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Exploration of indirect anti-brand behaviour and proposed response strategies

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Executive Summary

Over the past 20 years, the Internet has radically changed marketing and consumers' place in the marketplace. Consumers can now participate in the communication from the brand. Where marketing was before a one-way form of communication, it has now turned into a two-sided conversation. Other than the benefits from this change, this has also caused consumers to have more power in the market and to be more demanding. As a result, they are more often dissatisfied and have more power to respond accordingly, putting companies at a higher risk of being the victim of anti-brand behaviour.

This paper aims at exploring the various forms of anti-brand behaviour, namely boycotts, negative word of mouth, brand avoidance, customer retaliation and consumer brand sabotage. These different phenomena were explored by comparing existing academic literature on each phenomenon separately to identify its cause, the objective of the consumer engaging in it, what moderates their decision of engaging in it and finally what the effects are of the behaviour on the company and observing consumers. A typology based on objective and the form of behaviour visualised that the different behaviours largely are caused by the same objectives and causes. As a result, we concluded that the choice of a consumer between the different forms of consumer misbehaviour is largely dependent on the moderators.

The study also showed that anti-brand behaviour can have severe negative effects on a company's reputation, profitability and relationship with other consumers as a result of the negative publicity generated by the anti-brand behaviour. As a result, the remainder of the paper attempts to explore the different response strategies to deal with anti-brand behaviour.

To explore this broad subject, we first identified academic literature on response strategies based on three categories, namely managing negative publicity, reputation management and managing anti-brand behaviour. Based on this, we identified ten themes of possible strategies to deal with anti-brand behaviour, namely preparing for negative publicity, accommodative vs responsive strategies, proactive vs reactive strategies, no reaction, spreading information, reputation management, proactive marketing, corporate social responsibility, handling negative publicity spread by consumers online and handling boycotts. These themes and the corresponding findings were tested by interviewing six experts in communication in semi-directive interviews. The transcriptions of these interviews were then analysed using deductive thematic analysis in Atlas TI.

We found that experts mainly agree with what the literature proposes. However, a major difference lies in that most literature states that not responding can have detrimental effects on the company, based on the consumers feeling ignored and the company losing control over the situation. However, most experts stated that a lot of negative publicity, especially online is not worth interacting with.

Table of content

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	1
PART 1: ANTI-BRAND BEHAVIOUR PHENOMENA	3
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER 2: BOYCOTT.....	4
1. DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOYCOTT.....	4
2. MOTIVATION OF BOYCOTTS.....	5
3. OBJECTIVE OF BOYCOTTS.....	6
4. MODERATORS OF BOYCOTTS	7
5. EFFECTIVENESS OF BOYCOTTS	10
6. CONCLUSION	12
CHAPTER 3: NEGATIVE WORD OF MOUTH	14
1. DEFINITION OF NWOM	14
2. MOTIVATION OF NWOM.....	16
3. OBJECTIVES OF NWOM	16
4. MODERATORS OF NWOM	17
5. EFFECTIVENESS OF NWOM	19
6. CONCLUSION	23
CHAPTER 3: BRAND AVOIDANCE	25
1. DEFINITION OF BRAND AVOIDANCE	25
2. MOTIVATIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF BRAND AVOIDANCE	25
3. MODERATORS OF BRAND AVOIDANCE	28
4. EFFECTIVENESS OF BRAND AVOIDANCE	29
5. CONCLUSION	29
CHAPTER 5: CUSTOMER RETALIATION	30
1. DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER RETALIATION.....	30
2. MOTIVATIONS OF CUSTOMER RETALIATION	32
3. OBJECTIVES OF CUSTOMER RETALIATION.....	33
4. MODERATORS OF CUSTOMER RETALIATION	33
5. EFFECTIVENESS OF CUSTOMER RETALIATION	36
6. CONCLUSION	37
CHAPTER 6: CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE	38
1. DEFINITION OF CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE	38
2. OBJECTIVE OF CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE.....	39

3. MOTIVATION OF CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE	39
4. MODERATORS OF CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE	39
5. EFFECTIVENESS OF CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE	41
6. CONCLUSION	42
CHAPTER 7: TYPOLOGY ANTI-BRAND BEHAVIOUR	44
1. TYPOLOGY BASED ON FORM	44
2. TYPOLOGY BASED ON OBJECTIVES	45
3. SUMMARIZING THE TWO TYPOLOGIES BASED ON FORM AND OBJECTIVE.....	46
PART 2: DEALING WITH ANTI-BRAND BEHAVIOUR.....	47
CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTION	47
1. RESEARCH QUESTION	47
2. METHODOLOGY	47
CHAPTER 2: NEGATIVE PUBLICITY	49
1. PREPARATION FOR NEGATIVE PUBLICITY.....	49
2. ACCOMMODATIVE VS DEFENSIVE STRATEGY	49
3. PROACTIVE VS REACTIVE STRATEGY	51
4. NO REACTION	51
5. SPREADING INFORMATION	52
CHAPTER 3: REPUTATION MANAGEMENT	53
1. REPUTATION MANAGEMENT	53
2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.....	54
3. PROACTIVE MARKETING	55
CHAPTER 4: HANDLING ANTI-BRAND BEHAVIOUR	56
1. HANDLING SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEGATIVE PUBLICITY.....	56
2. HANDLING BOYCOTTS	59
3. HANDLING BRAND AVOIDANCE, BRAND SABOTAGE AND CUSTOMER RETALIATION	61
PART 3: FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS.....	63
CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY INTERVIEWS	63
1. THEMES IDENTIFIED AND QUESTIONS DERIVED	63
2. SEMI-DIRECTIVE INTERVIEWS	64
CHAPTER 2: FINDINGS INTERVIEWS.....	66
1. NEGATIVE PUBLICITY	66
2. REPUTATION.....	71
3. ANTI-BRAND BEHAVIOUR	75

PART 4: CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS.....	79
1. CONCLUSION	79
2. LIMITATIONS.....	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81

Introduction

The Internet has significantly increased consumer's power (Klein et al., 2004). Information on unethical business practices are now readily available on internet and have penetrated popular culture (Shaw et al., 2006; Sen et al., 2001), as well as experiences of other consumers (Balaji et al., 2016). This increase in information has made consumers less tolerant to irresponsible behaviour, both in terms of performance and ethics (Shaw et al., 2006; Xia, 2013), leading to dissatisfaction. In addition, the Internet has facilitated consumers sharing this dissatisfaction to more people, at a lower cost and more easily (Balaji et al., 2016). As a result, companies are increasingly faced with dissatisfied consumers acting out and harming the company with different forms of anti-brand behaviour.

This leads to the research question of this thesis: how can companies manage anti-brand behaviour?

To answer this question, we first need to understand what anti-brand behaviour is. Literature on anti-brand behaviour after dissatisfaction dates from before the Internet (e.g. Engel et al., 1969). However, Kähr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer and Hoyer (2016) argued that existing phenomena in anti-brand behaviour did not full encapture the increased threat of these more informed and dissatisfied, empowered consumers. Therefore, they proposed a new phenomenon, namely consumer brand sabotage. However, little to no empirical evidence has come out since then to support their phenomenon and its difference from other existing phenomena. As a result, we decided to explore the difference between the forms of anti-brand behaviour listed in the paper, namely boycotts, NWOM, customer retaliation and consumer brand sabotage. In addition, we added brand avoidance to compare the previous phenomena with consumers simply walking away from the company. To understand the difference between the different phenomena, we extensively studied literature on these five concepts. What makes a consumer decide to engage in this behaviour? Based on these findings, we proposed two typologies of these phenomena.

After we understood anti-brand behaviour, the question arose on how to manage it. We wanted to explore what strategies are possible to deal with anti-brand behaviour, what they entail and how companies can choose between them. To do so, we explored existent literature on response strategies. We decided to research three categories of response strategies, namely managing negative publicity, reputation management and managing anti-brand behaviour.

To concretise these findings, we conducted interviews with experts in communication based on the insights gained from literature. The qualitative data derived from the interviews was then compared to the literature to form an answer to the research question by using deductive thematic analysis. We then used the derived results to answer the research question.

The first part of this work deals with the different forms of anti-brand behaviour. At the end, the part is concluded with two proposed typologies and a summary diagram of these typologies.

The second part details the methodology and design of the research is. It includes an overview of the literature on the various response strategies found in literature and explains the different themes identified.

The third part consists of the practical work performed and the conclusion. First, we explain the method used for the interviews and then lists the findings per category and per theme. After each theme, we derived the possible response strategies summarising the findings of the interviews and the literature as an answer to the research question.

The last part gives a small conclusion on the work presented by summarising the answer to the research question, listing an interesting finding and listing the limitations of this work.

All sources that were used can be found in the bibliography. All appendices can be found in the separate document submitted.

Part 1: Anti-Brand Behaviour Phenomena

Chapter 1: Introduction

The following chapter deals with intentional, indirect anti-brand behaviour. We first define some important terms for the understanding of the following chapters.

- Anti-brand behaviour: all behaviour exerted by consumers as a result of negative feelings towards a brand (Yuan et al., 2017).
 - Brand: *a multidimensional marketing tool that communicates a constellation of values* (Lee et al., 2009b, p. 169). However, from a consumer's perspective, it mainly constitutes of their perception of the company (Strandvik et al., 2003). We mainly use the terms of company and brand interchangeably.
 - Consumer: a person acting within the marketing system (Lee et al., 2009b). Consumers are therefore not necessarily customers of the brand
 - Indirect: the behaviour happens outside of the company's context and control (Grégoire et al., 2010).
 - Intentional: the behaviour is the result of clear cognitive processes (Funches et al., 2009)
- Wrongs by companies: the anti-brand behaviour is caused by:
 - Service failure: when the service fails to live up to the consumer's expectations (Daskin & Kasim, 2016).
 - Egregious acts: when the consumer perceives the company to engage in irresponsible corporate behaviour. (Davidson, Worrel, El-Jelly (1995)
- Consumer brand-relationship: a consumer can have a relationship with a brand. Its quality depends on *satisfaction, commitment, trust, passion, partner quality and self-connection* (Kähr, 2017, pp 58-59).
- Reputation: a consumer's perception is heavily influenced by a company's reputation, which is *an overall assessment of a firm's product and service expertise, social character, customer experiences, and credible communications about the firm's ability to serve customers* (Li, cited in Chang et al., 2015, p. 50).

The following chapters explore different phenomena within anti-brand behaviour. We decided to study the phenomena mentioned in Kähr et al's (2016) paper. To compare these active types of behaviour to consumers simply walking away from a brand, we also studied brand avoidance. As a result, the following chapters respectively explore boycotts, NWOM, brand avoidance, customer retaliation. Each chapter compares literature concerning the phenomenon's definition, motivation, objective, moderators and finally its effects and factors influencing its effectiveness. Each chapter is concluded with a graphic summarizing the different factors relevant in the relationship between the perceived wrongdoing and the final behaviour, which were found in literature. These diagrams can also be found in appendix 1 (pp 2-9). In addition, in appendix 1 (p. 1), there is a legend explaining the different symbols used in the diagrams. This part is concluded in chapter 7 by a typology proposed to classify the different phenomena based on their objective and form.

Chapter 2: Boycott

One of the manifestations of the rise of consumer empowerment, is the steady increase in the number of boycotts, as well as in the participation in them (Friedman, 1991; Hoffman & Müller, 2009; Koku, 1997; Sen et al., 2001).

Friedman (1991) argues that boycotts are interesting to study since business leaders perceive it as a relatively big threat in comparison with other possible anti-brand behaviours. In addition, he argues that it has a more important role in social justice since it has been used more than other anti-brand behaviours to promote and protect groups of people and consumers' interests. Garrett (1987) adds that they pose a double issue for marketing, since they want to change the marketing purposes while inhibiting regular processing of marketing transactions. The following sections will study a boycott's definition and characteristics, the motivation of starting one or participating, the mediators in the decision of boycotting and finally their effects and effectiveness.

1. Definition and characteristics of the boycott

Throughout literature, different definitions of a boycott are proposed. Friedman (1985) defines a boycott as follows: *an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace* (p. 97). There are several important characteristics in this definition. The next section focuses on comparing these to those included in alternative definitions.

1.1. Individual vs organization

The definition makes a distinction between the organizing entities and the individual consumers who are urged to participate. The organizing entities are the ones calling for the boycott, sometimes also referred to as the sponsors of the boycott. The definition and Friedman's work focuses on the individual consumer as a boycotter, rather than also including organizations etc. who could participate in boycotts.

The focus on the individual is reflected by Klein, Smith and John (2004) describing as purchase voting. The consumer uses their purchasing decisions to enact the change they deem necessary. Shaw, Newholm and Dickinson (2006) explain this behaviour by deferring from classical economics. Traditionally, consumption is seen simply as a free choice to maximize one's needs without the inclusion of values and morals. Instead, they propose that consumers realize their responsibilities and exercise their citizenship with their consumption choices, believing that often their economic vote holds more power than their political vote. Neilson (2010) defines this consumption behaviour as political consumerism and highlights the paradox of not believing in the market to fix problems on its own, yet still using the market to remedy them.

1.2. Type of initiative: individual or collective?

Most researchers agree on the definition of a boycott as a collective act and not an individual one (e.g. John and Klein, 2003; Kozinets and Handelman, 1998; Sen et al., 2001). Yet, some researchers such as Shaw et al. (2006) and Friedman (1991) also mention the existence of individual boycotts.

1.3. Action or simple consideration to?

By defining a boycott as the urging to refrain from purchasing, Friedman (1991) includes instances where a boycott never is actually realized but just considered or announced. Shaw et al. (2006) agree with this inclusion by defining a boycott as a collective act to change corporate behaviour, similar to Neilson (2010) and Kozinets and Handelman (1998). Friedman (1991) further defines the different stages a boycott goes through, from the consideration until the action is taken, as different types. These respectively go from an action-considered boycott to an action-taken boycott. When a boycott fails to generate the necessary response in a prior stage, it moves on to the next one until either the sponsors meet a lack of resources or the targeted company makes the required change.

In contrast, John and Klein (2003) use the characterization of abstaining from purchase when defining a boycott, meaning that only the intention to do so is not enough to call the consumer behaviour a boycott. Davidson III et al. (1995), Koku (1997) and Garrett (1987) also precise that a boycott entails a withholding of purchase. However, in a later paper, Klein et al. (2004) move on to apply Friedman's definition and add that the objective is to get compensation for the company's failure to sustain a sufficient customer focus.

1.4. Types of boycott

Finally, Friedman (1991) added several types of boycotts. A first distinction made is the difference between a non-surrogate and surrogate boycott, respectively when the targeted, boycotted firm is the one committing the egregious act or not. An example of the latter is when consumers boycott companies from a certain geographical region because of the local governmental policies (Fazel, 2015; Knudsen et al., 2008). Next, the distinction between beneficiary and conscience boycotts represents if the boycotter is harmed by the egregious act. John and Klein (2003) define these respectively as direct or indirect boycotts.

2. *Motivation of boycotts*

Boycotts are a consumer's reaction to a perceived egregiousness of mostly companies (Friedman, 1985). There are different types of egregious acts.

2.1. Direct vs vicarious acts

Most authors make distinctions relating to the egregious act committed by the company. First, John and Klein (2003) distinguish the egregious acts between direct or vicarious acts. A direct

act means that the boycotters personally were harmed by the act, while a vicarious act means the boycotter simply observed it. Friedman (1991) made this distinction by defining two different types of boycotts, respectively beneficiary and conscience boycotts.

2.2. Political or economic acts

Friedman (1985) further makes the distinction between political or economic egregious acts. The first entails a violation of the consumer's set of beliefs. The second is a perception of for example an unfair rise in prices.

Based on a study of boycotts ranging from 1970 to 1980, Friedman (1985) found that most boycotts were based on a perception of a violation of workers' rights or insensitivities to concerns of minority groups. Klein et al. (2004) in agreeance state that most egregious acts go against the rising focus on corporate socially responsible (CSR) behaviour.

3. *Objective of boycotts*

As a result of this behaviour, some consumers engage in boycotting. However, not all consumers have the same objective and not all researchers agree what the precise types of objectives of this behaviour are. The main distinction is between instrumental and non-instrumental goals.

3.1. Instrumental goal

Kozinets and Handelman (1998) theorize that the objective of a boycott is to generate a change in the targeted company's marketing. Friedman (1991) defines these types of objectives as an instrumental goal, entailing a cessation of the egregious act.

This is the basic motivation of wanting to make a difference by stopping the egregious act and to change corporate behaviour in order to adopt ethical practices in both their policy and behaviour (Farah & Newman, 2010; Klein et al., 2004). In case of a surrogate boycotts, consumers want to send a message to the country of origin (Friedman, 1991).

Shaw et al. (2006) describe it as the duty of the consumers to balance their personal needs with ethical reflections and to use consumption choices to contradict those that the consumer deems unethical.

3.2. Non-instrumental goal

John and Klein (2003) add the existence of non-instrumental goals, where the participants in the boycott realise that their actions will most likely not result in a change of the company's behaviour, but simply serve as a venting of the anger and frustration resulting from the

egregious act. Friedman (1991) defines boycotts with this type of objective as an expressive boycott.

Kozinets and Handelman (1998) found that the boycott is satisfying and that participation itself is the motivator to engage in this behaviour. The actual effects of boycotting on the targeted firms is secondary and consumers are more concerned with their search of an enhanced power by placing themselves outside of the traditional purchase system and choose based on their conscience. This helps them gain a sense of personal power, in addition to sacralising their behaviour by distancing themselves by perceived immoral practices. Klein et al. (2004) confirm this by adding the need of cleaning oneself of immoral purchasing behaviour.

John and Klein (2003) follow the reasoning of the actual cessation of the egregious act not being the main motivator. They found the motivation of avoiding guilt and dissonance between the customer's set of beliefs and the reality of purchasing unethical products or services. Additionally, consumers wish to maintain their self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined by Banister and Hogg (2004) as *the motive to seek experiences that enhance or protect the self-concept* (p. 853). Further, they found that participants want to be a part of the victory. As a result, they agree with Kozinets and Handelman (1998) that participating is an end in itself.

Finally, Friedman (1991) defines boycotts with the goal to punish the company as punitive, in contrast to those that are aimed to change the company's practices. This can even entail driving a company completely out of business (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998).

4. Moderators of boycotts

Not all perceived egregious acts lead to boycotts, as there are several moderators at play that influence the consumer's choice to engage or not engage in this behaviour and to opt for boycotting rather than another type of anti-brand behaviour.

4.1. Degree of egregiousness

The degree of egregiousness of the act impacts the likeliness of participating in a boycott. The more egregious an act, the more likely a consumer is to engage in boycotting (Klein et al., 2004; Kozinets and Handelman, 1998).

4.2. Proximity to egregious act

Hoffman (2013) argues that there should be a distinction between different types of egregious acts, namely in terms of proximity, ranging from being personally affected, being socially affected or being spatially affected. He argues that this influences the likeliness of participating in the boycott, by using rationalization to move the arguments against/ for a boycott in a certain direction, or in favour of the boycotts if proximity exists. This as a result of the existence of a relationship or a perceived similarity with the victims of the egregious act. He argues that

earlier reasoning regarding the dissonance between a company's behaviour and a potential boycotter's beliefs and values is heavily warped by this effect, where it can intensify their effect.

4.3. Expected participation

The expectation of overall participation is an important mediator in the choice between free riding or boycotting. Klein et al. (2004) found that it has both a positive and negative effect, since a higher esteemed participation can increase the likeliness to participate, but also minimize it as it is an incentive to free ride. Free riding is when consumers do not participate, but hope that the participation of other consumers will be enough for them to also experience the benefits. John and Klein (2003) found that the direction of the effect is the net sum of the substitutability and complementarity associated with the boycott.

4.3.1. Substitutability

The substitutability is when a consumer sees that their participation can be substituted by someone else and the cost of boycotting is too high, resulting in free riding. Consumers weigh the benefit of boycotting against the utility if purchasing and will not participate if the utility of boycotting is lower and consequently the cost of participating is too high (Garrett, 1987). Sen, Gürhan-Canli and Morwitz (2001) refer to this weighing as the social balance, where public interest is compared to personal interest. They also state that a higher preference for the product will lower the chance of participating. In general, free riding is higher for instrumental boycotts than non-instrumental boycotts (John and Klein, 2003).

4.3.2. Complementarity

Complementarity causes a high perception of participation leading to higher participation. Additionally, as a result of the bubble of likeminded people they find themselves in, they will generalize their participations to their surroundings (Shaw et al., 2006). Consumers believe they are part of a larger group, even when they come up with the decision to participate individually (Farah & Newman, 2010).

Opposite than in the case of substitutability, consumers will achieve more utility by punishing the firm together, while in case of non-participation risking feeling guilty (John & Klein, 2003; Shaw et al., 2006).

4.4. Identification with group

Most consumers identify themselves with a reference group to which they look for purchasing choices. A reference group is defined by Turner as *members who are psychologically significant for one's attitudes and behaviour* (cited in White and Dahl, 2006, p. 405). The reference group can decide to boycott. By participating, they sometimes hope to achieve to access membership (John & Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001). The greater the identification with

the reference group, the stronger the motivation to align with the group's normative behaviour (Farah & Newman, 2010; Neilson, 2010).

