at the way you think. (Phil, Chick-fil-A attacker #202)

The money that you give them goes to charities that abuses LGBT people. If we all boycott them then the company will lose out on profits and will change the way they operate. It is up to us to change organisations and the way they operate. (Charlie, Chick-fil-A attacker #936)

Which companies you decide to buy from and support could make a difference to society. (Emma, Chick-fil-A attacker #976)

This should be an exemplar to other companies and they should listen to the fact that we support the community and do not like the fact that they discriminate them. (Bob, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,906)

As opposed to regular corporate attackers that feel anger, compassion and disgust for various reasons, friends and family of those who identify as being part of the LGBTQ+ feel disgust towards the organisation only. They defend their friends and families who identify as LGBTQ+ by stating that they will boycott the company to show their support. They are disgusted by the fact that companies restrict rights for their loved ones to love freely and want to show their disagreement with all the companies that contribute to the suffering of their friends and family. This may be an indirect need to help their friends and family as much as they can as they view them to be very vulnerable citizens in society and so, showing their disgust and boycotting organisations, is a way of achieving this. The comments below signify the support that family and friends of those who identify as LGBTQ+ show towards them and act as a way to alleviate the discrimination these individuals face in society.

I will stand by my family and friends who are part of the LGBT+ community and will boycott the restaurant. (Sarah, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,885)

I will never eat at a Chick-fil-A. I love my friends enough not to support such an organisation that causes so much damage to the LGBT+ community. (Andy, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,002)

We have to stand against companies that support similar issues in solidarity of our LGBT+ friends. We have to win the fight against these organisations that suppress people and make them suffer. (Gunther, Chick-fil-A attacker #608)

4.2.5 Apathy

There are also the consumers who feel moral apathy, which means that they do not take their morals into consideration upon making purchases. However, this does seem to be the minority as the majority are in the camps previously mentioned. These individuals look at other factors when making their purchases such as the quality of the product and service and how an organisation contributes to the society. They do not seem to care about the values the company has and so it can be argued that moral apathy takes place. The comments below highlight that consumers are more interested in how the company operates daily and the quality it provides to consumers as opposed to the values a company may have.

I like the company and how they operate on a general level, that's all I care about. I am not bothered about their value, anyone can believe what they want, like I believe in what I want. (Sal, neutral towards Chick-fil-A)

I cannot grasp why people are even bothered about this. If the company provides jobs to people, does good to the community, then fine. To be honest, the only thing I care about is the quality of the food, I am not concerned about anything else. (Jay, neutral towards Chick-fil-A)

Additionally, the reason for this apathy is based on the premise that they believe that all organisations act unethically to some extent. So, they believe that it is difficult to hunt down every single company that causes damage and so there is no way of stopping it completely. Moreover, they state that this makes it extremely difficult to be an ethical consumer as they would end up not being able to purchase from anywhere. Thus, the apathy is caused because

they perceive that they cannot change organisations and nothing can be done in order to create change. The following comments outline the fact that consumers feel that they do not have the power to change organisations and that is why they feel apathetic towards the company's actions. They additionally state that all organisations act unethically and so it is difficult to be an ethical consumer today.

All the organisations are bound to fund something you do not agree with. That's how it is, you just need to move on. You must be ignorant if you think that all the organisations are transparent. You are simply losing out on a very delicious sandwich. (Sonia, neutral towards Chick-fil-A)

How many companies would still be operating if we boycotted them for doing something wrong? All the companies do bad things like not paying taxes, mistreating staff etc. (Leonard, neutral towards Chick-fil-A)

Who investigates every CEO's beliefs of any company they purchase from..I can say for sure that behind every company you will find some type of racism. Your relatives may even be racists and you don't know it. When I buy products I never think about the CEO and what he believes. If I buy from this restaurant, it's simply because I'm starving and not because I follow the CEO and what he believes in. (Cameron, neutral towards Chick-fil-A)

Being an ethical consumer today is very difficult and not possible, you will find that all companies act unethically in some sort of way. I am not bothered about any CEO's opinions- all I care is that there are decent people working in these companies and they shouldn't be left without a job. (George, neutral towards Chick-fil-A)

4.2.6 Moral Emotions Overview

Overall, the data suggests that company supporters experience compassion towards the company and anger towards the opposing group. The compassion experienced towards the company leads consumers to defend and state their intentions to continue going to the restaurant. The anger towards the opposing group leads the company supporters to attack

them mainly on the grounds that they feel that their Christian values are under threat. These actions mainly occur due to the fact that these consumers want to protect their values and moral identity as the brand is viewed to have the same values as them. The company attackers on the other hand experience compassion towards the LGBTQ+ community and anger and disgust towards the company. The compassion towards the LGBTQ+ group leads these consumers to have to explain to the opposing group the difficulties that this community is facing in an attempt to change their thoughts and behaviours. The emotion of anger, on the other hand, leads them to attacking the company and its supporters by stating that they are both unethical and are causing damage to the LGBTQ+ community. This group of consumers state that they will boycott the company and also form protests against the company. The company attackers also experience disgust against the company, which again leads to boycotting the company and talking negatively about it. Again, this group feels that their moral identity and values are under threat and seek to protect these. Finally, there are consumers who experience moral apathy, which means that they do not take the negative event into consideration as they think that other factors other than values are more important when it comes to purchasing such as quality. Additionally, these consumers believe that all companies act unethically and it is unavoidable in today's society.

4.3 Consumers' Cognitions and Level of Identification After Negative Publicity

4.3.1 Consumer-Company Identification

Within the consumers that support the company a consumer-company identification is discernible (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). The company's identity is viewed by the consumers as a giving and caring company that helps everyone. The word 'we' as opposed to 'I' is used regularly which signifies a collective identity (Thoits and Virshup, 1997 cited in Beverland et al., 2020) and, thus, a form of identification is evident between the consumers and the brand. The consumers feel part of the company due to the identification and so there is a need to protect the group and their social identity. In the comments, they strongly defend the company by stating that the company has done many good deeds for the community and should not be judged for one negative incident.

We are entitled to believe anything we want. We can also give donations to anyone we please. You do not have the right to push your beliefs on us. (William, Chick-fil-A supporter #657)

They are a company that does a lot to the community, they provide scholarships and help people in disastrous cases and also donate food. It is much more than what other organisations provide. I definitely support a company that helps the community in such ways. (Oliver, Chick-fil-A supporter #304)

The company treats their workers and consumers with respect despite of their sexual orientation or beliefs. There was only one charity to those they donated that seems to be anti-LGBT and the company stated that it stopped their donations to that specific charity. (Barbara, Chick-fil-A supporter #673)

The company has given donations to a lot of charities, all which in turn make the lives of people in the community better. Out of the many charities they have donated money to, it seems they donated to three charities that have alterative views. It doesn't make sense to focus on these three charities and not the other thousand charities they have helped and contributed to. It just seems that the LGBT community is trying to virtue their beliefs to others. (Karen, Chick-fil-A supporter #703)

Consumers that support the company seem to be also defensive across the opposing party that state that the company is unethical and only shares hate. It is evident, as mentioned previously, that the consumers' morals and the company's morals are congruent. The data highlights that the consumers see themselves in the brand as they compare themselves with the brand in a positive manner, thus a values-alignment is evident. The consumers reply in a defensive manner to the opposing party, trying to explain that there is no hate involved in the corporation's actions and that it is a very ethical company and should not be blamed. Hence, it is argued that the consumers are protecting the brand as a way to protect the self. In the statements below, the consumers defend the company in a way that seems to be answering on the company's behalf, there seems a need to defend the company as a means of defending the self.

The company does not despise gay people, many people including myself believe in the Bible and its opposition to gay marriage, but it certainly does not mean we hate them. (Helen, Chick-fil-A supporter #935)

The company should be able to give their money to whichever charity they wish. I don't have anyone telling me which charities I should give money to. I help out charities that are Christian. It's my money and so it's my decision. It's their money so it's their decision. Did they ever reject you from any of their restaurants? My guess is no (Louise, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,345)

This concept of identification and the protection of the self is further seen when the consumers defend the CEO also as he is the one who instilled the values in the brand. They state that the CEO does not hate anyone and has never harmed anyone from the LGBTQ+ community. The Chick-fil-A supporters blame the media for distorting the story and not reporting it correctly once again. They further claim that they agree with how the CEO has acted and agree with his beliefs; this indicates that there is a congruence in their views and moral identity. It is possible that the consumers are using the CEO's actions (e.g. has never harmed anyone) in order to show his outstanding morality, and thus in turn exhibiting their morality also. Thus, their defense for the CEO is to protect their self. The following three comments depict the consumers' need to protect the CEO as it seems that they have the same values as him and so this is another means of protecting themselves and their identity.

The CEO just said that he believes marriage should occur between a male and a female as his religion has taught him. There was no harm done to the LGBT group. The story has been distorted. (Mitchell, Chick-fil-A supporter #906)

You see it as hate. The owner has the right to do what he wants and support whatever group he pleases. I agree with his stance I would do the same. It's my personal opinion and there is no loathe associated with this belief. (Robert, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,034)

I do think that people of the same sex being together is not okay and so does the CEO of the establishment. However, they have never refused service to anyone and that says a lot!
(Bernadette, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,421)

Furthermore, the data underlines that the consumers want to show that they are part of a respectable group and that should not be attacked by stating that other organisations do much worse. The need to further protect their group is apparent when these consumers compare Chick-fil-A's act with other acts such as fraud and child labour, where they state that these are greater unethical acts. As an attempt to protect their group they attack the other party by attacking their ego and by asking them how they have contributed positively to society. Other consumers are fixated on the fact that the company acts in a social responsible manner, which is enough and Chick-fil-A should not be held accountable for anything. In the statements below the consumers attempt to excuse the company by stating that other companies do worse and that Chick-fil-A actually contributes positively to society and so should not be attacked. This once again signifies a need to defend and protect their sense of self as it is a company in which they identify with.

If that is your view then fine but you also have to boycott other companies that do much worse and choose to operate in countries where there are policies in opposition to the LGBT group. I can say from my experience that the company treats members of the community fine whatever the sexual orientation of the individual and their workers are treated with respect. I cannot say the same about companies who use child labour. I will continue eating their food.
(Nancy, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,005)

The company does not treat the LGBT community any differently, if you apply to work at Chick-fil-A they will hire you. I would understand boycotting a restaurant because it has acts unethically and fraudulently. However, this protest over the company's beliefs is absurd.
(Lia, Chick-fil-A supporter #1,378)

It's a company and chooses to donate - it doesn't even have to! They are doing something to contribute to society - what are you doing? The causes they donate to aid many people including young athletes and students (Matthew, Chick-fil-A supporter #723)

I cannot see what is so wrong with the company. They donate to charities that help young people and help them excel. If these charities are against the LGBTQ group it doesn't matter, what matters is that they help people in the community. (Betty, Chick-fil-A supporter #712)

Moreover, the consumers feel that their social identity is under threat as they state that the opposing party wants to destroy them. They also feel like they are being oppressed as to what group they are allowed to follow, hence the attack that is occurring towards the LGBTQ+ supporters. The identification with the company, in conjunction with the threat imposed to their social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Whetten and Godfrey, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) is what urges this group to attack the other party. Their aim is mainly to preserve their social identity and to protect again a part of themselves. The following comments depict the consumers need to protect their social identity as they mention that the opposing group is trying to diminish their group (i.e. Christians) and they state that they feel that they are under threat.

These are all lies. The company does not act against any individual. The only reason you are doing this is to diminish Christians. (Margaret, Chick-fil-A supporter #892)

We are in a country in which the freedom to speak is promoted, so now are we not permitted to have our own views? Its upsetting that now we have to be told what we should and shouldn't believe in and be tormented about our beliefs. (Charles, Chick-fil-A supporter #801)

Could you please explain how these organisations have discriminated and are said to hate the LGBT community? Being a Christian company does not mean that they discriminate against others or that they hate and this is the case with Chick-fil-A. People are now being discriminated because of their religious beliefs and we will see more and more of this in the future. (Janine, Chick-fil-A supporter #845)

Are we no longer allowed to speak about our religion and beliefs? The LGBT community just cares about its members and is not tolerant towards other groups. (Mark, Chick-fil-A supporter #912)

4.3.2 Consumer-Company Disidentification

The group of people that support the LGBTQ+ community view Chick-fil-A's corporate identity as cruel, malicious and uncaring. This is due to the fact that they declare that the company is oppressing members of the LGBTQ+ community and is contributing to their suffering and having them killed for who they are. They even view the company as criminals. Additionally, they declare that the company has not negated any information with respect to their donations which according to them confirms that the company is all about contributing to destroying lives of the LGBTQ+ community. In the following four statements the consumers explain why they do not buy food from this company and that they clearly do not have anything in common with the company and disagree with the way it operates and the damage that it causes.

Purchasing ethically is not as easy as one might think, it takes a lot of investigation. However, when an organisations identity is clear to the public and what they support then it makes our job easier to not support them. I do not support Christian businesses as they tend to oppress others. (Deborah, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,865)

Chick-fil-A's profits go towards helping getting gay people killed in other countries. Countries like Uganda impose death penalties on gay people. That's the reason we despise the company. Not due to their religious views but because their profits go towards killing people. They are creating crimes against humanity and human rights. (Timothy, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,900)

It would be nice if the company did not donate to charities that are anti-LGBT. These charities only want their rights removed, criminalises them and causes them psychological distress. The company has never rejected this. (Jason, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,387)

They donate funds to pass a law in Uganda to get gay people killed. Anything they try to do to compensate for these preposterous actions will not even help. (Stephanie, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,578)

The data suggests that this group wants to morally distance themselves from the organisation as they state that they do not purchase from organisations in which their values do not align with and that a values misalignment is evident. This group views the organisation as immoral and unethical due to the donations it gives to specific charities. By claiming that they will never go to Chick-fil-A and will simply go to other restaurants in which their values match, the consumers want to show that they do not want to be associated with the organisation in any way. In the comments below the consumers state they do not purchase goods or services from organisations with which their values do not align with and Chick-fil-A is one of the companies that their values do not align.

Values cannot be tampered with for simply a sandwich. I do not patronise businesses in which are against the LGBT+ group and my values in general. I neither buy beauty products in which support animal testing. These are a sample of my values and what I condone. It may sometimes be inconvenient to cherry pick but my values are over inconvenience. (Lola, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,686)

I do not agree..it's clearly a matter of choice where we spend our money which we work so hard to achieve..I purchase from establishments that speak for me and my values. I never want to eat at Chick-fil-A, I will eat at establishments that have the same morality and values as I do... (Joshua, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,872)

Moral distancing from the organisation can be seen in the comments below. Another reason for morally distancing oneself from the organisation is not only due to values but also due to the need to exhibit one's morality. They want to show to others that they are people with morals and that they do not agree with the way the organisation operates. All in all, they want to show their morality to others online. In the comments below they state that they have a 'moral duty' and that they are 'adequate human being[s]' this underlines their need to exhibit their moral identity and moral superiority.

When you are aware of organisations' unethical acts, you have a moral duty to not support them. (Brian, Chick-fil-A attacker #2,006)

I prefer to be an adequate human being with morals rather than support such companies. (Kevin, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,895)

They further want to show that they disagree with this company and their moral distance to anything that has to do with the organisation by attacking the CEO of the company also. They view him as an extension of the brand and want to show that they disagree with his actions. They want to highlight their complete moral disengagement with the brand by making it clear that they do not support the CEO in any form either. They attack the CEO by stating that they do not support such people and that such individuals are not considered moral citizens of the society. Hinting once again that they are moral citizens of the society and that is why they do not want to be associated with him in any way. In the two statements below, it is evident that the company is anthropomorphised via the CEO and the consumers express that they do not support either the CEO or the company as they believe that their views are disrespectful.

The reason we are intolerant is because basic human rights such as marrying and working are stripped away from these people. We do not support people who do not let others live their lives as they want. (Edward, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,934)

The company is not a dutiful citizen of society. I will never buy anything from them. (Melissa, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,359)

These participants want to make it clear that they do not want to be associated with the company in any way or form and so they reveal that they do not agree with the company and the way it behaves. They point out all the wrongdoings of the company and want to make clear that the company is wrong and they are in the right. Thus, it is apparent that these consumers want to make obvious that they disidentify with the company and that their identities do not match (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). It is argued that these consumers want to make their social identity discernible and show to others online that they care about

the LGBTQ+ society. Their comments below show once again their strong disagreement with the company and that they do not want to be associated with it.

When you pay to maltreat other people, then you are the ones who are wrong not us. (Jeffrey, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,304)

I don't condone to any of these acts - they cause plenty of emotional scars. (Ryan, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,678)

Getting people killed for who they are and forcing them into therapy for conversion is something that I do not agree with. (Laura, Chick-fil-A attacker #2,000)

It is a crime when you say that LGBT people should die. (Cynthia, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,923)

The findings suggest that the company attackers want to show that they do not want to be part of a group that contributes to the suffering of other people and so once again want to distinguish their position and their social identity (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). This is particularly highlighted when coming into conflict with the other party and they inform them that giving money to this organisation grants them the permission to make other people agonise. In the following statements the company attackers attack the consumers also and inform them that by supporting the company they support criminal behaviours and are marginalising people.

Chick-fil-A helps to get gay people killed in Uganda. If you go to the restaurant then you are also contributing to this funding and the unlawful behaviours towards the LGBT community (Kathleen, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,503)

Believing is one thing and wanting to make people suffer is another. In other words, you eating there contributes to the suffering of the LGBT people. (Jacob, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,856)

The problem is the fact that there are people who believe that it's OK for Chick-fil-A to give money to such charities and kill gay people. (Gary, Chick-fil-A attacker #2,049)

You are telling me that you are fine with your money going towards the LGBT people suffering? Your money helps to fund conversion therapies and killing gay people in Uganda. (Bruno, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,824)

Additionally, the Chick-fil-A attackers go against the opposing camp in order to make them feel bad about their social identity and the identification they carry with this company. They degrade them as individuals and the organisation in which they identify themselves with. It is clear that once again they want to show their complete disidentification with the company. They also question them whether they are happy about the company in which they identify with and try to make them feel bad about their choices. The comments below signify that corporate attackers are trying to degrade the opposing group and are trying to make corporate supporters guilty for supporting the company and its actions. Thus, corporate attackers in the comments below attempt to attack the corporate supporters' social identity. Additionally, the corporate attackers pose questions to the corporate attackers in order to make them think about their actions.

If you think that congratulating such appalling behaviour is OK, then that says a lot about you and who are as a person. What other good things they do is completely irrelevant if they treat the LGBT group in such a way. (Beatrice, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,806)

They donate to charities that harm LGBT people and cause discrimination. Do you feel good about that? (Leyla, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,845)

They are against gay people and love. Is that even right? Existing and living as who you are is a basic human right. Anyone who doubts this then doubts the fundamental rights of a human being. How is that right in any way, Amalia? (Blake, Chick-fil-A attacker #2,000)

They are the ones sending the money to the charities and so they have gay people killed indirectly. People may be allowed to have opinions but to actively fund killing - that's

inappropriate and upsetting. Would you be OK with having a meal at an establishment that kills people just because they are straight? (Marcel, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,445)

The LGBTQ+ advocates also want to make clear their disidentification with the charities to which Chick-fil-A donates to. They clearly state that they do not donate to charities that discriminate other people and they find unethical. Thus, it is noticeable that they want to protect their social identity by disidentifying with the charities also, not just the company. The consumers express their strong disapproval of the charities that Chick-fil-A donates to due to the discrimination they have against the LGBTQ+ community, therefore the concept of disidentification is seen in the comments below. They degrade their charities and make their disidentification evident.

I don't support the Salvation Army due to their unethical actions. If I donate to charities I try and research about who they are and what they do (supporting the LGBTQ group is very important to me) and I decide accordingly. (Nova, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,465)

They make donations to the National Christian Foundation, which is one of the charities that promotes the killing of gay people in Uganda. You must be really proud about this charity. (Lionel, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,477)

The Salvation Army funds conversion therapies and does not take in gay or transgender individuals to help them out. It's an appalling charity. (Reuben, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,489)

The Salvation Army does not take in members of the LGBT+ community. I do not support them I support other charities that help all people and do not discriminate. (Pearl, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,961)

There are also those who acknowledge the difficulties their family and friends go through in their day-to-day activities and the obstacles they constantly face in their lives. They want to inform others as to the difficulties the LGBTQ+ members face and how vulnerable and fragile these people are in society. This highlights that they do not want to be associated with a company that contributes to the suffering of their friends and family and so disidentification

with the company shows their support towards their family and friends. The consumers in the following comments express their support to their friends and family who identify as LGBTQ+ and make it clear that their battle against the company is to keep their loved ones safe and secure.

I appreciate the fact that people are actively doing something about this as it means my friends and family feel secure and looked after. (Lorenzo, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,589)

My friend has to take into consideration where in the world it's safe to travel due to who he is. Constantly worried whether he should reveal the person with him is his husband. It's not about politics is about human rights. (Olivia, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,608)

It looks like you do not know what you are saying Max. You are a supporter of an establishment which wants people like my friends killed. (Zara, Chick-fil-A attacker #1,721)

4.4 Consumers' Emotions and Reactions to the Company's Response

4.4.1 Disgust and Disidentification

After the backlash the company faced when the consumers protested and went against them in Reading, Chick-fil-A decided to announce that it would stop donating money to those specific charities and would be looking into alternatives (Sandler, 2019). Again, the two opposing camps' reactions to this event differ between one another. The company attackers continue to experience the emotion of disgust as they state that nothing has changed and so they will continue to boycott the restaurant (Haidt, 2003) due to the fact that they believe that the company still has the same values. Moreover, they declare that the company has done a lot of harm to the LGBTQ+ community and so they cannot be forgiven. They also seem to still want to disidentify themselves with the brand by stating that they have not changed their views about the brand and that they will continue to not go to the restaurant (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). This shows that if the values are deeply embedded deep within an individual they do not change easily and also there is a need to guard and protect their moral values and moral identity once again. In addition to this, the need to disidentify with the

company is again apparent, which signifies that they want to make clear that they do not agree with what the company does and want to protect their social identity. The comments below highlight the consumers' disbelief in the corporates response and that they believe the company still holds the same values and beliefs and that nothing has changed. They state that they will still continue boycotting the restaurant until they see actual change.

