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strategies to negative publicity in social media“

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Introduction

The internet has changed the way business executives and marketing professionals are communicating with their stakeholders. The development of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 applications brought new opportunities and challenges for different types of businesses as well as non-profit organizations. Web 1.0 is known as a read-only medium where users had only limited possibilities to interact with each other. In contrast Web 2.0 enables them to become authors of Web-content, share this content, their feelings, thoughts and ideas with each other and directly communicate with participants of different social networking sites or organizations. The content created by users is called user generated content (UGC) and it ranges from bookmarking to photo and video sharing, from social-media blogs and networking sites to virtual worlds and communities (Casoto et al. 2010, pp. 312-313). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) there are three features that differentiate UGC from other forms of information. First, it must be published on the publicly accessible networking site and is available for some group of people. Second, it requires some creative efforts from the publisher. And finally, it must be created outside of the professional organizational practice (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61). Every user can be seen as author, editor, customer or distributor of this content (Constantinides and Fountain 2007, p.232).

The terms social media and Web 2.0 are often used interchangeably. However, Web 2.0 is mainly associated with online application and tools for information sharing and enabling interactions between users whereas the term social media represents the social aspects of Web 2.0 applications like openness, participation, connectedness and conversation (Constantinides and Fountain 2007, p.232).

The development of Web 2.0 technologies and applications is characterized by more opportunities for users to speak freely with each other and less control for organizations over the information available about them in the internet (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.60). The main advantages of social media for organizations are the possibility of direct and personalized interaction with their customers, a new way of learning about their needs, opinions and feelings, active use of user's ideas and suggestions in the new product development, the possibility of getting a direct feedback, and use of customer's complaints in preventing the organizational image damage. The new trends can be monitored and the appropriate reactions can be

undertaken much faster as by traditional media. The main threat of the new media is the speed with which the negative information and rumours about the organization can spread among users in different part of the world. Social media do not have any temporal or geographical boundaries. The message about the organization can reach thousands of users worldwide in just a few minutes. There are already many cases where users and environmental organizations (e.g. Greenpeace) exposing product failure or some corporate misconduct forced organizations to respond and take actions to remedy the consequences and take responsibility for their actions.

Researchers and practitioners in the field of marketing and crisis communication are concerned with the question: How should the organization deal with the negative information regarding its behaviour, its products or services that is circulating in online social networks? Online applications of Web 2.0 make it possible to spread such information just in a few minutes to thousand users worldwide. This implication has a direct influence on the image and reputation of the organization in the eyes of its stakeholders and can lead to substantial financial losses. There are already attempts to adapt the existing theories from the field of crisis management to the new online environments. New models are also developed that are suited to deal with threats that are appearing from the new forms of media. Crisis response theories that are often applied to social media are Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Benoit's Image Restoration Strategy and the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model that will be explained in detail in this master thesis.

As the negative publicity in the online environment represents a real problem for both the big and small size business companies as well as non-profit organizations the terms company, organization, firm, enterprise and corporation are used interchangeably in this master thesis.

The object of this master thesis is the comprehensive discussion of the topic of negative publicity in social media and its possible threats for organizations. The intention is to give some recommendations of how to deal with negative publicity regarding the organization in social media and to make some empirical investigations of which strategies proposed by the literature are the most effective in the attempt to protect company's reputation in the online environment. Empirical research with an online data collection procedure will be conducted for this reason.

The structure of the underlying master thesis is the following. In the first chapter the definition and the meaning of social media, their different types and their place in the marketing-mix of the organization as well as in the customer's buying decision-making process will be described. The second chapter gives an overview about potential threats of social media for organizations and the influence of negative online word-of-mouth on corporate reputation and trust-building activities of the firm. Also preventive actions of the company that should be made in order to avoid reputational damage from negative publicity in social media will be described in the last section of the second chapter. The third chapter describes different theories that were developed for dealing with negative publicity about the firm in social media. Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Benoit's Image Restoration Strategy and the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model as well as their usage in corporate practice are described in detail in this chapter. The fourth chapter gives an overview about empirical research in the field of crisis communication in social media. Sentiment and content analyses and their practical usage in scientific papers are described here. The fifth chapter presents a conceptual framework that will be investigated in the empirical part of this master thesis. Two sections of this chapter give an overview about the questionnaire constructs and stimulus materials that are used for data sampling procedures. Hypotheses are stated in the third section of this chapter. Sections four and five describe technics used for the data analysis and the results from the pre-test and from hypotheses testing analyses. Finally, conclusions are drawn and limitations are pointed out.

1. Principles of social media

The first section of this chapter gives the definition and classification of social media. It describes the main characteristics of various social media platforms as well as advantages and disadvantages of different forms of social media channels for organizations. The second section discusses in detail the role and place of social media in company's marketing-mix and in customer's buying decision-making process. Finally, different forms of communication and their usage in social media will be described.

1.1 Social media definition and classification

Social media can be defined, according to the most often used definition proposed by Kaplan and Haenlein, as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61). There already exist a lot of different web pages and online applications that can be classified as social media, like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Xing, Linkdl, and Wikipedia. They all differentiate in terms of the mode of information they allow to forward from one user to another, in number of active users and the possibility of sharing personal information and communicate with others. Nevertheless no systematic and consistent approach exists for classifying different types of social media.