4.5. Social pressure

Following the role of the reference group, social pressure is a strong moderator. The higher the social pressure to act in the group's interest, the more likely a consumer is to participate in the boycott (Garrett, 1987). Social pressure is higher for visible marketing transactions, for example public goods (Friedman, 1991; John and Klein, 2003). Additionally, if the cost of participation is perceived to be high, the social pressure of participation also rises (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001).

4.6. Perception of effectiveness

Another moderator is the perception of consumer's effectiveness. This reflects how likely the consumer perceives their participation to make a difference. If it is low, the consumer is more likely to free ride since they believe their attribution will not make a difference, while higher esteem of their effectiveness leads to more participation (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). John and Klein (2003) argue that a perception of ineffectiveness can lead to a non-instrumental boycott.

4.7. Source and framing information

The source and framing of the information has an important moderating effect on the likeliness of participating in the boycott. Often, consumers have imperfect information and have to act on partial representation of the situation (Shaw et al., 2006). The following factors increase consumers' likeliness of participating:

- Mainstream media coverage, for two reasons:
 - The information becomes more widespread (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998)
 - The media often frames action as collective, increasing its normalization and exaggerating its efficacy in terms of participation (Neilson, 2010)
- High credibility of leaders of boycotts (Garrett, 1987)
- Framing of boycott information by the advantages of if it is successful. The framing bias sets expectations (Sen et al., 2001)

4.8. Consumer's characteristics

A consumer's personal characteristics are important moderators for the probability of participating. The following factors increase the likeliness in participating in a boycott:

- Low trust of institutions (Hoffman & Müller, 2009). Hoffman and Müller (2009) tested for reallocations of subsidiaries of multinationals and confirm this and additionally found that the more the boycotter is concerned about the egregious act, the less they trust the committer of the act.

- High trust in political consumerism. Consumers then believe others have equally good intentions, meaning they will also participate (Neilson, 2010).
- High perception of control of behaviour (Farah & Newman, 2010).
- Altruism, both aimed at egregious act and at other (non)boycotters. Consumers might fear harming others (John & Klein, 2004).

4.9. Firm's reputation and position

A firm's reputation and position in the market has an impact on the probability of participating. The following factors positively impact the likeliness of boycotting

- High market position: boycotters believe that change in market leader's behaviour results in industry change (Neilson, 2010; Pagan, 1986).
- Prior negative reputation: consumers already distrust the company (Hoffman & Müller, 2009)
- Low perceived willingness to change: consumers believe that regular complaints do not evoke the necessary changes (Friedman, 1991)

4.10. Final notes

In general, there exists a perception of a stronger link between consumers' action and the outcome, namely the change in the company's behaviour. Either as a result as the perception of their effectiveness, an illusion of control over others or an overall ignorance of the link between their purchasing choices and the firm's behaviour (John and Klein, 2003).

Additionally, participants believe the participation is higher than the reality (Klein et al., 2004). Finally, it is important to note that there exists an unpredictability based on the cultural differences. Some issues lead to boycotts for one group of consumers or for one market, but not in another (Shaw et al., 2006). For example, consumers in the Middle East heavily engage in boycotts of American products and Farah and Newman (2010) have found that Muslims in Lebanon participate in those boycotts significantly more than Christians.

5. *Effectiveness of boycotts*

In general, harm done to the company goes beyond the egregiousness:

- Loss of sales because of consumers forgoing their products or services (Hunter et al., 2008).
- The brand's image is damaged beyond the egregious act. The boycott has a larger effect on the image than the information of the perceived wrong behaviour of the company (Klein et al., 2004; Knudsen et al., 2008).
- The decreased image reduces the purchase intentions of potential consumers (Yuksel & Mryetaza, 2009).
- Consumers can permanently switch to competitors after having had the opportunity to test them (Klein et al., 2004).

- Indirectly, the company's relationship quality with stakeholders can be reduced as a result of for example mistrust. Hunter et al. (2008) state this has two effects
 - Managing and communicating with stakeholders becomes more difficult
 - If the damage is longterm, it can depreciate the company's market position.

A company's focus on their image influences a boycott's success. Companies with a strong focus on their image are more likely to yield to the pressure of a boycott (Friedman, 1991). Boycotts are an increasingly strong threat to companies as a result of an increase of the vulnerability of corporate reputations as a form of negative publicity (Klein et al., 2004; Hunter et al., 2008).

Even though boycott success might be portrayed as a black and white winner loser situation, a boycott can already be considered successful if the participants cause minor or marginal losses (Hunter et al., 2008). However, Garrett (1987) argues that the understanding of the effectiveness is crucial for business leaders to assess boycotts and the relevant responses as to correctly handle the situation.

5.1. Definition of effective boycott

There are different definitions of what an effective boycott entails. John and Klein (2003) state that a boycott is effective when the egregious act is stopped and effective when the participation is nonzero, meaning consumers participated. Friedman (1991) makes a distinction between consequence success and execution success.

- Consequence success: the boycotters succeeded in evoking the targeted changes.
- Execution success: the sponsors attain their aspired participation.

Garret (1987) however argues that a boycott is effective when the targeted company changes its disputed policies, meaning only taking into account the consequence criterion. He additionally defines three determinants attributing to a boycott's effectiveness, namely economic pressure, image pressure and policy commitment. The first consists of a difficulty of conducting their business. Image pressure entails fear of tarnishing of a company's reputation. Policy commitment consists of the level of resistance of the target company to change their behaviour and/ or policies as a result of the boycotts. The first two have a positive effect on the effectiveness and are theorized to have a strong correlation, while the last one has a negative effect.

5.2. Measuring effectiveness

Following the reasoning that the effectiveness can be defined by the consequence criterion, additional problems arise. First, claims of success by organizing entities are not very credible since they might overestimate their effect on a firm's behaviour, but the same applies to the reporting by the targeted firm, that wants to discourage future boycotts (Friedman and Pruitt,

1986). Additionally, from an outside perspective, success and effectiveness are hard to define since the goals of the boycotts are often not clearly stated or defined and change along the course of the actions (Friedman, 1991). Finally, there is always the question of causality. Did the actions undertaken in the boycott cause change in the company's behaviour or was it something else (Friedman, 1991)?

5.2.1. Measuring effectiveness by boycott's objectives

Friedman (1985) did a first study on the effectiveness of boycotts by using the objectives defined by the organizing entities and the boycotters to measure 90 boycotts throughout the 1970-1980's in the United States and found 24 to be successful. However, he argued that this evaluation is not completely correct as a result of the abovementioned problems and therefore concluded that the other boycotts could not be deemed as unsuccessful.

5.2.2. Measuring effectiveness by firm's share prices

Friedman and Pruitt (1986) re-evaluated the success rate of the boycotts Friedman studied the prior year by measuring the consequence criterion using stock prices. By studying stock prices, they claim to be able to perform a quantitative analysis without the presence of biases and a change in prices is meant to reflect the damage done by the boycotting action, even if the stated goals are not necessarily met. We found three studies using this stock market method.

- Friedman and Pruitt (1986) found that there was a significant decrease in stock prices for a majority of the targeted firms by studying the impact of 21 of the 90 boycott announcements over a two-month period after the announcement.
- Davidson et al. (1995) found that the stock market already reacted to the announcement negatively. The end however did not impact the market, since it is expected.
- Koku, Akhigbe and Springer (1997) however found that the boycotts studied in his research inflicted no significant financial loss for the companies concerned, but actually experience a significantly positive increase. They theorized that this is because the firms take actions to handle the effects of the boycotts. Additionally, many boycotts trigger 'buycotts', where consumers with opposing views increase their purchases of the targeted company to express their values and beliefs. However, they found that there were no long term effects of the boycotts.

6. Conclusion

As a way to conclude, we will take back Friedman's (1985) proposed definition for the boycott: *an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace.*

- Attempts should be included. It has been empirically proven that the announcement already has a significant effect on company's behaviour (Friedman, 1986; Davidson et al., 1995). Therefore, non-enacted boycotts will be included in our definition of a boycott.
- Boycotts serve for instrumental goals as well as non-instrumental goals

- Only collective actions will be considered as boycotts. The individual boycotts proposed by Shaw et al. (2006) and Friedman (1991) will be further explored in chapter 3 under the form of brand avoidance.

As a result, we will follow Friedman's definition of a boycott.

Figure 2.1 summarizes the sources mentioned above regarding different moderators' effect on the relationship between the egregious act and engaging in boycotts. In addition, the different mediators, including the objectives are included.

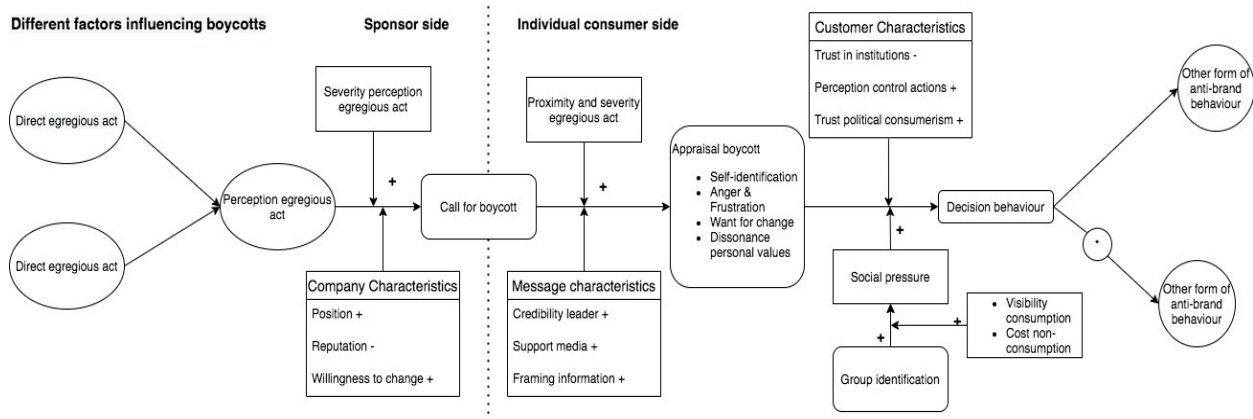


Figure 2.1. Factors important for boycotts (sources: see chapter 2)

The interesting case of esteemed participation is visualised in figure 2.2. When consumers are already convinced of the cause of the boycott, the esteemed participation plays a double, contradicting role.

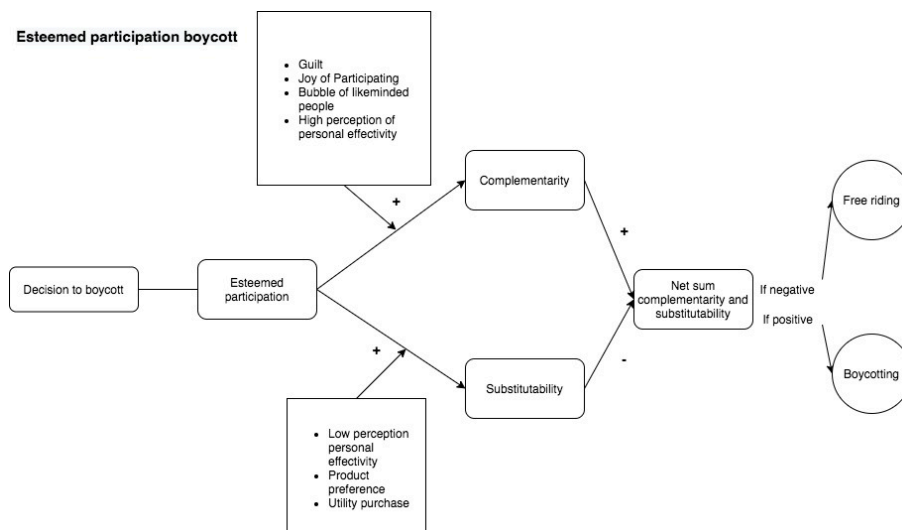


Figure 2.2. Role of expected participation on boycotting intentions (sources: see chapter 2)

Chapter 3: Negative Word of Mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) is seen as more reliable, credible and trustworthy than other communication concerning products and services given the transmitter's independence from the concerned company (Lau & Ng, 2001). Moreover, it is an information source of consumers' choices given its frequency and unbiased nature. Additionally, WOM is created through interaction, meaning it represents a multitude of opinions (East et al., 2007).

In addition, consumers hold more weight to negative information and find it more credible. As a result, the study of negative word of mouth is crucial (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Charlett et al., 1995; East et al., 2008; Richins, 1984).

1. Definition of NWOM

1.1. Definition WOM

Arndt defines WOM as *oral, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale* (cited in Lau & Ng, 2001, p. 164). This definition has been used many times over by other authors in the field. Given that the consumer is perceived to be non-commercial, it is up to the interpretation of the consumer. As a result, this definition views WOM from the perspective of the consumer. In addition, the communicator can be commercial, but hidden or invisibly so from the receiver. An example of this could be a brand endorser that does not disclose their affiliation with the company.

East, Hammond and Wright (2007) simplify the definition and define it as informal advice from consumers. This definition therefore focuses on the fact that it happens between consumers and concerns advice. As result, this definition includes communication that would be included in Richin's definition, such as brand endorsers. However, Garland and Marr (1995) do not specify that it happens between consumers. As a result, it could be transmitted by the company or its competitors.

The participants in the WOM consist of two parties (Bansal & Voyer, 2000):

- The transmitter shares the information
- The receiver receives the information

1.2. Negative Word of Mouth

WOM can either be favourable or unfavourable, categorized in respectively positive word of mouth (PWOM) and negative word of mouth (NWOM) (Arndt, 1967). PWOM is encouraging a brand choice, while NWOM discourages a brand choice (East et al., 2008).

Regarding NWOM, Richins (1984) defines it as *interpersonal communication among consumers concerning a marketing organization or product which denigrates the object of communication* (p. 698). Not including a direction, Richins highlights that NWOM is not linear communication, but rather an interaction. Again, consumers are the expected participants.

1.3. Online WOM

Important to note is that Arndt's definition requires person-to-person, oral communication. Richins' definition also highlights the interactive nature of NWOM. As a result, online postings such as reviews, social media posts and forums posts are not classified as WOM. These type of consumer opinions do often not entail interaction nor person-to-person communication. They consist of one-to-one communication, or even one-to-many. In addition, the conversations between consumers do not have to be simultaneous, as is the case for normal WOM (Balaji, 2016). However, given the rise of online discourse, the importance of these types of information sharing also gain importance. Where in person NWOM is limited, the Internet exposes the consumers to significantly larger proportions of it (Hornik et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010).

East et al. and Charlett et al.'s definition in contrast includes online discourse, since it can be seen as informal advice among consumers. However, Hornik, Satchi, Cesareo and Pastore (2015) prefer to create an additional category of WOM and refer to online discourse as online WOM (eWOM). They consequently define online WOM as customer to customer interactions on the Internet. Another term frequently used is electronic WOM (eWOM) (Balaji et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010; Pfeffer, 2014).

Balaji, Khong and Chong (2016) added a subcategory to eWOM, namely social WOM (sWOM). The major difference is first users are identifiable for sWOM, while eWOM can be posted anonymously. Consequently, it poses a higher social risk than eWOM since the sender is known. It cannot be discredited as easily, since the sender is now an identifiable person.

1.4. Primary or secondary WOM

Hornik et al. (2015) additionally identify two different types of WOM. Primary WOM stems from consumers who spread WOM based on personal experience. In contrast, secondary WOM entails consumers spreading WOM based on other consumers' experience and WOM. In the case of eWOM, Hornik et al. found that 70% of all WOM is secondary WOM.

1.5. Random or systematic WOM

Richins (1984) makes a distinction between random and systematic NWOM:

- Systematic NOWM: a large group of consumers spreading the same message at the same time, for example after a company commits large egregious act. A call for a boycott can then evoke systematic NWOM in a group of consumers.

- Random NWOM: there is no pattern, occurs whenever a consumer shares a negative opinion

2. *Motivation of NWOM*

In contrast to literature on other anti-brand behaviour, there is limited information on the triggering act for NWOM. In general, authors agree that NWOM occurs in some cases after dissatisfaction, as a result of a service failure or an egregious act (Richins, 1984; Wangenheim, 2005).

3. *Objectives of NWOM*

There are certain objectives named by authors as to why consumers engage in NWOM.

3.1. Avoiding cognitive dissonance

Arndt theorized that an important objective of engaging in NWOM is the avoidance of dissonance. He states that consumers use WOM to establish cognitive clarity in an ambiguous situation (cited in Richins, 1984). The dissonance is caused by the difference in expectations of how a company should perform and reality (Balaji et al., 2016).

Wangenheim (2005) consequently performed a study on NWOM from consumers after they made the switch to another brand. He found that consumers use NWOM to justify their decision. Consumers spread negative information about the brand they previously used and about other, not chosen alternatives. Therefore, they try to eliminate the possibility of having chosen the wrong brand.

Balaji et al. (2016) consequently proved that cognitive dissonance is one of the motivations for engaging in sWOM.

3.2. Riddance of negative emotions

In contrast, some consumers use NWOM as a way of venting emotions. First, it can be to alleviate their negative experience and reduce their anxiety surrounding it. Second, it can be a form of vengeance (Arndt as cited in Richins, 1984, Balaji et al., 2016).

Consumers are likely to turn to social media to cope with negative events. This phenomenon is referred to as the social support theory. The social support relies on three factors, namely the size of the social network, the support provided by other members of the network and behaviour from other members. A crucial factor for a perception of high social support is the strength of ties with other members in the network. If the ties are stronger, the perception of social support is higher (Balaji et al., 2016). If consumers have a perception of high social support, they are more likely to engage in NWOM (Balaji et al., 2016).

3.3. Inquiry of receiver

Mangold, Miller and Brockway (1999) found that the main cause of spreading of WOM in the service industry is the inquiry of the receiver. The receiver asks the transmitter of the information to share their opinion on their experience, resulting in WOM. They additionally found that the content of WOM mostly concerns subjective information such as quality, rather than objective information such as prices.

Bansal and Voyer (2000) additionally found that receivers often are the ones initiating the WOM.

3.4. Altruism

Arndt additionally theorized that altruism is one of the main reasons for engaging in NWOM (cited in Richins, 1984). This means that consumers deem it necessary to warn others about a company's malpractices to help them prevent dissatisfaction (Engel et al, 1969; Lau & Ng, 2001; Richins, 1984).

4. *Moderators of NWOM*

Richins (1984) states that once dissatisfaction occurs, consumers are likely to engage in NWOM. Yet, consumers can opt to do nothing, complain directly to the company or to engage in another type of anti-brand behaviour. The following section summarizes the findings of literature of moderators with an indirect effect on the likeliness to engage in NWOM.

4.1. Product and purchase involvement

Product involvement has an important effect on the likeliness to engage in NWOM. High product involvement means the consumer holds great importance to the product and is more informed about the product category than other, less product involved consumers (Wangenheim, 2005). It increases the likeliness of WOM as follows:

- A highly product involved transmitter will be more likely to share their opinion (Engel et al., 1969; Lau & Ng, 2001; Richins, 1984).
- A highly product involved receiver will be more likely to seek out WOM (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

4.2. Product knowledge

A high perception of the transmitter's knowledge on the product or on the service increases the likeliness of engaging in NWOM in the following ways.

- The transmitter will be more likely to spread WOM (Bone, 1995; Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Engel et al., 1969; Lau & Ng, 2001).
- The receiver will be more likely to seek the transmitter's opinion (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

4.3. Perceived risk

In general, consumers will engage in WOM to lessen their perceived risk. As a result, if the perceived risk associated with the purchase is higher, WOM is more likely (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Lau & Ng, 2001). The perception of risk associated with the purchase also has an influence on the receiver's likeliness to seek out WOM. Arndt (1967) divides the perceived risk into two categories:

- Importance of purchase: how important is it for the consumer to have the same quality of product as before
- Uncertainty of purchase: how uncertain are they about the quality of the new product.

4.4. Perception of company

Perception of the company can influence the likeliness of NWOM. The following aspects influence it positively

- Negative perception of handling of complaints: consumers will believe complaints make no difference and vent their emotions in NWOM (Mangold et al., 1999; Richins, 1983).
- High blame attribution (Balaji et al., 2016; Richins, 1984).
- Bad reputation leads to lower perception of a company's competence with two results (Hess, 2008):
 - Higher blame attribution
 - Higher perception of severity of failure

4.5. Other characteristics of the transmitter

- High sociability: they are more open to speak with others (Lau & Ng, 2001; Richins, 1984).
- High altruism: they have a higher desire to help others (Lau & Ng, 2001; Richins, 1984).
- Consumers who adopt new products or services early on after its release (Engel et al., 1969).
- High general likeliness spreading WOM (East et al., 2007).
- High general confidence: they are less concerned with being associated with negative issues (Lau & Ng, 2001)
- High opposition directly addressing/ complaining to company (Lau & Ng, 2001)

4.6. Relationship and proximity between receiver and transmitter

If a dissatisfied consumer is close to others, the consumer is more likely to engage in NWOM. (Lau & Ng, 2001). Furthermore, if the relationship between two parties is stronger, the receiver is more likely to seek out WOM (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

5. *Effectiveness of NWOM*

NWOM has a negative effect on other consumer's probability of purchasing the aforementioned product or service (Charlett et al., 1995). Additionally, WOM has both a short and long term effect on a consumer's perception of a brand (Bone, 1995). Finally, WOM has an impact on the brand's reputation and can therefore impact their business (Pfeffer et al., 2014; Richins, 1984). Richins (1984) even found that NWOM impacts the purchasing decision, even if the receiver does not believe the message.