It looks like a deep hollow offer if I'm honest. It doesn't change all the bad things they have done and I will still not buy anything from them. (Anabel, Chick-fil-A attacker #800)

They still hold the same values nothing has really changed just the donations. I am still boycotting them. (Melina, Chick-fil-A attacker #619)

They already harmed so many people the damage has already occurred, it's too late. I will continue not to buy from this restaurant. (Stanley, Chick-fil-A attacker #240)

I am never going to a Chick-fil-A unless they can convince me that they will no longer spread hate and terror in the community. (Roxanne, Chick-fil-A attacker #404)

Furthermore, the emotion of disgust is also seen when consumers state that they want to boycott the company due to the fact that they believe that it is not a genuine organisation. According to the consumers, this is based on the premise that the company has also said in the past that it would stop donating to anti-LGBTQ+ charities and the company never delivered its promise. They are disgusted by the dishonesty of the organisation and they have difficulty believing that the organisation is capable of change. Due to the company's false behaviour and lies they also state that they do not trust that it is now saying the truth. Therefore, due to mistakes that the company has done in the past, consumers have lost their trust towards Chick-fil-A and so many reparations are necessary by Chick-fil-A in order to regain back their trust. Also, most consumers state that they will wait and see whether the organisation has changed the way it operates, underlining their doubt in the company's honesty. It is evident from the data transparency and honesty from organisations is critical in cases of negative publicity. A lack of trust in the company's actions is expressed in the

following statements as consumers are not sure whether the company will stop donating to the specific charities and so are reluctant to change their views.

It still doesn't change my view that I have about them. It doesn't seem a genuine change they are still a Christian company that oppresses the LGBT+ community. I prefer not to support them and show my support towards my friends who have suffered as a result of their actions. (Roy, Chick-fil-A attacker #9)

They promised in the past that they will terminate the funds to such charities and didn't stick to their promise. They are liars I will only trust that they are telling the truth when I see evidence. (Matteo, Chick-fil-A attacker #788)

The problem is that any money we decide to give them will most likely go to anti-LGBT causes. I would wait and see what they do because they always lie and just state they will stop and then don't. (Walter, Chick-fil-A attacker #601)

Moreover, consumers are convinced that the company is lying due to their dishonest behaviour in the past and so they claim that the company has ulterior motives for their actions and are doing it in order to cover up any damage that the negative publicity has caused. They also believe that the company will continue donating to such charities so these consumers are not easily convinced by a simple statement that the company will stop donating to such charities. Consumers are no longer easily convinced by a simple statement that is published by the company, they seek more action as to how the company responds to negative publicity. It seems a simple statement only is not sufficient to fix any damage done. Below, the consumers state that the company is only declaring that it will stop its donations to specific charities in order to avoid further backlash and, thus, they are convinced that the company's actions are not pure. As a result, they state their intentions to keep boycotting the company.

They are simply ceasing the donations because they want to avoid further negative publicity and not because they have changed their minds and feel that the LGBT society should have

the same rights as everybody else. The company still supports this kind of stuff, just more discreetly. (Leon, Chick-fil-A attacker #729)

Are you that naïve to believe that the company has changed and they think they have made a mistake? The only reason they are doing this is clearly to open other chains in other countries and to avoid any future protests. They are a greedy company after the money. (Tate, Chick-fil-A attacker #734)

They are not sorry for the damage they have caused or have they changed their views? This is simply happening because they have been denied rental space and faced boycotts, things that they want to avoid in the future. (Scarlet, Chick-fil-A attacker #27)

It's a publicity stunt and to enhance their brand image. The company is filled with hate and I will continue to boycott them! (Athena, Chick-fil-A attacker #4)

Also, due to the fact that the CEO has stated outright his religious beliefs in public, the consumers that are against the company still believe the CEO is likely to cause damage on a personal level and so they do not want to be associated with him in any way. Thus, the avoidance and boycott towards the company seems to be also due to the fact that these consumers do not want to have any ties with the CEO. The consumers state in the comments they are not convinced that the CEO will stop donating on a personal level and so they still want to boycott the company as they still do not want to be identified with it.

The company will stop the donations but I'm sure the CEO will still donate to these awful charities, I will never step foot in a Chick-fil-A. It's not a coincidence that this announcement came out now that they want to operate in other states where they are not tolerant of such beliefs and behaviours. (Paula, Chick-fil-A attacker #97)

If the company stops donating to such charities that cause damage I may consider going again. However, the issue now is that we all know the horrendous views the CEO holds so he will still continue donating on a personal level so no major change. My values are far more superior than just some food. (Christopher, Chick-fil-A attacker #378)

The Chick-fil-A supporters who initially identify with the company do believe Chick-fil-A's statement in contrast to the opposing group. As opposed to compassion previously experienced, disgust is now seen as they state that they no longer want to go to the restaurant (Haidt, 2003). The disgust is mainly due to the fact that they believe that the company betrayed their values and beliefs and so the consumers feel a sense of betrayal. They proclaim that the main reason they went to Chick-fil-A was due to their values and so, as they no longer withhold Christian values, they will no longer support them. A disidentification with the organisation is also seen as they no longer want to have any relations with them as they believe that this move also impacts them negatively as individuals also (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). This highlights that their moral and social identity are both under threat and so they decide to attack the company also, as they do not want to put these at stake. The consumers who previously supported the company now attack it and in the comments they express their disgust against the company. This is due to the fact that it has changed its values and beliefs and they feel betrayed by the organisation.

I do not concur with the company subsidizing their beliefs, it shows a negative light on us Christians. I am disgusted by Chick-fil-A. I will never go again! The company was donating to outstanding charities! (Kason, Chick-fil-A attacker #522)

You shouldn't stop donating to those organisations, you should stand up to your beliefs. We who followed you now feel that you betrayed us in order to acquire new consumers who are not even going to follow you! (Dulce, Chick-fil-A attacker #701)

It's not worth eating there if they do not donate to these charities. The owner is a fake Christian he has given up on his Christian beliefs. I will never go again. (Vivian, Chick-fil-A attacker #592)

Why can you not just keep to your morals? I'm disgusted by the fact that you are subsidizing you should support and be proud in what you believe in! (Rodolfo, Chick-fil-A attacker #62)

The two figures below provide a summary of the findings presented above. Figure 4.2 presents an overview of how company supporters reacted to both negative event and to the

company's response. Additionally, Figure 4.3 presents an overview of how company attackers responded to the negative event and to the company's response. The figures depict how consumers' emotions and the level of identification with the company affect their actions towards the company.

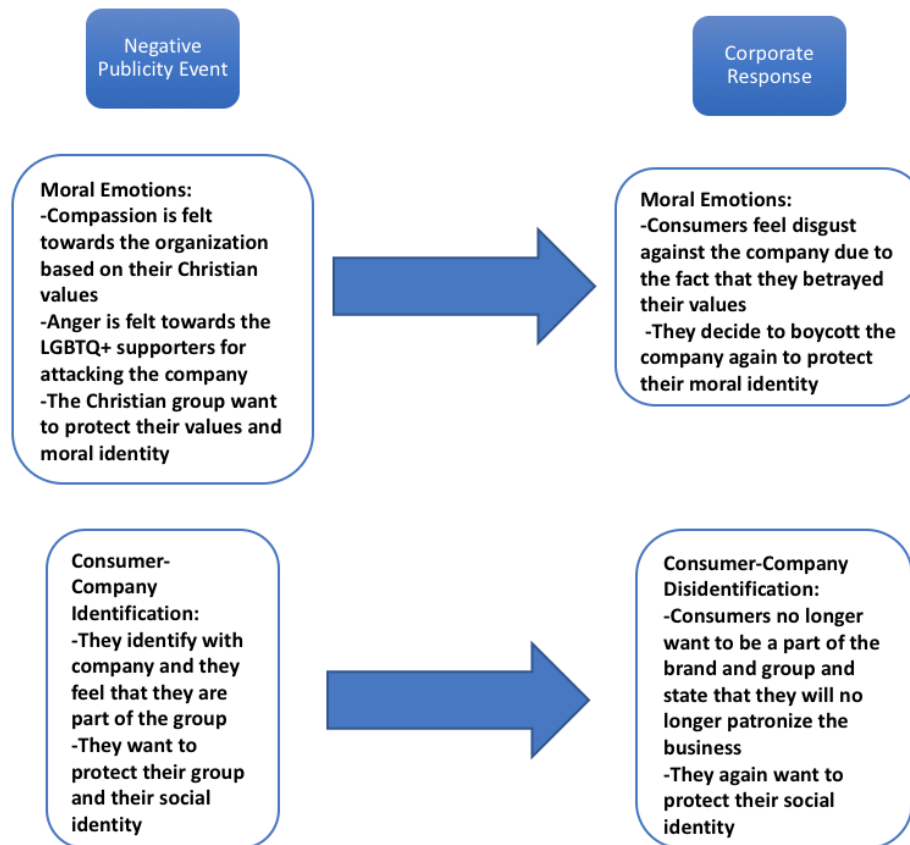


Figure 4.2 Overview of How the Company Supporters Responded to Negative Publicity and to Company's Response

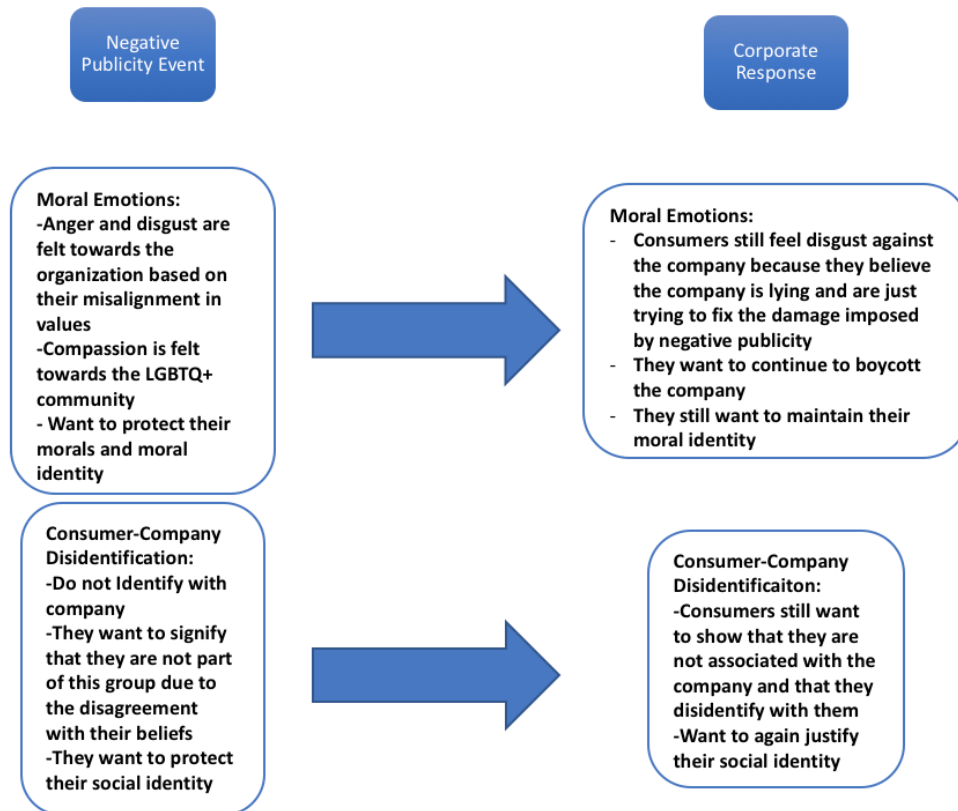


Figure 4.3 Overview of How the Company Attackers Responded to Negative Publicity and to Company's Response

4.4.2 Consumer Recommendations to the Company

Through their comments, consumers provide their opinions as to what the company should do in order to rectify the situation and, in turn, to forgive them for all their wrongdoings. These findings will potentially guide companies as to how to deal effectively with negative publicity online. They state that ending donations to those charities is not enough and one way they feel may make things better is by truly apologising and helping out and giving back to the LGBTQ+ community. Their suggestions involve hiring LGBTQ+ members as staff and including same sex couples in their advertising campaigns. In summary, they request from the company to give back to the community what they believe has been taken away from them. They request the company to adhere to equality and diversity and somehow ease the suffering of the LGBTQ+ society. The consumers in the comments below suggest that for

them to change views about the company, they should support the LGBTQ+ group more actively as opposed to just ending the donations to specific charities and simply apologising.

In order to get over this bad publicity, the company could have chosen a way to show its support for the LGBT community but it didn't. (Dakota, Chick-fil-A attacker #71)

The company still has to do a lot until I forgive them. The damage they have caused towards people is too big. A simple apology is not suffice and does not fix anything. I may go if they find ways to repair the damage done to the LGBT society. (Duncan, Chick-fil-A attacker #84)

We will start believing the company when it actively supports the LGBT community by hiring such members as part of their staff and recruiting same sex couples in their adverts. I will not go unless I see these things happening. (Kate, Chick-fil-A attacker #124)

They are lying, I don't think it's true. They have stated their religious beliefs and people don't just change their religious beliefs just like that. If they were truthful about it and were sorry they would have apologised and would have started to donate to LGBTQ+ groups. Christians who make mistakes ask for redemption, I don't see them doing that. (Francisco, Chick-fil-A attacker #49)

Furthermore, amongst other suggestions are to make changes within the organisation. For example, for the company to change its identity and make it more inclusive and accepting of everyone. Another suggestion is to not take a stance publicly about social matters. Other consumers state that in order to buy food from the Chick-fil-A, the company's CEO should change as he is the one who carries the Christian values. This can be interpreted as an act the company can win back the trust of the consumers. The consumers suggest in their online statements that the company should have values that apply to the whole population and in some way provide back to the community. Additionally, they state that the company should change the way it operates.

They just have to cease from supporting such hateful groups. All companies should have similar values to Hard Rock Café that states that they love and serve everyone. Those are values to have. (Bianca, Chick-fil-A attacker #57)

This is the problem when a company takes a stance publicly. In this instance, it is a stance in which discriminates certain people which is not acceptable. We have to the responsibility to support companies that do good and not harm. (Angelo, Chick-fil-A attacker #344)

They should change the people who run the company, then many things will change and I may consider going. (Sunny, Chick-fil-A attacker #589)

The owners' views are still morally unacceptable. Until they leave from the company I will never go and eat there. (Gemma, Chick-fil-A attacker #130)

Finally, the last suggestions involve the statements that the company published after the negative event. It is clear that consumers expect more extensive explanations for the company's actions and motives behind the decision to stop donating to those charities. The consumers suggest that the company should be clear in its statements and use precise wording and also not leave any doubts regarding their ties with certain charities in the future also. In addition to this, they also expect explanations as to how the company intends to rectify the damage caused. Thus, the goal of the company would be to ease the mind of the consumer that the company will break ties with these charities forever and inform consumers about their actions, values and corporate identity in moving forward. The data highlights that response statements are crucial in responding to negative publicity and do play a vital role in the response, however, it is not the only response the consumers seek. The comments below depict what consumers expect from a public statement made after a negative event. It is clear that they expect greater and more transparent responses from a company in such circumstances.

The company has not provided full explanations as to why it will stop donating to these charities, which makes me suspicious that they just don't want consumers to boycott them.

That's it and not because they are sorry for the damage caused. (Marie, Chick-fil-A attacker #258)

The article title is very deceptive. The company will cease from donating to two specific charities but it doesn't mention any other charities it plans to donate to. It also doesn't mention that the company will never ever give funds to other alike charities that marginalise the LGBT people. I am still boycotting the company. (Summer, Chick-fil-A attacker #102)

It's the wording the company uses that makes me think that they will leave a window open for future donations to similar charities. (Daniel, Chick-fil-A attacker #202)

I really don't believe that they have changed their views. I read that their donations to charities are based on contracts and go for a certain period. It seems that the contract is over and so they are now choosing to donate elsewhere that's it. Nothing was said about Chick-fil-A no longer donating to these charities because they disagree with their philosophy. Also, nothing was said about future charities and whether these would be pro-LGBT. They have done nothing basically. (Victoria, Chick-fil-A attacker #224)

4.5 Overview of Key Findings

1. Consumers React Both Emotionally and Cognitively to Negative Publicity

The data indicates that consumers react based on both their emotions and cognitions. In the case of company supporters, they experience positive emotions towards the company (compassion) and negative emotions against the opposing group (anger) and thus they support the company. Additionally, their cognitive connection towards the company also drives them to support the company (based on values congruence and self-congruence with the company). On the other hand, the company attackers experience negative moral emotions against the company (anger and disgust) and positive emotions towards the LGBTQ+ community (compassion) and thus attack the company. Moreover, they experience a cognitive rejection towards the company (due to values incongruence and self incongruence) which again leads them to attack the company. These two elements (emotional and cognitive

reactions) are more inter-related than separated hence the suggestion in this research that identification with a company involves both a cognitive and an emotional component and so does disidentification.

2. Moral and Social Identities are Both Salient

The findings reveal that both moral and social identities are salient in cases of negative publicity. This is mainly due to the fact that consumers react based on their moral emotions which means that they act upon their moral identity. Additionally, they also react based on the cognitive connection/rejection they have with the company (identification/disidentification) and so their social identity is also present. Therefore, it is evident in the data that both identities are salient and that consumers react upon these two identities in order to protect both of them.

3. From Identification to Disidentification with the Company

The data reveals that consumers who initially supported the company and identified with it after the negative event, they seem to no longer identify with the company after the company's response. This is mainly because these consumers view that the company has betrayed their values and so they want to boycott it. This contrasts prior studies as they simply suggest that identified consumers are likely to defend the company in such circumstances (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012) and not turn against it.

4.6 Addressing the Research Questions

Overall the data has successfully answered the three research questions posed in this study and thus has achieved the aim of the study which is to understand the nature of the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity online. The three research questions and how they were answered are revealed below.

Research Question 1: What are the emotions that consumers encounter when faced with negative publicity online and how does it affect the way consumers react towards the

company?

The data suggests that consumers experience different emotions based on their values and moral identity, which subsequently affect their actions towards the organisation. The company supporters support the company based on their shared Christian values and beliefs and so Christianity is part of their moral identity. The data indicates that these consumers experience compassion towards the company and anger towards the opposing group. Compassion is experienced towards the company as they share the same values and so they feel that they are also under attack also. It is apparent that they want to protect the company as a means of protecting their selves and their values and so state that they will continue going to the restaurant. In addition to compassion, corporate supporters also experience anger against the opposing party. The anger seems to be based on the fact that they feel that they are degraded as Christians and feel a threat imposed upon their moral identity. They therefore attempt to attack the opposing group in order to diminish the threat is imposed upon them.

On the other hand, the company attackers attack the brand based on the premise that they do not share the same values and beliefs. They experience both compassion and anger also but towards different recipients and also disgust. They express their compassion towards the LGBTQ+ community as they are aware of the difficulties and the discrimination that this community is facing. Therefore, they try to help this community by attempting to change the opposing group's views and by explaining to them the negative impact their behaviours have on this community. Additionally, they also express their anger towards the company and its supporters as they feel that they are contributing to the suffering of others and wish to enhance their own morality. They attack the company by degrading it and engage in revengeful behaviours against them such as boycotts, protests and negative online word of mouth. They also attack the company supporters by shaming them about their morality and identity. These consumers also state their disgust towards the organisation. They express their disgust towards the organisation because their values do not match as it discriminates individuals. Their disgust is expressed as a means of protecting their morality and also to signify their intolerance against unethical organisations. They, therefore, state their desire to boycott the company and also urge others to do the same. There are also those who experience disgust towards the company as they do not like the fact that their friends and family who identify as LGBTQ+ are discriminated by the company. They also state the fact

that they will boycott the company as an act of support towards that community. Both company supporters and attackers experience these emotions and act upon them in order to protect their values and their moral identity that they view is under threat. There are also those consumers who do not experience any emotions and are apathetic towards the company's actions, thus moral apathy takes place. These consumers have other criteria when buying goods or services from companies such as the quality of goods or services. Additionally, these consumers believe that all companies act unethically and so it would be impossible to shop from anywhere if this was a criterion.

Research Question 2: How do consumers' cognitions and identification with a company affect their actions towards a company encountering negative publicity online?

The data suggests that consumers' cognitive connection and level of identification with the company affect the way in which consumers respond to online negative publicity. The consumers that identify with the company feel that they are a part of a Christian group. Their identification lies within the fact that their (Christian) values are congruent with the company's and they share the same identity with the company (giving and caring). They want to exhibit to others that they are part of respectable group and so they defend the company. Thus, their identification with the company leads the consumers to defend the company by stating that it is a company that has contributed positively to the community and should not be blamed. They also defend the CEO of the company declaring that he has outstanding morality as they share the identical values and beliefs. They also postulate that the other group is oppressing their beliefs and view the other group as a threat to their social identity. Thus, it is evident that consumers are protecting the company and the CEO as a means of protecting their social identity also.

On the other hand, there are consumers who do not identify with the brand. These consumers do not share the same values and identity with the brand. They disagree with their (Christian) values and view the company's identity as cruel, malicious and uncaring. This group of consumers supports the LGBTQ+ community, either because equality and diversity lie within their values or in order to support friends or family members who identify as LGBTQ+. On this basis, the consumers disidentify with the company and state the fact that they want to

boycott it as they do not agree with the donations it gives to specific charities and it suppresses the LGBTQ+ community. They also attack the CEO of the company for acting unethically and donating to those specific charities, highlighting the fact that they do not want to be associated with the organisation any way. They also attack the corporate supporters and they degrade them and undermine their morality for supporting the company. Moreover, besides the attacks made towards the company and the CEO, they also state that they disapprove of the charities Chick-fil-A donates money to and do not want to be associated with them either. Thus, the data suggests that the reason the consumers encounter these behaviours and actions is because they want to enhance and protect their social identity.

Research Question 3: How does an immediate corporate response after a negative event affect consumers' emotions and behaviours towards the company?

The data indicates that consumers' moral emotions and level of identification with the company (and thus the consumers' moral identity and social identity) also affect how consumers respond to the company's response. The company attackers continue to feel disgust towards the company and do not want to identify with it as they believe that the company's identity and values remain the same and they do not trust the company has pure intentions nor say the truth. This translates into consumers still attacking the company and engaging in negative behaviours such as boycotts and negative word of mouth. Once again, it the data indicates that these consumers want to protect and preserve their moral and social identities. On a similar wavelength, the company supporters also attack the company and so turn into company attackers also. They state their disgust towards the company and do not want to identify with it as they feel betrayed that the company has changed its values and identity. This indicates that they feel that their identity is under threat but from the very own company this time, and so they attack the company in order to protect their social and moral identities once again.

4.7 Conclusion

Overall, the data suggests that consumers' moral emotions and level of identification with a company affect the way in which consumers respond to negative publicity. Their emotions

and their level of identification is what drive consumers to behave in the way they do. The data also indicates that a consumers' moral identity and social identity also determine whether a consumer protects or attacks a company and can make or break a relationship a consumer has with a company. Moreover, the data also suggests that in cases of negative publicity a correct corporate response is crucial as it can break the strong identification a consumer has with an organisation. All these findings along with the aforementioned prior literature are discussed in the following section.

5 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter takes the findings and analysis of the research and addresses the study's contributions to knowledge, it also presents the contributions towards the field of relationship marketing and negative publicity. In this chapter, the definition of negative publicity is developed and online negative publicity is conceptualised. Also, it presents the development of two theories; emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification. These two theories aid in better understanding the relationship between the company and the consumer, especially in cases of negative publicity and, thus, may aid companies in times of crisis.

5.2 Online Negative Publicity

5.2.1 Conceptualising Online Negative Publicity

The popular definition to explain negative publicity seems outdated as it does not consider the online element and the role of social media in cases of negative publicity (Reidenbach, Festervand and MacWilliam, 1987). Additionally, the recently developed definition that does consider social media, renamed 'online firestorms', focuses solely on how consumers respond cognitively to the negative event and the emotional element is neglected. Thus, a holistic definition that considers the online element, consumers' emotions and cognitions, is absent from the literature. Based on these thesis findings, social media seems to change the scenery of negative publicity to a great extent. The findings reveal that consumers react differently on social media as their emotions are expressed directly and they seek to protect their identity. Additionally, the findings reveal that consumers respond both emotionally and cognitively to negative publicity, which have not been considered in prior definitions. Therefore, it is important to consider all these elements when explaining negative publicity, thus, based on the findings of the study, a new definition has been created;

‘Online negative publicity is defined as the negative thoughts and adverse emotional reactions consumers express on social media towards a company, which lead to negative reactions by consumers, and need to be addressed promptly by the company’.

Furthermore, the relevant literature refers to two types of values-related negative publicity, ‘social failure’ and ‘communication failure’ (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Social failure refers to instances where an organisation infringes upon basic values, for example when a firm uses children for labour (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). Communication failure occurs in instances where a company communicates morally unacceptable messages such as when a company uses offensive language in their campaigns. The literature states that the first usually does not directly affect the consumer and his /her life whereas the second one does (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). This thesis uncovers an additional element to communication failure, which is the organisation is not communicating its ethos and values to the consumers in a correct manner; thus, leading to potential misinterpretations by consumers. In this case, Chick-fil-A is perceived by the company attackers as an organisation that acts unethically since they have Christian values and go against the LGBTQ+ community. There is no identification with the company present and so this leads to them attacking the organisation and the organisation ends up losing a proportion of the population as consumers even after it attempts to rectify the situation.

Conducting a longitudinal netnographic study with a real-life scenario, this thesis uncovers that both the cognitive and the emotional element are important in cases of negative publicity. Hence, categorising consumers according to their thinking styles or emotional connection towards the company does not help to understand the relationship between the consumer and the company to a full extent. The researcher’s findings from this netnographic study highlight that the emotional element and cognitive element should not be considered individually and should be considered in conjunction with one another. This contradicts with prior research that presents consumers as either rational decision makers, or who make decisions upon which there is an emotional connection to the company (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Monga and John, 2008; Hasen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava (2000) divide consumers into two different groups that only consider the emotional aspect only, they examine lowly and highly committed consumers. They

postulate that highly committed consumers do not take into consideration negative publicity events and that lowly identified consumers do. On the other hand, Monga and John (2008) claim that there are two types of consumers, analytic thinkers that change their attitudes towards a brand after negative publicity since they take into consideration the negative event only. On the contrary, holistic thinkers consider other factors and do not form negative thoughts about a brand after negative publicity; thus, claiming that a consumers' thinking style is what determines how he/she responds to negative publicity (Monga and John, 2008). Furthermore, one of the few studies exploring negative publicity online focuses on how a consumer's thinking process determines his/her reaction to an adverse event online (Hasen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). This thesis uncovers that in order to better understand the nature of the consumer-company relationship post negative publicity both aspects need to be considered. The findings also indicate that the consumer's thinking style and the level of commitment seem to be unimportant aspects in a real-life negative publicity scenario and other aspects are far superior such as moral emotions (Haidt, 2003) together with consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and the moral and social identity.

5.3 Conceptualising Emotional Consumer-Company Identification and How it Affects Negative Publicity

Previous research that has investigated consumer-company relationships has explored various concepts that either involve an emotional connection a consumer has with a brand which leads to repeat purchases (i.e. brand commitment, brand loyalty) (Lastovicka and Gardner, 1978; Oliver, 1999; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Park et al., 2010; Malar et al., 2011) or a cognitive connection a consumer has with a brand which similarly leads to repeat purchases (i.e. organisational identification, consumer-company identification) (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Bhattacharya, Roa and Glynn, 1995; Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). This thesis investigates both side by side and indicates that the emotional and cognitive components are both important and should not be treated as separate components when examining consumer-company relationships. This thesis extends two key theories in relation to consumer-company relationships, consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and consumer-company disidentification (Wolter et al., 2016). The findings

of this research uncover an emotional dimension to these theories that has not been identified in previous research, which is further discussed below.

5.3.1 Moral Emotions, Consumer-Company Identification and Negative Publicity

The theory of moral emotions developed by Haidt (2003) helped the researcher uncover the emotions consumers were feeling during the negative event. This was mainly due to the fact that the participants were not always stating outright their emotions in the comments and were simply stating their actions. So, the researcher used this theory in order to infer the emotions consumers were experiencing. Haidt (2003) acknowledges moral emotions as the emotions that occur when a moral transgression takes place and they are the emotions that are related to societal issues and people affected by it. Haidt (2003) declares that these emotions are based on intuition and not reasoning, which helped the researcher to identify what emotions consumers were feeling during the negative event. Haidt (2003) mentions, in the theory of moral emotions, that when individuals want to alleviate the suffering of another person, they usually experience compassion. It is mainly felt for people who have a communal relationship (Haidt, 2003). Based on this, the researcher interprets the helping behaviours of the consumers as feeling *compassion* towards the company; thus, the first emotion experienced by those who identify with the company is *compassion*. *Compassion* is noticed as Christian consumers empathise with the company (since they relate with their identity and values) and so state their intentions to continue patronising the establishment. They strongly support the organisation by stating that it is a human right to have one's own values and beliefs. It is evident from this defense that the consumers can relate with the company, and they feel like they are under attack for their values too. Moreover, the emotion of *compassion* leads consumers to protect both the organisation and themselves. They also feel *compassion* for the charities that are under attack and protect them, thus the data suggests that their goal is to safeguard their morality and moral values and not simply the company or any other entity. The data thus highlights that the consumers see themselves in the brand and attempt to protect their sense of self and moral identity as they view these are under threat. This thesis identifies that in cases of negative publicity the actions associated with *compassion* are helping behaviours such as standing up for the organisation and portraying it in a positive light. These findings agree with Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019) that argue that

after a company encounters negative publicity consumers that experience *compassion* and are likely to spread positive word of mouth about the brand that is under scrutiny.

This thesis thus suggests that *compassion* is experienced due to the fact that the supporters feel like they are under attack for their morality and values. Their *compassion* leads to protect the organisation by standing up for it and stating all its good qualities. Thus, they attempt to protect the organisation as a means of protecting their moral identity. This is in contrast to Meyer, Huber and Huber's (2019) findings that suggest that helping behaviours are more likely to occur in cases where a company has a robust reputation. This thesis suggests that a company's reputation seems somewhat irrelevant, however, what seems to be relevant is that helping behaviours are likely to occur as consumers want to protect their moral identity. Additionally, Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019) also argue that perceived blame, perceived helplessness, problem severity, and reputation play an integral role as to the level of *compassion* felt by the consumers. In contrast to the aforementioned study, this thesis identifies that reputation, perceived blame, perceived helplessness or problem severity do not seem to be criteria in which a consumer experiences positive emotions such as *compassion*.

Moreover, another emotion that is evident in the data by those who identify with the organisation is *anger*. According to Haidt's (2003) theory of moral emotions when individuals experience *anger* is mainly due to frustration, betrayal or injustice and it typically leads to attacking, humiliating or getting revenge. Based on this, the data suggests that consumers feel *anger* because these consumers attack and humiliate the other party that disidentify with the company. In contrast to prior studies that simply examine emotions towards companies (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013), this thesis has also identified emotions directed to other parties other than the company (i.e. other consumers). These consumers feel *anger* towards the opposing party (LGBTQ+ supporters) as this group accuses them of being unethical. The data suggests that the *anger* they feel is due to the fact that they feel that the opposing party is a threat to their moral identity and their sense of self as they state that the other group is attempting to diminish them (as Christians). In response to that they, therefore, attack the other group and accuse them of trying to create problems. Thus, the data uncovers that two emotions are experienced simultaneously, they feel *compassion* towards the company and they feel *anger*

towards the opposing party. In conjunction with one another, they both lead to attacking the LGBTQ+ supporters. This leads to the consumers defending the company as it is viewed as a personal attack to the self and thus seek to protect their moral identity (i.e. Christian identity). It is evident from the data that an individual's moral identity is core to self and not peripheral in the context of negative publicity, somewhat in alignment with Aquino and Reed's (2002) findings that state that an individual's moral identity is either core or peripheral to the self.

5.3.2 Social Identity, Consumer- Company Identification and Negative Publicity

Regarding consumer-company identification and why consumers identify with a company, the data suggests that the consumers identify with companies for various reasons that are analysed below, initially because they view their identity as the same as the company's. The findings indicate that consumers identify with the organisation as their identity is congruent with that of the organisation. The consumers view the organisation as giving and caring and an organisation that helps everyone; there seems to be a connection with the organisation on this basis. This is in alignment with the concept of self-congruity (Pratt, 1998), which postulates that a consumer identifies with a company due to the fact that they share a similar identity and it expresses who they are (Sirgy, 1982; Aaker, 1997). This is when a consumer perceives the personality of the brand to be compatible with their personality (Sirgy, 1982; Aaker, 1997). The self-congruity also means that the consumer views the brand as part of their identity (MacInnis and Folkes, 2017).

This study also uncovers that value congruence is an important aspect in consumer-company identification and seems to be part of the cognitive connection a consumer holds with a brand. The data underlines that the consumers identify with the organisation based on their Christian values and it is evident that Christianity is part of their value system and identity. This is in alignment with prior studies that have similarly detected that value congruence with an organisation is also an important factor as to why a consumer decides to identify with an organisation (Chatman, 1991). Previous studies postulate that value congruence is the similarity of values between the consumer and the firm (Lee and Jeong, 2014). The data further highlights that consumers who have value congruence with the organisation seem to want to protect the organisation and speak very highly of it; an attempt to refute any negative

information in regard to the firm. This is again in alignment with previous studies that state those who have value congruence with an organisation tend to have a greater desire to sustain their relationship with the organisation (Byrne, 1997; Gaunt, 2006) and additionally, it is more likely for these consumers to generate positive word of mouth (Zhang and Bloemer, 2008). Moreover, another reason as detected in this study for why consumers identify with a company, is to feel a part of a social group, which lines up with Marin and De Maya's (2013). The findings signify that the consumers feel part of a group as they attempt to defend the organisation and show to the opposing party that they are part of a respectable group stating that other companies do much worse. The data suggests that value-congruence and self-congruity could be the factors that lead consumers to want to be part of a social group, which has not been detected in prior studies.

It is also apparent that consumers identify with the company for social approval as their need to protect the organisation and their social identity are expressed on a social media platform persistently and, thus, this signifies their need to exhibit their social identity. It seems that the group that initially identifies with the firm feels that their social identity is under attack as they claim that the other party wants to dismantle them and so they retaliate by attacking them persistently. They declare that the opposing group is attempting to oppress their group's beliefs and who they are. It is thus evident that they want to protect their social identity. This is also congruent with Roy and Rabbanee's (2015) study which proposes that self-congruity occurs for social approval, meaning that consumers may want to achieve social status or social relations. The findings above, thus, highlight that the most important reasons that consumers identify with brands are due to self-congruity, values alignment and to seek social approval. This contradicts previous research that declares that identification occurs due to multiple reasons such as identity attractiveness (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994), self-distinctiveness (Mael and Ashforth, 1992), self-enhancement (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995), and 'other consumer effect' (Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011).

This thesis further proposes that consumers are divided between those who identify with the brand and those who disidentify with the brand and not lowly identified and highly identified as suggested in previous studies (Einwiller et al., 2006; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). However, the researcher agrees with the aforementioned researchers (Cheng, White and

Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012) that those who identify with the brand disregard the negative information against the firm and try to defend it. The thesis uncovers that they mainly defend the brand in order to protect their self (which previous studies have also detected) (Einwiller et al., 2006; Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011; Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012) but it is also evident that they want to protect their social identity. Previous research has not established how consumers protect their extension of self and their social identity, apart from the fact that highly identified consumers defend the organisation (Cheng, White and Chaplin, 2011). This thesis establishes that the identified consumers attempt to defend the organisation by stating all the good deeds the organisation has done and portraying all the good qualities of the organisation. Furthermore, the supporters stress that other companies do much worse such as committing fraud and child labour which are more unethical and so the organisation should not be blamed for anything. Thus, in order to protect their social identity that is under attack, they portray the company in a positive light. Moreover, as another attempt to protect their social identity, they attack the opposing group that disidentifies with the company by attacking their ego and asking them what they have done in order to help society.

It is also evident that their need to protect their social identity and their self is more apparent online as these actions have not been previously identified when researching negative publicity in the offline context; thus, highlighting the fact that when negative publicity takes place online consumers have a greater need to protect their social identity. Moreover, the seriousness of the event seems to be an irrelevant factor when a consumer responds to negative publicity and, as prior research has discovered (Liu, Wang, Wu, 2009), other factors such as consumer values and social identity seem to be the determining factors for how consumers decide to respond to negative publicity.

5.3.3 Emotional Consumer-Company Identification

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), in their theory of consumer-company identification suggest that a consumer identifies with a company for various reasons amongst them being that they want enhance their social identity and so want to be part of a social group or because they share the same goals with an organisation. They also argue that being a part or a member of a

group is not a pre-requisite for identification to occur (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Pratt, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Additionally, the relationship is purely cognitive and there are no emotional ties or bonds between the company and the consumer (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). Given the findings, it is evident that there is an emotional component when a consumer identifies with the organisation, especially when the organisation is under scrutiny. Thus, a cognitive and an emotional connection are both present.

This research identifies an emotional component to consumer-company identification, and this is evident in the moral emotions consumers experience during the adverse event. The data suggests that the emotions occur because of the identification a consumer has with a company and so they act upon their moral emotions in order to protect their moral identity. Thus, the data highlights that a moral identity is also salient when a consumer identifies with a company, and especially in cases of negative publicity. Moreover, the data suggests that identification with the company occurs due to cognitive factors (as previous research has detected) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) such as self-congruity and value congruence. These are elements that help construct a consumers' social identity. In the context of negative publicity, consumers have a need to protect their social identity and sustain their prior positive social identity, hence the consumers defending and supporting the brand.

This thesis adds to existing knowledge of the consumer-company identification theory by conceptualising emotional consumer-company identification as a cognitive and emotional connection a consumer feels towards a brand based on self-congruity, values congruence and positive and negative moral emotions. Additionally, it seems to mostly occur for consumers in order that they are able to construct both their social and moral identity. The advancement of the existing theory (consumer-company identification) is thus one of the major theoretical contributions of this study. The theory of emotional consumer-company identification better helps understand the relationship a consumer has with the company with all its facets and thus, in turn, this may aid companies to form better connections with their consumers both after a negative event and in general. The diagram below depicts that emotional consumer-company identification, which involves both consumers' cognitions and emotions. Specifically, the consumers' emotions involve their moral identity and moral emotions felt

towards the company and other stakeholders. Additionally, consumers' cognitions involve their social identity and how they connect with the brand based on value congruence and self-congruity.

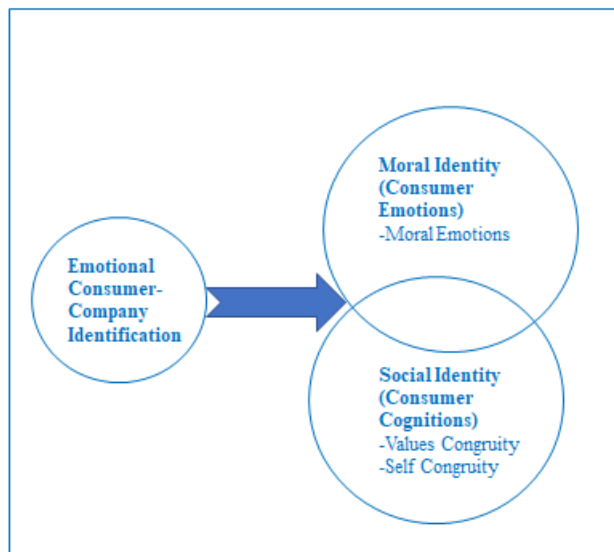


Figure 5.1 Overview of Emotional Consumer-Company Identification Overview

5.4 Conceptualising Emotional Consumer-Company Disidentification and Its Affect on Consumers During and After Negative Publicity

Another concept developed in this thesis that has been under-researched in the relationship marketing literature is consumer-company disidentification. The literature calls for a precise conceptualisation of consumer-company disidentification and to clearly articulate how consumers view brands via their self (Einwiller et al., 2006; Tuskej, Golob and Podnar, 2013; Wolter et al., 2016), therefore the researcher addresses this. To date, existing literature argues that consumer-company disidentification is based on reasoning and a cognitive rejection and does not involve any emotions (Josiassen, 2011; Wolter et al., 2016). Consumer-company disidentification is a novel and underexplored concept in the literature, which signifies the fact that this definition is underdeveloped. It does not refer to which identity the consumers appeal to. So far, this concept only considers the cognitive rejection a consumer experiences with a brand. This thesis, however, manages to uncover which identities are salient in such instances and also the emotions that consumers encounter during this process, refuting the fact that it is purely a cognitive process.

5.4.1 Moral Emotions, Consumer-Company Disidentification and Negative Publicity

Similar to what seems to happen when consumers experience identification, the rejection that the consumer experiences towards the brand is not solely cognitive as previous literature states; it is also emotional since consumers experience different emotions towards the company. The consumers who disidentify with the company also experience various emotions amongst them are anger and disgust towards the company and compassion towards the LGBTQ+ community. Haidt (2003) asserts that anger leads to attacking, humiliating or seeking revenge mainly due to betrayal, injustice and frustration. The actions of the participants were interpreted based on this theory. This thesis unveils that *anger* is an emotion that is experienced by disidentified consumers after negative publicity and, specifically it leads to revengeful actions, as also detected in prior research (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). This thesis uncovers that the revengeful behaviours consumers engage in involve online negative word of mouth and online protests in antithesis to prior research that focuses on offline means and states that it involves negative word of mouth and protests (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013). Although, Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2013) declare that *anger* leads to revengeful behaviours, they have not revealed why consumers feel the way they feel the way they do and the reason they react in the way they do which this thesis successfully uncovers. The *anger* towards the organisation is perceptible when the consumers attack the company and degrade it, arguing that it abuses individuals and violates basic human rights. The *anger* is also perceptible via their revengeful behaviours whereby they state their intention to boycott and also urge others to boycott the organisation. These revengeful actions are mainly due to the fact that they believe that the organisation contributes to the suffering of the LGBTQ+ society and, so by boycotting them and urging others to boycott them, it may alleviate the suffering of these people. Their *anger* is also seen when they show their support towards the LGBTQ+ society in the offline world. They form online protests and petitions against the company, showing their active and pragmatic support towards the LGBTQ+ people in an attempt to create change in society.

Anger is also observable when they attack the other group, stating they are unethical for supporting the organisation. The company attackers want to exhibit their moral superiority by shaming the other group for supporting the company's actions. Preceding studies also declare

that in order to feel morally superior and acquire value within their identity and self, consumers with opposing values usually attack one another (Luedicke, Thomson and Giesler, 2010), which is in line with this thesis' findings. Additionally, they attack the other group's identity and morality, attempting to change their thoughts and actions, hoping that this may lead to more boycotts, thus helping their LGBTQ+ friends. Overall, it is evident that retaliatory behaviours such as boycotts, online protests, online negative word of mouth and intimidating the opposing party mainly occur due to the fact that they do not agree with the company's values and want to protect their morality and beliefs, which are based on equality and human rights. Furthermore, they want to exhibit their moral identity and moral self and so these actions are mainly done in order to preserve their moral identity and stand up for their values.

Another emotion that is experienced by disidentified consumers is compassion, not towards the company but towards the LGBTQ+ society which they view is under attack. Results from this thesis suggest that emotions (and specifically *compassion*) are also experienced towards people outside the company and these are equally important to the emotions experienced towards the company. Haidt (2003) proclaims that when others want to alleviate the suffering of someone else *compassion* is the emotion that eventuates. When this group defends the LGBTQ+ community to the opposing party they question them whether they can comprehend how these individuals feel and ask them to walk in their shoes. Under the influence of the emotion of *compassion*, the actions of these consumers are very different to the ones of anger. As opposed to attacking the other party, they calmly try to explain what challenges the people who identify as LGBTQ+ are facing, and try to convince them that if they change their negative behaviours, they may make a huge difference to society. The data also uncovers that this group does not have a particular issue with the organisation but it goes against anyone who suppresses the LGBTQ+ society as they view them as a threat to society for oppressing human rights. *Compassion* along with supporting the LGBTQ+ society are a result of protecting their moral values, which lie in equality and changing society and also in preserving and protecting their moral identity.

Besides anger and compassion that lead to attacking the company, the company attackers also experience *disgust*, which also leads to consumers boycotting the company. Haidt (2003)

attests that *disgust* leads to avoiding the offending entity because there may be perceived betrayal, hypocrisy and cruelty. In the context of negative publicity, *disgust* is an emotion that has been noticed (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013) with no specific actions stated, only that it does not lead to punitive actions (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). This research uncovers that *disgust* occurs in cases of negative publicity in accordance with Haidt's (2003) theory of moral emotions since the consumers express their need to distance themselves from the brand and boycott it. This boycott varies to the one of anger as it does not have a punitive character and consumers only express their views and thoughts without seeking revenge and just seek to disconnect with the brand. The company attackers express their *disgust* towards the organisation and their intention to boycott it because of their corporate values which they believe to be unethical. Their *disgust* is also expressed towards people who support the company, once again highlighting that the issue is with anyone who discriminates against the LGBTQ+ society. The data underlines that *disgust* is also felt towards the way organisations contribute negatively to society as a whole and thus boycotting these organisations may help change society. These organisations are used as a vehicle of expression and portray what consumers are opposing. Moreover, exhibiting their values and showing they disagree with an organisation that has anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs and also boycotting them is a way to signify to other organisations that these actions follow what when companies act unethically. The friends and family of those who identify as LGBTQ+ feel *disgust* towards the organisation also and boycott the company as a sign of solidarity to their friends and family and because they feel disgusted by the way they are treated in society. Boycotting such organisations is a way for them to show their loves ones their support. Overall, the emotion of *disgust* and boycott differs from anger as they are not revengeful behaviours, however, their actions are based on similar motives, which are to distance themselves from anything they disapprove of and to protect their moral identity.