5.1. Measuring NWOM's effectiveness

The actual effectiveness of WOM is hard to study, since it is hard to observe specific cases where WOM influenced decisions and its effect is delayed (East et al., 2008). Luo (2009) however tried to study its long term and delayed impact using information available on the stock market. He argues that NWOM has a financial impact on companies. First, it causes a loss of sales. Second, it reduces a company's intangible assets, such as loyalty and its relationship with customers. As a result, it must invest in acquiring new customers and marketing in general. He found that NWOM has a both a significant long- and short term impact on the company. In addition, the presence of competition amplifies NWOM's impact. Competitors use NWOM to gain market share and consumers have a lower cost of switching.

5.2. Availability and source of information

The following aspects positively impact the NWOM's influence:

- Low general availability of information (Bone, 1995; Lau & Ng, 2001).
- Source of information is receiver's reference group (Bone, 1995; Richins, 1984).
- High perception product knowledge of transmitter (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Bone, 1995).
- High perception likeability of transmitter (Richins, 1984)/

5.3. Nature of message

East, Hammond and Lomax (2008) found that the strength of the message of the WOM has an effect. If the message is stronger, it has a larger impact. Lee and Song (2010) confirm this for eWOM.

Lazniack et al. (2001) additionally found that three effects impact the influence of the NWOM. First, the distinctiveness of the message has a positive impact on the influence of the NWOM. If the transmitter spreads attributes negative information to one brand and not others, it will have a greater effect. In addition, if they had a consistently negative experience with the brand, the effect will be greater. Finally, the perceived consensus of the message, namely other consumers spreading the same information, has a positive impact. If all three are high, the receiver will put the blame on the brand. If all three are low, the receiver will put the blame on the transmitter.

High consensus in eNWOM equally leads to a higher attribution of blame to the company (Lee & Carnage, 2014; Lee & Song, 2010).

5.4. Characteristics of receiver

Several aspects regarding the receiver positively influence the NWOM's impact

- The receiver initiated the WOM (Bansal & Voyer, 2000)
- The receiver is likely to give NWOM themselves (East et al., 2008).
- Lower perception of own product knowledge increases the perceived risk of purchase (Bone, 1995).
- High purchase involvement makes the receiver risk averse (Ahluwalia, 2002)

5.5. PWOM versus NWOM

The effectiveness of NWOM depends on how much PWOM there is to counter it (Richins, 1984). The actual prominence of PWOM versus NWOM and their respective effects are highly contested.

5.5.1. PWOM versus NWOM: importance

Negative information is thought to be more credible for several reasons:

- The negativity effect: it is seen as more informative, useful and diagnostic (Ahluwalia, 2002; Ahluwalia et al., 2000).
- It differs from what is presumed, namely a positive experience (Ahluwalia, 2002)
- It does not benefit the transmitter. Positive information is seen as a confirmation of a decision (Richins, 1984)

East et al. (2008) however contest NWOM's higher importance. Most consumers' probability of purchasing a product or service is less than 50%. As a result, positive information has more room to change a consumer's opinion. They nevertheless acknowledge the impact of NWOM on a consumer's purchasing decisions. In general, East et al. (2008) state that the effectiveness of WOM is complex and difficult to test. Therefore, there might be a bias in prior research and literature.

5.5.2. PWOM versus NWOM: incidence

The incidence of WOM depends on two factors. First, it depends on the number of people spreading it. Second, it depends on how many people they spread it to and at what frequency (East et al., 2007). There are several reasons why NWOM can be more prominent:

- Dissatisfied customers are more likely to spread NWOM and to more people (Richins, 1984). Knauer found that a consumer with a negative experience on average relays their experience to 9 people, while a positive experience only warrants a recounting to 5 people (cited in Mangold et al., 1999).
- A negative experience calls for action (Söderlund, 1998)

- A negative experience is more unexpected, therefore requiring more cognitive processing, which can result in NWOM (Söderlund, 1998).

East, Hammond and Wright (2007) contest the higher prominence of NWOM. After a study on the incidence of WOM, they found that consumers diffuse more PWOM than NWOM. Söderlund (1998) also highlights arguments for higher prominence of PWOM. People prefer to be associated with positive things and therefore are more likely to relay positive information. East et al. (2007) however found that PWOM and NWOM are being spread at the same frequency.

5.6. Prior relationship with the brand

An important factor in the assessment of negative information is the relationship with and the attitude towards a brand. The reception of negative information for consumers with a prior relationship with the brand is highly contested. Some state that it causes a great discrepancy with prior experiences. As a result, it will require more cognitive processing and therefore have a larger negative impact. Others state that the consumer will be biased and assimilate the information received with prior positive experiences. Therefore, the consumer diminishes the negative impact of the information (Ahluwalia et al., 2000).

5.6.1. Attitude towards brand

The attitude towards the brand consists of a consumer's trust, commitment, satisfaction, connection, familiarity and intimacy with the brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Xia, 2013). The strength of an attitude a consumer has for a brand influences how strong the resistance of the consumer is against negative information (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). The strength is determined by prior experiences with the brand and the consumer's perception of them (Xia, 2013).

Ahluwalia, Burnkrant and Unnava (2000) state that the negativity effect depends on the commitment of the consumer towards the brand. Low commitment leads to an objective judging of the brand. They might even attach greater importance to negative information, as it is in contrast with their prior experiences. Higher commitment however, leads to consumers trying to excuse negative information and minimize its impact. Therefore, it still has an impact but in the opposite direction, as they will try to use it as a justification for excusing the negative information. As a result, lowly committed consumers go through a higher attitude change after negative information than highly committed consumers (Ahluwalia et al., 2000).

5.6.2. Familiarity brand

Ahluwalia (2002) states that prior brand familiarity opens the consumer up to being more receptive to information on the brand. Consumers can have defensive motivations. This entails the consumer defending their prior perceptions and judgements. Therefore, they will defend their current position and disconfirm contrary information. This leads to high position

involvement. As a result, because of the consumer's high commitment, the negative information will hold less weight (Ahluwalia, 2002; Ahluwalia et al., 2000).

East et al. (2008) confirm this and adds that the reverse also takes place. Consumers receiving negative information about an unfamiliar brand, will put more weight on the negative information.

5.7. Diminishing quality of message

Richins (1984) states that the quality of WOM diminishes as it gets passed along. Namely, secondary WOM shortens the information. Next, the message gets sharpened by consumers only leaving in the most pertinent details. Finally, consumers use assimilation with their own prior ideas, experiences, stereotypes etc. to alter the message they spread. Hornik et al. (2015) empirically proved this for the spreading of secondary online WOM. As a result, the information spread through WOM becomes less reliable as it gets spread around, meaning that it can misrepresent the situation. However, since WOM is often seen as more reliable as other sources of information, a brand's perception can be distorted.

5.8. Role of the Internet

Regarding eWOM, the Internet has several effects amplifying the effectiveness and influence of WOM.

- Information gets spread around quicker and to more people. The Internet also can be classified as an unrestrained flow of information (Balaji et al., 2016; Pfeffer, 2014).
- Social media is gaining importance as an information source, often even replacing traditional media (Balaji et al., 2016; Pfeffer, 2014).
- A perception that a person's own beliefs are more widespread as a result of their online space functioning as an echo chambers because of the following reasons (Pfeffer, 2014)
 - They are more likely to be mostly connected to likeminded people
 - The algorithm of most social media causes information displayed to the consumer also to reflect the consumer's opinions and beliefs.
- eWOM is more likely to be negative, spread to more people, and last longer and be longer than WOM because of comments added by other consumers (Hornik et al., 2014)

NWOM going viral on the internet, meaning it gets shared on an enormous scale, can cause a public relations crisis for the targeted company (Balaji et al., 2016).

5.9. Relationship and proximity transmitter

If the relationship between the transmitter and receiver is closer, the WOM will have a larger effect (Bone, 1995; Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Next, if the transaction of information happens face-to-face, it weighs more heavily on the receiver's judgement as it will be more easy for them to recall it (Lau & Ng, 2001).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we go back to the definition proposed by Richins (1984): *oral, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale*. Given that most WOM is initiated by the receiver, we will continue with this receiver-centric definition.

Additionally, the receiver is not specified to be non-commercial. As a result, complaining to any third party is possible. Given the existence of third party complaining, explored in chapter 4 on customer retaliation, this will stay the same.

The oral aspect entails that online messaging between consumers cannot be considered as WOM. However, given the prevalence of this, we will drop the oral part to include forms of communications such as emails, text messages, direct messages through social media, ... As a result, we follow Richins' definition with the omission of the oral aspect.

The concept of eWOM and sWOM were introduced. The main difference between both is that sWOM cannot be anonymous. We will categorize sWOM as a subcategory of eWOM. Given that eWOM can be one-to-many communication, the relationship between the transmitter and receiver will be less important. In addition, eWOM is often a way for the transmitter to vent negative emotions. As a result, the receiver-centric approach from Richins is less relevant. We will therefore keep the concept of WOM and eWOM separate. eWOM will further refer to consumers communicating about a brand, product or service in an online setting, either anonymous or not.

Figure 3.1. summarizes the path from dissatisfaction to NWOM for a transmitter, including the various moderators.

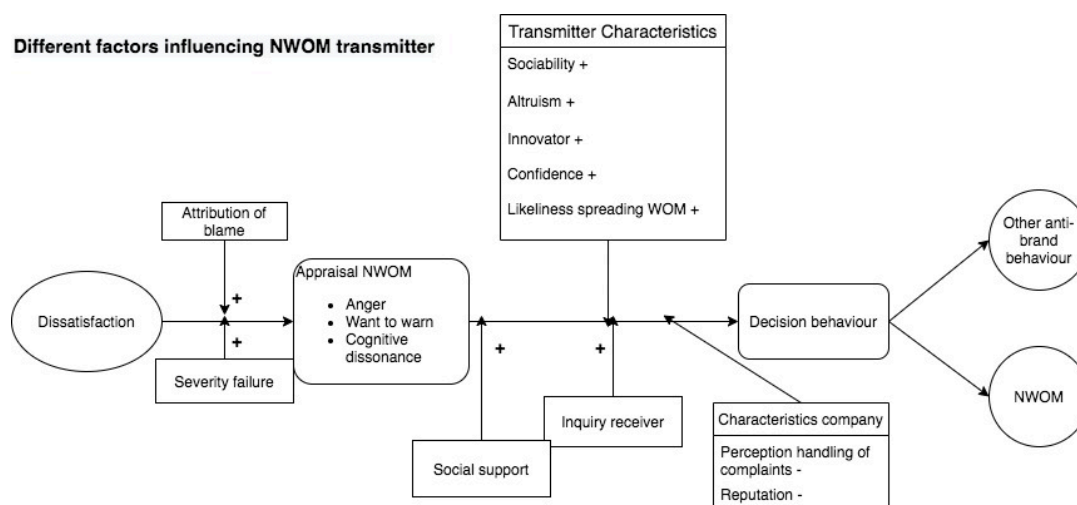


Figure 3.1. NWOM from transmitter's perspective (sources: see chapter 3)

Given the importance of the receiver perspective for NWOM, figure 2.2. depicts NWOM from their point of view. It goes from the perceived risk associated with a purchase to purchase intentions. The first part concerns the likeliness of a receiver engaging in NWOM. The second part concerns the effectiveness of the NWOM on their purchase intentions. The asterisk refers to the reflection of the transmitter to give NWOM.

eWOM can concern anonymous messaging. As a result, all moderators regarding the relationship between communicator and transmitter and other characteristics of the transmitter cannot always be generalized for eWOM. sWOM however can experience these moderators.

However, consumers unsure of the quality of a brand, service or product can proactively look for WOM themselves. As a result, we can generalize those moderators.

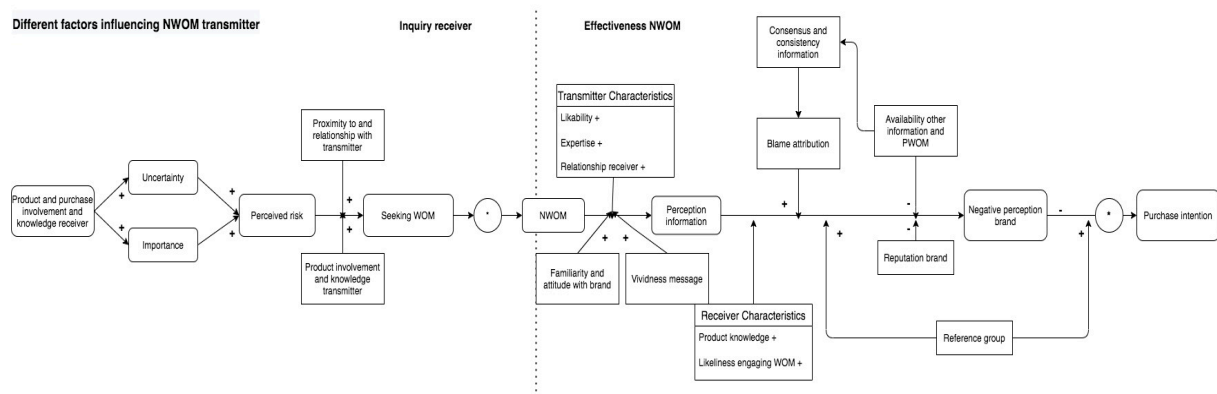


Figure 3.2. NWOM from receiver's perspective (sources: see chapter 3)

The second asterisk in figure 2.2. between the perception and purchase intention is detailed in the next section. Consumers can choose not to purchase from a brand anymore and therefore start avoiding the brand.

Chapter 3: Brand avoidance

Lee, Motion and Conroy (2009b) compare the concept of brand avoidance with boycotting. According to them, the difference lies within the continuation of the relationship. Boycotters ultimately want to re-enter the relationship when their conditions are met. Brand avoiders on the other hand do not always wish to re-establish the relationship. Odoom, Kosiba, Djamgbah and Narh (2019) add that avoidance is individual, while boycotts are collective. In addition, receivers of NWOM choosing not to purchase a brand can be classified as brand avoiders. It is not easy for companies to determine why consumers choose not to consume their brand. Brand avoiders can have both a negative and positive perception of the company (Khan & Lee, 2004).

Brand switching can be caused by trivial causes. For example, Mazursky, LaBarbera and Aiello (1987) and Keaveney (1995) found that the switching can be triggered by better deals. Another brand might offer cheaper brands. Consumers can also simply desire to try something else. However, the next section focuses on brand switching and avoidance fuelled by dissatisfaction or negative perceptions of the brand.

1. *Definition of brand avoidance*

According to Lee et al. (2009b), brand avoidance is a concept that falls within brand switching. Brand switching is defined by the American Association as *a change from one brand to another* (cited in Lee et al., 2009b, 170). Brand avoidance on the other hand occurs when consumers deliberately reject brands (Lee et al., 2009b). Oliva, Oliver and MacMillan (1992) however refer to brand switching to what occurs when consumers switch brands when dissatisfied.

As a result, brand avoidance is defined by Lee et al. (2009a) as *whereby consumers deliberately choose to keep away from or reject a brand* (p. 422). The concept can only be applied if the consumers have access to the brand, both physically and financially, and actively choose not to purchase from it (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009b).

2. *Motivations and objectives of brand avoidance*

Elliot states the main motivation for avoiding is *instigated or directed by negative/undesirable event or possibility* (cited in Khan & Lee, 2014, p. 330). According to Lee et al. (2009a), the undesired or negative outcomes or possibilities result in a perception of an incompatible promises. These promises can be explicit or implicit. They can be real or imaginary. Additionally, even if stated, they are often up for interpretation. As a result, promises are mostly subjective. These promises can be communicated in advertising or WOM (Knittel et al., 2016).

Other than influencing existing consumers, these promises influence pre-purchase behaviour. Pre-purchase, the consumers will not have experienced the quality of the service or product.

These promises will help them assess the associated risk associated with the purchase. This risk can be financial, social, psychological, ... If the risk is too high, they can avoid the brand.

Lee et al. (2009a) divide brand avoidance into four categories based on four types of promises. In general, a mixture of undesired promises is the motivation for brand avoidance, rather than one (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009b; Odoom et al., 2019).

2.1. Experiential Avoidance

The motivation for this type of avoidance is undelivered brand promises. The promise sets expectations for what a purchase will deliver to the consumer. If the brand does not deliver however, the consumer's expectations are disconfirmed. This can lead to brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a & b).

Service failure is the main motivator of brand avoidance (Keaveney, 1995; Khan & Lee, 2014; Oliva et al., 1992). Again, the failure can cause perceptions of violating distributive, procedural and interactional justice (Keaveney, 1995).

2.2. Identity Avoidance

The motivation for this type of avoidance is an unappealing brand promise. The consumer perceives the brand to be inauthentic, associate it to a negative peer group or consider it to be too mainstream. By disassociating, the consumer will have the objective of regaining individuality and trying to attain their ideal self (Lee et al., 2009a). Both consuming and not consuming certain brands serves as identity communication (Banister & Hogg, 2004).

In other words, consumers can engage in this behaviour to protect their self-esteem. By avoiding the brand, they avoid the negative self (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Therefore, undesired self-congruence positively influences brand avoidance (Khan & Lee, 2014).

Brand avoidance can be either to attain the reference group, or to be perceived in a certain way by the reference group. The reference groups can exhibit social pressure to behave a certain way. Here, that entails avoiding a brand. Just as well as having a peer group consumers want to attain, they might have avoidance groups. When a product is associated with an avoidance group, the consumer can opt not to consume it to avoid association with that group (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Lee et al., 2009b).

Another reason can be a perception of the brand. The brand can appear inauthentic. This means that the consumer sees it as artificial, fake. Another perception is that the brand is too mainstream. By avoiding it, they avoid being seen as everyone else and keep their individuality (Lee et al., 2009b).

2.3. Moral Avoidance

The motivation of this type of avoidance is a socially detrimental promise. The brand's values do not align with the consumer's personal set of beliefs and morals (Lee et al., 2009a).

2.3.1. Country of origin

The brand might be strongly associated to a certain country or be simply seen as foreign. This can increase brand avoidance for several reasons:

- Avoid association to certain country: country of origin is negatively perceived based on military actions, previous conflicts, political or economic events, anti-globalization, ... (Khan & Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2009b; Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009).
- Avoid buying foreign brands:
 - buying foreign brands is unpatriotic (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009).
 - by purchasing local, the money stays local (Lee et al., 2009b)
 - preserve local cultural diversity (Lee et al., 2009b)
- Avoid risk: in the case of little information on the brand, characteristics of the country of origin, such as innovation level, technology, reliability, are generalized to the brand (Khan & Lee, 2014).

2.3.2. Ethical concerns

Consumers can avoid companies out of ethical concerns (Keaveney, 1995; Lee et al., 2009b; Strandvik et al., 2013). Strandvik et al. (2013) found that there were several types of avoidances related to ethics:

- Consistent avoidance of companies consistently perceived to be unethical rather than based on a single offense
- Avoidance based on greenwashing: imbalance between company's CSR and communication about it
- Avoidance based on religious reasons: discrepancy between brand's values and religion (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009).

2.3.3. Company type

The consumer might be cynical regarding certain companies. They believe the companies simply operate to serve themselves (Lee et al., 2009b). They want to avoid the company if they perceive it to be too dominant in the market. Consumers often believe that larger companies are more at risk of behaving in a corporate irresponsible way. Additionally, consumers find these brands too impersonal. As a result, they hope to avoid further dominance and a future monopoly by avoiding the brand. Avoiding is seen as the moral high ground and the ethical way of operating (Lee et al., 2009a).

2.4. Deficit-Value Avoidance

The motivation for this type of avoidance is a functionally inadequate promise. This represents an unacceptable benefit-cost trade-off (Keaveney, 1995; Lee et al., 2009a). This type of avoidance mainly occurs for consumers who have no prior relationship with the brand (Knittel et al., 2016). This can be due to a perception of either too high or too low cost:

- Budget brand avoidance: cost is a waste, the quality is too poor (Lee et al., 2009a)
- Luxury brand avoidance: increase in price does not correspond to equal increase in quality (Lee et al., 2009a).

2.5. Advertising

Advertising is an important form of communication of the brand. It influences brand avoidance based on several factors:

- Cues about reference group: consumers perceive who consumes the brand, causes identity avoidance (Hogg et al., 2009)
- Content of the advertisement: a dissatisfaction arises based on the celebrity, music, colouring, ... used or general feeling of the ad (Knittel et al., 2016).
- Inclusion of sexually provoking images: causes moral avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016)
- Inclusion of taboo topics: are used for their attention grabbing qualities, but have two consequences (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012):
 - Negative effect on brand attitude
 - Increase of social pressure not to purchase a brand

3. *Moderators of brand avoidance*

Not all undesired promises lead to brand avoidance. Several factors increase a consumer's likeliness of brand avoidance.

- High differentiation between brands (Lee et al., 2009b).
- High visibility of consumption after brand avoidance based on peer pressure (White & Dahl, 2006).
- High disposable income: increases access to alternatives (Khan & Lee, 2014)
- High self-consciousness: results in higher susceptibility to peer pressure and threats to self-identity (White & Dahl, 2006).

Finally, the relationship between customer loyalty and satisfaction is nonlinear. In general, multiple service failures lead to dissatisfaction, but there is no clear relationship. As a result, it depends from one situation and consumer to another if the failure will lead to brand avoidance (Oliva et al., 1992).

4. Effectiveness of brand avoidance

The effectiveness and effects of brand avoidance are hard to study. How to discern the difference between a consumer who simply chooses not to consume a brand and a consumer who actively chooses to avoid it (Lee et al., 2009b)?

However, there are some impacts of brand avoidance on the brand:

- Loss in revenues after customers leave the brand (Keaveney, 1995)
- Cost of acquiring new customers (Keaveney, 1995)
- Brand avoiders can engage in NWOM post-switching (Wangenheim, 2005).

5. Conclusion

Based on the different types of reasons consumers have to avoid a brand, Oliva et al.'s definition of brand switching solely after dissatisfaction is not broad enough. Therefore, reassess the definition proposed by Lee et al. (2009a): *whereby consumers deliberately choose to keep away from or reject a brand*. This definition has several implications:

- Intention: consumers have to have the means to access the brand, but choose not to
- Customers and non-customers can engage in brand avoidance, based on personal experience, internal information, such as advertising, or external information, such as NWOM
- Individual participating in a boycott can be seen as brand avoidance as it fits in the definition

Figure 4 summarizes the path between brand awareness and the decision to avoid a brand. Existing customers that can engage in brand avoidance based on experience are included, as well as non-customers.

Different factors influencing brand avoidance

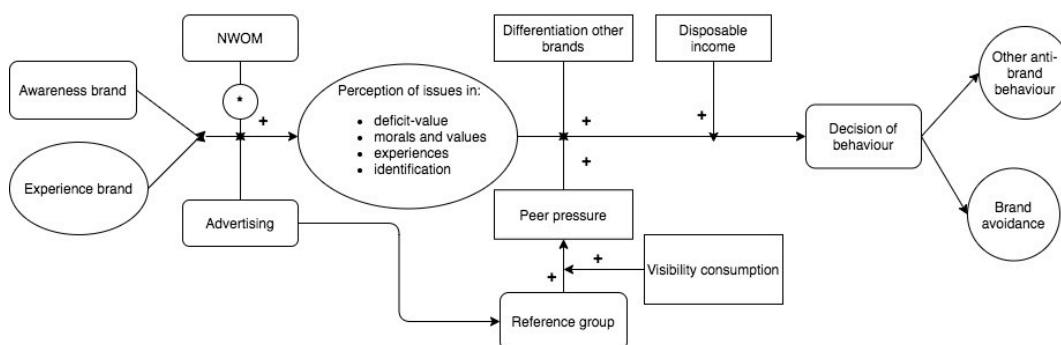


Figure 4: Different factors influencing brand avoidance (sources: see chapter 4)

NWOM and advertising are included as information. Other sources are possible, but based on literature and the previous chapter, these are included. The asterix between NWOM and the relationship between brand awareness can be replaced by the various factors presented in the previous chapter in figure 3.2.

Chapter 5: Customer Retaliation

Retaliation is a concept that is mostly used in management literature referring to negative employee behaviour. Retaliation in that context refers to employees who experience injustice and want to get even. The injustice is perceived to be the fault of the employer. The injustice triggers the feelings of anger, hostility, shame and guilt (Barclay et al., 2005). As a result, employees act out in different ways, such as theft, sabotaging, withdrawing themselves from the company psychologically, ... (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

Hirschman made a model for how people deal with dissatisfaction.. Either they try to change the cause of the dissatisfaction from within the relationship, they leave the relationship or they choose to stay loyal. These are respectively referred to as voice, exit and loyalty (cited in Saunders, 1992). Huefner and Hunt (2000) adapted this model to the consumption context and added customer retaliation. They argued that consumers can try to harm the company as well. They state that this is the worst behaviour. The consumers act in a harming way, without necessarily providing information as to why.

Grégoire and Fisher (2006) state that a consumer can restore the balance in the customer-company relationship in two ways, namely reparation and retaliation. Reparation is demanding that the company compensates the customer for the failure committed. This includes an apology, exchanging a defect product, getting a reimbursement or getting a discount.

1. *Definition of customer retaliation*

Grégoire and Fisher (2006) define customer retaliation as *a customer's efforts to punish and make a service firm pay for the damages it has caused* (p. 33). This definition has two important concepts: a consumer wanting to harm a firm and it being a result of the damages the firm has caused.

The damage caused is a result of a service failure and failing to rectify the situation (Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2006; Huefner & Hunt, 2002; Keefte et al., 2008).

Most sources agree with these two concepts, with some focusing more on one than the other (e.g. Huefner & Hunt, 2000). For example, Bonifield and Cole (2006) mainly mention consumers wanting to hurt the firm. Funches, Markley and Davis (2009) in contrast agree with the second concept. They define retaliation as an action taken by a consumer as a result of an injury of an offense committed by the company.

However, differences arise in what customer retaliation is classified as well as what it entails.

1.1. Classification among other concepts

Huefner and Hunt (2000) define three possible categories as a result of egregious acts based on Hirschman's classic typology. Customer retaliation is one category, after voice and exit. In contrast, Funches et al. (2009) and Grégoire and Fisher (2008) include voice in customer retaliation. The only category that they do not include is exit. Simply leaving the consumer-brand relationship is not considered as customer retaliation.

Additionally, Huefner and Hunt (2000) define consumer retaliation as aggressive behaviour. This means that it is behaviour with the main intention to hurt the brand. It is intentional behaviour. Similarly, Funches et al. (2009) state that consumer retaliation is the result of cognitive processes. It differs from other consumer behaviour that is spontaneous. Aron (2016) in contrast, includes spontaneous behaviour in their concept of customer retaliation. He states that it is simply another name for dysfunctional consumer behaviour.

Harris and Reynolds define dysfunctional behaviour as *actions by customers who intentionally or unintentionally, overtly or covertly, act in a manner that, in some way, disrupts otherwise functional service counters* (cited in Aron, p. 123).

1.2. Behaviour of consumer retaliation

Different authors categorize different types of behaviour as customer retaliation:

- Vindictive complaining/ aggressive complaining: contacting the focal company to abuse its employees (Bonifield & Cole, 2006; Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Huefner & Hunt, 2000).
- Third party complaining: turning to third parties, such as media, legal or consumer agencies to publicize the egregious act (Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008).
 - Huefner and Hunt (2000): the objective is to harm the brand
 - Grégoire and Fisher (2008): the objective is to help the company to change its behaviour
- NWOM with the objective to harm: dissuading other consumers of purchasing and hurt the reputation of the company (Bonifield & Cole, 2006; Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008; Huefner & Hunt, 2000).
- Withhold consumption/ slow frequency of purchasing (Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2006)
 - Funches et al. (2009): objective is to voice dissatisfaction
 - Grégoire and Fisher (2006): objective is to harm the company by loss of sales
- Obstruction of organizational goals: for example obstruct entrance, flood the company with fake orders to limit resources, ... (Funches et al., 2009; Huefner & Hunt, 2002).
- Demanding discounts: Bonifield and Cole (2006)
- Physical aggression: for example theft and vandalism (Funches et al., 2009; Huefner and Hunt, 2000).

2. *Motivations of customer retaliation*

As mentioned before, customer retaliation occurs after the consumer perceives the company doing something wrong. Aron (2016) state that customer retaliation is the result of an experience of an unfair, unjust, inequitable outcome. This can be objectively found, when a firm does not deliver on its promises. It can however also be subjective, meaning it is a perception of injustice by the customer.

Often the undesired outcome is the result of a service failure (Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2006; Huefner & Hunt, 2002; Keeffe et al., 2008). Johnson, Matear and Thomson (2011) however contest that the customer retaliation is the result of one or multiple critical events. Again, to avoid dissonance, the consumer then engages in retaliatory behaviour.

2.1. Perceived betrayal

As a result of the service failure, the consumer can feel betrayed. Perceived betrayal entails when the consumer feels like the company breached what is normative in the context of their relationship (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Keeffe et al., 2008). The consumer can feel lied to, taken advantage of, feel exploited, ...

2.2. Breach of fairness

The service failure is seen as unfair. According to Grégoire and Fisher (2008), fairness has three dimensions. The service failure therefore does not necessarily concern a faulty product or lacking service, but can be a perception of wrong procedures or rude employees.

2.2.1. Distributive fairness

Distributive fairness concerns the outcome of the interaction with the firm. A failure in distributive fairness therefore entails the company not delivering on the promises it made for the product or service. This also includes the efforts made to recover the failure (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). A firm breaking their promises is one of the main motivations of customer retaliation (Aron, 2016; Bonifield & Cole, 2006; Funches et al., 2009). Failing in this regard results in the consumer feeling a financial loss (Funches et al., 2008).

2.2.2. Procedural fairness

Procedural fairness concerns the procedures and processes a company took during the purchasing and recovery process (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). The consumer judges the way the company deals with their requests and complaints. They can perceive the company not to follow what would be normative or to break the rules (Keeffe et al., 2008). Funches et al. (2008) however found that consumers are often not aware of the procedures. However, if they are, they are less likely to retaliate.

2.2.3. Interactional fairness

Interactional fairness concerns how consumers perceived the interactions with the employees (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Consumers can feel as if they are not allowed to have a voice or as if they are ignored. As a result, they feel disregarded. Additionally, they can feel as if the service was rude (Funches et al., 2008).

3. *Objectives of customer retaliation*

The main objective of customer retaliation is to hurt the brand (Bonifield & Cole, 2006; Funches et al., 2009; Huefner & Hunt, 2000; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). The consumers want to punish the brand for the inflicted loss (Grégoire and Fisher, 2006).

- Make company feel the same loss to service justice (Funches et al., 2009; Huefner & Hunt, 2000). There are two types of losses (Funches et al., 2009)
 - Financial loss: money or value lost
 - Social loss: dignity or respect lost during effort of restoring the failure
- Restore balance in relationship with the company by ‘getting back’ to the company to get psychological equity (Huefner & Hunt, 2000)
- Protect others (Funches et al., 2009). This is however contested by Huefner and Hunt (2000), who state that customer retaliation is not altruistic

4. *Moderators of customer retaliation*

Not all service failures lead to customer retaliation. Several factors play into the desire to retaliate. Anger is a mediator in the relationship between the service failure and customer retaliation. (Bonifield & Cole, 2006; Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Keeffe et al., 2008).

4.1. Failure severity

The failure severity has a positive effect on the likeliness to retaliate. The more severe the service failure, the higher the loss for the consumer. Therefore, the consumers are more likely to retaliate (Funches et al., 2009; Huefner & Hunt, 2000; Zhang et al., 2020).

4.2. Attribution of blame

After perceiving the service failure, consumers will determine who is to blame. If they blame the company, they are more likely to feel angry (Aron, 2016; Bonifield & Cole, 2006; Keeffe et al., 2008). The consumer expects the company to make up for their mistakes. Failing to do so, results in a higher likeliness of retaliation (Keeffe et al., 2008).

Keeffe, Russell-Bennett and Tombs (2008) additionally found that if employees refuse blame in the recovery process, the consumers are more likely to engage in customer retaliation.

In contrast, if they blame themselves, they are more likely to feel regret. In that case, they will engage in conciliatory behaviour. This includes PWOM, willingness to accept discounts for future purchases and in general wanting to continue the relationship (Bonifield & Cole, 2006).

Johnson et al. (2011) contest this. They include feelings of embarrassment, shame and guilt. These represent the blame the consumers put on themselves. As a result, consumers lose self-worth. To regain it, they are more likely to retaliate.

4.3. Inferred goodwill

Inferred goodwill is how the consumer perceives the provider's goal to maximize the customer's benefits. A firm's behaviour influences the perception of the goodwill. Apologizing for a service failure and providing compensation will result in a better perception. A high inferred goodwill will lessen the likeliness to retaliate (Zhang et al., 2020).

4.4. Relationship quality

Low relationship quality means interactional and procedural fairness will have a larger effect. Since those consumers have little to no prior experience with the brand, they do not know what the outcome is. Therefore, they can only judge based on the procedures of the company and the interaction with employees (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006).

The effect of high relationship quality (RQ) however is highly contested in literature. High relationship entails brand love. The next three paragraphs entail how consumers deal with negative experiences with a brand. As a result, it is an extension to the relationship role in the processing of information mentioned in chapter 3 on NWOM.

4.4.1. 'Love is blind' effect

Some authors state that there is a 'love is blind' effect for consumers with high RQ. This means prior relationship buffers the negative experience and lessen the likeliness of retaliation as a result of three factors (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006; Zhang et al., 2020).:

- Assimilation bias: the negative experience is inconsistent with consumers' prior interactions. As a result, consumers assign less weight to this experience.
- Interpretation bias: the consumer overlook and ignore the inconvenience of the negative experience
- Consumers do not want to harm a valued partner
- Accepting the negative experience would have a detrimental effect on their self-image and –worth. Therefore, they choose not to

4.4.2. 'Love becomes hate' effect

Other authors claim that there is a 'love becomes hate' effect for consumers with high RQ. A positive prior relationship will reinforce the perception of betrayal and failure severity for several reasons (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006; Zhang et al., 2020). :

- The negative experience is in sharp contrast with their prior positive experience.
- They have a higher expectation of the service they deserve
- The service failure is disconcerting with their self-concept.

Different explanations are offered for why sometimes high RQ or brand love leads to one effect and sometimes to the other.

4.4.3. Controllability

The consumers will judge if the company had any control over the failure. If they perceive higher controllability, they are more likely to retaliate (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Aron, 2016). High RQ does not make a significant difference on the likeliness to retaliate (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006). In case of low controllability in contrast, the 'love is blind' effect will lead the consumer with high RQ to feel empathy. As a result, they will be more forgiving and reduce their likeliness to retaliate (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006).

4.4.4. Self-relevant relationships

Johnson et al. (2011) however explain the effect of high RQ through the role of self-relevancy in brand relationships. A self-relevant relationship entails that the consumer gets part of their self-image or –concept from their relationship with the brand. Neutral relationships however do not necessarily mean a weak relationship. There can still be a lot of trust and commitment and high RQ. Yet, it does not help the consumer reach some relevancy.

They found that that self-relevant relationships will positively influence a consumer's likeliness to retaliate in case of service failure. This is a result of a destruction of a part of the consumer's perception of their self-concept or image. The loss of the relationship causes trauma. Therefore, the consumer will try to cope to get their self-worth back.

In contrast, self-neutral relationships will have a negative effect on the likeliness to retaliate. The relationship quality will decrease their likeliness to retaliate and will urge them to simply walk away (Johnson et al., 2011).

4.4.5. Different effects in different stages

Zhang, Zhang and Sakulsinlapakorn (2020) explain the conflicting role of brand love in different stages:

- ‘love becomes hate’ will moderate the relationship between failure severity and anger negatively by leading to a higher perception of violation of the three types of fairness and of betrayal, therefore leading to more anger
- ‘brand love’ will moderate the relationship between anger and retaliatory behaviour by lessening the effect of the anger on the likeliness to retaliate

5. *Effectiveness of customer retaliation*

5.1. Effects customer retaliation

The cost of retaliation can be high. It can cause:

- Financial loss (Keeffe et al., 2008). This is a result of a loss of patronage, damage inflicted upon the company and loss of material (Funches et al., 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Zhang et al., 2020).
- Psychological damage to employees (Funches et al., 2008; Keeffe et al., 2008).
- Harm to the impact of the brand (Funches et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, since it happens outside of the borders of the company, it is out of their control (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008).
- Resentment in the retaliation consumer: even though the retaliatory behaviour is satisfactory, it can be in conflict with their self-image (Funches et al., 2009)

Given that customer retaliation can take different forms, no specific studies about its effectiveness are available. However, the studies on boycotts and NWOM, included in customer retaliation, prove that it can have a real effect on a company.

5.2. Amplifying effect Internet

The Internet has made customer retaliation more prominent and enlarged its effects. Consumer platforms are giving tremendous power to the consumer (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Funches et al. (2009) add that technology causes an increase in competitiveness and more choices of alternatives. Consumers can also compare these more easily. As a result, the cost of switching has reduced (Aron, 2016). Therefore, there is an increase in purchasing power.

The Internet has also led to better access of social support. The information of retaliatory behaviour is more easily available, accessible and shareable. As a result, the impact of it is scaled exponentially. This leads to higher chance of retaliation and higher effectiveness (Aron, 2016; Funches et al., 2009).

Even though the circumstances of service failure have not changed, the landscape in which they happen and are shared has changed. Information deficits that made consumers feel little compared to companies, have disappeared. Consumers have higher expectations and purchasing power. Digitalization leads to easier access to consumer's satisfaction. However, this is a double edged sword. Consumers as a result also have higher entitlement (Aron, 2016).

6. Conclusion

When looking at the different types of behaviour included in customer retaliation, some notes can be made:

- Grégoire and Fisher (2008) include voice in customer retaliation. However, following the classification of Huefner and Hunt (2000) voice is an entirely different category. According to them, only behaviour with the objective of getting even or harming the brand can be classified as customer retaliation. Voice serves as helping others, or wanting the company to change its behaviour.
- Aron (2016) included unintentional behaviour in his definition of customer retaliation. This is opposed to Huefner and Hunt (2000) and Funches et al. (2009) who call it deliberate.
- customer retaliation is as a result of service failure. As a result, mainly existing customers can engage in it

We follow Huefner and Hunt's (2000) classification of customer retaliation. As a result, only behaviour intended to get even with the company, harm it or regain psychological equity. These goals are all non-instrumental. As a result, voice and exit are not included. In addition, given it has a goal, we state it cannot be unintentional.

We define customer retaliation as behaviour by consumers after an experience of service failure aimed at getting even with the brand, restoring psychological equity or harming it. This can include NWOM, vindictive complaining, complaining to third parties, vandalism, obstructionism, physical violence, ... Some authors also include boycotts as customer retaliation. However, in the literature studied in Chapter 1 on boycotts, no mention was made of service failure as motivation for boycotts. Yet, not all possible literature was studied. Boycotts can have occurred as a result of service failure.

Figure 5 summarizes the relationship between service failure and customer retaliatory behaviour. The decision at the end depends on the objective of the consumer.

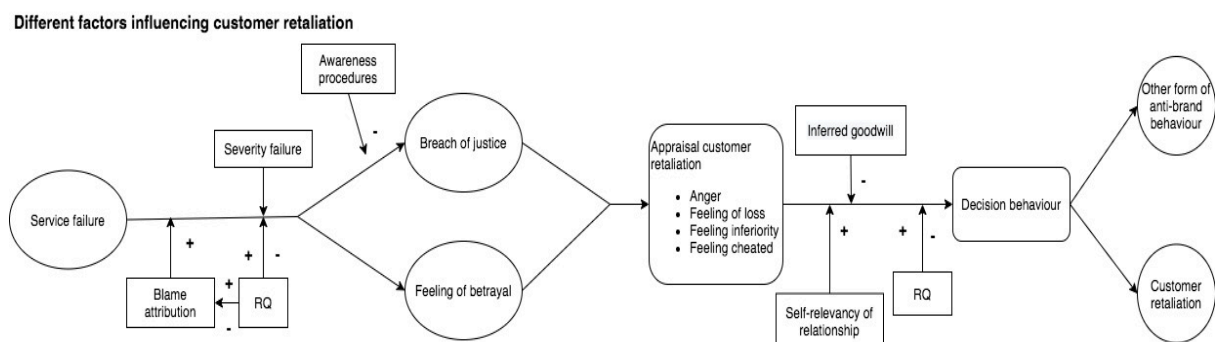


Figure 5: Summary different factors customer retaliation (sources: see chapter 5)

Chapter 6: Consumer Brand Sabotage

Consumer brand sabotage (CBS) is a relatively new classification of anti-brand behaviour. The term was first introduced by Kähr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer and Hoyer in 2016. The term of a brand saboteur already existed in employee context. There it is defined as rational behaviour intended to *damage, disrupt, or subvert the organization's operations for the personal purposes of the saboteur by creating unfavourable publicity, embarrassment, delays in production, damage to property, the destruction of working relationships, or harming the employees or customers* (Crino, cited in Ambrose et al., 2002, p. 948).

Kähr et al. (2016) therefore expanded the term to also include players outside of the organization. However, literature on this phenomenon is very limited. Most papers written on the subject were written or co-written by the authors of the original 2016 paper. Additionally, Rodrigues, Lopes and Freire (2019) highlight that this phenomenon has not yet been sufficiently empirically tested.

1. Definition of consumer brand sabotage

1.1. Definitions

Kähr et al. (2016) define CBS as: *a deliberate form of hostile, aggressive behaviour on the part of a consumer, designed to harm a brand* (p. 25).

In contrast, Daskin and Kasim (2016) define consumer sabotaging behaviour as *intentional behaviour in exchange settings that violates the generally accepted norms of conduct* (p. 470). They refer to it as another term for dysfunctional behaviour, misbehaviour or customer retaliation.

1.2. Five characteristics

Kähr et al. (2016) define five characteristics to define CBS:

- deliberate action: it is a conscious and intentional action. Rather than being impulsive, it was thought out and chosen with the intention of harming the brand.
- actual behaviour: simply planning the behaviour or announcing it is not enough, it needs to be acted out
- non-customers and customers can partake in CBS, either individually or in group
- main objective is harming the brand: by targeting the brand, brand saboteurs target crucial part of their 'enemy'
- harm is based on breaking the relationship with other consumers. They never want to re-establish their own brand relationship

2. *Objective of consumer brand sabotage*

Kähr et al. (2016) argue that CBS is a new type of behaviour. They state that as a result of technological developments, consumers have more power. This increase in power in addition to a desire to harm leads to a more dangerous type of behaviour.