Overall, this thesis unveils that the negative moral emotions that are mostly prominent when a consumer disidentifies with a company are only *anger* and *disgust*. Prior research has suggested that contempt (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018) and *schadenfreude* (Ruppel and Einwiller, 2020) are the negative emotions that occur when a consumer disidentifies with a company which are not in alignment with this thesis findings. Prior research highlights that contempt is an emotion that emerges in cases of negative publicity and leads to adverse behaviours

towards the organisation such as negative word of mouth (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018). Additionally, it has also declares that the emotion that emerges when a consumer disidentifies with a company in cases of negative publicity is *schadenfreude* (Ruppel and Einwiller, 2021). This refers to the emotion that involves the joy that comes from other people's misfortune (Haidt, 2003). This is mainly because they feel good about the fact that they did not relate with the company in any way and it is another chance to enhance their identity (Van Dijk et al., 2011). The only emotions that are detected in this research are *anger* that leads to attacking the company and *disgust* that leads to avoiding the company.

5.4.2 Consumer-Company Disidentification and Negative Publicity

In relation to the cognitive aspect, this study suggests that consumers mainly disidentify from brands if their values are not aligned with those of the brand. This thesis indicates that value incongruence occurs due to the fact that the consumer does not have the same values as the firm; this contradicts prior research that suggests that values incongruence occurs due the reputation an organisation holds (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002). According to Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) values incongruence occurs when a company holds a negative reputation and so a consumer is likely to disidentify with it as it would potentially affect their sense of self negatively. This thesis suggests, however, that this is not the case. Value misalignment seems to be an important aspect as to how consumers feel towards the brand. The data uncovers that consumers who do not support the company do not have the same Christian values as them. This group supports the LGBTQ+ society and equality and diversity are amongst its values and declare that their values lie within contributing positively to society and helping others. Additionally, these consumers make it clear that their values are not the same as the company's and state that the company's acts are discriminatory and shameful and it is a morally corrupt organisation. Moreover, the value incongruence with the organisation can further be seen where these consumers morally distance themselves from the organisation and state that they do not buy products from companies whose values they do not agree with. The data, therefore, suggests that consumers want to exhibit their distancing and values misalignment with the firm in order to portray their social identity and that they disidentify with certain online groups. This is further seen when the consumers attack the CEO of the firm as they view him as the extension of the brand; they state that his actions are unethical

and do not agree with them. The data also highlights that values (in)congruence with the organisation is an important factor for consumers when making purchases, leaving other factors, such as quality and price, behind. Overall, this study challenges previous findings that state that disidentification occurs because consumers want to preserve their ‘self-esteem, self-continuity and self-distinctiveness as a major self-definitional goals’ (Ruppel and Einwiller, 2020, p. 188) and because consumers have a lack of experience and interaction with the brand (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001).

Similar to self-congruity where consumers view the brand as part of their identity and who they are (MacInnis and Folkes, 2017), in cases of consumer-company identification the opposite seems to occur in consumer-company disidentification. The data suggests that there is incongruence between the company’s identity and the consumer’s identity. Thus, this thesis suggests that self-incongruity is a part of consumer-company disidentification highlighting that consumers construct their social identity even via a disidentification with a brand. The consumers that disidentify with the organisation are the ones who created the protests against the organisation. These consumers view the corporate identity as cruel, malicious and uncaring due to the fact that they oppress human rights and contribute to the suffering of the LGBTQ+ community. This shows that the corporate identity is not always the one that the company wishes to portray and that it may be perceived differently by various consumers. This may even damage the brand as the corporate identity may be interpreted negatively. These consumers want to signify that they disagree with the company’s actions and do not want to be associated with it in any form and they make it clear that their identities are not compatible. They want to show their care and concern towards the LGBTQ+ community and exhibit their social identity online. This thesis indicates that that disidentification occurs due to identity detachment and not the negativity that occurs between the consumer and the brand in alignment with Elsbach and Bhattacharya’s (2001) findings. However, this thesis further uncovers that disidentiication also occurs because the consumers have the need to protect and preserve their social identity and the group in which they identify with.

5.4.3 Emotional Consumer-Company Disidentification that Occurs After the Corporate Response and How it Affects Consumers

5.4.3.1 Disidentification After the Corporate Response

The fact that this study takes place in real time helps to reveal how consumers respond both to the negative event and to the corporate response. Previous studies have neglected consumers' reactions and emotions towards a company after it has responded to negative publicity, thus the following findings are novel. The researcher followed the consumers' reactions to the company's response, which involved the company announcing that it would no longer donate to Christian charities and stated that it would simply donate to those in need. The consumers who disidentified with the brand from the beginning disidentify with it after the corporate response also, which again signifies the importance of an appropriate corporate response after negative publicity. They feel *disgust* and state their desire to boycott the brand, mainly due to the fact that they still believe that they do not share the same values with the company. Therefore, this signifies that value incongruence is still present. They also claim that they have caused a lot of damage to the LGBTQ+ community and they cannot forgive the company for the damage caused. Additionally, they still believe that the organisation may still have the same identity; the company has made promises in the past that it would cut off ties with such charities, but it did not deliver. Thus, a disidentification towards the company is observed due to self-incongruence. As mentioned in the findings above values incongruence and self-incongruence lead to consumers to want to disidentify with organisations to protect their social identity. The same findings seem to appear after the corporate response. The emotion of disgust and boycotts are also perceptible as consumers are suspicious as to the corporate response and believe that it is not genuine and the company just wants to cover up the harm caused to the brand. They also believe that the company will continue the donations as they are not convinced by a simple statement. Therefore, this again highlights the moral emotions that are present in consumer-company disidentification and that consumers seek to protect their moral identity also. Even after the corporate response, consumers still engage in negative word-of-mouth online and state their intentions to keep rejecting the brand.

5.4.3.2 From Identification to Disidentification after the Corporate Response

Researchers have suggested that when an organisation is under scrutiny due to negative publicity, identified consumers are likely to defend the brand (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). This is because they view the brand as an extension of the self and so they take the attack towards the brand personally and so a defense mechanism is in place (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). This is seen in the initial phase of the negative event, however, there is a shift in the consumers' emotions and actions towards the company after the corporate response. This thesis suggests that when consumers identify with an organisation based on its values and these values are then tampered with by the organisation then disidentification occurs as they view that their moral identity is under threat. These findings are slightly different to those of Einwiller et al. (2019, p.10) that declare that when consumers identify with brands based on their CSR practices and a negative event emerges involving those CSR practices then the consumer feels that their 'self-concept of morality' is threatened and so the consumers disidentify with the company.

The current study also suggests that emotional consumer-company identification can break as soon as consumers experience negative emotions towards the brand. After the negative event, these consumers feel compassion towards the organization; however, after the corporate response they feel *disgust* and turn against the organisation. The consumers claim their *disgust* towards the organisation as they claim that the firm has betrayed their values and beliefs and has also betrayed them. They state that the main reason they previously went to the restaurant was due to the company's values and, as they have now abandoned their Christian values, they will no longer purchase from the organisation. Thus, a disidentification is present as the consumers no longer feel emotionally connected to the brand and because their moral identity is under threat also. These findings do not fully align with prior research from organisational psychology, which claim that members of a group may experience anxiety and sadness if they are part of an organisation that is perceived negatively by others (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). The feelings of anxiety and sadness are not present in this context; however disgust is present.

Moreover, there is a sudden shift from defending the brand to talking negatively about it and wanting to boycott it. The research exhibits that after the corporate response, consumers that

identify with the organisation suddenly disidentify with it (after the corporate response) because they want to protect and preserve their social identity. They feel a sense of threat to their social identity and so decide to boycott the brand. This is evident when they shame the brand and try to intimidate it for the way it responded. This is in line with prior research which highlights that disidentification is a way for consumers to expel any negative connotations a brand may carry and thus protect their social identity (Wolter et al., 2016) and their extension of their self (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002). Additionally, this thesis findings are also in alignment with recent studies that highlight that when a consumer experiences a threat to their identity due to the negative associations made with the group they identify with, disidentification then occurs (Bizman and Yinon, 2002; Hodson and Esses, 2002; Guun and Wilson, 2010). So disidentification occurs in order to protect their self-esteem and their positive sense of self (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). This research suggests that when an organisation is viewed negatively, then consumers disidentify with the organisation in order to avoid a negative social identity. Additionally, this thesis also indicates that the concept of disidentification and protection of social identity is more evident online as, in their comments, consumers attempt to defend themselves. This suggests that consumers also take into consideration how other people view them online and so this is why they want to make their disidentification with the company more evident. This is also in alignment with Einwiller et al. (2019) that state that that disidentification may occur not because of how consumers may be thinking but how external people may view them as identifiers of a company that has undergone a transgression. Additionally, this thesis unveils that disidentification is both an emotional and cognitive separation that is experienced towards a brand, which negates prior studies that state disidentification is a 'cognitive separation' between an individual and a group in which the individual once identified with (Anaza et al., 2021).

The threat to their social identity and their moral identity leads consumers to boycott the brand and talk negatively about it agreeing with Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) and Wolter et al. (2016) findings that disidentification leads to these actions. The shift from identified consumers to disidentified consumers has not been detected before in the context of negative publicity and so this is a novel finding: from identifying with the company and feeling compassion to feeling disgust and wanting to disidentify with the brand. This highlights the

fact that a wrong corporate response may have a detrimental effect for brands and that even the corporate supporters may turn against it if the wrong response strategy is implemented. The emotional consumer-company disidentification mainly occurs because they feel that both their social and moral identity is under threat. It is evident across the data that emotional consumer-company disidentification is attempt by consumers to protect their sense of self and the identities that are salient.

It is evident from the data that emotional consumer-company disidentification involves an emotional response followed by cognitive processing. Contrasting earlier studies that have mentioned consumer-company disidentification does not involve an emotional component and adverse emotions, it mainly involves a consumers' 'personal modification to one's social identity' and a cognitive process (Anaza et al., 2021, p. 117). Thus, emotional consumer-company disidentification is conceptualised as the cognitive and emotional rejection a consumer experiences against a brand based on negative and positive moral emotions felt and on self-incongruity, values incongruence. It is a process in which consumers protect both their moral identity and social identity online. Therefore, it is more about preserving and maintaining both the social identity and moral identity. The conceptualisation of emotional consumer-company disidentification is another major contribution to knowledge as the concept of disidentification is generally under-researched in the literature. The theory of emotional consumer-company disidentification better helps to understand why consumers want to break their ties with companies, and thus this may further aid companies rectifying the relationship they have with their consumers post negative publicity. Figure 5.2 below depicts that emotional consumer-brand disidentification involves both consumers' cognitions and emotions. Specifically, consumers' cognitive rejection involves their social identity and how there is an incongruence between the brand and the self, based on their values and identity. In addition to this, consumers' emotional rejection involves their moral emotions felt towards the company and other stakeholders based on their moral identity.

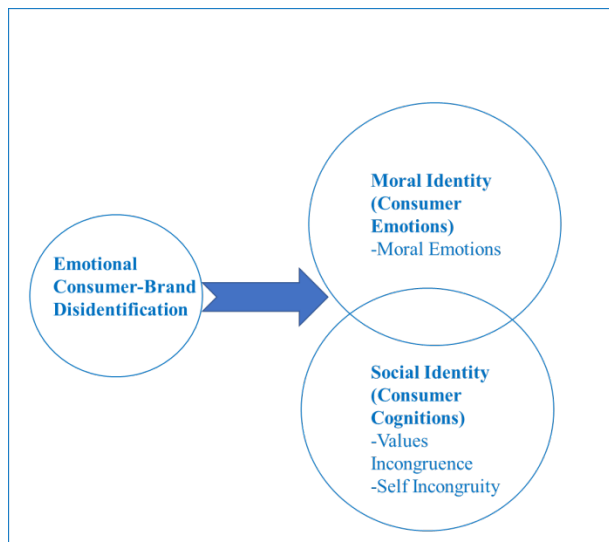


Figure 5.2 Overview of Emotional Consumer-Company Disidentification Overview

5.5 Corporate Response to Online Negative Publicity

The findings indicate that a corporate response is a critical strategy after negative publicity as it can help rectify the issue. A wrong strategy can lead to adverse effects such as identified consumers changing their behaviours and who become disidentified with the company and disidentified consumers who do not change their behaviours at all. Thus, an appropriate strategy is critical in values-related negative publicity, highlighting the importance of this study. The findings clearly outline that consumers request companies to respond to negative publicity, so ignoring the negative event and not responding is not a healthy option for companies. This is in line with previous research that has found similar findings that it is necessary for companies to respond to negative publicity otherwise consumers form negative attitudes (Griffin, Babin and Attaway, 1991; Bradford and Garrett, 1995; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999).

The response strategy that Chick-fil-A adopted after negative publicity seems to be ineffective; the company attempted to take responsibility and negated the negative information by stating that it would change the charities to which it donated. Thus, indirectly the company attempts to take responsibility and to some extent discredits the negative information (i.e. by showing that it is not an anti-LGBTQ+ organisation). These strategies do not seem to be effective as both sets of consumers feel disgust towards the company after its

response and want to boycott it; therefore, signifying that these strategies are weak in responding to an adverse event. This contradicts prior research that states that most effective strategies include following a concession response (the organisation takes full responsibility for the event and informs the consumers that they are right to feel the way they do) (Bradford and Garrett, 1995) and a correction strategy (the company discrediting the negative information published) (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). Moreover, the data suggests that dividing consumers into analytic and holistic thinkers is not appropriate in cases of negative publicity either, since this strategy focuses purely on consumers' cognitions and omits consumers' emotions. According to the researcher's findings, consumers' emotional reactions should also be considered when organisations respond to negative publicity. The aforementioned strategies do not address consumers' emotions, which highlight their ineffectiveness to be used alone.

Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014) stress that in an online firestorm consumers are extremely crucial in the response strategy and state specifically that 'promoters' that are satisfied consumers supporting the brand can help spread positive word of mouth. They declare that an effective strategy is to use company supporters in order to employ positive word of mouth and thus over-ride the negative comments (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014). This thesis uncovers that even the corporate supporters turn against an organisation and, therefore this strategy cannot always be employed. This thesis suggests that a firm should be able to respond to all types of consumers simultaneously and addressing consumers' emotions in calm manner seems to be more effective.

Moreover, the findings show that positioning does play an important role as to how consumers interpret a brand and its identity and it seems to be an important element in cases of negative publicity. This aligns with the results of Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas's (2006) study, which suggest that a company can avoid negative publicity by prior correct positioning. However, the findings reveal that having a specific positioning strategy (i.e. identify as a Christian brand) may damage a brand and, thus, it is important to communicate the strategy effectively to avoid misinterpretations. Additionally, a multiple positioning strategy (i.e. appealing to different groups of people) may work better. This will help brands not to cause controversies amongst consumers. It is evident in the data that when the

company tries to please their attackers, by stating that they will end the donations to the charities, they upset their (Christian) supporters. Having a more diverse and inclusive values-related positioning strategy from the beginning may aid brands in avoiding consumers attacking brands or even causing controversies between consumers.

Additionally, the thesis findings uncover that corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies may be an effective way to respond to negative publicity; this confirms previous studies that postulate that an organisation should respond to negative publicity by employing CSR strategies (Klein and Dawar, 2004; Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009). However, this thesis detects that the CSR strategy should address the problem at hand, which prior studies have not accurately detected. For example, in this instance, most consumers view that the company has caused a lot of damage to the LGBTQ+ community and, therefore, its duty as a company should be to give back to that community. It should donate money to support them, hire more LGBTQ+ staff and include more LGBTQ+ and diverse material in their advertising strategy. Thus, the firm should include diversity within its identity and corporate strategy. Simply stating that the firm will end donations does not seem to be sufficient. The data highlights that it is not a matter of employing any CSR strategies after negative publicity but an attempt to give back in order to make up for the any damage caused.

Moreover, it is clear from the data that a corrective action is what consumers are seeking from a company after negative publicity and not reduction-of-offensiveness. Therefore, somewhat challenging Dutta and Pullig's (2011) findings that uncover that for a values-related negative publicity event, the most appropriate strategies are reduction-of-offensiveness and corrective action. Dutta and Pullig (2011) state that corrective action involves the company taking action and providing a remedy, however, they do not address what type of remedy a company should offer. The findings in this instance state that the company should take responsibility and show its regret and should make changes within the organisation, for example it should change the CEO who is at fault for the wrongdoings, change the corporate identity and avoid taking a stance publicly on social matters. On a wider aspect, companies should consider re-branding or re-positioning.

The data indicates that apologising and communicating to the public how the organisation plans to rectify the situation would be effective strategies for consumers to forgive the company. The consumers state that they expect a genuine apology from the company and they expect the company to clearly outline how it will fix the situation. This matches Xie and Peng's (2009) findings that indicate the best strategies to achieve consumer forgiveness and rectify consumer trust is to have an affective and informational response. The former refers to apologising to consumers that it shows remorse and the latter refers to communicating to consumers how the organisation intends to rectify the situation (Xie and Peng, 2009). Moreover, findings identified in this thesis suggest that consumers expect extensive explanations from companies after a negative event occurs, thus highlighting that this strategy may alleviate the negative emotions the consumers are experiencing and thus avoiding adverse consumer behaviours. Additional findings suggest that consumers seek extensive explanations as to why the company encountered unethical behaviours and how they intend to repair the damage done. They expect precise wording in their press release statements without leaving the public with any doubts. They expect explanations as to how the company plans to fix the damage caused. In this instance, consumers stated that the press release was very vague and left doubts as to why the organisation decided to stop the donations, thus expecting a more precise explanation and what the company intends to do to rectify the problem at hand. The goal of the explanations should be to ease the mind of consumers and not leave them with any doubts. These findings align with those of Menon, Jewell and Unnava (1999) and Griffin, Babin and Attaway (1991) that similarly uncover the correct way for a firm to respond to negative publicity is to offer explanations to consumers as to what exactly happened. Additionally, they also align with Herhasuen et al.'s (2019) findings, these state that the best response strategy for consumers who are experiencing both high and low level arousal emotions are explanations in order to mitigate the impact the event has on the brand.

The findings suggest that consumers want to boycott the brand as they do not trust that the organisation is genuine in its response to the adverse event. The consumers state that they do not trust what the company's claims, as it has made promises in the past and has not delivered their promises. Therefore, a lack of trust towards the brand is evident even after the corporate response. The results of this research suggest that trust is crucial in such instances

and that a corporate response should be authentic and genuine in order to be able to acquire the trust of consumers towards the company. The consumers state that in order to forgive the company, they want to see how the brand intends to act in the future and then be able to forgive it and trust it again. Thus, it is apparent that consumers want to see the company makes changes and then their trust towards the company may be repaired. Similar findings are uncovered by Xie and Peng (2009) in their study that states in order for a firm to achieve a trustworthy image after negative publicity repairing trust and acquiring forgiveness from consumers are key.

The data highlights that the two groups of consumers react with the same emotion albeit the reaction is quite different, which indicates that there is no one correction strategy an organisation can employ in order to please all types of consumers. For people who initially identify with the company and strongly support it, after the corporate response, they feel disgust and, subsequently, want to boycott the organisation as they feel a sense of betrayal from the organisation and a lack of trust towards the organisation. It is apparent that this group of consumers is not willing to forgive the company and state a strong desire to be disassociated from the company. Therefore, from identification with a company, a disidentification with the company is observed in the data. They do not provide any suggestions as to how the organisation could rectify the situation as their disgust seems to be difficult to over-ride. Thus, the data suggests that companies should potentially address the emotion of disgust after negative publicity as it translates into losing valuable consumers.

5.6 Corporate Response to Online Negative Publicity Suggestions

Based on the aforementioned data, the following points outline a few recommendations as to how companies can rectify their relationship with consumers who identify or disidentify with the company post negative publicity, which is another contribution of this thesis.

1. In order for a company to avoid their *identified consumers* turning against them, after the negative event the company should clearly *explain the company's values and identity* and ideally should remain unchanged. This is key in order to avoid any misinterpretations and avoid turning brand supporters to brand attackers.

2. Furthermore, an organisation should *respond to the consumers that disidentify with the brand*. The organisation should appeal to both the consumers' social identity and moral identity and thus attempt to change their negative cognitions and emotions.
3. In order to appeal to the consumers' social identity and avoid further negative thoughts in regard to the organisation, an organisation should employ a *corrective action*. This means that it should show remorse and provide a solution for these consumers.
4. Additionally, a company should also *appeal to consumers' moral identity and address the negative emotions* they are experiencing. The company should respond with a *genuine apology* and a *statement* explaining how the company intends to rectify the situation and also how it will deal with the issue in the future also.
5. Moreover, a *CSR strategy should be implemented* but a CSR initiative that is clearly linked with the issue (for example Chick-fil-A in this instance can give back to the LGBTQ+ community and not do something random such as an environmentally friendly CSR strategy).
6. Finally, a firm should consider re-positioning or re-branding and employ a multiple positioning strategy that will appeal to all consumers to avoid any controversies from consumers and consumers boycotting the company.

Prior research has not detected the importance of consumers' social identity and moral identity and their emotions and cognitions when an organisation responds to negative publicity. Thus, these recommendations are considered useful as they addresses both consumers' emotions and cognitions that have not been discovered before; thus, dealing with these issues more effectively as a company is addressing all the consumers' concerns.

5.7 Conclusion

To sum up, this thesis identifies that both consumers' emotions and cognitions are important when consumers respond to negative publicity as both elements affect the relationship the consumers have with the company post negative publicity. This helped advance the theories of consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification and added the emotional element to both theories (i.e. emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification). These two theories have aided the researcher in comprehending the relationship between the consumer and the company in times of crisis and additionally how consumers react in times of crisis. Both theories point out that the protection of the social and moral self is important for consumers and are drivers for how consumers behave towards companies, which are also elements that affect the consumer-company relationship.

6 CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to identify how consumers react to negative publicity, both emotionally and cognitively, in order to better understand consumers' behaviours in cases of online negative publicity and their relationship with the company post negative publicity; thus, helping companies to better address online negative publicity. The researcher successfully achieved the aim of the study by exploring two key concepts, consumer-company identification and moral emotions, which have been researched separately in past studies (Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Furthermore, the researcher conducted a netnographic study following a real-life negative publicity event therefore identifying consumers' actual behaviours in such circumstances and not hypothesising behaviours as per prior studies (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Monga and John, 2008; Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009; Huber et al., 2010; Dutta and Pullig, 2011). The researcher also successfully addressed the three key research questions.

The first research question involved consumers' emotional responses to negative publicity online. It sought to answer what emotions consumers encounter when faced with negative publicity online and how these emotions affect the way in which consumers react towards the firm. Both theories developed in this thesis, emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification, help to reveal consumers' emotional responses. An emotional component to both consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification is uncovered in this thesis. The data reveals that part of this emotional component is the moral emotions consumers' experience towards the company and their reactions. Consumers react with either positive or negative emotions in order to preserve or protect their moral identity. Consumers who identify with the brand experience compassion towards the company as they connect with them on an emotional level and based on the fact that it is a Christian organisation and Christianity is part of their values and moral identity. Their compassion leads consumers to protect the organisation and, to some extent, their own identity by stating all the good deeds the organisation has done towards the

community. Additionally, these consumers also feel anger towards the opposing party (company attackers) because they feel that they are a threat to their moral identity (as Christians) and they state that the attackers are trying to diminish Christians. Thus, the emotions of compassion towards the company and anger towards the opposing groups leads consumers to attack the other party as they want to protect their moral identity and extension of self.