According to Kähr et al. (2016), the main distinction between CBS and other types of anti-brand behaviour is the motive. Where other forms of anti-brand behaviour are mainly to regain equity in the relationship or get even in general, CBS's main motive is to harm the brand. In addition, other types of consumer behaviour leave room for the company to restore its relationship with the brand. Consumers engaging in CBS however never want to restore it.

3. *Motivation of consumer brand sabotage*

Kähr et al. (2016) state that companies provide stimuli that trigger anti-brand behaviour. They make the distinction between two types of stimuli:

- Performance based stimuli: a failure in quality of the service or product. This requires an experience with the brand and is mostly found among existing customers
- Value based stimuli: a negative perception of the behaviour of the brand in the market, reflecting the philosophy, identity and engagement of the brand in unethical practices. Brands with simple identities are more at risk, since it is easier for consumers to perceive the difference with their personal values.

4. *Moderators of consumer brand sabotage*

Not all egregious acts, perceived as performance or value based stimuli, lead to CBS. Consumers can engage in other forms of anti-brand behaviour or simply move on without taking any action. Several moderators increasing the likeliness of engaging in CBS are discussed.

4.1. Appraisal egregious act

The appraisal of the attribution of blame and severity of failure increase the likeliness of engaging in CBS:

- If the the company is at fault, they are more likely to engage in anti-brand behaviour and CBS (Kähr et al., 2016).
- The more severe the failure, the more likely they are to engage in CBS (Rodrigues et al., 2019).

4.2. Emotions

Consumers feel emotions as a result of the stimuli. The emotions stem from the rift between what the consumers wanted to attain and what the reality is. The reality being the result of the

company's wrongdoing, for example a loss. These will then lead to a certain type of behaviour (Kähr et al., 2016).

Kähr et al. (2016) define several emotions as precedents of anti-brand behaviour:

- Frustration: result of the failure of meeting the consumer's expectations, caused by a rift between a consumer's desired goals and the perceived reality. This is present in other anti-brand behaviours as well and is a crucial antecedent of aggression.
- Anger: mediator between frustration and anger, caused by attribution of blame
- Outrage: caused by combination of anger felt for own loss as well as for other consumers' loss. Mostly present for value based stimuli
- Hatred: desire to harm or hurt the company

Important to note is that Kähr et al. (2016) found that people with a more aggressive personality, are more likely to engage in anti-brand behaviour and CBS.

4.3. Cognitions

In addition to emotions, consumers also experience cognitions. Kähr et al. (2016) define several as antecedents as mediators for different types of anti-brand behaviours and CBS:

- Hostile thoughts: wish to harm the brand
- Perceived identity threat: wrongdoings of the company diminish the consumer's sense of competence and increases their aggression
- Perception of powerlessness: want to restore the power after feeling of no possible influence in the brand-relationship
- Perception of betrayal: company acted outside of normative behaviour

4.4. Perception of and interactions with the company

The perception of the consumer of the company and its interactions with it moderate the likeliness of engaging in CBS, rather than other types of anti-brand behaviour. The following factors increase it (Kähr et al., 2016):

- Low willingness to change: belief that there is no way of influence the company's actions
- Low responsiveness: belief that aggression is the only way to get a reaction
- Number of bad interactions, including recovery processes and responses to other forms of anti-brand behaviour: if unsatisfactory, the consumer can resort to CBS
- High rumination: refers to continuous reappraisal a consumer does during the lag time between wrongdoing and company's reaction. This continuously increases their negative perception

4.5. Relationship quality

Similar to customer retaliation and NWOM, the relationship quality also plays a role for CBS:

- ‘Love becomes hate’ for value based stimuli: the wrongdoing poses a threat to the consumer’s self-worth. In case of high identification with the brand, it increases their likeliness to engage in CBS (Kähr et al., 2016). Self-identification entails how a consumer judges their belonging to the brand (Kähr, 2017).
- ‘Love is blind’ for performance based stimuli: the consumers feel sympathy and judge the brand less harshly (Kähr et al., 2016). They are less willing to accept negative information about the brand (Rodrigues et al., 2019)

5. *Effectiveness of consumer brand sabotage*

Kähr et al. (2016) state that the risk of damage of CBS is higher than that in the case of other forms of anti-brand behaviour. Perpetrators of CBS are more focused on harming the brand. Additionally, with technological advances, consumers can cause a lot of damage with relatively little effort. Next, they found that consumers wanting to hurt the brand put in more effort. The combination of these three factors make CBS more dangerous than other forms of anti-brand behaviour (Kähr et al., 2019). Given that there are limited sources on CBS, no studies exist on its effectiveness.

5.1. Observing consumers

Nyffenegger, Kähr, Krohmer and Hoyer (2018) state that the effect of CBS is the alienation of other, existing consumers and preventing potential consumers to choose the brand. The brand image is impacted and other consumers’ purchase intentions are altered.

An observing consumer of CBS will have different moderators which will impact their reaction to the CBS, namely to diminish their purchase intention and harm their perception of the brand’s image (Kähr, 2017). Additionally, they might start engaging in NWOM to vent their negative emotions. These negative emotions are a result of the information learned from the CBS, as for example an empathic reaction. This means that the CBS will reach more people than only from the perpetrator of the CBS. Two factors influence their brand attitude and purchase intentions:

- Perceived betrayal: caused by perception of behaviour out of normative context from the brand communicated by brand saboteurs. This effect is reinforced in case of high brand trust.
- Threat to self-identity: caused by communication of brand saboteurs. This effect is reinforced if they identify more strongly with the brand.

5.2. Related companies

An additional study by Nyffenegger et al. (2019) found that consumer brand sabotage goes further than simply harming the focal brand. Retailers carrying the targeted brand also suffer from an increasingly negative perception by consumers. Delisting the brand however can

mitigate this negative attitude. This means that for targeted brands, other than having a bad image, they might also lose their selling channels.

6. *Conclusion*

The only real, found sources on CBS are by the authors who introduced the concept. Daskin and Kasim (2016) were the only authors to give an alternative definition for CBS. Given that they call CBS a synonym for dysfunctional behaviour rather than a separate concept within it, means we will focus on Kähr et al.'s definition to incorporate findings from the previous sections.

These authors are the main academics to identify characteristics and moderators for the relationship between a company's perceived wrongdoing. We will therefore follow their graphic summary of the different aspects of this relationship. It can be found in appendix 1 (p. 8).

However, the difficulty arises when looking at the classification of CBS among other types of anti-brand behaviour. The definition of CBS differs from those of boycott, NWOM and brand avoidance in the sense that it does not describe a type of behaviour. It defines some characteristics, but it mainly focuses on the objective. The definitions of the other three phenomena in contrast do not include a specific objective. For example, the definition of boycotting includes 'to achieve certain objectives', yet those objectives are not specified. Those definitions focus instead of the specific type of behaviour the phenomenon entails.

Among the different objectives of the previously mentioned phenomena, the main distinction was between instrumental objectives and non-instrumental objectives. The instrumental objectives were wanting to help the company change or altruistically wanting to warn other consumers. The non-instrumental objectives mainly concerned avoiding cognitive dissonance, conserve the self-concept or venting negative emotions.

Kähr et al.'s study was based on qualitative interviews. However, they already divided the respondents into categories of CBS or other phenomena to compare the results. As a result, they already divided the committers of anti-brand behaviour into the two categories based on their own definition. As a result, they defined other types of anti-brand behaviour never to have the objective of harming the brand. They found for example that perceived identity threat was more present in CBS than the other forms of anti-brand behaviour. However, this is linked to the goal of wanting to harm a brand. By already separating for example two consumers spreading NWOM based on their motivation, they confirmed that CBS concerns a bigger identity threat than NWOM. However, we could argue that both engaged in NWOM. The bigger identity threat causes the desire to harm the brand. The distinction made between CBS and NWOM is based on the authors' definition of NWOM. However, as mentioned before, these other phenomena do not have specifications of their objective. Without the inclusion of

the objective of harming the company, NWOM and performed boycotts can be considered as CBS. They can entail actual behaviour that was planned, that can be done by both customers and non-customers. Both NWOM and calling for a boycott can cause the breaking of relationships with other potential customers.

Furthermore, the authors classify all behaviour of customers based on service failure as customer retaliation. All behaviour with the motive to the wish to harm the brand is excluded. However, the definition found above for customer retaliation includes the clear intention to hurt and punish the brand. In addition, those authors found NWOM and boycotts with the wish to harm the brand. In addition, we defined it as intentional behaviour. Therefore, the only difference we find between customer retaliation and consumer brand sabotage is that the concept of consumer brand sabotage is broader. CBS can concern committed both by customers and non-customers, while customer retaliation mainly is done by customers. In addition, CBS concerns both performance based and value based stimuli, while customer retaliation only concerns performance based stimuli. Finally, customer retaliation does not always entail actual behaviour. Brand avoidance does not entail any actions taken, but is considered as customer retaliation. Figure 6 summarizes our classification of CBS among other concepts in case of a service failure. The horizontal axis represents all other goals left and the goal to harm the brand on the right. The vertical axis represents actual actions undertaken or not. This graph is based on all literature considered in chapters 1-6. In case of egregious act, customer retaliation can simply be dropped from the graph.

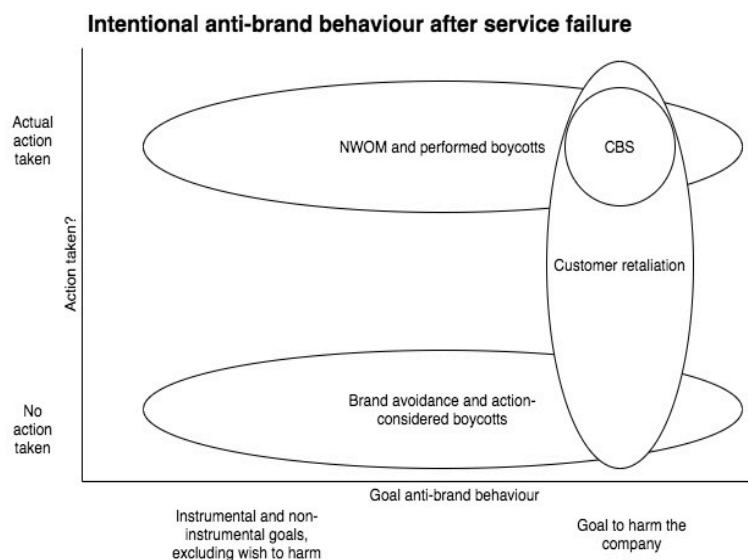


Figure 6: classification intentional anti-brand behaviour after service failure (source: see chapter 6)

We conclude that the findings for CBS concerning motivations, objectives and moderators concern and influence all intentional, actual behaviour that has the main motive to harm the brand.

Chapter 7: Typology Anti-Brand Behaviour

The first part of this work focused on comparing literature on five different phenomena within indirect anti-brand behaviour. We studied five phenomena: boycotts, NWOM, brand avoidance, customer retaliation and consumer brand sabotage separately and concluded each chapter with a diagram to summarize the most important factors influencing them. We found that boycotts, NWOM and brand avoidance are mainly defined by the form they take, while customer retaliation and NWOM are mainly defined by their objective. As a result, we want to explore both classifications and therefore propose two typologies in subsection 1 and 2 based on chapters 2-6. These two typologies are afterwards summarized in subsection 3. All diagrams can be found in appendix 2 (pp 10-14).

1. *Typology based on form*

Of the five studied phenomena, three precisely describe what the behaviour entails, namely boycotts, NWOM and brand avoidance. The two main types of behaviour within these three phenomena are withholding purchase and spreading negative information. Withholding purchase is brand avoidance. If a consumer withholds their purchase after a call of a sponsor for boycotting and a collective action, then it is boycotting. Spreading negative information can either be to call a boycott or spreading NWOM. Figure 7.1 summarizes this in a diagram.

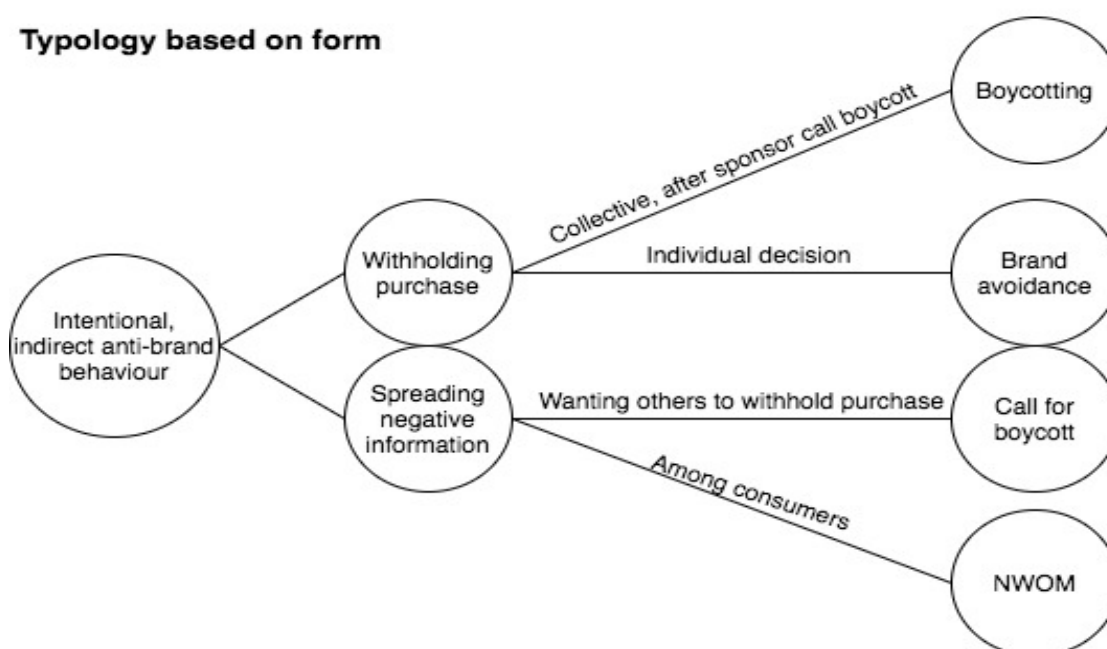


Figure 7.1. *Typology based on form* (sources: see chapters 1-6)

We acknowledge that other types of action are possible, such as complaining to third parties, organizing protest or petitions, ... However, due to the limited nature of this work, we decided to focus on these types of behaviour.

2. Typology based on objectives

Hirschman proposed a first classification of behaviour based on objectives after dissatisfaction, split into wanting to change the cause of dissatisfaction or simply leaving the relationship. Huefner and Hunt (2000) extended this to include the objective of wanting to harm the brand. However, throughout chapters 2 to 6, we found many more objectives. As a result, we argue an extension of the model is needed. We therefore propose the following classification.

In non-instrumental objectives, we identify four main categories: working on the self-concept, venting negative emotions, restoring the equity and wanting to harm the brand. Within working on the self-concept there are two main categories, namely wanting to attain a reference group or avoid an avoidance group, and avoiding cognitive dissonance. These different objectives are non-exclusive. Figure 7.2 summarizes this in a diagram.

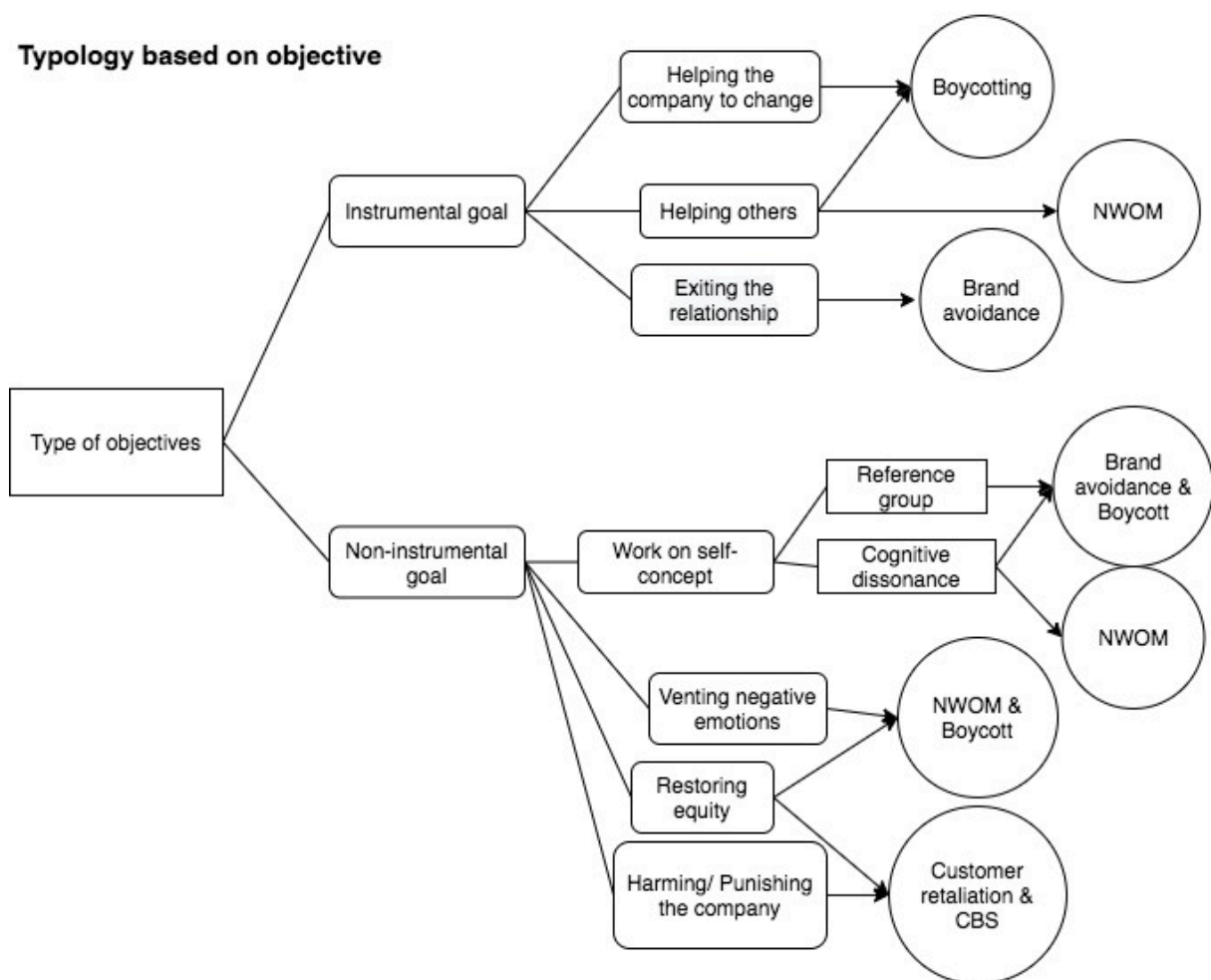


Figure 7.2. Typology based on objective (source: see chapters 1-6)

As mentioned before, CBS and customer retaliation can be in the form of a boycott or NWOM, or other forms. They mainly refer to intentional behaviour that has the main objective of hurting the brand. As mentioned before, the desire to harm a brand can form after multiple rounds of unsuccessful recovery processes. In addition, if previous committed anti-brand behaviour with other objectives were not satisfying, the consumer can develop the willingness to harm the brand.

3. Summarizing the two typologies based on form and objective

Based on the typologies on form and objective, we wondered if any interesting findings would occur when comparing the two. We therefore combined both in one diagram. Based on the typology on form, we extract the dimension of type of behaviour, split into withholding purchase and spreading negative information. These two are presented on the vertical axis. Based on the typology on objective, we extract the dimension of type of objective, split into instrumental and non-instrumental goals. These two are presented on the horizontal axis. We then placed all the different forms of objectives based on the anti-brand behaviour identified in figure 7.2. corresponding to their form of anti-brand behaviour found in figure 7.1. in the graph to see if any patterns would emerge. Figure 7.3. visualises this graph.

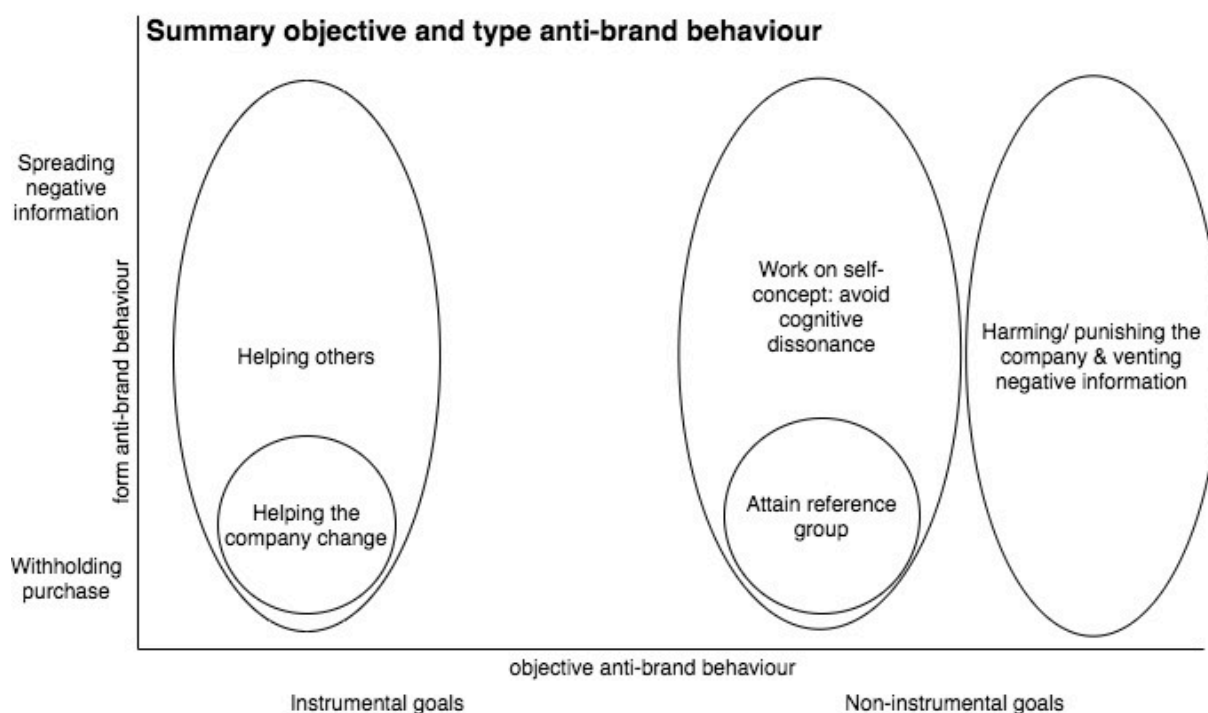


Figure 7.3. Summary objective and type anti-brand behaviour (source: chapter 1-7)

Interestingly, we find that almost all goals can lead to both spreading negative information and withholding purchase. Only helping the company change and attaining a reference group are unique to withholding purchase. After the perception of a wrongdoing of a company, the consumer identifies their objective. Following this graph, they can in most cases then choose among boycotting, NWOM or brand avoidance. How then does a consumer choose among the different concepts? We believe this is the effect of the moderators.

Consequently, we tried to identify if certain moderators urged consumers to choose a certain type of behaviour. However, we did not manage to find any relevant literature on this. As a result, we tried to theorize what could influence these decisions, based on the previous findings from chapters 2-6. In appendix 2 (pp 12-14), we included the decision between NWOM and brand avoidance after a service failure and between NWOM and boycotting after an egregious act.

Part 2: Dealing with Anti-Brand Behaviour

Chapter 1: Methodology and research question

1. Research question

After having explored different forms of indirect anti-brand behaviour, we found that they can have severe impacts on the company. The impact is based on two aspects:

- The direct consequences of the anti-brand behaviour. For example, consumers withholding purchase and causing a loss in profits or NWOM affecting a company's reputation
- The indirect consequences of anti-brand behaviour: by engaging in this behaviour, the dissatisfied consumers generate negative publicity about the company. This negative publicity affects observing consumers, who then can change their purchasing behaviour or even engage in anti-brand behaviour themselves.

The question then rises how companies can try to deal with anti-brand behaviour. The rest of this work deals with this question. As a result, the research question of this thesis is identified:

How can companies manage anti-brand behaviour?

2. Methodology

In order to answer this question, we decided to conduct qualitative research to find the answer. We want to explore what response strategies exist, when which one can be applied and how the right strategy can be chosen for managing anti-brand behaviour. However, finding and testing the different strategies for all these types of behaviour is out of the scope of this work. Therefore, we can base our research on existing research.

A lot of research exists on different types of response strategies. However, these studies are often conducted in clinical settings on students or are simply theories that have not been tested (e.g. Klein et al., 2004; Lee & Chung, 2012; Xia, 2013). Do these strategies accurately describe what needs to be done to manage anti-brand behaviour and are they relevant?

To confirm existing literature, we based our research on the method proposed by Pearse (2019). Pearse (2019) proposes studying literature, identifying the most important themes, and then conducting interviews based on these themes to test the literature's applicability to real life by analysing the results using deductive thematic analysis. We adapted his method in this work.

2.1. Identify the themes to abord in interviews

In order to find the necessary themes to find the questions to ask during our interviews, we first had to find what areas of literature to look in. Based on the literature review conducted in part 1, we identified three categories of themes in which we could conduct further literary research.

- Negative publicity: anti-brand behaviour generates negative publicity. The effect of it on bystanders is one of the most important consequences of anti-brand behaviour. In addition, negative publicity generated by other issues can increase consumers' likeliness of engaging in anti-brand behaviour: how can companies manage negative publicity?
- Reputation: the moderators identified in part 1 have proven to be important in consumers' decision to engage in anti-brand behaviour. Two important moderators that companies can influence are its relationship with consumers and its reputation. Given the highly contested role of the brand relationship, we decided to focus on reputation: how can a company manage its reputation to moderate anti-brand behaviour?
- Anti-brand behaviour: in general, what can companies do when anti-brand behaviour occurs?

Chapters 2-4 detail the found literature. Each subsection details a theme and what it entails. Only the anti-brand behaviours mentioned in subsection 3 of chapter 4 were not used as a theme, which is explained in that chapter.

Based on these themes, we derived questions and conducted interviews. More details on the method used for the interviews, can be found in part 3.

2.2. Analysing the results using deductive thematic analysis

To analyse the qualitative data, we used deductive thematic analysis, following the methods described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill. According to Saunders et al. (2016), thematical analysis is useful for the following reasons:

- It allows for exploring different interpretations and approaches of different phenomena
- It allows to structure findings
- It allows the findings to be easily understood by others
- It is a relatively simple analytical technique compared to other forms of qualitative analysis

In short, thematical analysis entails encoding the data found in qualitative studies.

Following Pearson's (2019) method, these codes were determined in literature to be able to compare literature to the insights of the interviews. As a result, the thematic analysis is deductive. The results of these findings can be found in part 3.

Chapter 2: Negative publicity

Negative publicity is defined by Sherrel and Reidenbach as: *the noncompensated dissemination of potentially damaging information by presenting disparaging news about a product, service, business unit, or individual in print or broadcast media or by word of mouth* (cited in Chung & Jiang, 2017, p. 268).

In general, different types and classifications of strategies are proposed, mostly borrowed from crisis communication. The following section will go over the most common ones. These strategies are not mutually exclusive and can be used in combination. The target audience is not only existing customers, but stakeholders in general (Hunter et al., 2008; Klein et al., 2004).

1. Preparation for negative publicity

Before negative publicity occurs, companies can devise a plan for when it happens. Companies that prepare are more effective in dealing with issues than those that do not. They can respond more effectively and swiftly (Barton, 1990; Smith, 1990; Thomas et al., 2012). Preparedness consists of the following elements:

- Detect early warning signs of negative publicity, for example by tracking social media (Balaji et al., 2016; McGriff, 2012)
- Define what needs to be addressed (Balaji et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2012).
- Set guidelines for the necessary response strategy (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012)

2. Accommodative vs Defensive strategy

2.1. Definition accommodative and defensive strategy

An accommodative strategy entails the company accepting responsibility through an internal explanation (Chang et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010; Xia, 2013). This can be an apology, where the company accepts responsibility and asks for forgiveness (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). This means the company assigns the fault to itself (Lee & Cranage, 2014). A level of the accommodation strategy can range higher than simply offering an apology. It can go as far as offering some form of compensation or corrective action (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017).

A defensive strategy entails the company trying to offer an external explanation. The blame of the dissatisfaction is put on an external cause, outside of the company (Lee & Cranage, 2014). The company tries to disprove statements made about them. This can range from trivializing the issue, denying responsibility, blaming others to even attacking the consumers accusing the brand and questioning their reliability (Hearit, 1994; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Xia, 2013). It can even go as far as pursuing legal action to clear a brand's name (Thomas et al., 2012).

2.2. Advantages and disadvantages accommodative vs defensive strategy

An accommodative strategy means a company shows itself to be vulnerable. As a result, it appears to be sincerer and create a higher feeling of trust for the company (Xia, 2013). It can even cause observers of the interaction to forgive the actions of the company and assign the blame elsewhere (Chang et al., 2015). In addition, by engaging in the debate, the company creates positive information about themselves (Thomas et al., 2012).

However, Xia (2013) contests this and states the company opens itself up to more responsibility. Weitzl and Hutzinger (2017) add that the level of accommodation is important. A high accommodation strategy can also be seen as an admission of guilt and unnecessarily shift the blame to the company. This can have a detrimental effect on the brand image (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Xia, 2013). As a result, the purchase intentions will lower. By admitting to its mistakes, a company also can be seen as weaker and consumers can try to exploit this (Xia, 2013).

A defensive strategy allows a company to reclaim the narrative. It can counter any negative information and defend itself. By offering an external explanation, the blame can be shifted to outside of the organisation. As a result, its image does not suffer as much. However, it can make the company seem to try and shift the blame away, rather than accepting it. It comes across as insincere and can disappoint observers (Lee & Carnage, 2014). In addition, it can be seen as disrespectful (Xia, 2013). Observers can deem it inappropriate (Dean, 2004; Xia, 2013). As a result, it can further increase the negative perception for the people observing the interaction (Lee & Song, 2010; Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009). In the case of legal action, it can also create a preference for the sued party. This can then create a further negative perception of the company. It also does not ensure a better perception, as it can only be a legal clearing (Thomas et al., 2012).

2.3. Choice between accommodative and defensive strategy

Some authors argue that an accommodative strategy is always preferable (Chang et al., 2015; Coombes & Holladay, 2008; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). Others argue that in the case of false negative publicity, companies should reclaim the narrative and defend themselves (Knudsen et al., 2008). However, many others argue that it depends on the blame and controllability attribution (Chang et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010):

- The blame is assigned to the company: an accommodative strategy is advisable to lessen the impact of the negative publicity.
- The blame is not yet assigned or assigned to an external source, a defensive strategy is advisable

Other than the blame attribution, credibility was found to be an important moderator for the effectiveness of both strategies. If the company is more credible, the favourable outcome on observers is more likely (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017).

Again, the role of relationship quality is contested. Xia (2013) found that a higher relationship quality buffers the inappropriateness of a defensive strategy. Dean (2004) on the other hand found that positive feelings towards a company lead to a harsher judgement of the company's recovery strategy. As mentioned before, Ahluwalia et al. (2000) explains this difference with the difference in commitment in high quality relationships. In case of low commitment, counterarguing can be effective. In addition, the addition of vulnerability in an accommodative strategy is mainly advantageous in a strong brand relationship. It can even help to build a strong relationship (Xia, 2013).

3. Proactive vs Reactive Strategy

3.1. Definition proactive and reactive strategy

In general, proactive or reactive refers to the timing of the response. If a company comes out with information themselves rather than waiting for it to come out, it is proactive. If they however solely react to information with their own perspective, it is reactive (Hearit, 1994).

3.2. Advantages and disadvantages proactive and reactive strategy

Communicating proactively allows companies to guide the direction and framing of the discourse (Hearit, 1994; Hunter et al., 2008). In addition, it makes the company look more credible. Credibility is important, as it increases the effectiveness of the strategy (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). However, waiting can allow the company to judge the severity of the situation. It can see how far the negative information reaches, and more importantly who it reaches. It allows the company to avoid bringing too much attention to the issue (Hearit, 1994). In addition, the company can use the lag time to collect information and plan its response (Thomas et al., 2012)

3.3. Choice between proactive and reactive strategy

Sometimes, companies do not have a choice. The negative publicity can be completely unexpected (Hearit, 1984). This is especially in the case of anti-brand behaviour. Companies are not always aware of the causes of the anti-brand behaviour. As a result, they cannot spread information on what caused the dissatisfaction before the consumers signal their dissatisfaction.

4. No reaction

No reaction entails not giving any response at all, or taking no real action (Lee & Song, 2010; Thomas et al., 2012). This strategy is most often adopted when companies try to distance themselves from the negative publicity. It hopes the tumult will die down on its own. Consumers have a short attention span. Finally, the company can think that responding will lead to a more negative reaction than the negative publicity on its own (Lee & Song, 2010; Thomas et al., 2012). However, not reacting means not providing any counter action to the

negative information. As a result, the negative information could more severely damage the brand image for observers (Lee & Song, 2010; Thomas et al., 2012).

5. *Spreading information*

When negative publicity about a company is being spread, companies can opt to spread information themselves. This does not only consist of information concerning the issue at hand.

5.1. Transparency

Spreading half-truths or misinformation can have detrimental effects on a company's credibility and consequently its reputation. Therefore, Hunter, Le Menestrel and de Bettignies (2008) propose to be as transparent as possible to take control of the situation, even if the information is negative.

According to Pagan however (1986), a company has four worries when being open. First, the legal department might oppose openness out of fear of legal damages. Second, marketing might believe that openness will publicize secrets to competitors. Third, financial executives might believe openness opens the company up to accepting responsibility, meaning financial compensation will be needed. Finally, openness can increase the risk of the company appearing to be risk and naïve. This leads to the possibility of being betrayed or taken advantage of.

5.2. Negative information competitors

Companies can spread negative information about a comparable competitor. The information should immediately set a direction regarding the blame and controllability. This technique is comparable to a smear campaign. It is meant to divert the attention (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009).

Ahluwalia et al. (2002) highlight that this is especially useful in the case of consumers with high commitment to the company. It shows that the company is not very different from its competitors. It reinforces the assimilation bias.

5.3. Spreading positive information

Companies can try to spread positive information about themselves, unrelated to the negative publicity. It can serve as a reminder of the good reputation of the brand and diffuse the situation. (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009).

An example of this is spreading proof of corporate social responsible (CSR) efforts. It helps to increase the favourable framing of the company. For this to be effective however, the CSR's efforts need to seem genuine and credible (Chung & Jiang, 2017). Section 2.2.1. details some more findings on CSR.

Chapter 3: Reputation Management

A detailed overview of what a reputation entails is given in appendix 3 (pp15-16). In general, as mentioned in the introduction, it refers to a value judgement of the consumer of the company, therefore not objective. It can be favourable or unfavourable. It is formed by the company's performance (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

1. Reputation Management

1.1. Place of reputation management in organization

Considerations of reputation management are mainly not found in a company's primary activities. Davies and Miles (1998) found that reputation management that advertising and public relations are seen as the major activities in reputation management. Furthermore, Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest (2001) therefore define reputation management as a subcategory of public relations. Public relations are defined as corporate communication.

1.2. Core value selection and communications

It is important for a company to choose the core values it wants to focus on. Next, it should try building a high perception of those (Davies & Miles, 1998). For example, companies can increase their visibility in the media and try to communicate their values and identity through advertising (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). These could also be reflected in the company's product, service, or general design (Davies & Miles, 1998). Another example is devising a way to encourage employees to communicate the company's identity through their behaviour. They can then serve as protection and enhancement of the brand (Gotsi & Wilson, 2011).

1.3. Measurement of reputation

An important part of reputation management is the measurement of the reputation. A company needs to collect continuous feedback from its stakeholders on its image, reputation and values. This includes informal feedback, as well as formal feedback organized on a consistent basis. If the image of the company is not what the firm was trying to convey, the company can decide changes need to be made. These changes can be either in communication or behaviour. Additionally, information on the reputation should guide the company's policies and behaviour (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

1.4. Consistent good behaviour and accompanying communication

However, according to Davies and Miles (1998), honesty, integrity and trustworthiness are crucial to a company's reputation. These factors are influenced by the company's behaviour and communication. Hutton et al. (2001) further state that therefore a reputation cannot be directly managed. Investing in corporate communication only has a small correlation with the perception of the reputation. Communication can only be meaningful when public relations have the right material to work with. Consequently, reputation is created through actions. These can then be communicated and on the long term improve a company's reputation

2. Corporate social responsibility

2.1. Growing importance CSR

David et al. define corporate social responsibility (CSR) as: *corporations' citizenship function with function with ethical, moral and social obligations for the mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics* (cited in Chung & Jiang, 2017, p. 268).

Palazzo and Scherer (2006) state that a company's operations are depended on its corporate legitimacy. They define this as the appropriate role a company plays in society, based on norms values and expectations. If a company is judged to have low legitimacy, stakeholders will be reluctant to deal with it. The company will seem to not adhere to social rules. There are two tangible aspects in legitimacy. On the one hand the financial and economic and on the other hand the moral aspect. The balance between these aspects depends on the social context. Over the past years, the role of moral legitimacy, namely the socially responsible behaviour, has gained in importance. As a result, engaging in CSR has gained importance. Hawn & Ioannou (2016) confirm the growing pressure from stakeholders to increase CSR efforts.

2.2. Positive effects CSR

A positive perception of a company's CSR efforts results in a perception of social responsibility, which has several advantages:

- Consumers' attitudes towards the company improves, creating goodwill (Chung & Jiang, 2017).
- A company's reputation and consequently its performance improve (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).
- Consumers are found to even engage in PWOM regarding CSR efforts (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).
- Consumers are more resistant to negative publicity about the company (Eisingerich et al., 2011), reducing anti-brand behaviour (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990)

2.3. Risk of perception of greenwashing

The consumers can however be sceptical of the CSR motives of the company and deem it to be greenwashing. Greenwashing is when stakeholders believe companies solely engage in CSR communication to gain a positive perception by their audience (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Hawn & Ioannou, 2016). This will in turn impact their perception of the CSR efforts of the company. In turn, this also influences their reaction to it (Chung & Jiang, 2017).

It is therefore important for companies to consider the following factors when designing their CSR efforts and the communication surrounding it:

- general fit of the CSR efforts and the company:
 - CSR efforts highly related to the company's activities, will heighten perception of appropriateness by the consumer. It is easier to accept as fitting

- A low fit will put into question a firm's sincerity and cause negative evaluations of the CSR efforts (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Chung & Jiang, 2017).
- The fit also relates to the reputation of the company. If it is negative, the CSR efforts will seem less sincere (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004)
- CSR history: If the company is known to have engaged in CSR for a longer time, it will lead to a more positive evaluation. A longer history gives a perception of a higher commitment (Chung & Jiang, 2017).
- Gap between CSR and communication surrounding it: Hawn and Ioannou (2016) If the communication efforts are larger than the actual efforts, stakeholders will deem the company to engage in greenwashing. If the reverse is true, companies do not fully tap into the advantages of the CSR and therefore do not reach their actual market value. In general, most firms undercommunicate about their CSR efforts, against popular belief about greenwashing. Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) confirm that a significant number of consumers are unaware about a company's CSR efforts.

3. *Proactive marketing*

Proactive marketing consists of spreading positive information on a company and its products. It is not necessarily a response to negative information. It is a means of customer acquisition and brand image creation. Literature proposes three proactive marketing techniques:

- Creating an online presence based on positive information (Xia, 2013). This is important in case of a crisis. When a consumer searches the brand's or company's name online, the first results should be from the brand or company, rather than the negative publicity (McGriff, 2012).
- Maintaining good relationships with all stakeholders as conflict prevention. Stakeholders include consumers, competitors, consumer interest groups, employees, suppliers, ... are taking over the conversation about the brand. In addition, the trust for traditional media is diminishing. Given that stakeholders are less limited by fact checking and the representation of objective facts, they can pose a severe threat.
- Setting up online brand communities: consumers with good relationships help the brand to spread a positive message. In case of negative publicity, they can act as defenders of the brand (McGriff, 2012; Thomas et al., 2012). This has several advantages, but also disadvantages:
 - It is an effective use brand's resources (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017)
 - The word of these brand advocates is seen as more credible and authentic (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017)
 - The company seems more transparent for the brand advocates (Thomas et al., 2012)
 - Control is left in the consumers' hands, if the company displeases them they can use their voice of authority given by the company to harm the company's reputation (Thomas et al., 2012).

Chapter 4: Handling Anti-Brand Behaviour

Anti-brand behaviour could simply be prevented. For example, bad handling of a crisis can result in a negative perception of consumers and therefore cause anti-brand behaviour. Appendix 4 (pp 17-20) gives an overview of crisis communication. However, we mainly focus on handling anti-brand behaviour after it has already occurred as a result of the limited scope of this work.

1. *Handling Social Media and Negative Publicity*

As mentioned in the introduction, anti-brand behaviour causes negative publicity. In addition to the definition containing NWOM, Yuksel and Mryteza (2009) and Lee and Song (2010) propose that literature on negative publicity can also be applied to boycotts. Information spread about egregious acts is similar to negative publicity. As a result, studying negative publicity on social media has implications for all anti-brand behaviour.

As mentioned before, social media plays an important role in the spreading of various forms of anti-brand behaviour and therefore of negative publicity. It therefore also holds an opportunity for companies. Before, the spreading of negative publicity mostly happened in private spheres. More specifically, NWOM before was unobservable for companies. They had little to no opportunities to know what consumers were saying it or to respond to it. Social media and the Internet have allowed companies to observe and enter private conversations. However, social media have also increased the consumers' power.

The next section first describes social media and its threats. Next, different strategies to deal with negative publicity on social media are described by studying literature on eNWOM.

1.1. Definition and Threats

Social media can be defined as *activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and options using conversational media* (Safko & Brake, cited in Thomas et al., 2012, p.88). On the technical side, it concerns: *a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content* (Kaplan & Haenlein, cited in Xia, 2013, p.73).

Social media represents a challenge, as companies have little to no control over what is being shared about them online. Where before they had control over the communication spread about their brands, they are now but a player on a stage where everyone has a voice. Next, where marketing was before a one-way form of communication, social media and the Internet have made it a two-sided conversation. In addition, what before was an interaction between a limited number of consumers and a company, can now be observed by a multitude of people through social media (Balaji et al., 2016; Thomas et al, 2012; Xia, 2013).