On the other hand, those who go against the company feel anger towards it and impose revengeful actions such as online negative word of mouth, boycotting the organisation and attacking consumers who support the organisation. Moreover, they also feel compassion towards the LGBTQ+ community and so attempt to explain what difficulties this community is facing in society. Disgust is another emotion experienced by this group who again states that it wants to boycott the firm as it is revolted by the firm's actions. These emotions and actions seem to occur on the basis that these consumers want to exhibit their morality and beliefs and so, in turn, their moral identity. This is done as a means to preserve their moral identity.

The second research question involved consumers cognitive processing in cases of negative publicity. It sought to answer how consumers' cognitions and identification with a company affect their actions towards an organisation that encounters negative publicity online. This research highlights that identification with a company plays a crucial role as to how consumers respond to negative publicity online. Both theories developed in this thesis (emotional consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification) help support this. Consumers who identify with a company do so based on a cognitive connection also, as previously detected (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003); however, this thesis detected that they form this cognitive connection with the company based on their values congruence and self-congruence with the brand. This is how consumers form their social identity. In cases of negative publicity, the consumers who identify with the brand protect it as they want to protect their identity and their self. They protect it by portraying the organisation in a positive light and also attack people who do not identify with the organisation. These actions mostly occur in order to protect and preserve their social identity.

Additionally, consumer-company disidentification seems to play an important role in cases of negative publicity also. The consumers who disidentify with the brand experience a cognitive rejection towards the brand as there is a perceived incongruence of values and identity. This also leads consumers to want to protect their social identity by attacking the organisation and the consumers that identify with the organisation. This phenomenon of protecting the social identity is more prominent online as these acts have not been detected in prior research that has researched negative publicity offline.

The final research question looked to answer how an immediate response by a company affects consumers' emotions, thoughts and behaviours towards an organisation and also how a company can better respond to values-related negative publicity. This research discovered that emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification can have a detrimental effect on an organisation depending on how it decides to respond to negative publicity. Chick-fil-A responded immediately to the negative event by indirectly taking responsibility and discrediting negative information. These are namely the strategies of taking responsibility (Bradford and Garrett, 1995) and correction strategy (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998). These strategies seem to be ineffective as both parties turn against the firm even those who initially defend the firm. The consumers who initially identify with the organisation feel disgust and turn against the company, stating that they want to boycott it as they feel that there no longer seems to be an alignment between the consumers' values and identity with the brand. A threat is thus imposed upon their social identity and moral identity as the company is perceived to be shifting their corporate identity. Therefore, consumers transition from emotional consumer-company identification to emotional consumer-company disidentification.

Consumers who initially disidentify with the brand still do so as they view that the company has not changed its values and identity, thus incongruence in values and identity is still present along with the emotion of disgust. They still perceive a threat imposed upon their social identity and moral identity and so once again try to protect these two identities. They still talk negatively about the brand and want to boycott it. Therefore, emotional consumer-company disidentification is still active. This research indicates that an organisation should clearly portray its values and identity to the public in order to avoid controversies online and

that the response strategies used should appeal to either a consumers' social identity or moral identity. The strategy that best appeals to a consumer's social identity is corrective action and the strategies that better appeal to consumers' moral identity are a genuine apology along with an explanation and a CSR strategy that address the problem at hand. This research has crucially detected that companies should appeal to the consumers' social and moral identities when responding to negative publicity and thus, to some extent, to address both consumers' thoughts and emotions when a negative event occurs. The table below (Table 6.1) provides an overview of research questions and findings of the thesis.

Table 6.1 Overview of Research Questions and Findings

Research Question	Findings
RQ1: What are the emotions consumers encounter when faced with negative publicity online and how does it affect the way consumers react towards the company?	This thesis uncovers an emotional component to consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification which involves emotions consumers experience towards companies. Customers that identify with the company experience compassion towards the company as they view the brand as part of their self and so by protecting the company they protect their moral identity. Also, they feel anger towards the other party (company attackers) as they view them as a threat to their identity so they attempt to attack them as a means to protect their moral identity again. On the other hand, those who disidentify with the company experience anger towards the brand and attack it by using revengeful behaviours such as negative word of mouth and boycotts. They also feel compassion towards their peers and try to protect them by attacking the company. Disgust is also an evident emotion which leads consumers to boycotting the company. These emotions are experienced as these consumers want to exhibit their morality and protect their moral identity.
RQ2: How do consumers' cognitions and identification with a company affect their actions towards a company encountering negative publicity online?	The level of identification and cognitive connection a consumer has with a company seem to play a vital role as to how consumers process negative publicity and react to it. Customers that identify with the company do so based on values congruence and self congruence, so during the negative event they seek to protect the company as they want to protect their social identity. On the other hand, consumers who experience a disidentification with the company based on a cognitive rejection due to values incongruence and self incongruence also seek to protect their social identity and so attack the company.

RQ3: How does an immediate corporate response after a negative event affect consumers' emotions, thoughts and behaviours towards the company and how can organisations better respond to negative publicity?	Consumers cognitions and emotions and specifically a consumers' emotional consumer-company identification/consumer-company disidentification seem to influence how a consumer reacts to a corporate response also. Chick-fil-a employs unsuccessfully after the negative event a correction strategy along with partially taking responsibility. Consumers that identify with the company turn against it, they feel disgust toward the company as they believe that the company no longer has the same values and identity. Thus, an incongruence of identity and values occurs. They boycott the organisation as they feel a threat is imposed upon their social and moral identity. Similarly, those who disidentify with the company still feel disgust and continue to talk negatively about the company and boycott it as they still believe that their values and identity do not align and thus do not want to tarnish their moral and social identities. This research suggests that a company should initially clearly state their values and identity and not make any changes to these two elements immediately after the negative event in order to avoid identified consumers turning against the organisation. Furthermore, it is revealed that a company in order to address the concerns of disidentified consumers it should appeal to their moral and social identities by using strategies such as corrective action, a genuine apology along with an explanation and a long-term CSR strategy. A firm after doing these actions should consider a multiple positioning strategy in the long-run.

6.2 Thesis Contributions

In the following sections the theoretical contributions are presented and explained, online negative publicity is conceptualised, and the development of both consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification theories are presented. Consumers' reactions to online negative publicity are also explained along with the most appropriate corporate responses. Moreover, the methodological contribution of netnography is also explained. Finally, the practical and managerial implications are also presented.

6.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

1. Conceptualising Online Negative Publicity

One of the contributions of this thesis is to the literature of negative publicity. This is the conceptualisation of online negative publicity as it has not been previously established in the respective literature. Online negative publicity is defined in this thesis as: *the negative thoughts and adverse emotional reactions consumers express on social media towards a company which lead to negative reactions by consumers, and need to be addressed promptly by the company*. This varies to prior definitions as they define negative publicity in the offline context and omit the online element (Reidenbach, Festervand and MacWilliam, 1987). Additionally, other definitions that take the online element into consideration only take

consumers' cognitions into consideration (Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley, 2013), neglecting consumers' emotional responses to negative publicity. Thus, a new updated definition, which considers the online element and both consumers' cognitions and emotions, is set out in this thesis. This definition helps to understand what online negative publicity is looking at all its facets and additionally, it helps to distinguish the difference between online and offline negative publicity.

Furthermore, this thesis adds a new dimension to the already known 'communication failure', which is a type of values-related negative publicity (Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). This thesis suggests that a communication failure may also be when a company does not communicate its ethos and values to consumers in the way the company intends therefore leading to a misinterpretation of the corporate identity. This new dimension discovered in this thesis will help understand the differences between the communication failures and how they can be dealt with appropriately.

2. Consumers' Emotions and Behaviours in Cases of Online Negative Publicity

Moreover, another contribution to the field of online negative publicity is that this thesis acknowledges that both consumers' emotions and cognitions are important when consumers respond to a negative event online. It refutes prior work that suggests that consumers act upon either emotions or cognitions after negative publicity (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Monga and John, 2008; Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018). This thesis reveals how and why consumers experience certain emotions, the role of consumers' cognitions and identification with the company and reasons behind their final actions towards the company. Prior studies exploring negative publicity have not explained how and why consumers experience certain emotions, their cognitive processes and why they react in the way they do (Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019). Prior studies simply state the actions that follow after consumers experience emotions (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018) or cognitions (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012; Einwiller et al., 2019).

One of the important contributions of this thesis is that it reveals that the emotions consumers experience and their level of identification affect their actions and they are a result of consumers defending their social and moral identity. The company is viewed as a form of identity expression. Their need to protect their moral and social identity is more evident online as various emotions and actions have not been detected when researching negative publicity offline. For instance, the literature does not state what actions follow when a consumer experiences disgust in cases of negative publicity (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013). This thesis' findings importantly detect that consumers' emotions and actions revolve around the protection of the self rather than the protection of the company. The organisation is viewed as an expression of the self and who they are both via identification and disidentification.

3. Development of Consumer-Company Identification Theory

Another important theoretical contribution is to the literature of relationship marketing. The fact that consumers in cases of negative publicity react both based on their emotions and cognitions and the fact that these two aspects are inter-related and not separate; highlight that identification with a company involves both a cognitive and an emotional component. Hence, the advancement of the consumer-company identification theory developed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) to emotional consumer-company identification theory. This thesis suggests that identification with an organisation has an emotional component, thus it is a cognitive and emotional connection that a consumer experiences with a brand, and not only a cognitive one, as proposed by prior research (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Therefore, the concept of consumer-company identification is advanced to emotional consumer-company identification. This theory suggests that the most important factors when a consumer identifies with a brand that involve the emotional aspect includes a consumer's moral identity and the positive emotions a consumer has towards a brand. Moreover, the cognitive component includes values congruence and self-congruence; establishing that these are the reasons consumers identify cognitively with a brand challenging prior studies (Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991 cited in Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995; Pratt, 1998; Curras-Perez, Bigne-Alcaniz and Alvarado-Herrera, 2009; Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011; Marin and De Maya, 2013).

This mainly fulfils a consumers' social identity. Therefore, this thesis conceptualises the theory of emotional consumer-company identification as a cognitive and emotional connection a consumer experiences towards a company. This is mainly based on the needs to fulfill a social identity, which includes self-congruity and values congruence, and to fulfill a moral identity that involves positive emotions a consumer feels towards an organisation; therefore, revealing that both the social identity and moral identity are salient when a consumer identifies with an organisation.

4. Development of Consumer-Company Disidentification Theory

Another major theoretical contribution of this thesis to the relationship marketing literature relates to the advancement of the consumer-company disidentification theory. Based on the premise that consumers experience both negative emotions and cognitions towards the company simultaneously and not separately highlights that consumer-company disidentification is not only cognitive as previously suggested. The theory of consumer-brand disidentification developed by Wolter et al. (2016) is developed to the theory of emotional consumer-company disidentification. The consumer-company disidentification theory is generally an under-developed concept in the literature of relationship marketing. This thesis develops this concept by recognising that disidentification does not only involve only a cognitive rejection towards a company as previously detected (Wolter et al., 2016) but also an emotional rejection a consumer has towards a company. Therefore, the theory is advanced to emotional consumer-company disidentification. The emotional rejection a consumer experiences against a company involves negative moral emotions that are felt towards it. This translates to the consumer having negative emotions, such as anger and disgust towards a company because it clashes with his/her moral identity and disidentifies with it in order to preserve his/her moral identity. Moreover, the cognitive rejection involves values-incongruence and self-incongruence. This thesis highlights that the only factor that seems to affect disidentification from the reasons stated in the literature is values-incongruence (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2002), challenging all the other reasons stated in the literature (Ruppel and Einwiller, 2021, p. 188; Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). Additionally, in regard to values-incongruence this thesis uncovers that consumers disidentify on a cognitive level with an organisation as the values of the organisation do not seem to be aligned with the

values of the consumer. This is in contrast to prior research that suggests that values incongruence occurs due to a company's reputation (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002). Additionally, another reason that consumers reject the company cognitively is self-incongruence. Prior studies have detected that consumers mainly identify with brands due to the fact that there is self-congruity, meaning that the company's identity is congruent with the consumer's (MacInnis and Folkes, 2017). The data uncovers that the opposite occurs when a consumer disidentifies with a brand, meaning that there is self-incongruence. These incongruencies lead consumers to want to distance themselves from the company. The disassociation and incongruence the consumers have with the company are in order to protect their social identity.

Therefore, emotional consumer-company disidentification is conceptualised as the cognitive and emotional rejection a consumer has against an organisation, which involve values incongruence, self-incongruity and the negative moral emotions a consumer experiences. These are a result of one protecting and preserving his/her social identity and moral identity; revealing that both identities are salient when a consumer disidentifies with a company. This is an underexplored concept in the literature of consumer-company relationships and so this theory provides a better understanding as to why consumers avoid brands and how companies can form better relationships with consumers. Also, this theory looks at both consumers' cognitions and emotions and, therefore, provides a more robust understanding of the nature of the relationship the consumer has with the company. Therefore, this theory aids also in better understanding the consumer-company dynamic and how this dynamic can shift from a negative one to a positive one. Understanding how consumers think and feel about brands and their reactions is important in understanding why and how consumers distance themselves from brands especially when a negative event emerges. Moreover, this theory establishes the fact that consumers enhance their identity via disidentification also.

5. From Identification to Disidentification

Furthermore, another contribution to the relationship marketing literature is the fact that consumers from identifying with the company turn out to disidentify with it after the

company's response. A sudden shift in behaviour is seen by the consumers who initially identified with the company, which highlights the fragility of the relationship between the consumer and the company. This shift has not been detected in prior studies, which is considered one of the contributions of this thesis as prior studies suggest that identified consumers simply defend the company (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012). This shift mainly occurs because the consumers view that the company has betrayed them and their values and this is in somewhat antithesis to preceding studies that propose that consumers disidentify with a company due to its CSR practices (Einwiller et al., 2019). Moreover, the consumers feel disgust towards the company and state that they want to boycott it and engage in negative word-of-mouth. This is contrast to previous research that proposes that consumers feel anxiety and sadness when they disidentify with an organisation (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). The feeling of disgust and the subsequent boycott seems to occur due a threat they feel towards their moral identity. Additionally, consumers also feel a threat to their social identity as there is no longer values congruence and self-congruence with the company and so they distance themselves from the brand. These findings reveal that consumers can easily turn from identified to disidentified consumers and that a consumer-company relationship can easily break if the company is not consistent with its identity and values.

6. Corporate Response Strategies After Online Negative Publicity

Another contribution of this thesis is to the field of negative publicity. This involves the response strategies proposed to companies as to how to respond to negative publicity taking into consideration both consumers' emotions and cognitions. This is a useful contribution as previous research has not proposed strategies that take into consideration the online element and both consumers' emotions and cognitions. The fact that the consumers' actions change significantly after the corporate response and instead of having positive feelings towards the organisation, negative emotions and thoughts emerge, recognises the importance of an appropriate response strategy to negative publicity online.

This thesis reveals that some strategies proposed in prior studies seem to be effective, however, when used in combination with one another and not on a separate basis as

suggested in the literature, for example corrective action (Dutta and Pullig, 2011), apology (Xie and Peng, 2009), offering explanations as to what exactly happened (Griffin, Babin and Attaway, 1991; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Herhasuen et al., 2019) and a CSR strategy (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009). This is an important contribution as all these strategies have been proposed for offline negative publicity and this thesis provides guidance to companies as to which strategies should be implemented for online negative publicity.

6.2.2 Practical and Managerial Implications

To date there have been many theories that explain the positive relationship between the consumer and the company and which are applied into practice. Previous theories however have explored concepts that either involve an emotional connection a consumer experiences with a company or cognitive connection a consumer has with a brand, which lead to consumers forming strong ties with brands and thus repeat purchases. In the literature, concepts such as brand commitment (Lastovika and Gradner, 1978), emotional brand attachment (Park et al., 2010; Malar et al., 2011), brand love (Caroll and Ahuvia, 2006), and brand loyalty (Oliver, 1991; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) focus on the emotional connection a consumer has with a company. On the other hand, concepts such as organisational identification and consumer-company identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) look at the cognitive connection a consumer forms with a company. The emotional consumer-company identification theory that is developed in this thesis involves both a cognitive and an emotional connection a consumer has with a brand. Furthermore, this theory indicates the importance of both a consumers' social identity and moral identity and that both identities are salient when a consumer makes decisions in regard to his/her purchases. To the researcher's knowledge, this theory is the only one that looks at all these elements (i.e. consumers' emotions, cognitions, moral identity and social identity) when looking at a relationship between a consumer and a company. This highlights that previously companies have appealed to consumers either on an emotional or a cognitive basis. This theory will aid companies in forming more meaningful relationships with their consumers as they will form stronger bonds with them.

In addition to this, there are many theories that look at why consumers distance themselves from brands. Earlier studies explore concepts in which consumers emotionally reject a brand such as aversion, brand avoidance and brand hatred (Lee et al., 2009; Johnson, Matear and Thomson, 2011; Park et al., 2013) and where consumers cognitively reject a brand such as consumer disidentification and consumer-brand disidentification (Josiassen, 2011; Wolter et al., 2016). The theory of emotional consumer-company disidentification that is developed in this thesis underlines that both an emotional and a cognitive rejection are experienced when a consumer rejects a brand. Additionally, the theory suggests that both a consumer's moral and social identities are salient when rejecting a brand. This theory will aid companies in understanding better as to why consumers do not choose their brand from both a cognitive and an emotional aspect and take both identities into consideration. It will also aid companies in turning disidentified consumers into identified ones. Besides understanding consumers better, both concepts developed in this thesis also help companies better understand how consumers react in cases of negative publicity and can also address these behaviours more effectively.

This thesis presents recommendations to companies as to how it should respond to online negative publicity. These recommendations will be useful for companies as it will aid them in responding to online negative publicity effectively and avoiding many damages made towards the brand. These recommendations take into consideration all the important aspects for consumers when a company encounters negative publicity, for instance consumers' emotions and cognitions and consumers' moral and social identity. These recommendations are novel in the area of negative publicity as previous studies have failed to identify all these important aspects when recommending ways for companies to respond to negative publicity. For example, prior research in the context of negative publicity proposes scattered strategies as to how companies can respond to a negative event and they do not take into consideration either consumers' emotions and cognitions or moral identity and social identity. According to the thesis findings, some strategies proposed in these studies seem to be ineffective strategies in responding to online negative publicity. For instance, concession response (Bradford and Garrett, 1995), correction strategy (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998), dividing consumers into analytic and holistic thinkers and responding accordingly (Wang et al., 2016), using company supporters to spread positive word of mouth (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014) or

attacking consumers who insult the organisation (Scholz and Smith, 2019). However, some other strategies that have been detected in the literature do seem to be effective such as corrective action (Dutta and Pullig, 2011), apology (Xie and Peng, 2009), offering explanations as to what exactly happened (Griffin, Babin and Attaway, 1991; Menon, Jewell and Unnava, 1999; Herhasuen et al., 2019) and a CSR strategy (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009); however, these studies do not mention when and how companies can use these strategies. This thesis provides guidance to companies about when and how to use these strategies and in what combination.

This thesis uncovers that prior correct positioning may save a brand in cases of negative publicity as proposed by previous studies (Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas, 2006). However, this thesis additionally detects that a multiple positioning strategy may be more suitable for companies as it will avoid controversies between consumers. It is also important that their identity is communicated in a correct manner in order to avoid any misinterpretations. A diverse values-related positioning may be useful in order to tackle this issue. Two other factors that companies need to consider when responding to online negative publicity are consumers' trust and consumers' emotions. A lack of trust by consumers as to how the company responded to the event is evident in the data, thus this signifies that trust is an important element that companies need to consider. The findings indicate that a corporate response should be authentic and genuine in order to regain consumers' trust. Moreover, the data indicates that after the corporate response both groups of consumers seem to feel disgust towards the company and want to boycott it, thus it is key for companies to address and alleviate consumers' negative emotions. In summary, this thesis indicates that responding to online negative publicity varies in the response towards offline negative publicity. Additionally, consumers' trust and addressing consumers' emotions seem to be key in order to rectify the damage caused.

This research proposes some practical examples for companies in order to address negative publicity online. Initially, companies should not respond immediately to the negative event and should wait and see how the event unravels prior to responding. If consumers generally start forming negative thoughts about the company then the company should address these. For an organisation to do this they should respond with a corrective action, meaning the

organisation at this stage should show remorse and provide an effective solution for the consumers. Furthermore, if consumers experience negative emotions towards the company, then the company should appeal to them in order to change their negative emotions into positive ones. The company should do this by issuing a genuine apology along with an explanation that extensively explains how the organisation intends to fix the issue. This press release should include precise wording without leaving any ambiguities as to why the company behaved in an inappropriate manner and address how the company intends to rectify the situation. This should be employed along with a CSR strategy but a CSR strategy that addresses the problem at hand and make up for the damage lost (e.g. Chick-fil-A is viewed to have had caused damage to the LGBTQ+ community, therefore, it should give back to charities that support this community). After all these strategies have been employed, a company should then consider a multiple positioning strategy (i.e. cover a spectrum of values) in order to avoid future controversies. Overall, this will aid companies to better deal with consumers in online crisis situations and specifically values-related negative publicity. These strategies are strategies that appeal to both consumers' emotions and cognitions and help to avoid consumers' negative emotions and behaviours. These recommendations will help companies in responding to negative publicity online addressing all the facets that are important to a consumer in such circumstances. Thus, these recommendations address the root cause of the problem and do not only focus on consumers' behaviours.

6.3 Thesis Limitations

Despite the contributions stated above, this thesis does have a few limitations. One of the limitations of this study is the fact that the comments that are included in the research are only from one social media platform and particularly Facebook. Social media platforms between them vary and so it may be a good idea in the future to examine other platforms in order to gain additional insights. Additionally, due to the fact that the research is conducted on a social media platform such as Facebook, this may have induced some form of bias from the consumers' side as they know that the comments they post on social media are available to the public and may be seen by friends and family. Despite the limitations, this platform was selected because the researcher wanted to investigate how consumers' respond to the online newspaper article posts and examine the interaction between the consumers. Future

studies alternatively could look into other social media platforms such as Twitter (which has been a platform that has been successfully used in prior studies such as Scholz and Smith (2019), and this may be useful in order to see whether the consumers' reactions and dynamics differ.

Moreover, this study focuses solely on one specific values-related negative publicity event. This may mean that certain emotions and behaviours may have emerged in this specific event that was examined due to the nature of the event (i.e. it involved the LGBTQ+ community). Thus, future studies may want to use a variety of events in order to examine whether there are also other emotions consumers experience during a values-related negative event. It may be a good idea to examine other contexts and industries under varied ideologies and philosophical standpoints in order to achieve additional insights into this topic.

Another limitation of this thesis is the fact that it was only followed for the interval of six months, although it is still considered longitudinal, this may have been a short period of time for which the consumer-company relationship was examined. It is possible that consumers may change their minds or forget about the event and this may mean that the nature of the consumer-company relationship may be different after a longer period of time. Thus, it may be worthwhile for other studies examining the consumer-company relationship to perhaps follow the event for a prolonged period of time (perhaps for a year).

An additional limitation is the fact that it is a non-participatory netnographic study (as the researcher does not intervene and the data occurs naturally in order to again investigate the dynamics between consumers) (Kozinets, 2020); the comments reveal only the emotions and the thoughts consumers are feeling at that point in time. This may mean that there were also other important factors for consumers that were not revealed in the comments and may need to be investigated further.

Furthermore, given that it is a qualitative research design that requires the researcher to interpret the data, it is stated qualitative studies may include a form of bias (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). In order to minimise this limitation however, 'inter-reliability coding' was implemented (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020), the data was cross-coded with other colleagues (a

senior teaching fellow and a PhD candidate) to achieve the desired score of agreement (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This research can be expanded and other fruitful avenues can be explored. One potential avenue may be to explore other moral emotions also, such as shame, embarrassment and guilt, which are part of Haidt's (2003) self-conscious family of emotions. Exploring the actions associated with these emotions and their motivations behind these actions may reveal new insights in regard to online negative publicity. Understanding other emotions and behaviours may also help better understand the nature of the consumer-company relationship to a greater extent.

As disidentification has only recently emerged in the literature of relationship marketing, other studies can explore this concept further. Future studies can explore how long consumers may disidentify with brands and whether consumers who are disidentified can turn into identified ones. This will help understand the negative effects of disidentification. Also, future studies can also explore how companies can avoid consumers from disidentifying with them. Additionally, both theories that have been developed in this thesis, emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification, can be further tested in order to see whether these theories have other dimensions that have not been revealed in the current study.

Moreover, future research can also look into comparing and contrasting various negative events in order to examine whether the nature of the negative event determines the nature of the consumer-company relationship. Additionally, exploring different type of events can help in revealing different emotions and reactions consumers may experience. For example, future studies can explore negative events that involve a consumers' health, such as the scandal that emerged with Johnson&Johnson where allegedly their talc products caused cancer (Jolly, 2022). Or other events involving fraud such as the Starbucks not paying its taxes (Davies, 2015) or the Tesco accounting scandal where it overstated its profits (Wearden, 2014). Additionally, events that involve mistreating workers can also be explored such as Samsung

exploiting young workers (Arthur, 2012). This will also help to better understand consumers' emotions and behaviours in cases of negative publicity.

Moreover, this research can be expanded and look at other avenues such as a consumer's national culture and values and how these values affect their reactions towards negative publicity, as prior research states that consumer ethical behaviours are highly determined by their national culture (Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova, 2013). A cross-cultural study may help identify other aspects that are important to consumers also or it may be that each culture may perceive a negative event very differently.

Another area to explore would be to examine potential online response strategies companies can use in order to alleviate consumers' negative emotions. Various response strategies can be tested in order to establish which strategies help to deal better with consumers' negative emotions. This will aid companies in understanding to a greater extent as to how to deal with negative publicity online. Also, this will provide companies with more strategies to be able to tackle the issue as online negative publicity is an under-researched topic and companies do not have specific strategies in place in order to deal with online negative publicity.

Finally, a comparison study can be conducted in order to establish the main differences between online and offline negative publicity. How these two vary between one another, the impact each type has on consumers and whether an online event can be dealt with offline and vice versa.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

The current thesis addresses the three key research questions which seek to answer how consumers' cognitions and emotions affect their reactions towards a company encountering negative publicity online. It also addresses how consumers react to an immediate corporate response and how companies can better respond to negative publicity online. Amongst the key findings are that consumers' actions are highly based on whether they identify or disidentify with the company, both on an emotional level and a cognitive level. This is mainly because the identification or disidentification with a company signals their social and

moral identity, and thus, they seek to protect these identities in times of crisis. Consumers who experience emotional consumer-company identification protect the brand in contrast to those who experience emotional consumer-company disidentification that attack the brand both as a means to protect and preserve their social and moral identities. This thesis contributes to knowledge by advancing two key theories, consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification, renaming then emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification and uncovering that both theories entail an emotional and cognitive component. These theories better help to understand how and why consumers form ties with brands, how and why they decide to reject brands and the nature of the consumer-company relationship in cases of negative publicity. Additionally, the recommendations towards organisations as to how to respond to online negative publicity more effectively takes into consideration both consumers' emotions and cognitions and the identities which are salient in consumers when identifying or disidentifying with a company (i.e. moral identity and social identity); therefore, helping companies to better respond to online negative publicity. Companies are presented with a holistic idea of how consumers respond to negative publicity and so they can respond better when a company is in a state of crisis. Overall, the researcher is confident that the contributions of this study will be useful for both academics in Marketing and Marketing Managers and Executives alike.

Academics and PhD colleagues showed great interest in this topic and saw great potential at the conferences the researcher attended such as the International Colloquium of Relationship Marketing and the Academy of Marketing (gaining the Academy of Marketing Doctoral Bursary Award to attend this conference), which also signifies a great potential in publishing this thesis in the form of articles. Additionally, as the contributions and findings seem meaningful and will impact the field of Marketing, moving forward, the researcher intends to publish this work and submit to various journals where the aims of the study coincide with those of the respective journal, thus acquiring a perfect fit. The researcher intends to break the research in three parts; one article will be a conceptual article synthesising knowledge from the area of negative publicity and introducing the role of moral emotions and consumer-company identification in cases of negative publicity. This prospective article seems a perfect fit with the Psychology and Marketing Journal as this journal seeks articles that use

psychological theories that are applied to a Marketing context. It also seems a perfect fit as this journal has quite a few articles introducing the relationship of negative publicity and moral emotions (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Meyer, Huber and Huber, 2019) and the relationship of negative publicity and consumer-company identification (Liu, Wang and Wu, 2009), therefore, this conceptual article will examine all these concepts together and how one intertwines with another. Two empirical articles will follow; the first article will focus on how the consumers respond emotionally and cognitively to negative publicity and the role of identification and moral emotions will be established. This article will present the two theories developed in this thesis, namely emotional consumer-company identification and consumer-company disidentification, and will be aimed at the Journal of Business Research where they seek for theories that can be applied to a real business setting. Moreover, this article will act as a continuation of Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi's (2013) article that explores the negative behaviours consumers have after negative publicity and the implications these actions have for businesses, and Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau's (2018) article that examines consumers' perceptions after an online firestorm and how this affects brands, both of which are both published in the Journal of Business Research. The second article will focus on how consumers react to corporate responses after negative publicity and the role of emotional consumer-company identification and emotional consumer-company disidentification. Again, the article will be aimed at the Journal of Business Research as they seek for articles that publish theories that can be used in a real business setting as previously mentioned. Moreover, it will also act as a continuation of Dutta and Pullig's (2011) article published in this journal, which examines different corporate response strategies to different types of negative publicity. Alternatively, the researcher will also consider the Journal of Business Ethics, which also seems a good fit with this research as the journal seeks articles that involve ethical issues surrounding businesses; and as one of the articles published in this journal specifically explores how CSR can help fight negative publicity (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009).

On a personal note, I would like to state that this PhD journey has taught me a lot of useful things. I will carry all these elements that I have picked up from my PhD journey and carry them with me to my future jobs. This PhD has taught me accurate critical thinking, fast problem solving (as in a PhD you face many obstacles and you have to overcome them

relatively quickly), learning that in order to achieve optimum results, it requires perseverance and hard work. Additionally, it helped me see Marketing from another angle and explore other facets of it. I also learnt many new ideas and concepts by attending conferences and it was also a place where I was able to present my work with confidence. Most importantly, learning how to focus on my goals and not let anything interfere with them (as in the middle of my PhD a pandemic came upon us and at times I could not see light at the end of the tunnel). This journey has certainly made me wiser, stronger and a better marketer and researcher. This journey mainly taught me that you can achieve anything in life irrespective of the obstacles you may face, as long as you put your mind to it. All in all, I am extremely proud of the end result as it took a lot of hard work, dedication and many sacrifices.

'A happy man is the one who has a healthy body, a wealthy soul, and a well-educated nature' – Thales

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Overview of Literature on Negative Publicity

APPENDIX 2: Overview of Findings

APPENDIX 3: Thesis Findings and Contributions Overview

APPENDIX 4: Ethics Form

Appendix 1: Overview of Literature on Negative Publicity

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Corporate Responses (How to overcome negative publicity)	Bradford and Garrett (1995)	Journal of Business Ethics	Explores the most effective ways to respond to negative publicity (denial, excuse, justification, concession)	Fake scenario	Experiment – 342 respondents	- A response is more effective than no response - Concession response is the most appropriate response to fix a brand's image	- Uses experiments that do not depict reality - It does not include factors that are important today (e.g. internet and social media)
	Menon, Jewell and Unnava (1999)	Advances in Consumer Research	Examines how consumers react when a company does not respond	Northstar Running Shoes - Uses four different response scenarios	Experiment – 88 students	- Consumers are not forgiving when the company does not respond - A weak response is as bad as no response	- Uses hypothetical scenarios. This does not allow participants to provide realistic answers - Perhaps outdated in relation to today's world (given the rise of the internet) - Uses students which involves ethical issues and they are not a representative sample
	Hoeken and Renkema (1998)	Corporate Reputation Review	Explores whether corrective actions can repair a company's image after negative publicity	Fictitious bribery scandals	Experiment	Correction is key to restoring company image	- Based on reading newspaper articles – does not take time lapse into consideration - Only focuses on one way of response

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas (2006)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Explores two types of negative publicity (value—related and performance-related) and how companies can respond to each	• Rinna – fictitious brand – fictitious scenarios • Fruit juice and Odwalla (juice contamination and employee discrimination – fake scenarios)	• Experiment - 188 students • Experiment – 306 students	• How the brand is positioned (i.e. brand positioning) prior to the scandal plays an important role as it may protect the brand • “A positioning strategy that aligns with potential negative event publicity, when created with high certainty will likely insulate a brand from harmful effects”	• Provides useful inputs in relation to the two different types of negative publicity • Unrealistic outcomes due to fictitious scenarios • Neglects how a company can respond effectively after the negative event • Uses students which are not an accurate depiction of the whole population
	Vanhamme and Grobben (2009)	Journal of Business Ethics	Exploring how CSR can help fight negative publicity	• Fictitious company and events (make-up and animal testing)	• Experiment – 125 Dutch consumers	• CSR prior to negative publicity event may be helpful • This strategy leads to consumer doubt in relation to the company’s integrity (consumer scepticism)	• Small sample size • CSR has been discredited in literature as an effective way to overcome negative publicity (corporate hypocrisy) • Experiment – external validity

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Dutta and Pullig (2011)	Journal of Business Research	Investigating different corporate responses to different types of crisis	Addidas – fake scenario	Experiment – 134 students	- Response depends on the nature of the crisis - For values-related negative publicity, reduction of offensiveness and corrective action are the most effective strategies - Denial is effective for values-related and performance-related negative publicity	- Useful as to what consumers expect from each type of negative publicity - Small sample – not representative - Use of experiment - validity - These corporate responses are considered non-effective, thus need to address this issue further to come up with useful managerial implications
	Hegner, Beldad and Heghuis (2014)	Journal of Brand Management	How company responses after negative publicity affect consumers' trust	Different scenarios with different responses	Experiment – 187 residents in the Netherlands	- Not responding may damage a brand due to the fact that it will be perceived by consumers as the company not caring - Trust may act as a buffer after a crisis - If the company denies the event then the brand equity is likely to depreciate	- Experiment – external validity - Focuses only on the concept of trust and fails to explore the consumer-company relationship further

Common Theme	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Company Response and Consumer Reactions	Xie and Peng (2009)	Psychology & Marketing	Exploring how company responses can restore consumer trust	Fictitious corporate brand and events	Experiment – 220 students – China	Affective functional, and informational responses repair a company's image and repairs consumers' trust	- Looks at trust (which not many studies do), however, does not explore the consumer-company relationship - Methodology and sample used do not represent realistic outputs - experiment – external validity issues - Lack of emotional element in consumers
	Wang et al. (2016)	European Journal of Marketing	Examines how an individual's thinking style (holistic or analytic) will determine how (s)he will interpret a company's apology after a crisis	Hypothetical scenarios and fake brands	3 Experiments – 308 students in total (Surveys) - China	- Holistic thinkers tend to want apologies focusing on “why” the event happened - Analytic thinkers tend to want apologies focusing on “how” the event happened	- Sample problematic – external validity - Presents consumers as rational decision makers and omits consumers' emotions
	Bowen et al. (2017)	Journal of International Management	How a company's response affects consumers' behavioural intentions	VW Emissions Scandal	Quantitative Survey – German and US consumers	- Revenge and avoidance more present in US than Germany - Trust mediates the relationship between perceived appropriateness of crisis response, revenge and avoidance intentions	- Very good study that looks at how consumers react; however, focuses on intentions as opposed to actual behaviours and so the findings are not so realistic - The emotional aspect is not present - Consumer-company relationship is not explored extensively

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Online Firestorms	Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014)	Journal of Decision Systems	How negative word-of-mouth spreads online, how firestorms are caused and how companies should respond to them	Real comments online – random interactions between participants online	“Empirical investigation”	- Social status of the members seems to be a key influence in a firestorm counter-response - Response time is critical and a counter-response strategy should be employed promptly in order to avoid negative effects	- Does not emphasise on one specific event and does not provide clear explanations as to what events were researched - Mentions that it examines consumers’ positive and negative attitudes, however, fails to address what these attitudes are
	Herhasuen et al. (2019)	Journal of Marketing	They examine emotions and how they are affected by the level of arousal, and they also examine the role of the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the messages	Online brand communities on Facebook between 2011 and 2016, which firestorms had unravelled online	Netnography - “472,995 negative customer posts across 89 online brand communities”	- High arousal emotion words are more contagious than low arousal emotion words and they have more power to go viral - A fast response to the negative comments helps a lot and that the best strategy is providing explanations - After offering explanations in order to mitigate the negative effect, compensation may help in order to decrease the virality of the negative message - An empathetic response seems to be a good strategy but not as effective as the others	- Used text mining dictionaries, which is mostly used for psychology for deep rooted and expressive emotions - Fails to examine specific emotions and leaves it open to high intensity and low intensity emotions - Based on an online brand community, which works quite differently to a traditional online setting and online in general - Used netnography, which aided immensely in uncovering insights and help shape this thesis

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Scholz and Smith (2019)	Journal of Marketing Management	How companies should respond to online firestorms	• Netnography – “Protein World” negative event	• 5,374 individual tweets	• ‘Deny strategy’ – does not seem to work as it brings out more negative consumer reactions • “Diminish strategy” – ineffective strategy • “Escalation strategy” – is the most effective strategy - this strategy helped the company as they managed to turn the tables and make the consumers look bad and themselves good, and they insulted consumers who attacked them	• Mentions the importance of morals and identity, however, fails to research them. • It mentions that the successful strategy proposed (i.e. escalation strategy) has the potential to strengthen the consumer-company relationship, however, it does not examine this further either. • Escalation strategy seems to be contrary to all the research proposed up until today (respecting consumers and providing apologies and compensation) • Important findings using netnography – signified the benefit of this method

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Different Typologies of Consumers Responding to Negative Publicity	Monga and John (2008)	Journal of Consumer Psychology	How analytic and holistic thinkers interpret and react to negative publicity	BMW and Mercedes-Benz (fictitious negative publicity events)	- Quantitative Experiment - BMW– 44 students - Mercedes-Benz – 144 students	- Holistic thinkers are less likely to change their perceptions about a company after negative publicity - Analytic thinkers are more likely to take into consideration the negative events and alter their beliefs about the brand - Companies should respond differently to each style of thinking	- Good insights as to how a company should respond according to each style of thinking - Useful as to how consumers interpret negative publicity cognitively - Uses a fictitious scenario, which is not an ideal representation of reality - Uses students who are not a representative sample of the the whole population - Categorises consumers according to their style of thinking and presents consumers as rational decision makers neglecting human emotions

Common Theme	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Alhuwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava (2000)	Journal of Marketing Research	Looks at how two types of consumers (highly committed and lowly committed) respond to negative publicity in the media	Nike & Mizuno companies used but with fictitious events (in the media)	- Quantitative Experiment – Survey - Nike experiment - 35 students - Mizuno experiment – 71 students - The third experiment looked at how the companies should respond	- Highly committed consumers do not take into consideration the negative publicity events and remain loyal - Lowly committed consumers do take into account the negative publicity events - Highly committed consumers - diagnostic strategy - Lowly committed consumers – counterargumentation strategy	- A very good study that reveals how different consumers respond to negative publicity in the media - However, it portrays consumers as rationalised thinkers and does not explore the emotions consumers may feel

Common Theme	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Consumer-Company Relationship after Negative Publicity	Huber et al. (2010)	Journal of Business Research	Examines the consumer-company relationship after negative publicity, particularly “consumers repurchase intentions” after a brand misconduct	Fictitious scenario with a jeans company (negative event - child labour)	Experiment with a sample of 219 people	“Ideal and actual self-congruence” indeed do influence the consumer-company relationship ‘Partner quality’ and ‘repurchase intentions’ are significantly affected from brand misconduct and it may lead to companies losing out on consumers - When a company acts unethically, this deteriorates the quality of the relationship between the consumer and the brand and, therefore, the purchase intentions - This is especially true for “long brand relationships”	- It does not clearly articulate as to why the dynamics of the relationship change and a reasoning behind why consumers feel the way they feel is not clearly provided - It focuses on purchase intentions and not actual behaviours - Very useful as it highlights the importance of identity in cases of negative publicity, however, greater insights are needed in relation to how a consumer’s identity affects their behaviour in cases of negative publicity
	Davies and Olmedo-Cifuentes (2016)	European Journal of Marketing	Explores how corporate misconduct affects trust and how different types of consumers respond to a corporate crisis	Fictitious brands and negative scenarios	Conjoint Analysis – 404 respondents	Consumers reactions highly depend on how they perceive a crisis (i.e. one who sees it as breaking the law and another might see it as corporate irresponsibility)	- Does not examine consumers’ reactions extensively - Uses also fictitious brands and scenarios that do not reflect reality

Common Theme	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Negative Publicity Online	Hansen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau (2018)	Journal of Business Research	Examines consumers' perceptions after an online firestorm and for how long this perception lasts in consumers' memories and subsequently how this affects brands	- Adopted all their data online from Twitter - they used big brands such as "Nintendo, Sony, Google, Yahoo, Amazon, McDonald's, Burger King, Primark, Mango, Adidas, ING-DiBa, Ikea and HTC" - Follow-up survey 2 years after the people had commented negatively online and asked them whether they remember the event	60 firestorms 977 survey participants	- Product-related crises seem to affect more consumers' perceptions as opposed to values-related - Consumers seem to forget the online negative event in the long-run and so its effects are not long-lasting - They seem to remember the negative event if it was seen in the form of a video as opposed to written text - Long-lasting firestorms with greater consumer engagement seem to be remembered more in the long-run and seem to influence also brand perceptions negatively	- Useful as it suggests that a consumer's identity plays a role in cases of negative publicity and so it provides a new lens - Values-related negative publicity is very under-researched in this article - Omits to study how consumers process negative publicity on an emotional level - The study does not emphasise on specific behaviour changes'; it just states that there are greater negative brand perceptions

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Consumer-Company Identification	Einwiller et al. (2006)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Explores how company-identification affects consumers responses to negative publicity in the media	Conscious Funds (imaginary company and negative publicity scenario)	- Quantitative Experiment 210 shoppers in San Diego Mall	- Consumers who have a high identification with a company disregard negative news - Consumers who have a low identification with a company take into account negative information about a company - Propose different strategies to respond to each type of consumer (e.g. further encourage consumer-company identification, etc.)	- It uses an experiment that does not depict reality - It is from San Diego, which may not be generalisable - Categorises consumers and presents them as rational decision makers and omits the emotional element
	Liu, Wang and Wu (2010)	Psychology & Marketing	Examines how commitment, identification and consumer sensitivity to corporate social performance affects consumers' behaviours after negative publicity	Carrefour in Taiwan is used as a company example but fake events are presented	- Quantitative experiment 230 college students	- Consumers with a weak identification and have high sensitivity to corporate performance have adverse attitudes after negative publicity in contrast to strongly-identified consumers and low sensitivity consumers - These attitudes are on the basis that the event is not extremely serious	- Focuses mainly on attitudes and not behaviours - The emotional aspect is not present in this study - Students used as sample, which is not representative of population - Conducted in the form of an experiment with fake scenarios and, thus, the findings do not depict reality

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Lisjak, Lee and Gardener (2012)	Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	Examines how identified consumers respond when a company is experiencing a crisis and so it is under threat and explores the role of self-esteem and self-activation	Four surveys with Starbucks and Facebook as examples of companies experiencing negative publicity	- Four quantitative surveys - A total of 356 university students as the sample	This study states that when the brand is under threat, then consumers with low self-esteem who highly identify with a brand are more likely to defend it	Although there are useful findings from this research in regard to how it affects consumers personally, it does not include the emotional factor
	Cheng, White and Chaplin (2011)	Journal of Consumer Psychology	Investigates the role of self-brand connection in cases of negative publicity and how this affects the consumer-company relationship	Two experiments with Blackberry as a company experiencing negative publicity	- Experiments 245 university students	- The findings show that highly identified consumers defend the brand when it experiences negative events because the brand is seen as the extension of self and, thus, a personal failure - Identified consumers defend brands to maintain their positive self image	Although an important study as it reveals the importance of the self in the consumer-company identification, it does not provide further reasoning as to why these behaviours occur and omits the emotional aspect

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Einwiller (2019)	Journal of Business Research	It investigates consumers' identification based on a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and how this type of identification affects consumers' behaviours	- Two companies presented as socially responsible: Ecoworld and Volkswagen - The negative events involve these companies going against their CSR principles	- Quantitative Experiment & Survey 123 students (Ecoworld) 169 German consumers (Volkswagen)	- CSR does not work as a buffer to negative publicity and only makes things worse - When consumers decide to identify with brands due to their CSR policies and ideology and unethical corporate acts related to these principles follow, then consumers feel that their self-concept is under threat and can longer identify with the company - When identification is based on CA principles and the transgression is still moral, no changes to consumer behaviour occur - Due to a perceived sense of betrayal, consumers engage in negative word of mouth	Very useful insights emerge from this study such as the impact a corporate identity can have to the self and the study has used a real-life example. However, it does not focus so much on what causes this identification and what emotions are involved in this process