Furthermore, social media have increased a consumer's and stakeholders' power. Where before they had to accept information, they can now enter the debate and choose what information they receive. Costs of participating in the debate have been reduced. In addition, consumers find information shared by other consumers more reliable and credible. This means that they will believe other consumers' experiences, rather than the company's communication. However, stakeholders are less likely by having to fact check and represent objective facts than traditional media. As a result of these different factors, stakeholders need to be incorporated more actively in the marketing and communication strategy, rather than being passive receivers. Companies need to become skilled at influencing other people's information, rather than diffusing it themselves (Balaji et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2012; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017).

1.2. Strategies for eNWOM

Companies are often reluctant to respond to online negative discourse of their brand. Responding can draw more attention to the issue, escalating the issue. However, companies should be aware of the power social media holds (Thomas et al., 2012).

The spreading of online, brand-related negative publicity can take place on brand-generated platforms, such as the company website, or on consumer-generated platforms, such as social media websites like Facebook, ... (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

When the handling of the negative publicity happens in a public space, for example on social media, consumers observing will also be affected by the response strategy. As a result, a response strategy is necessary to soothe the spreader of negative publicity, prevent detrimental effects on observers and preserve the company's reputation (Balaji et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010; Lee & Carnegie, 2014; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Xia, 2013).

Companies need to have a strategy for handling eNWOM on social media. They need to set guidelines on how to handle negative information before it occurs. Companies should invest in tracking comments made in social media, to be able to respond in a timely manner (Balaji et al., 2016). A timely response can prevent other consumers joining in attacking the brand. It is also needed to protect and improve the brand's image (Lee & Song, 2010; Lee & Carnegie, 2014).

Given the definition proposed earlier for eNWOM, we will refer to online, brand-related negative publicity as eNWOM. The handling of eNWOM online is called webcare (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017).

1.2.1. Accommodative vs defensive strategy

As mentioned before, the choice between an accommodative or a defensive strategy depends on the blame attribution. The blame attribution depends according to Lee and Cranage (2014) to the consensus of the WOM and information online. As mentioned before, high consensus leads to a higher attribution of blame. An accommodative strategy is advisable. In case of a low consensus, using a defensive strategy can influence the consumer to shift the blame to an external source.

In addition, anti-brand behaviour is often used as a way of restoring equity in the consumer-brand relationship. Denying consumers their justification for engaging in this kind of behaviour, can cause further enragement (Lee & Song, 2010).

1.2.2. Proactive vs reactive strategy

Given that most eNWOM comes unexpected for the company, the classification of the two is different than the one mentioned before.

A proactive strategy in eNWOM entails responding to negative comments that do not necessarily warrant a response. For example, a consumer makes a tweet complaining about a company without addressing it and the company responds. A reactive strategy is then only addressing the comments demanding a response (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

A proactive response can be seen as pushy. In addition, Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) found that reactive responses are found to have a higher perception of a human voice. A human voice consists of a more natural style of communication than typical corporate communication. It is better received. The opposite creates the perception of the company solely engaging in the conversation for personal benefit and profit.

According to Xia (2013) however, a proactive strategy corresponds to pre-emptively spreading positive information. It corresponds to the proactive marketing mentioned in the section on reputation management.

1.2.3. No reaction

A company can always opt not to respond to negative comments. Some are not worth engaging with, as they are not genuine. Some consumers engage in eNWOM simply for the pleasure of it. They cannot be dissuaded and will never be satisfied. In addition, the attention span online is very short. Every day, a plethora of information about different subject is shared (Thomas et al., 2012).

However, social media has strong algorithms. These increase the likelihood that negative information will find its targeted audience. In addition, not responding can make the company seem to dismiss their consumers' concerns (Thomas et al., 2012).

A no reaction for eNWOM can also be to simply divert the interaction to a private channel (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). This technique is however only aimed at the spreader of eNWOM. The bystanders can still interpret this as a dismissal of their worries.

Weitzl and Hutzinger (2017) state that an accommodative response is better than no response for two factors for bystanders. First, it triggers more positive outcomes, such as increasing purchasing intention. Second, it mitigates negative outcomes, such as a bad perception of the brand or NWOM. Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) go even further and state that any webcare intervention is better than no response.

Another form of not directly responding is to try to censor the eNWOM. Censoring is the removal or suppression of unwanted information. This tactic is employed to protect the brand image. However, it is often ineffective since the Internet is difficult to control. In addition, it can make the brand seem inauthentic and aggressive (Thomas et al., 2012).

2. Handling Boycotts

As mentioned previously, dealing with negative publicity is a large part of dealing with a boycott. First, it helps in reducing consumers' likelihood to participate. Second, it reduces the impact of the boycott on other consumers. The next section therefore focuses more specifically how to deal with boycotters.

2.1. Steps for dealing with a non-surrogate boycott

2.1.1. Detecting and assessing the boycott

- Detect early warning signs of boycotts (Davidson, 1995; Pagan, 1986), for example be done through tracking tools of social media (McGriff, 2012).
- After boycott detection: companies need to assess the size of the boycott.
- Assess boycott's pressure on reputation, based on size (Garrett, 1987)
- Listen to consumers: economic considerations cannot overshadow ethical concerns. The boycotters may express a valuable criticism. (Klein et al., 2004)
- Assessment of grievences to choose the right strategy (Davidson, 1995, Pagan, 1986).
 - Assess severity of egregious act (Klein et al., 2004)
 - Assess link between egregiousness and boycott: is it a instrumental or non-instrumental boycott (Klein et al., 2004)

2.1.2. Strategy for boycotts

Klein et al. (2004) propose that based on the severity, companies need to decide between changing the opposed practices or communicate the reasons behind the practice. Not all boycotts are worth engaging with (Davidson, 1995).

Garrett (1987) adds that a firm should assess how opposed it is to changing its policies. If the severity is low and the firm is highly opposed to changing, it should not make any changes. Yet if the pressure is high and the firm is willing to change, changing is the advisable strategy. The most difficult situation is when both the pressure and the opposition to changing are high. Garrett (1987) then proposes the firm should counterattack and represent its own perspective. However, as mentioned before, a defensive strategy has its downsides.

Hunter et al. (2008) proposes that the company needs to highlight the inutility of engaging in a boycott. Klein et al. (2004) confirm this for instrumental boycotts. However, as mentioned before, denying those engaging in anti-brand behaviour their justification for engaging in this behaviour can further enrage them. Kähr et al. (2016) even went as far as to say it could provoke them to become more aggressive and act out in CBS.

If the company decides to change, it can hold a competitive advantage. First, it can turn boycotters into brand advocates. Second, it can put them ahead of the market, especially when dealing with ethical issues (Davidson, 1995).

2.1.3. Communication with boycotters

The different strategies listed above for dealing with negative publicity are also valid here (Yuskul & Mryteza, 2009). In general, McGriff (2012) proposes the communication of the company should be continuous throughout the process. It should be consistent across all channels, including local ones. Consumers and boycotters will peruse the Internet to find more information, so it is essential that there are no inconsistencies.

It should be made clear that the company is listening to the boycotters. Denying their voice can further infuriate them and worsen the boycott (Davidson, 1995; Pagan, 1986). McGriff (2012) however highlights that not all boycotters are worth engaging with, following the findings for eNWOM mentioned above.

It can even go as far as asking the boycotters to consult the company about necessary changes. It can help the boycotters accept the proposed solution better (Pagan, 1986). McGriff (2012) goes even further and proposed that the most avid voices in online boycotts should be integrated into the response team. They should contribute to the solution. Communication should also be directed at important stakeholders (Davidson, 1995). They can be used as another form of consultancy (Hunter et al., 2008).

Garrett (1987) however states that the communication cannot include that the boycott was done out of fear. This could increase the chance of future boycotts. Davidson (1995) nonetheless highlights the importance of the firm admitting its mistakes.

Important to note however is that boycotters often start with a mistrust of the company. As a result, the communication of the company can seem less credible. Using a trusted and credible third party can be advisable to spread the message (Neilson, 2010).

2.2. Strategies for dealing with a surrogate boycott

In general, companies that are boycotted but not the committers of the egregious act need to distance themselves from it (Knudsen et al., 2008). For example, if the act was committed by a partner, they can distance themselves from the partner.

Given the prevalence of boycotts as a result of the company's country of origin, companies should have a strategy in place to deal with those (Fazel, 2015). A first possibility is by making donations to the country boycotting the company. A company can also go into dialogue with the local authorities (Knudsen et al., 2008).

Another possibility is to localise the perception of the brand. This can be done by localising the marketing mix. For example, local flavours can be introduced. An often used solution is the introduction of local brand endorsements (Knudsen et al., 2008). Brand endorsements can be celebrities being ambassadors for the brand, sponsoring events, ... The endorsement reinforces the relationship between the consumer and the brand. As a result, it can have a negative effect on the likeliness of boycotting (Fazel, 2015). Brand endorsers are now often influencers with a large following online (McGriff, 2012). However, as mentioned before, using a brand endorser disliked by the consumer can lead to brand avoidance. As a result, the online brand communities proposed in the section on proactive marketing can be a solution. The company can even go as far as introducing a local subsidiary with a different name to completely erase the country of origin (Knudsen et al., 2008).

3. *Handling brand avoidance, brand sabotage and customer retaliation*

3.1. Handling brand avoidance

Brand avoidance entails consumers leaving a brand mostly quietly. It is therefore in the majority of the time not possible to address the leaving consumer directly. As a result, it is more important to treat the causes of brand avoidance. In addition, brand avoidance is often caused by factors out of the company's reach. For example, it can be because of religious reasons or country of origin effects (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). As a result, companies cannot do a lot to minimize brand avoidance.

Since brand avoidance is often caused by negative publicity, the solutions proposed in earlier sections also apply here. In addition, it depends on consumers' perception of the brand. Consequently, the value setting listed in the section on reputation management is especially important. In addition, companies need to test the perception of their reputation (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

3.2. Handling consumer brand sabotage

The literature on how to manage CBS is almost non-existent. Kähr et al. (2016) state that companies can use accommodative or a defensive strategy. However, they also emphasize that brand saboteurs do not want to restore their relationship with the brand. Efforts to save the relationship are futile (Kähr et al., 2016). Therefore, the main focus of handling CBS needs to be to minimize the impact of CBS on observers. Based on the negative publicity spread by the brand saboteurs, they can start avoiding the brand or even start spreading NWOM (Kähr, 2017).

As a result, dealing with CBS further is mostly based on managing negative publicity. It is important to note that brand saboteurs were found to put in significantly more effort than consumers engaging in anti-brand behaviour with other objectives (Kähr et al., 2016). As a result, the proposed techniques above should be monitored even more closely.

3.3. Handling customer retaliation

The literature we found concerning customer retaliation concerns the prevention of customer retaliation. For example, Funches et al. (2009) highlight the importance of companies clearly communicating their recovery procedures to reduce the likeliness of customer retaliation. However, as mentioned before, we limit the scope of this work to handling anti-brand behaviour when it occurs or by preventing it by reputation management or handling negative publicity.

However, we found no relevant literature dealing with the consequences of customer retaliation. Since customer retaliation again causes the spread of negative publicity, we therefore once more argue managing negative publicity partly deals with the negative consequences of customer retaliation

3.4. Conclusion

In conclusion to this section, we state that the identified strategy for handling consumer brand sabotage and customer retaliation will mainly consist in minimizing their impact on observing consumers by managing negative publicity. In addition, since negative publicity is often the cause of brand avoidance. Successfully managing it can prevent consumers avoiding the brand. As a result, we will only consider handling social media negative publicity and boycotts for how to manage anti-brand behaviour.

Part 3: Findings & Conclusions

Chapter 1: Methodology Interviews

1. Themes identified and questions derived

Based on the literature detailed in part 2 chapters 1-3, the following codes were identified per main category:

Negative Publicity	Reputation	Anti-Brand Behaviour
• Preparedness • Accommodative vs defensive • Reactive vs proactive • No reaction • Spread information	• Reputation Management • Proactive Marketing • CSR	• Handling social media negative publicity • Handling boycotts

In order to receive the experts' opinions on the different subject matters, the following questions were derived, following the order of the table above:

- What can a company do to prepare itself against anti-brand behaviour?
- When does a company accept the blame? What are the following steps?
- When do you see the advantage in waiting to respond?
- When do you decide not to respond? Why?
- What kind of information can you spread in case of anti-brand behaviour? How much information do you need to spread?
- What can a company do to improve its reputation?
- Are there any actions a company can take proactively to protect itself from negative consequences on its reputation?
- How do you see the role of sustainability in a company's reputation?
- How do you decide what to respond to on social media? How do you then proceed?
- In case of a boycott, how do you respond?

In addition, we wanted to test if the responses given could be compared to literature. We wanted to test if the experts had the same ideas regarding anti-brand behaviour and reputation as identified in part 1.

The following codes were identified based on chapters 2-7 of part 1 and chapter 1 of part 2:

Anti-Brand Behaviour	Reputation
• Anti-brand behaviour • Cause anti-brand behaviour • Objective anti-brand behaviour	• Reputation

Consequently, we also asked the following questions following the order of the table:

- What types of consumer anti-brand behaviour do you know?
- What are possible causes of anti-brand behaviour?

- What do you think the goals are of people engaging in anti-brand behaviour?
- How do you see the role of reputation in times of crisis or issues?

The results of these findings can be found in appendix 5 (pp 21-28).

2. *Semi-directive interviews*

2.1. Interview structure and technique

Based on the found themes, individual, semi-directive interviews were conducted. We chose this type of interviews since they allow for flexibility and to not put any words into the mouth of the respondent. Yet, they still allow to implement the necessary questions to get back to the themes. We used the different steps proposed by Gavard-Perret et al. (2008):

- 1) Starting phrase: every interview started with an introduction of the subject and the context and the inquiry for the respondent to do the same, as well as the permission to record the interview
- 2) Centring the subject: the first question was asked, namely what different types of anti-brand behaviour the respondent knows. As mentioned, this was to be able to compare literature to the findings in the interviews
- 3) Relaunching phrase: to get more into the details of previously given answers, some additional questions were asked. In addition, themes the previous respondents touched upon were brought up during this phase
- 4) Conclusion: every interview finished with the question if the respondent had any final notes, thanking the respondent and the offering of sending the final product of the thesis

We decided on the number of interviews based on the saturation criteria. Based on literature, we identified themes we wanted to confirm with the interviews. This is the theoretical saturation. In addition, we wanted to hear different views on these themes. This is semantic saturation. After 6 interviews, we concluded that all themes were addressed. The last two interviews mostly confirmed what earlier experts said, meaning the semantic and theoretic saturation was mostly reached.

2.2. Respondents interviews

To find interesting respondents, we decided to contact firms specialized in public relations and crisis communication. Using Google and networks such as LinkedIn, different firms were selected. To ensure that the respondent had the relevant knowledge, for example to have noticed the evolution of social media, only respondents with over 10 years of experience were selected. The interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes over Zoom and Microsoft Teams in Dutch, French and English.

- Baudouin Velge: Director of Interel, a firm specialized in communications and public affairs. Baudouin Velge has experience of over 40 years in communication and public affairs after experience in the public sector, at the National Bank of Belgium and in the private sector, in banking, retail, ... He successfully managed the Kaupthing crisis in

2008 in collaboration with the Luxembourgian government and a published a book about this situation, which landed in the top 10 of French bestsellers in Luxemburg.

- Thierry Debièvre: Director of Operations and Manager Partner at Havas, a firm specialized in Marketing and Communications. Thierry Debièvre has an expertise in strategic communication of over 28 years. He is additionally lectures at the IAE Lille in Marketing and Communication Strategy, where he also finished his master degree in Marketing and Communication. Throughout his career, he has managed encountered multiple issues with anti-brand behaviour as a result of crises or poorly received corporate communication.
- Emmanuel Goedseels: founder of Whyte Corporate Affairs, a firm specialized in corporate communications. He has an expertise of over 30 years in communication and teaches Strategy and Communication at the UCLouvain, where he also received his master in communication. He successfully managed multiple crises for multinational firms, including forms of anti-brand behaviour.
- Julien Radart: Associate at Akkanto, a firm specialized in corporate communications. Julien Radart has experience of over 15 years in crisis communication and management after studies in Law and Public Affairs. He has encountered multiple crises over his career at Akkanto, including boycotts.
- Stavros Papagianneas: founder of StP Communications, a firm specialized in communication, branding and public relations. He has over 25 years of experience in communications and has founded the non-profit Steps 4 Europe, which promotes the EU values to its citizens. He has additionally published two books regarding the EU and how it should be rebranded.
- Alba Xhixha: Director of Communications at Cambre Associates, a firm specialized in strategic communication and public affair consultancy to C-level executives. She has over 13 years of experience in communication, having worked for various communication consultancies in B2C, B2B and B2G and having finished a master degree in International Policies and Security at the ULB and a bachelor of Business Administration at the Utrecht Business School.

2.3. Transcribing and coding interviews

As mentioned above, the interviews were analysed using deductive thematic analysis. In order to be analyse the data, the interviews were fully transcribed rather than summarised. By analysing the full text, we avoid excluding information based on pre-existing ideas and interpretations. The transcriptions can be found in appendix 7 (pp 29-99).

The coding was done using the tool Atlas TI. The themes identified above were selected as codes. The findings per code were then compared to both literature and across the interviews. The next chapter details the various findings.

Chapter 2: Findings interviews

The following chapter details the findings from the interviews per category, following the order given in the table in chapter 1. For every theme, the name is given, what it means and the number of times it was mentioned. Every part starts with typical citations of the theme to give an idea of the insights shared during the interviews. The initials after every quote indicate what interview the quote comes from. Afterwards, the findings that are confirmed by the experts are listed. Then an overview of aspects the experts disagreed with or added. Finally, we summarise the analysis in the form of proposed strategies per category based on literature and interviews as a way to answer to the research question.

All aspects mentioned in the chapters 1-2 of part 2 that were not mentioned are listed in appendix 6 (p. 28). Since the number of interviews was limited, we cannot state that the experts omitting these subjects means they are not relevant. We can simply not draw any conclusions about them based on the interviews.

1. *Negative publicity*

1.1. Preparedness

Theme	Preparedness
Meaning	Should companies prepare for negative publicity? What should this look like?
Frequency	14

1.1.1. Typical citations preparedness

- ‘The majority of companies do it [crisis preparation] on the industrial side. That is to say, what happens if a plane crashes, a train derails, if a factory breaks down. They are obliged to do it for business continuity. Slowly, they are starting to integrate the notion of reputation’ – EG
- ‘The key to managing customer wrong behaviour is planning’ - SP

1.1.2. Findings preparedness

The experts confirmed multiple aspects found in literature:

- Preparing for negative publicity can increase a company’s effectiveness in dealing with negative publicity
- Tracking social media is crucial to gain understanding from what consumers are saying and to identify possible issues, or to ‘keep a finger on the pulse’
- Defining the issues that need to be addressed and which can be ignored is essential to assist communication employees

The experts additionally mentioned the following points:

- Defining a response strategy is virtually impossible. Every situation is different and needs to be studied to identify the right strategy
- Multiple experts stated that reputation management is a crucial part in preparing for issues and crisis and the resulting negative publicity
- Other than defining what needs to be addressed, the communication employees need to be trained to recognize when to raise issues to a higher level of management, so when it is out of their ‘pay grade’
- One expert stated that social media is not the only place to detect negative publicity. For example, HR or supply chain also come into contact with negative information. It is therefore crucial for a company to facilitate these employees sharing this information with each other to recognize patterns

1.2. Accommodative vs defensive strategy

Theme	Accommodative vs defensive strategy
Meaning	What is an accommodative or a defensive strategy? When should a company choose an accommodative vs a defensive strategy? What moderates their success?
Frequency	33

1.2.1. Typical citations accommodative vs defensive strategy

- ‘There are multiple strategies, because I don’t think there is one strategy that fits all’ – AX
- ‘The worst thing is to take responsibility for something that was actually not your fault’ – AX
- ‘I always say to my clients: do not even try to sacrifice the least amount of money to change the opinion of people who have decided the earth is flat’ – EG

1.2.2. Findings accommodative vs defensive strategy

The experts confirmed multiple aspects found in literature:

- An accommodative strategy entails apologizing and offering an explanation, possibly even a recompensation. The level of accommodative strategy will depend on the situation.
- A defensive strategy entails finding someone else responsible and defending the company. This can range from explaining the external source to designating a common enemy with the consumer. The company discredits the enemy and puts the blame on it
- Apologizing means accepting the responsibility. This opens the company up to all the consequences of being to blame
- A defensive strategy allows to retake the narrative. It can prevent unnecessary harm of the reputation. However, the company can seem aggressive, which will turn consumers against them.
- The cause of the problem determines if the company should apologize or not, if it is internal or external. Companies can assess the attribution of blame by tracking consumers’ responses and should act accordingly

- Credibility is an important moderator for the effectiveness for the success of the chosen strategy. Companies apologizing with a bad reputation will not be believed as easily

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- The advantages of an accommodative strategy are not mentioned as such, rather that it creates a feeling of trust and is mostly expected by the consumer. For example, one expert called owning up to mistakes brave rather than vulnerable
- The consequences of the issue that the negative publicity addresses are more important than who is to blame. For example, if there were casualties, companies need to be very empathic
- A strong brand relationship will make any strategy more effective.
- In case of external blame, one expert proposed using third parties to confirm that the company is not to blame to appear more credible and less aggressive
- Credibility also plays for the counterparty. If their reputation is better than the company's, countering their claims will have no point since it will not be believed.

1.3. Proactive vs Reactive Strategy

Theme	Proactive vs Reactive Strategy
Meaning	When should a company respond to a crisis and anti-brand behaviour?
Frequency	14

1.3.1. Typical citations proactive vs reactive strategy

- 'Certain things die down because of the news cycle. (...) The advantage is that, of course, tomorrow you're going to be old news. The disadvantage is that a lot of people and of people or CEO's or companies believe that tomorrow people going to forget about and they don't speak. (...) They do not speak and then the issue becomes underaddressed' – AX
- 'What is the probability of the information getting out, becoming known? And honestly, 9 times out of 10, the probability is high. (...) So what purpose does it serve to wait?' – EG
- 'What we call stealing thunder, is really to, even if the possibility exists that the information never gets out, you still release the information.' – JR

1.3.2. Findings proactive vs reactive strategy

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- The distinction between a reactive and proactive strategy is based on the timing of the response
- Responding proactively allows for setting the direction and gives the company higher credibility
- Responding reactively allows to see how severe the situation is, how far it reaches. The company can design its response accordingly, or even decide when not to respond at all
- Sometimes, the company has no choice and has to respond reactively

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- If responding reactively, it is crucial to respond as quick as possible to avoid other actors taking over the conversation or appearing as if it has something to hide. Responding too late can have detrimental effects on the reputation
- If the company brings out information too quickly without having taken all the necessary actions behind it, it can be detrimental for their credibility. Therefore, the company can release an initial quick statement to establish that they are listening

1.4. No reaction

Theme	No reaction
Meaning	When does a company benefit from not giving a response at all?
Frequency	12

1.4.1. Typical citations no reaction

- ‘I always to my clients: do not even try to sacrifice a single euro to try to change the opinion of people who are convinced that the earth is flat. It does not serve any purpose’ - EG
- ‘Not communicating can also be a strategy, right?’ – BV

1.4.2. Findings no reaction

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- News cycles move fast enough sometimes to make the negative publicity disappear on its own
- Taking distance from negative publicity: if the negative publicity occurs outside of the target audience, responding can draw the target audience’s attention to it
- Responding will cause more negative reactions than the negative publicity on its own: some rumours are so wild that engaging with them will only cause the risk of the company coming across as aggressive
- Disadvantage not responding: there are little to no counterarguments for the negative publicity

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- Not responding also depends on how many people are spreading the negative publicity and who those people are
- Multiple experts stated that responding to consumers who are very anti-brand does not serve any purpose
- As a result of social media, news cycles have become even faster, meaning there is a higher chance of it disappearing on its own

1.5. Information spreading

Theme	Information spreading
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Meaning	What information should the company spread? How much information should the company spread?
Frequency	18

1.5.1. Typical citations information spreading

- ‘In times of negative publicity, it is very important to be able to spread positive messages’ – BV
- ‘You try to approach the truth. Why do I say approach the truth? Because when you give too many details in a situation, it opens too many doors, but necessarily the good ones’ – EG
- ‘You normally have to tell the truth as much as possible (...) but you are free to tell about it what you want. In French we say ‘le mensonge par omission’ - BV

1.5.2. Findings information spreading

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- Spreading positive information when negative publicity occurs: to balance the negative information with positive information
- Spreading misinformation can impact the reputation badly by harming the company’s credibility and needs to be avoided
- Companies need to be as transparent as possible
- Being transparent can reveal commercial secrets to competitors

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- Rather than legal or a financial risk of sharing too much information, experts stated that sharing too much information is dangerous because it gives other parties too much power. They can select the parts of the information relevant to their cause and take it out of context to serve their own goals, such as discrediting the company
- All experts agreed that lying or spreading misinformation is detrimental to the company’s reputation and is inadvisable
- Rather than being as transparent as possible, companies need to find the acceptable zone of transparency. This zone consists of sharing enough information to address the negative publicity and answer the consumers’ questions, but not more than that. One expert states that communication should aim at explaining the situation to a 12-14-year-old, and not more than that.

1.6. Conclusion negative publicity

Based on literature and findings derived from interviews, we propose the following strategy for managing negative publicity:

- The company needs to be prepared: it is crucial to train all personnel in recognizing arising issues and possible negative publicity. This also consists of identifying the right tools to track information spread about the company and its policies, behaviour and

general perception of the public. This information is found online, but also through other channels

- When a possible source of negative publicity is detected before it becomes public, the company needs to assess the likeliness of it coming out. If it is likely, the company needs to act proactively to gain control of the situation and gain in credibility
- If the negative publicity is unexpected, the company needs to assess the merit in responding:
 - Who is spreading the information? In what influence spheres and to what extent? How credible are the spreaders of the information?
 - How severe is the cause of the negative publicity?
 - How likely is it to still be relevant tomorrow?
 - What is the intention of people spreading it? How true is the negative publicity?
- If the threat on the reputation is large based on these factors, the company needs to respond as fast as possible to gain control over the situation and increase their credibility
 - If the blame is clearly the company's: it should accept its apologies and communicate how future similar situations can be avoided
 - If the blame is still unclear: it should release an initial statement to already state that they are present in the discussion, but not pre-emptively share too much information to avoid overcommunication or unnecessarily accepting blame
 - If the blame is not the company's: it should try to communicate and defend itself, it should however try to not come across as aggressive. To increase their credibility, companies can use third parties to defend them
- The company can never spread misinformation and must be as truthful as possible. However, full transparency is not recommended. Companies need to determine what consumers need to know and only share that information to prevent false interpretation of the information shared
- If the threat on the reputation does not directly appear significant, the company can try to not respond
 - If the threat grows, the company can still respond reactively
 - The company needs to avoid the negative publicity to be the only information present about them. Positive messages need to exist to keep the balance between positive and negative information

2. Reputation

2.1. Reputation management

Theme	Reputation management
Meaning	What can a company do to maintain a good relationship?
Frequency	39

2.1.1. Typical citations reputation management

- ‘You can do market studies to see: ‘if someday this would happen, what would your reaction be regarding the image of the brand?’ (...) every strategic act of the company needs to be accompanied by communication’ – TD
- ‘Reputation is not something that is decreed, it is something that is built’ – EG
- ‘It is important to have enough material and take enough initiatives, for when a crisis breaks out you can bring forward a positive message’ – BV

2.1.2. Findings reputation management

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- The need for market research
 - To test the brand’s current position and perception. If necessary, adjustments can be made
 - To test possible strategic decisions to get an idea of consumers’ reaction. These need to guide the company’s behaviour, policies and communication
- The reputation is built partly built through communication, such as advertisements and corporate communication, but it can also be through the aesthetics of the brand.
- A reputation is not simply communicated; it is built through actions. If the right actions are taken, then the right accompanying communication can help the company grow its reputation

The experts additionally mentioned the following points:

- In general, one expert states that reputation management is often not a priority. It is often cut from budgets. In addition, given that it is a long term effort, managers are often not around long enough to see the benefits of it. As a result, they do not consider it as beneficial for them to closely manage it.
- If after testing it appears consumers will respond negatively to a strategic decision, but the change needs to be implemented, the company needs to have a very strong accompanying communication strategy.
- Emotional storytelling was found by two experts to be a very effective way to gain positive perception and improve brand relationships with consumers
- Choosing the right values is not based on the company’s perspective anymore as it was before, but on what the consumers want. Therefore, it is crucial to know them well
- Testing the company’s reputation also happens through social media tracking

2.2. Proactive marketing

Theme	Proactive marketing
Meaning	What can a company do proactively to enhance their reputation?
Frequency	6

2.2.1. Typical citations proactive marketing

- ‘The best way to manage a reputation, is that people express themselves in your stead in a positive light’ – TD
- ‘It is very important to be able to bring out positive messages and for that you need material (...) you cannot start doing this when the issue has arisen, then it is too late’ - BV

2.2.2. Findings proactive marketing

Two of the three aspects of proactive marketing were confirmed by experts:

- Proactively spreading positive information about the brand to create an online presence: In case of an issue, other information than the negative publicity is available
- Creating online brand communities: consumers defend the brand when necessary and spread positive information

One expert additionally mentioned the following point:

- Use of third party endorsements: confirm the company’s reputation, such as governmental agencies, partners, employees, experts, ... speaking out in favour of the company

2.3. CSR

Theme	CSR
Meaning	What is the role of sustainability and CSR for a company?
Frequency	18

2.3.1. Typical citations CSR

- ‘The societal aspect: what does the brand do today for society (...). It is the only aspect that rises in importance’ – TD
- ‘From the moment you put the environmental side a little forward, you engage in greenwashing. If you put the social side forward a little, you engage in social washing’ – EG
- ‘Especially, with all the CSR reports that are being made, it is a delicate exercise, it has to be real to succeed’ – BV
- ‘On the ethical side, it is even more sensitive and hard to anticipate, it can explode all of a sudden (...) why all of a sudden does a subject gain in importance?’ – JR

2.3.2. Findings CSR

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- CSR is a crucial part of a company’s reputation
- Moral legitimacy:
 - Sustainability is gaining in importance
 - Within sustainability, the morals and values are evolving and companies need to follow.

- Putting forwards CSR is often seen as greenwashing:
 - History of CSR influences the credibility
 - There is a need for a fit between company's activities and CSR efforts
 - Need for fit between communication and actions

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- Keeping up with evolving morals, values and ethical concerns is very difficult. Even if a company tracks changes, it is often too late to make the necessary changes.
- Ethical issues are very nuanced, both often presented too simplistically by the public
- CSR is not an asset that can be put forward as positive information. It has turned from nice-to-have in must-have. Irresponsible or unethical companies will not survive
- Most consumers do not trust company's societal engagement. Experts mentioned LGBTQ washing, social washing, diversity washing, ...
- Most companies still prefer not to engage in societal debates. Those that do, mostly do so out of financial interests.

2.4. Conclusion reputation

Based on literature and findings derived from interviews, we propose the following strategy for dealing managing the company's reputation:

- The company needs to identify the values it wants to incorporate and design its communication accordingly:
 - The values need to be based on the needs of the consumer
 - Sustainability needs to be an important factor as it is increasing in importance.
 These values are constantly evolving, so continuous tracking is necessary
- The company needs to test its reputation among consumers and change make the required modifications to its communication and behaviour
- The company can use third party endorsement from stakeholders to confirm its reputation or defend it in times of crises or issues
- The company needs to create a positive online environment to acquire customers, but also to act as a buffer in times of crisis. The previously generated positive content can then be pushed forward to counter negative publicity. In case of CSR reporting however, companies need to be careful to not be considered to be greenwashing
- The reputation is a long term investment and mostly constructed through behaviour:
 - The company needs to accompany good behaviour with good communication to maximize its positive effect on the reputation
 - The positive communication needs to be backed up with the corresponding behaviour, especially in the case of communication on CSR efforts
 - In case of strategic decisions, the company needs to test consumers' reactions to it. If the reaction is negative, but the company needs to implement it, it needs to design the necessary strategic communication

- Unethical behaviour is to be avoided at all costs, as its effects on the reputation is detrimental. However, it is difficult to assess what will be deemed unethical, further highlighting the importance of evolving societal values
- CSR efforts need to fit within the activities of the company to appear sincere and require long term investments to improve the social reputation of the company

3. *Anti-brand behaviour*

3.1. Handling social media negative publicity

Theme	Handling social media negative publicity
Meaning	How can companies handle negative publicity on social media? How do they determine what comments to engage with? How does it influence observers?
Frequency	25

3.1.1. Typical citations handling social media negative publicity

- ‘There are people who spend their life on social media (...) they have opinions on everything. If you do not speak, in any case they will speak in the name of the brand or against the brand’ – TD
- ‘In terms of social media, I think unfortunately that the company has to learn to live with, with people who are anti [the company] – EG
- ‘Anyone can become an influencer and influence a large part of the population’ - JR

3.1.2. Findings handling social media negative publicity

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- Advantages of social media: two-way communication is made possible, allowing for receiving feedback and detecting possible issues
- Risk of social media:
 - loss of control of information spread about the company online: people who want to destroy you have more means to do so
 - echo chamber confirming consumers’ beliefs and amplifying negative publicity’s impact
 - negative information is more likely to find its target as a result of algorithms
 - information can quickly spread to a lot of people
 - consumers have immensely gained in power and expectations
- Place of occurrence: experts only mentioned social media, therefore consumer-generated platforms for the spreading of information on a company
- Observers of negative publicity online: join in on sharing it, are influenced by it. This highlights the importance of handling negative publicity
- Tracking of discourse online is highly important. The following factors were found to be important:

- The following of the person spreading NWOM: larger following indicates larger influence and higher risk
- The sphere of influence: is the target audience affected and reached by the negative publicity?
- Proactive vs reactive strategy:
 - having a strong positive online presence is necessary to have more available online than the negative information being spread
 - company needs to judge what comments need to be engaged with, regardless of if company is addressed or not
 - time is of the essence, there is no room to wait on social media to prevent further spreading and other people joining in on the conversation
- No reaction: some reactions are not worth engaging with. They go beyond non-genuine comments, to include comments that are outside of influence sphere of the target audience, made by people with malicious intent, that have too little consensus, or companies hope will disappear on their own. Mostly, people comment for the pleasure of commenting, so engaging with them has no purpose for changing their mind
- Disadvantage no reaction:
 - consumers will still speak, so only information found will be negative and outside of the company's control.
 - Social media algorithms are strong: can still reach target audience
- Accommodative vs defensive strategy: experts did not specify what techniques needed to be used, only that sometimes interference is necessary and that observers are affected by it

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- More and more companies are leaving social media. Most conversations are not worth engaging with and companies need to learn to live with eNWOM, for several reasons
 - Social media has taken away any form of nuance
 - There are too many voices, it is not possible to respond to everything
- It is very difficult and costly to determine the sphere of influence of eNWOM
- Decision of responding also depends on the reputation of the transmitter of eNWOM

3.2. Handling boycotts

Theme	Handling boycotts
Meaning	How should a company handle a boycott?
Frequency	20

3.2.1. Typical citations handling boycotts

- ‘When do you need to respond to a boycott or not, it very, very strongly depends on the circumstances’ – JR
- ‘There is a big difference between customers and citizens, because one can be shocked by a company, not like its behaviour, even call for a boycott, but not even be a customer’ – EG

- ‘Sometimes you have to fight organisms with such strong reputations that you in fact cannot win’ – BV

3.2.2. Findings handling boycotts

The experts confirmed most aspects found in literature:

- Comments online need to be tracked to detect boycotts, since they can erupt seemingly out of nowhere
- In case of a boycott, the response needs to be based on several aspects:
 - What is the cause of the boycott? Is it severe or trivial?
 - How can it grow: this is difficult to predict, since ethical issues and concerns can gain importance very suddenly
 - What are the consumers saying about it?
 - How big is the threat on the reputation?
- Choice of accommodative vs defensive strategy: based on the credibility and reputation of the consumer
- Accommodative strategy: apologize and change the targeted behaviour. Companies need to be willing to admit to their mistake
- Communication needs to be consistent across all channels and spokespersons. Journalists and consumers will profit of inconsistencies to discredit the company, decreasing the credibility of the company
- Showing that the company is listening to the raised issues:
 - Proposed solution needs to address the changes requested by boycotters.
 - Is a disarming technique to already show that the company takes into consideration the issues raised by consumers.

The experts disagreed on or additionally mentioned the following points:

- Engaging or not engaging with a boycott needs to be determined by who is calling for the boycott rather than only the size. Are they within the customer base of the company? What is their reputation? What is their reach?
- In case of a sponsor with a very good reputation, such as Greenpeace, a defensive strategy will never be useful, you will never be seen as more credible than them
- A possible strategy can be to propose alternatives to changing the targeted policies or behaviour in case the company is not ready to change
- Companies can in case of a risk of a surrogate boycott already drop certain partners. For example, Delhaize dropped products with GMO's to avoid negative publicity

3.3. Conclusion anti-brand behaviour

Based on literature and findings derived from interviews, we propose the following strategy for dealing managing anti-brand behaviour:

- Tracking social media is an opportunity to prevent dissatisfaction
 - Get feedback from consumers
 - Track future possible issues, including changing societal values

- A strong pre-existing positive presence on social media helps buffer the effect of social media negative publicity
- Tracking social media to find negative publicity posted online or detect boycotts
 - Who is the person spreading the negative publicity? What is their following? What is their reputation? Does their sphere of influence include the company's target audience? If the person has a large influence, the company needs to respond since they pose a bigger risk
 - What is the goal of the spreader of negative publicity? If they are doing it for the pleasure of it or out of spite, engaging with them will not change their perception of the company. However, they can still have a negative effect on the reputation, so if they have large influence actions need to be taken to mitigate effects on bystanders
- If the threat on the reputation is severe
 - Respond as fast as possible: waiting too long will cause other people join in and other parties to take over the control of the situation
 - Assess the reputation of the opposite party: if it is very strong, a defensive strategy is not effective since the company will not be believed
- If the negative publicity happens outside of the target audience, it holds little consensus among consumers or the consumer will not change their mind based on the response of the company, the company can choose to not respond. The risks however are:
 - Social media algorithms can cause the message to reach the target audience
 - Observers are strongly influenced by negative publicity and can join in and share it even further, until it is completely out of the company's control

Specifically, in the case of a boycott, where the cause is severe and the blame is attributed to the company:

- Communication needs to be consistent across all channels to prevent stakeholders attacking the integrity and credibility of the company
- If it is willing to change: choose an accommodative strategy: the company needs to apologize its behaviour based what the consumers are saying
- If it is not willing to change:
 - The sponsor has a good reputation: propose an alternative to changing the targeted policies, a defensive strategy will not work because the company does not have the necessary credibility in comparison to the consumers
 - The sponsor has a bad reputation: explain the reasons behind the behaviour or even discredit the sponsor

It is important to note however that tracking online activity is incredibly complicated and costly. It is difficult to measure the sphere of influence of negative publicity. The company needs to continuously try to improve its tracking tools.

Part 4: Conclusion and Limitations

1. Conclusion

As a way to conclude this work, we revisit our research question: how can a company deal manage anti-brand behaviour?

In part 1, we first set out to define five different types of anti-brand behaviour. For every phenomenon, we explored the literature to define the concept, find the possible motivations, objectives, moderators and the effects of the phenomenon. We wanted to study the differences between the different types of behaviour and identify if we agreed with the classification of Kähr et al. (2016) of CBS among the other types of behaviour. We found the following:

- We disagreed with the conceptualization of CBS as a separate concept and proposed how we would classify it among other concepts
- The main difference between the concepts is based on their form. Boycotts, brand avoidance and NWOM have clearly defined forms. Customer retaliation and CBS on the other hand have some characteristics, but do not describe an actual form of behaviour
- Almost all objectives identified in literature can be found for the two forms found, namely withholding purchase and spreading negative information.

As a result, we concluded that the choice of a consumer of which form of behaviour to engage in, namely boycotting (withholding purchase collectively) brand avoidance (withholding purchase individually) and NWOM (spreading information) will be determined by surrounding factors or moderators. We theorized how such a decision can look like and what surrounding factors can help a consumer make their choice.

In part 2, we started to answer the research question. By deriving three categories of possible management of anti-brand behaviour from the literature research in part 1, we conducted a literature research to identify existing response strategies. We found relevant literature on 10 different strategies among these three categories.

Negative Publicity	Reputation	Anti-Brand Behaviour
• Preparedness • Accommodative vs defensive • Reactive vs proactive • No reaction • Spread information	• Reputation Management • Proactive Marketing • CSR	• Handling social media negative publicity • Handling boycotts

From these categories, we derived questions to use in semi-directive interviews with experts to confirm the findings of literature. After a deductive thematic analysis, we found that the ten themes were mostly confirmed by experts. We proposed action plans in part 3 to answer the research question.

The main difference was that opposite of what literature states, the experts found that not all negative publicity and anti-brand behaviour is worth engaging with. Because of the amount of opinions and information shared online, the experts stated that it is virtually impossible to respond to everything. However, they also confirmed the dangerous nature of social media, where seemingly irrelevant negative publicity can very quickly gain in importance.

Interestingly, multiple experts stated that engaging with anti-brand consumers with the intent to harm the brand is pointless, since they cannot be won back. However, they also acknowledged the danger of those consumers, who in one expert's words 'have nothing better to do than to harm the brand'. This confirms Kähr et al's (2016) statement that brand saboteurs pose a big threat to companies.

However, we doubt that companies can identify the objective of consumers on an individual level manually, since it would be too costly. In addition, as one expert stated, A.I. is not yet advanced enough to accurately identify consumers' emotions, meaning it can also not be found automatically. As a result, identifying the brand saboteurs proves to be difficult.

We therefore urge future researchers to identify how to prevent anti-brand behaviour, rather than simply managing it.

2. *Limitations*

The results and findings in this thesis can be limited due to the following factors:

- Limited scope: some relevant subject matters fell out of the scope of this work and could have enriched its findings further.
- 6 respondents are based in Brussels: the diversity among the respondents was not very high, which can limit the generalization of the findings found
- Personal biases:
 - Sustainability: a high personal interest in all subjects related to sustainability can have lead to a subjective increased focus on CSR
 - Social media: a high wariness of information shared online can have lead to a subjective negative view of all subjects related to social media
- Findings limited by questions asked and literature found:
 - Identified literature could be irrelevant, insufficient or unreliable, impacting the conclusions drawn from it
 - Questions asked could not have addressed the relevant subject matters, limiting the findings on relevant topics derived from the interviews
- Limited time per interviews and number of interviews: not all themes could be addressed in all interviews, given the limited amount of time per interview and the chosen flexible structure of the interviews. In combination with the limited number of interviews, this can have limited our findings and derived insights

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