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
Moral Emotions	Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2013)	Journal of Business Research	Explores the negative behaviours consumers have after negative publicity, such negative word of mouth and boycotts, and studies the implications these actions have for businesses	Dark Chocolate and Big Retailer – two fictitious companies with real negative scenarios	- Experiments 280 Italians	- Negative word of mouth is a form to express negative emotions - Protests are a way to express dissatisfaction and anger towards the company - Ethical and social transgressions are tied to negative emotions such as contempt, anger and disgust - Emotions experienced clearly depend on the ethical virtues a customer withholds	- Participants are provided with forced stimuli so there is lack of naturalistic conditions and, thus, realistic findings - The emotional aspect and why people behave the way they do could have been explored

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019)	Psychology & Marketing	Investigates the role of compassion when corporations face negative events	Scenario-based experiment – participants are asked to recall past experiences in which companies encountered negative publicity and their emotions towards these companies	- Scenario-based experiment 930 participants	- Helpful behaviours are more likely in cases with companies with a higher reputation - the companies are self-relevant and so there is no threat to their social status - When self efficacy is high, then it is easier to cope with the feeling of compassion - When perceived blame increases along with problem severity and low reputation, then consumers are less likely to feel compassion and help - Perceived helplessness along with increased problem severity and perceived blame seem to be a factors that affect compassion and helping behaviours in highly reputable companies	- Participants retrieve emotions and thoughts from memory from their own experiences, which may have led to a form of bias in regard to the events - Also the memories may not be accurate - The study explores intentions only and not actual behaviours, thus does not represent reality - Fails to examine the consumer-company relationship alongside emotions and the self - Focuses only on compassion, other emotions and their effects need to be further explored

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi (2013)	Psychology & Marketing	Explores consumers' emotional response to corporate wrongdoing. They specifically look at "constructive punitive actions" and "destructive punitive actions" by consumers and the role of moral emotions (anger, contempt and disgust)	- Fictitious company with various real-life negative events -"dark chocolate" that used child labour - A company in Porto Terres that had an oil spillage from a tank in the sea causing harm to the environment and the community	- Experiments 145 university students 167 participants from Porto Terres	- Anger leads to constructive punitive actions, which lead to acts such as reconciliation - Contempt leads to destructive punitive actions - Disgust leads to none of the punitive actions discussed above	- Does not explore the relationship between the consumer and the company - Fictitious events and experiments do not represent reality - It does not look at any subsequent emotions that may occur - Focused only on negative emotions

	Author(s)	Journal	Objectives	Context	Methodology & Sample	Findings	Critical Analysis
	Xie and Bagozzi (2018)	Psychology & Marketing	Investigates how corporate irresponsible behaviour affects consumers' emotions and attitudes	Offshore shipping firm in Norway with scenarios that the company violated ethics of community and autonomy	- Experiment & Survey 211 participants	- Violations towards a community usually bring out contempt with moral identity, empathy and self-concepts playing a moderating role - Individuals with greater central moral identities, with greater empathetic concern and who hold strong collective self-concepts feel contempt and engage in negative behaviours - Anger seems to emerge when ethical transgressions affect others – the greater the self concept, the greater the anger - Anger leads to negative word of mouth and boycotts - The greater the morality, the greater the empathy experienced - The greater the relational self-concept, the greater the negative attitudes	- Restricted the emotions studied to anger and contempt - Only focused on negative emotions - Importance of the collective self-concept not addressed extensively - Although they use real scenarios, a fake company is used and the researchers call for additional research to use real companies and events

Appendix 2: Overview of Findings

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
MORAL EMOTIONS (Negative Event)	“Those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” (Haidt, 2003, p.853) According to Haidt (2003) when anger is felt instinctively it leads to attacking the other party, humiliating them or seeking revenge Haidt (2003) states that when compassion is felt it leads to wanting to help and alleviate the suffering of the other party. In accordance with Haidt’s (2003) moral emotions theory, when disgust is felt the individual immediately avoids contact with the offending entity	<i>I totally enjoy their food and support their corporate values and beliefs. It is a very good organisation.</i> <i>The reason the company went against the LGBT community is because it comes into conflict with their religious beliefs. Religious freedom should be treated with equal respect as LGBT activism. They are a good example of an organisation that goes by its values and is not in any form restrictive.</i> <i>The company should be able to give their money to whichever charity they wish. I don't have anyone telling me which charities I should give money to. I help out charities that are Christian. It's my money and so it's my decision. It's their money so it's their decision. Did they ever reject you from any of their restaurants? My guess is no</i>	The people who support the company are the ones with the same Christian values and beliefs as the company. They support it on the basis that they agree with their values and think they are an outstanding company due to their values. This group defends the organisation and their values that are important to them by stating that the actions of the organisation are solely based on their religion. They also shift the blame to the media for not reporting the story correctly. These consumers see themselves as part of the company. There seems to be a congruence in their moral identities. When accused by the opposing party about being full of hate they defend themselves and the organisation by stating that there is no hate involved. Thus ,attempt to protect their moral identity.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>You see it as hate. The owner has the right to do what he wants and support whatever group he pleases. I agree with his stance I would do the same. It's my personal opinion and there is no loathe associated with this belief.</i> <i>A human life and human rights are more important than anything else. It goes without saying that we should flee from companies that our values do not match and we hate. Why support a company and help them fulfill their discriminatory practices?</i> <i>Values cannot be tampered with for simply a sandwich. I do not patronise businesses in which are against the LGBTQ+ group and my values in general. I neither buy beauty products in which support animal testing. These are a sample of my values and what I condone. It may sometimes be inconvenient but values over inconvenience.</i>	They also defend the CEO by stating that he has done nothing wrong and that they agree with his stance. Their seems to be a congruence in their values and their identities also. The CEO is glorified and this is to protect what the view as the extension of their self. The ones who oppose towards the company and its actions are the ones who support the LGBTQ+ community. Their values lie within diversity and equality. They declare that the company is disgraceful for its beliefs and that based on that they should not be supported. These consumers want to morally distance themselves from the company and exhibit that their values do not align. They claim that the company is unethical and hence they will not support it.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>I prefer to be an adequate human being with morals rather than support such companies.</i> <i>The company is not a dutiful citizen of society. I will never buy anything from them.</i> <i>I tried Chick-fil-A once even though I was aware of their views. To be honest, it was one of the most divine chicken sandwiches I ever had. Although it was nice my morals will not be compromised and I will never step foot in any of their restaurants.</i>	The moral distancing does not only occur because they do not want to be associated with the company but also because they want to exhibit to the public their moral sense of self. They want to show their distance with the organisation in any way possible and so they also attack the CEO of the company. He is viewed as an extension of the brand and so they want to morally disengage with him also. The data highlights that consumers highly take their values into consideration upon making purchases and leave other factors such as quality behind.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>I think that the company should be free to donate to whoever they want, it's no one's business. I love Chick-fil-a and will definitely be going again. I completely agree with their stance. I have rights to believe what I want, as everyone has.</i> <i>How about our human rights? All the organisations have CEOs in which they are all allowed to have their values and beliefs. Can they not choose who they want to donate to? The LGBT group state that they accept all people..they cannot say that they accept all peoples' rights and then go against a group that has different beliefs to them!</i>	Compassion is evident towards the organisation from their Christian supporters. They seem to be able to relate with the company. They state their intentions to continue going to Chick-fil-a. Compassion is further seen by the way the Christian consumers react to the other group that attacks the company. They claim that is in their right to believe what they want. They also claim that they feel that they are being attacked for the values and beliefs and so they can relate to the company. Thus, they can understand what the organisation is going through, they view it as an indirect attack to themselves also so compassion towards the organisation is felt.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>The Salvation Army aids so many people from any background and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes is a religious charity which just has some regulations in place, the athlete must be straight and not to have intercourse prior to getting married. There is no discrimination they are simply following their religious beliefs. I think you're thinking is quite outdated and if you don't like their beliefs then just don't encounter them.</i> <i>Nope. Wrong again. It's Christians who are being attacked, sued, bullied and intimidated for their beliefs. YOU want Christians to be forced by law to violate their beliefs. YOU demand that those who believe that homosexuality is a sin conform to YOUR beliefs. Fact. What beliefs do Christians/conservatives want turned into law?? How exactly are those organisations "attacking" you? You sound ridiculous.</i>	This group also defends the Christian charities for having outstanding values and that it should not be attacked. They also intimidate the LGBTQ+ supporters by stating that they should be ashamed for going against these charities. This shows that they are not protecting only protecting an organisation or a charity but the threat imposed on their moral values as a whole. Anger is also felt by the Christian consumers as they attack the other group. They proclaim that the other group is trying to diminish Christians and they are shifting the blame to the other party. They feel that their religion and moral identity are at threat and so the anger expressed to protect these. The data highlights that both emotions felt lead to a need to protect the moral identity as the organisation is viewed as the extension of the self.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>The company gives part of their profits to charities in which contribute towards killing gay people in Uganda. It is not about having opposing beliefs or views. This is a human rights problem and whether you will actively contribute towards these atrocities.</i> <i>This organisation is exactly what's damaging society at the moment. Marginalising individuals and imposing their beliefs on everyone. We should all stop eating there and make them go bankrupt.</i> <i>The reason for the protest is to inform people as to where their money ends up. I believe that individuals will assess better and make careful decisions when they are aware of the fact that this company kills people like my friends.</i>	The emotion of anger is also apparent in the people who support the LGBTQ+ society. They degrade the company by stating that they are contributing to the destruction of lives and violate basic human rights. The anger is further seen when the consumers want to take revenge against the company.. They want to see the company close down and urge everyone to boycott it. They feel by actively doing something and making the restaurant disappear it will alleviate the suffering of their LGBTQ+ friends. The anger is also manifested in the form of protests which is viewed as another way of attacking the company. By protesting they want to actively contribute to changing society and help the community in the offline world.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>They help in destructing LGBT peoples' lives just because of their sexual orientation. If you buy food from this place you are not a decent human being. People who have morals will not buy from this place.</i> <i>Would you like it if people were saying you are a disgrace to society? Would you like it if someone wouldn't want you to exist? Would you feel nice to be treated inferiorly just because you were born that way? How would you feel if your job and life were at threat just because of this? This company supports all those things.</i>	The LGBTQ+ supporters also attack the other party online which again highlights the emotion of anger. They want to exhibit their moral superiority and they shame the other group and the company for their morals and values. They want to attack the other party's moral identity by shaming them and indirectly trying to force them to boycott the company. Another emotion that is evident in the LGBTQ+ supporters is compassion for those who identify as LGBTQ+. When coming into conflict with the other party they ask whether they can comprehend how the members of the LGBTQ+ society feel. This shows that they understand their struggles and because they feel compassion they try to help them by explaining to the other group their struggles and how this can change if they change the way they behave.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>It is not only about uniform rights, the issue is the fact that the company contributes to restricting the rights of the LGBTQ+ group and creating a threat towards the group. If you are not against the LGBT+ group I would request you don't support companies that dehumanize people.</i> <i>I live in the USA and I have never entered a Chick-fil-a in my life and nor will I ever will, after finding out that they fund to charities that abuse LGBT members I was disgusted and even more disgusted that people still go and support them</i>	The anger and compassion combined lead to the LGBTQ+ supporters fighting against the company as it is viewed as a threat to the community. It is also clear that they do not have anything personal with the company but the issue is with anyone who attacks the community in any way. Disgust is another emotion felt by the LGBTQ+ supporters due to the fact that they feel that the company acts unethically and discriminates which goes against their moral values. Disgust is also felt for the Christian supporters which again shows they have nothing personal with the company but it is on a general level with those who go against their values. They also urge others not to go in order for the company to close down which shows that disgust can also lead to revengeful behaviours.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>We have the strength to fight big organisations when we do not agree with their values. We have the right to protest and boycott businesses. Our protests have led to the closure of the restaurant. Boycotts towards Starbucks has forced them to pay their tax owed. Not caring is never the solution if you want change. You accuse me of being wrong maybe you should look at the way you think.</i> <i>We have to stand against companies that support similar issues in solidarity of our LGBT+ friends. We have to win the fight against these organisations that suppress people and make them suffer.</i>	Disgust is also felt for the way organisations operate unethically and that boycotting organisations is the only way to create change. The company is therefore used as a vehicle of fighting for their values and changing society. Friends and family of those who identify as LGBTQ+ only feel disgust towards the organisation. This disgust is on the basis that their family and friends are treated unfairly and they want to actively show their support by boycotting the organisation.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>I cannot grasp why people are even bothered about this. If the company provides jobs to people, does good to the community then fine. To be honest, the only thing I care about is the quality of the food I am not concerned about anything else.</i> <i>All the organisations are bound to fund something you do not agree with. That's how it is you just need to move on. You must be ignorant if you think that all the organisations are transparent. You are simply losing out on a very delicious sandwich.</i>	The data suggests that there is also a third group, one that does not have any values in relation to Christianity or LGBTQ+ related. This group experiences moral apathy and does not take their morals into consideration upon making purchases. They look at other factors such as quality. Apathy is mostly felt because they think that all organisations act unethically and so there is no point in acting or reacting as no changes will occur. Also, they state that boycotting every company for doing something wrong would make their lives difficult.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
CONSUMER-COMPANY IDENTIFICATION (Negative Event)	Consumer-Company Identification is primarily defined “as the primary psychological substrate for the kind of deep, committed, and meaningful relationships that marketers are increasingly seeking to build with their customers” (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003, p. 76)	<i>We are entitled to believe anything we want. We can also give donations to anyone we please. You do not have the right to push your beliefs on us.</i> <i>It's a company and chooses to donate it doesn't even have to! They are doing something to contribute to society what are you doing? The causes they donate to aid many people including young athletes and students</i> <i>Could you please explain how these organisations have discriminated and are said to hate the LGBT community? Being a Christian company does not mean that they discriminate against others or that they hate and this is the case with Chick-fil-a. People are now being discriminated because of their religious beliefs and we will see more and more of this in the future.</i>	The consumers who are Christian seem to identify with the company and so a consumer-company identification is apparent. They defend the company as a means to defend their group and their social identity. These consumers want to show that they are part of a very respectable group and that other companies do much worse such as child labour. They attack the LGBTQ+ supporters and their ego by asking them to state what they have done in order to help society. This group of consumers feel that their identity is under threat as they state that the opposing group wants to diminish them. The identification with the company along with the threat imposed on their social identity leads to attacking the opposing party

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
CONSUMER-COMPANY DISIDENTIFICATION (Negative Event)	“A consumers’ active, cognitive rejection of a brand” (Wolter et al., 2016)	<i>Purchasing ethically is not as easy as one might think it takes a lot of investigation. However; when an organisations identity is clear to the public and what they support then it makes our job easier to not support them. I do not support Christian businesses as they tend to oppress others.</i> <i>When you pay to maltreat other people then you are the ones who are wrong not us.</i> <i>Chick-fil-a helps to get gay people killed in Uganda. If you go to the restaurant then you are also contributing to this funding and the unlawful behaviors towards the LGBT community</i>	It appears that the company’s identity is relative to each individuals perception and not always what the company wants to portray. The LGBTQ+ supporters view the company's identity as cruel, malicious and uncaring. This is due to the fact that they state that they contribute to the suffering of other people. The LGBTQ+ supporters want to signify that they do not want to have to do anything with the brand and point out all of its wrongdoings. They want to make their social identity clear and discernible. They also want to be clear as to the unethical acts the company carries and why they do not want to be associated with them. They inform the opposing party that giving them money helps makes other people suffer.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>If you think that congratulating such appalling behavior is ok then that says a lot about you and who are as a person. What other good things they do is completely irrelevant if they treat the LGBT group in such a way.</i> <i>Salvation army does not take in members of the LGBT+ community. I do not support them I support other charities that help all people and do not discriminate.</i> <i>My friend has to take into consideration where in the world its safe to travel due to who he is. Constantly worried whether he should reveal the person with him is his husband. It's not about politics is about human rights.</i>	They also attack and degrade the other group and make them feel bad about their group and their social identity, once again trying to distinguish themselves from the crowd. They further want to make clear their disidentification with the charities that Chick-fil-a donates to. They state again that their actions are unethical. Highlighting once again that they do not want to be part of such groups. The disidentification also occurs because according to them the company contributes to the suffering of their friends and family. By showing their disidentification and disapproval online they feel that in turn they are somehow helping.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
MORAL EMOTIONS AND CONSUMER-COMPANY DISIDENTIFICATION (Corporate Response)		<i>They already harmed so many people the damage has already occurred, it's too late. I will continue not to buy from this restaurant.</i> <i>They promised in the past that they will terminate the funds to such charities and didn't stick to their promise. They are liars I will only trust that they are telling the truth when I see evidence.</i>	The company responded by stating that it will no longer donate to those charities. The LGBTQ+ supporters still feel disgust towards the company even after the response. This is mostly because their beliefs about the company did not change and they believe that the company has already caused a lot of damage. Following the disgust stated they also want to make clear that they still disidentify with the company and they do not want to be associated with them in any way. A protection of the moral self and social identity is once again seen. Disgust is also seen when this group declares that it will boycott the company because they are dishonest. They feel repulsed by the lies the company has said in the past and so they do not trust that the company is capable of change. Honesty seems to play a moderating role in cases of negative publicity.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>They are simply ceasing the donations because they want to avoid further negative publicity and not because they have changed their minds and feel that the LGBT society should have the same rights as everybody else. The company still supports this kind of stuff just more discreetly.</i> <i>The company will stop the donations but I'm sure the CEO will still donate to these awful charities, I will never step foot in a Chick-fil-a. It's not a coincidence that this announcement came out now that they want to operate in California where they are not tolerant of such beliefs and behaviours.</i>	The LGBTQ+ supporters claim that they are not convinced that the company is being honest due to its past behaviours and that they have ulterior motives for responding in this manner such as to rectify the negative publicity caused. They are not convinced by a simple statement that there is an honest change in their behaviour. The fact that the CEO stated outright in public his Christian beliefs also makes them think that the CEO is likely to cause damage on a personal level and so they will continue boycotting the company. Thus, the disidentification here is on the basis that they do not want to be associated with these beliefs in any form.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>You shouldn't stop donating to those organisations you should stand up to your beliefs. We who followed you now feel that you betrayed us in order to acquire new customers who are not even going to follow you!</i> <i>We will start believing the company when it actively supports the LGBT community by hiring such members as part of their staff and recruiting same sex couples in their adverts. I will not go unless I see these things happening.</i>	The Christian consumers who identified with the company seem to now experience disgust and want to disidentify with the company also. This is mainly because they feel betrayed by the company and they do not want to be associated with people who do not stick to their beliefs and values. These consumers want to protect their morality and social identity. The consumers state that ending donations to these charities is not suffice and that in order to rectify the damage they should give back to the LGBTQ+ community. They request from the company to be more diverse and stop the suffering imposed towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Themes	Definition	Sample of Participants Comments	Summary of Findings
		<i>They just have to cease from supporting such hateful groups. All the companies should have similar values to Hard Rock Café that states that they love and serve everyone. Those are values to have.</i> <i>The company has not provided full explanations as to why it will stop donating to these charities. Which makes me suspicious that they just don't want customers to boycott them that's it and not because they are sorry for the damage caused.</i>	Another suggestion is to change the company's identity by making it more inclusive and to not take a stance on social matters. Also to change the people who run the company in order to regain consumers' trust. The final suggestion is in regards to the statement that the company published after the negative event. They claim that the statement should have been more explanatory as to why the company has decided to respond in that manner. Additionally, the wording in the statement should have been more clear also in order to not leave any doubts to the consumers as to how the company intends to move forward.

APPENDIX 3: Thesis Findings and Contributions Overview

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
Online Negative Publicity	Online negative publicity is newly defined in this thesis as the negative thoughts and adverse emotional reactions consumers express on social media towards a company, which lead to negative reactions by consumers and need to be addressed promptly by the company.	Online negative publicity is conceptualised in order to better comprehend the difference between online and offline negative publicity and what it is. This definition considers the online element and consumers' emotions and cognitions that have not been considered in prior definitions.	Understanding the difference between the online and offline negative publicity will help companies in responding with more appropriate strategies
	This study highlights an additional facet to communication failure, which is the organisation not communicating its ethos and values to the consumers in a correct manner, thus leading to potential misinterpretations.	This thesis uncovers an additional communication failure in negative publicity; this will help to distinguish the differences between various corporate failures.	If companies are aware of the different types of failures, they will be able to deal with them more effectively.
	Via a netnographic study and a real-life event, this thesis uncovers that both the cognitive and the emotional element are equally important when considering consumers' behaviours in cases of negative publicity. Therefore, refuting prior studies (Alhuwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000; Monga and John, 2008; Hasen, Kupfer and Hennig-Thurau, 2018) that state that only consumers' cognitions or emotions play an active role in cases of negative publicity.	This finding highlights that both elements are important when considering consumer-company relationships.	With this finding, companies can now form stronger and more meaningful connections with their consumers as the literature in the past has pointed out to focus either on one or the other.
	By exploring a real-life scenario, this study underlines the factors that seem to affect negative publicity are moral emotions, consumer-company identification and moral and social identity. A consumer's thinking style (Monga and John, 2008) and level of commitment with the company (Alhuwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava, 2000) seem to be unimportant factors in cases of negative publicity, as suggested by prior research.	This finding underlines which factors are important when considering a consumer-company relationship.	This will aid companies to tackle adverse events more efficiently.

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	This research uncovers that consumers in such instances are divided into consumers who identify with a company and consumers who disidentify with a company. They are not divided into highly identified and lowly identified when it comes to negative publicity (Einwiller et al., 2006), as prior studies suggest.	This finding is important as it signifies the nature of the relationship consumers have with companies, especially in cases of negative publicity.	This will again help companies understand the nature of their relationship with their consumers.
Emotional Consumer-Company Identification	This thesis uncovers that customers who initially identify with the company feel compassion towards it and so attempt to defend the company by standing up for it and portraying it in a positive light. They feel compassion due to the fact that there seems to be an alignment in the consumers' and company's moral identity, which has not been previously detected in the literature.	The theory of consumer-company identification is advanced to emotional consumer-company identification as an emotional component has been discovered. Consumers experience compassion towards the company and support it by portraying it in a positive light. They also experience anger toward the opposing group and attack it. These actions are enforced in order to defend and protect their moral identity, which appears to be salient in such instances.	This theory will aid companies in forming more meaningful relationships with their consumers and it will aid in rectifying their relationship with consumers when adverse events emerge.
	This study identifies that reputation, perceived blame, perceived helplessness and problem severity do not affect consumers' emotions, as previously suggested by Meyer, Huber and Huber (2019).	Via the development of this theory, this thesis has helped to identify which aspects are important for consumers' emotions.	
	This research establishes that emotions are experienced towards other consumers also. In antithesis to previous research that states that negative emotions are felt towards companies after negative publicity only (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013), anger is felt towards the opposing party, which leads to attacking them in an attempt to protect their moral identity.		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	Findings reveal that these two emotions (compassion towards the company and anger towards other consumers) lead to supporting the company and attacking other consumers. These emotions and actions mainly occur to protect their moral identity and sense of self which has not been detected in prior research. This finding also reveals that moral identity is a salient and core identity when consumers identify with brands. This is in contrast to prior research that states that only the social identity is salient in such instances (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	This thesis highlights that the most important factor for a consumer to identify with a company that involves the self is self-congruity. Another important factor that seems to be important is value congruence. These factors lead to consumers wanting to identify with a brand and, thus, being part of a group. These are the three factors established in this study negating other factors suggested by prior research (Pratt, 1998 cited in Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995; Karaosmanoglu, Bas and Zhang, 2011).	Moreover, in accordance with the prior established theory (i.e. consumer-company identification), a cognitive connection towards the company is also present. This appeals to consumers' social identity. However, this thesis reveals that the most important factors for consumers to identify with a company cognitively are value congruence and self congruence. This involves the consumers sharing the same values and identity with the company. Due to the value congruence and self congruence, consumers defend the company by generating positive word of mouth, portraying the organisation in a positive light and also attacking the consumers who disidentify with the organisation by intimidating them. These actions are enforced in order to protect their social identity online.	
	This study establishes that self-congruity involves a consumer identifying with a company based on the perceived similarity in their identity and it occurs to seek social approval, confirming prior studies (MacInnis and Folkes, 2017; Roy and Rabbane, 2015). This research additionally reveals that self-congruity leads to consumers wanting to protect their social status online in cases of negative publicity.		
	This thesis also establishes that value congruence is the identification that occurs between a consumer and a company based on their mutual values, validating prior research (Lee and Jeong, 2014).		
	The findings also indicate that values congruence in times of crisis makes consumers want to support the brand and defend it and generate positive word of mouth, again validating prior research (Zhang and Bloemer, 2008).		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	As per prior research (Einwiller et al., 2006), this study also discovers that identified consumers do not take into account negative publicity and defend the brand. The findings of this study additionally discover that consumers seek to protect their social identity and sense of self and that is why they defend the brand.		
	This thesis reveals that consumers protect the company by portraying the organisation in a positive light and state that other companies do much worse. They also attack the consumers who disidentify with the organisation by intimidating them. These are the ways that the identified consumers attempt to restore a company's reputation after negative publicity.		
	One of the revelations of this study is that consumer-company identification is not only a cognitive connection (i.e. self-congruity and values congruence) a consumer has with a brand but also an emotional connection. This is especially true when an organisation is under scrutiny. Additionally, identification does not only involve a consumer's social identity but a consumer's moral identity is salient also, as in the case of negative publicity consumers experience emotions that signify their need to protect their moral identity.	This theory uncovers that the consumer-company identification appeals to two identities, the social identity and the moral identity, and involves both consumers emotions and cognitions. This theory helps to identify the relationship that exists between the company and the consumer under all its facets and to better understand how consumers react to adverse corporate events.	
Emotional Consumer-Company Disidentification	The disidentification the consumers experience towards the brand is not only cognitive as suggested by prior research (Wolter et al., 2016; Anaza et al., 2021), it is also emotional as negative moral emotions emerge also. Consumers feel emotions, such as anger and disgust, thus an emotional rejection is also present.	The theory of consumer-company disidentification is developed to emotional consumer-company disidentification as an emotional dimension to this theory has been detected in this thesis. The disidentification is said to occur via both a cognitive and an emotional rejection towards the brand. The emotional rejection involves experiencing negative emotions towards the company.	This theory will aid companies in understanding why consumers do not want to form relationships with them and it will also help in rectifying their relationship with consumers when adverse events emerge.

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	Anger is an emotion that emerges after negative publicity by the consumers who disidentify with the brand and they undertake revengeful behaviours online such as negative word of mouth, online protests and intimidating the opposing party and attacking their morality and ego.	They experience negative emotions, such as anger, towards the brand and undertaking revengeful behaviours online such as negative word of mouth, online protests and intimidating the opposing party. Disgust is also felt against the organisation and they, thus, want to boycott the company. They also experience compassion towards the group that is under attack and try to protect it. This is mainly in order to protect their morality and moral identity online.	
	The reasons behind their anger and their revengeful behaviours lie within the fact that they want to protect their morality, moral values and beliefs. Thus, these consumers attempt to preserve their moral identity and moral sense of self. Reasons behind consumers emotions have not been previously identified in the literature (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2013).	Understanding why consumers experience certain emotions towards brands is key in identifying how they feel about brands and the relationship they want to have with the company.	Understanding why consumers feel the way they feel will help companies provide consumers with more positive emotions rather than negative ones.
	Along with anger towards the company, these consumers experience compassion towards the LGBTQ+ society. They again go against the other group but in a calm manner and do not provoke them, they try to explain why they should not support the organisation.		
	Consumers distance themselves from the brand and want to disassociate from the brand. Along with disassociation, consumers also attack the brand. These consumers want to exhibit their values online and protect their moral identity. These actions have not been previously detected.	Understanding consumers' adverse behaviours towards brands is also important in order to identify in which ways consumers distance themselves from companies.	If companies know how consumers disidentify with them, they may be able to divert such behaviours from occurring.

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	Another negative moral emotion that is evident in the data is disgust. This emotion seems to involve boycotting the organisation and wanting to disconnect with the brand. This boycott differs to the one under the influence of anger as this boycott does not have a punitive character. These consumers feel disgust against the organisation and, thus, they want to protect their moral identity by boycotting the company. Actions that emerge from the emotions of disgust have not been detected in prior studies (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013).		
	The current thesis discovers that disidentification appears to occur based on incongruence of values and self-incongruity, which has not been identified previously.	Consumer-company disidentification also involves a cognitive rejection. This involves self incongruence and values incongruence. Meaning that their identity and values do not match with that of the company's and so they attack it and distance themselves from it. They thus disidentify with the company based on these aspects due to the fact that consumers seek to preserve and protect their social identity online.	
	The thesis identifies that value incongruence is when a consumer does not share the same values with the company. The values incongruence involves the company's core values and not reputation as previously detected (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002).		
	Self-incongruity is an aspect that refers to the identity of the consumer not being the same with the perceived identity of the company. Thus, self-incongruity leads to consumer-brand disidentification. This is a new theme that emerged in this thesis.		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	When consumers experience value incongruence, they again want to disassociate themselves with the brand and show their support to the group they support. Thus, this highlights their need to exhibit their social identity online.		
	This thesis establishes that a consumer's identity is constructed in instances of consumer-brand disidentification and not just in consumer-company identification.		
	Emotional consumer-brand disidentification involves both a cognitive and emotional rejection towards the brand. The cognitive rejection involves values incongruence and self-incongruity and the emotional rejection involves positive (compassion) and negative (anger and disgust) moral emotions. The findings highlight that the reasons for the occurrence of disidentification lie within the protection of both the social and moral identity as they are both salient in cases of consumer-brand disidentification. These findings contrast prior studies that claim that disidentification involves only a cognitive rejection consumers experience towards brands and it mostly lies within a consumer's social identity (Anaza et al., 2021). Additionally, this study contradicts the fact that the emotions that are present in consumer-company disidentification are contempt and schadenfreude (Xie and Bagozzi, 2018; Ruppel and Einwiller, 2021).	This thesis establishes that disidentification also helps consumers to construct and form their identity. Additionally, this thesis reveals that disidentification appeals to both consumers' emotions and cognitions and to both their moral and social identity. It further reveals how consumers react towards companies that are under scrutiny. It also uncovers why consumers do not want to form relationships with certain brands and what diverts them towards competing brands.	

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
Emotional Consumer-Company Disidentification after the corporate response	A sudden shift is detected from customers who identify with the brand to disidentifying with the brand after its response. They talk negatively about the brand and state that they want to boycott it. This is mainly due to the threat imposed on their social identity, so via disidentifying with the brand they seek to protect their identity. The consumers want to avoid any negative connotations the brand may have with their identity and so they want to avoid a negative social identity. This sudden shift has not been discovered in prior work, thus these findings are again novel. Prior work suggests that the norm is for identified consumers to always protect the company (Lisjak, Lee and Gardener, 2012).	The theory of emotional consumer-company disidentification is once again verified after the corporate response. However, in this instance, the consumers who initially identified with the organisation after the company's response now disidentify with it. This suggests the fragility of this relationship and that it needs to be built on stronger foundations.	This thesis points out that a correct response strategy is critical, especially in cases of negative publicity as consumers who even support them during the negative event may subsequently turn against them. This thesis also highlights that if companies want to build a robust relationship with their consumers, they should look at all the factors that affect consumers.
	The data suggests that consumers feel a threat to their moral identity when the company seems to change its corporate identity and stance. Therefore, the consumers disidentify with the brand. Also, they feel disgust towards the organisation as they feel that the company has betrayed their values. This signifies how fragile a consumer-company relationship is based on identification. These findings somewhat vary from prior studies, which suggest that consumers disidentify with a company based their CSR practices (Einwiller et al., 2019) and that the emotions associated with disidentification are anxiety and sadness (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994).		
	The thesis reveals that due to a threat in the consumers' moral and social identity, consumers decide to boycott the brand and they also engage in negative word of mouth. This underlines that a correct response strategy is critical for companies as a wrong strategy may turn consumers against the organisation.		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	The consumers who initially disidentified with the company continue to disidentify with it. They still disidentify with the organisation on the premise that they do not trust that the company has changed its values, and so values incongruence is still in place along with self-incongruence as they view the identity of the brand the same as before. Additionally, they disidentify based on the fact that they still feel disgust towards the organisation and have the need to boycott it in order to protect their moral identity.	This again signifies that a correct response strategy is key and that a genuine strategy may rectify consumers' trust.	A correct strategy in order to overcome negative publicity is key. How genuine and transparent the response is also seems to play an important role.
Response Strategies to Online Negative Publicity	Findings from this study highlight that a correct response strategy is critical in cases of values-related negative publicity as a wrong strategy may even turn identified consumers into disidentified consumers.	The theories developed in this thesis have aided in recommending better response strategies for companies that encounter negative publicity.	The strategies recommended in this thesis will help companies form better relationships with their consumers and deal more effectively with online negative publicity
	Prior studies have explored how to respond to offline negative publicity making some of these strategies for companies insufficient to be able to respond to online negative publicity. This study underlines that concession response (Bradford and Garrett, 1995), correction strategy (Hoeken and Renkema, 1998), dividing consumers into holistic and analytic thinkers and responding accordingly (Wang et al., 2016) do not seem to be appropriate strategies to respond to online negative publicity.	The ineffective strategies to respond to online negative publicity are presented in order to again make the distinction between the difference in online and offline negative publicity.	Knowing which strategies not to use to respond to online negative publicity will help companies respond more effectively and efficiently.
	This study reveals that corporate supporters may turn against a company at any time so companies should not expect consumers to fix their identity and should not insult them (Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos, 2014; Scholz and Smith, 2019), as preceding studies suggest, as they could go against the company at any point.		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	The findings exhibit that prior correct positioning may save a brand, as also suggested by Pullig, Netemeyer and Biswas (2006) . This is perceptible as a very specific positioning and identity may cause controversies and damage to the brand. A multiple positioning strategy may be effective as it will avoid consumers having controversies between them. Findings also highlight that it is vital for brands to communicate their positioning in a correct manner in order to avoid any misinterpretations. A more diverse values-related positioning may be useful in order to avoid this.		
	Responding with an effective CSR strategy does seem to be an effective strategy against negative publicity as also recommended by Vanhamme and Grobben (2009); however, it should be employed with caution. In antithesis with the previous literature, this study exhibits that the company should address the problem at hand and should make up for the damage that is caused and it should not be a generic CSR response. For example, the consumers state that Chick-fil-A, besides ending donations, should give back to the LGBTQ+ community for the damage caused.	A distinction is made as to the difference between responding to negative publicity online and offline. Amongst the most effective response strategies to online negative publicity seem to be an effective CSR strategy that solves the problem created, corrective action, apologising and communicating how the company intends to rectify the situation. Additionally, appealing to consumers' emotions, cognitions, social identity and moral identity also seem to be important in responding to online negative publicity.	
	The data suggests that consumers seek a corrective action (Dutta and Pullig, 2011) from companies, as prior research signifies . With the difference that this thesis uncovers, consumers specifically expect the company to show remorse and provide a solution for consumers. Consumers suggest a change in the company's identity and change in the employees of the company (i.e. CEO). In addition to this, they recommend for companies to avoid taking a stance publicly on social matters. Thus, an organisation should think about re-branding or re-positioning.		

	Thesis Findings	Theoretical Contributions	Practical Contributions
	Apologising and communicating to the consumers how the organisation intends to rectify the situation seem to be an effective strategy, as suggested in the data and prior research (Xie and Peng, 2009). The data in this thesis also suggests that consumers expect a genuine apology from the organisation and also to clearly outline how they will fix the situation. The findings also underline that explanations may alleviate the negative emotions consumers are experiencing. The consumers also recommend that the company should provide extensive explanations as to why a company acted unethically and how they intend to repair the damage caused.		
	A lack of trust is evident by the consumers in how the company responds, which again signifies that a correct strategy is crucial in such situations. The findings indicate that a corporate response should be authentic and genuine in order to regain consumers' trust. The findings also indicate that before a consumer changes their level of trust towards the organisation, they want to see how the company changes in the long-run and this is in line with previous research Xie and Peng (2009).	Trust seems to play an important role when a company responds to negative publicity especially online.	Companies should be genuine in their response strategy in order to not tamper with consumers' trust towards them.
	The data also reveals that the consumers who initially identify with the company after the corporate response subsequently disidentify with the company. They state that they will boycott the brand and they want to disassociate with the brand. These consumers do not seem willing to forgive the company and do not provide suggestions as to how a company should rectify the situation. Therefore, the data indicates that after negative publicity companies should address the negative emotions consumers experience in order to avoid negative consumer behaviours.	Addressing consumers emotions after negative publicity seems to be key in order to rectify any damage caused to the company.	In their response strategy, companies should appeal to consumers' negative emotions.

APPENDIX 4: Ethics Form



Ethics form (PhD research projects M&R)

This ethics form comprises two elements:

1. Cover sheet
2. Section A Research approval application

The cover sheet requires you to provide details about you and your research project. Section A is used to apply for ethical approval for your research project. You should answer all the required questions and you should ensure that you have read and understood the ethics requirements of the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee.

Application for research project approval

The University Research Ethics Committee allows Schools to operate their own ethical procedures within guidelines laid down by the Committee. The University Research Ethics Committee policies are explained in their *Notes for guidance*, which can be found at:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/res/ResearchEthics/reas-REethicshomepage.aspx>

Approval must be obtained from Dr Irene Gamelo-Gomez, who is the Ethics Representative for Marketing and Reputation, who will also inform our Head of School, before the research project commences.

During the research project

There is an obligation on all researchers to observe ethical procedures and practice and actively bring to the attention of their Ethics Representative and Head of School any concerns or questions of clarification they may have. If during the course of your work the nature of the research project changes or ethical issues arise, you must seek advice again from your Ethics Representative before proceeding.

Please note that this form is designed to conform to the University's requirements with respect to research ethics. Approval under this procedure does not necessarily confirm the academic validity of the proposed project.

Cover sheet

Project details

Name of researcher: Christos Michael

School title: Marketing and Reputation

Research centre in which the study is located (if applicable):

External research funding support (if applicable):

Email: c.michael@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Title of proposed project: Exploring consumers' emotions and reactions after a company encounters negative publicity: Investigating Chick-fil-a

Proposed timing of the research: 3 months

Nature of project

(Mark with an 'x' as appropriate)

Externally funded research	☐
HBS Academic Research Centre project	☐
HBS Applied Research Centre project	☐
Doctoral research	☒
Other	☐

Please state:

Date of submission: September 2020

Section A Research approval application

Section A must be completed in full. If you have any questions regarding the form, please discuss them with your Ethics Representative (Dr Irene Gamelo-Gomez). Approval must be obtained *before* the research project commences.

Summary of proposed project and research methods

This thesis aims to discover how consumers react to negative publicity. Specifically, 'values related publicity' which includes "social or ethical issues" (Pullig et al., 2006 cited in Chung and Jiang, 2017). It will particularly examine the emotions consumers encounter and also their reactions towards a company after it has faced negative publicity. Furthermore, this thesis aims to develop a conceptual framework that shows how companies might repair relationships that have been broken after negative publicity.

The research will be conducted via qualitative methods using netnography and then follow-up interviews. For the first method, netnography, the researcher intends to observe online the recent negative event that emerged with the fast-food chain Chick-fil-a (consumers were protesting about the store that opened in Reading due to the fact that the CEO supports anti-LGBT+ communities). Many newspapers (e.g. BBC, Guardian, Berkshire Live) have covered this story on Facebook and have posted content on Facebook. Thus, the comments below these posts (which are accessible to all the public) will be examined and analysed using thematic analysis. The comments will be selected according to the content – the ones that are talking about the event and the company, anything irrelevant to this will be disregarded therefore purposive sampling will take place. The purpose will be to see reactions towards the company and the event. They will then be classified into different themes. The researcher will stop collecting data online once saturation has been reached. Meaning that when recurring patterns in the data emerge then the data collection will stop. This information will be used as data and will be analysed since public information online can be used for research purposes and a researcher does not need to seek informed consent from the participants due to the fact that the comments are made publicly (they are accessible to all the public) (Langer and Beckman, 2005 cited in Rageh, Melwar and Woodside, 2013). The participants identity will not be revealed their names will be replaced by pseudonyms.

After, this process the researcher will conduct follow-up interviews via Skype or Facebook Messenger Video Chat (due to the fact that these platforms are free of charge) with the people who commented on these news stories. The people that will be selected will be the ones who have commented heavily (meaning long posts) due to the fact that these are the participants who will feel more passionate about the topic and therefore will be more willing to talk and share greater insights. They will be contacted directly via Facebook chat and will be asked if they want to be interviewed and their consent will be sought. The researcher will send the participant a short message explaining the research briefly and that he would like to interview him/her and

subsequently the participant information sheet will be sent. (The message: Dear Sir/Madam, I am Christos Michael a PhD student at the University of Reading (UK) and as part of my thesis I am exploring consumers' emotions and reactions when a company encounters negative publicity. Since you have expressed online your views about the recent Chick-fil-a incident closing down in Reading it would be nice if you could share any additional views on the subject in a short interview with me. Please find the participant information sheet attached and do not hesitate to ask me any further questions. I look forward to speaking soon and to having a delightful conversation with you. Many Thanks, Christos Michael). Facebook does have some fake profiles, the researcher will therefore ensure that they are real profiles by reviewing the profiles and looking whether they are engaging on Facebook. This will be done in order to acquire greater insights as to why they decided to post their comments online, to share more in regards to how they felt at the time and also how they reacted at the time. The researcher again will stop collecting data once saturation has been reached. These interviews will be audio-recorded due to the fact that participants may feel uncomfortable to record their face. All the participants taking part in the study will all be above the age of 18. The participants' identity will not be revealed, their names will be replaced with pseudonyms and the data collected will be securely stored on my laptop. During the transcription process the interviews will include pseudonyms and in a completely different file the researcher will have a table linking real names to pseudonyms in order to avoid any mistakes and confusion. I will take care to keep my laptop secure and safe.

The researcher will be exploring emotions in regards to negative publicity but participants are not expected to experience any distress since the discussion will not involve a personal matter/issue. In the extremely unlikely event that participants express any distress the interviewer will either divert the conversation elsewhere or stop conducting the interview. The netnography is expected to begin in December 2019 and along with the interviews it is expected to take approximately 3months.

1. Questions about proposed research (University ethics requirements)

Please reply to all of the following questions concerning your proposed research by marking with an 'x' as appropriate.

		Yes	No
1.1	Have the participants and subjects of the study been chosen because they are patients and/or clients of the National Health Service or Social Services in the UK, or equivalent health or social care systems in another country?		X
1.2.	Are the participants and subjects of the study unable to give free and informed consent because they are not over the age of 18, or as a consequence of their mental capacity? (For more details on how mental capacity might impair the ability to give free and informed consent, please consult the Mental Capacity Act 2005.)		X

1.3	Are you asking questions that are likely to be considered inappropriate or to cause distress to any of the participants?		X
1.4	Are any of the subjects in a special relationship with the researcher that could affect their ability freely to give informed consent?		X
1.5	Is your project funded by a Research Council or other external source (excluding research conducted by postgraduate students)?		X

If you have answered Yes to any of these questions, your proposal will be reviewed in accordance with the requirements of the University Research Ethics Committee.

If you are unsure whether any of these conditions apply, please contact your Ethics Representative (Dr Irene Gamelo-Gomez) for further advice.

2. Questions about proposed research (administration of investigation process)

Please respond to all the following questions concerning your proposed research project by marking with an 'x' as appropriate.

		Yes	No
2.1	The research involves only archival research, access to company documents/records, access to publicly available data and/or questionnaires, surveys, focus groups or other interview techniques.	X	
2.2	The need to reimburse expenses or make other payments to any research participants has been reviewed.	X	
2.3	Participants will be/have been advised that they may withdraw at any stage if they so wish.	X	
2.4	Arrangements for ensuring personal privacy, commercial confidentiality and data protection during and after the project and for the disposal of material will be in line with University guidelines.	X	
2.5	Arrangements for providing subjects with research results if they wish to have them have been considered.	X	
2.6	Research instruments (questionnaires, interview guides, etc) will be reviewed against the policies and criteria noted in The University Research Ethics Committee Notes for Guidance.	X	
2.7	The arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent of this have been reviewed.	X	
2.8	Information Sheets and consent forms will be prepared in line with University guidelines for distribution to participants, as appropriate. This contains details of the project, contact details for the principal researcher and advises subjects that their privacy will be protected and that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time without reason.	X	
2.9	Completed consent forms, where required, will be retained and submitted with the final report on completion of the project for retention by Henley Business School.	X	

If you have answered No to any of these questions, contact your Ethics Representative (Dr Irene Garnelo-Gomez) for further advice.

3. Safeguarding personal safety and security of the researcher(s) and research participants

If the research is to be conducted outside of an office environment or normal place of work and/or outside normal working hours please note the details in the comments box below and state how the personal safety and security of the researcher(s) and research participants will be safeguarded.

Comments

The interviews will be conducted online therefore outside an office environment and at times when the participants are available (so potentially outside normal working hours). However, since the researcher and the participant will be in their own personal environment (e.g. home) there are no expected threats to personal safety.

☒ I confirm that I have read and understood the ethics requirements of the University of Reading and will abide by these requirements in the course of my research.

Signed (doctoral researcher):



Date: 04/11/2019

Print name: Christos Michael

Approval (Ethics Representative/ Head of School)

Ethics Representative/Head of School to mark with an 'x' as appropriate:

[x] I have reviewed this application as **Approved** and confirm that it is consistent with the requirements of the University Research Ethics Committee procedures.

This proposal is **Not approved** and

☐ is returned to the applicant for further consideration

or

☐ has been referred for further review in accordance with University of Reading Ethics Committee requirements

Name (Ethics Representative)

Signed (Ethics Representative):

Name (Head of School)

Signed (Head of School):

Comments (where application has been refused)

Further action (office use only)