Kaplan and Haenlein proposed the classification of social media regarding two dimensions: their media-related or technical components such media presence and media richness and their social dimensions like self-presentation and self-disclosure concepts. Media presence represents the degree of acoustic, visual and virtual contact that can be achieved through the particular media between two or more communication partners. Generally speaking, media richness is lower for mediated, like a telephone call or e-mail, than for interpersonal forms of communication (e.g. face-to-face conversation). The degree of media presence has a direct effect on the degree of social influence that the communication partners have on each other's behaviour (Kaplan and

Haenlein 2010, p.61). According to Kaplan and Haenlein: “Media richness is the amount of information that the particular media allows to be transmitted in a given time interval” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61). So it can be concluded that the media presence tells us which type of information the particular media allow to transmit and media richness indicates the amount of information that can be forwarded or received through this media. As already mentioned the social dimension of the presented classification model include the type of self-presentation that the media allow, that is the possibility to create an own profile with some personal data, and self-disclosure components. Self-disclosure means the amount of personal information a person can share through a particular medium with others like thoughts, feelings, preferences etc. with the aim to create some desirable image of oneself in the eyes of other people (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.62). Based on the media-related and social dimension components the social media can be classified as proposed by **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Social Media Classification (cf. Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.62)

		Mediapresence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

As can be seen from the **Figure 2** blogs have the lowest level of media presence and media richness as they only allow the exchange of text between users. At the same time they allow a high level of self-presentation and self-disclosure. Social networking sites like Facebook and content communities like YouTube have a medium level of media presence and media richness as they enable users the sharing of pictures, videos and audio recordings. Social networking sites have more possibilities of sharing personal information with others rather than content communities as they allow users to create an individual profile with comprehensive personal information. Virtual social worlds have simultaneously the highest level of media presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure as they represent a virtual imitation of real worlds, which are populated with avatars – the three-dimensional pictures that a person can

choose to represent himself for interacting and communicating with others (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.62).

In the following, the main types of social media are discussed in more detail.

Jin and Lui define **blogs** as “a personal publishing or content management system on the Internet at which an author, or multiple authors, can publish information on a variety of topics” (Jin and Lui 2010, p.431). They also divide blogs into official organizational blogs which are created and guided by the organization and external blogs that are created and maintained by individuals or groups outside of the organization (Jin and Lui 2010, p.431). Blogs are one of the oldest forms of social media. The content is sorted regarding the date of publishing with the newest information at first. The main advantage of organizational blogs is the opportunity to receive a direct and immediate feedback from its customers and other stakeholders. Comments, thoughts and criticism written by users can be analysed. Results from this analysis should be considered by a strategic planning in the organization and in a product development and modification process (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.63).

A special form of blog is a **microblog** – the set of applications that enable users to post short messages in form of short status updates via the Web or mobile phone. The members of such web sites can create a profile page and connect with other users. One of the well-established microblogs is Twitter. Users of Twitter can exchange messages, so called tweets, up to 140 characters among each other. The corporations also make an intensive use of this platform by sending the latest updates and interesting news regarding their enterprise to their customers, associates and other stakeholders (Thelwall et al. 2010, p.407).

Social networking sites “are the internet applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.63). Such user profiles can include a lot of information about persons as well as videos, photos, audio files and links to other internet pages. The participants of such networking sites can invite their friends and colleagues to have access to their profiles, create groups and communities, share photos and videos with their friends online and send messages to each other (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.63). Social networking sites can be used in the form of professional networks for companies, business professionals and job seekers (e.g. LinkedIn, Xing, Ryze, Invetute) or as customer-oriented networks (e.g.

Facebook, V Kontakte). A lot of firms have already recognized the possibilities of these sites and are actively participating there with the goal of reaching a great number of their target audience, creating direct contact and dialog with their audience and receiving direct feedback from users. They are creating profiles for their companies in order to promote their organization, their products and services and to create a desirable and modern image between the networks users. Here companies have a possibility to communicate with their stakeholders in a more personal and informal manner. Creating a positive word-of-mouth about the organization and its products is often one of the main aims of the organization in such online networks. The factors that are needed to be successful in the social networking sites are creativity, openness, informal language use, trustworthiness, and ongoing monitoring and analysis of the appearing trends and sentiment online.

Content communities are online web pages that enable users to share content in form of video (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Metacafe), text (BookCrossing), pictures (Flickr, Photobucket, Picasa) or music (SoundCloud). Content communities represent the possibility for companies to present themselves and their products and services to a broader audience through videos, pictures, audio files or company's presentations. A huge audience and the possibility of using different modes of media are the main advantages of this type of media for organizations.

Wikis are websites (e.g. Wikipedia) which allow their users to add, delete, modify, and edit information. Main modes of information are text and pictures (Coombs 2012, p. 24). Wikipedia are a cost-free online encyclopedia. It is available in 270 different languages worldwide. More than 19 million articles on different topics are available on Wikipedia so far.

Virtual worlds are replications of the three-dimensional environment where users have a possibility to appear in the form of avatars. Users can interact with each other as they normally do in their everyday life, they can discuss problems, meet their friends or organize and participate in different groups of interest in the virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Additionally, they can play a particular role in virtual game worlds (e.g. "World of Warcraft") where they must abide by strict rules and behave in a predefined context. The virtual game worlds are normally accessible through the game controller (e.g. Microsoft X-Box, Sony Play-Station). Virtual social worlds give their users more freedom in their behaviour and interactions with others as the game worlds do (Kaplan

and Haenlein 2010, p.64). Product placement, virtual promotions and advertising are the main possibilities for companies to reach users of these applications in such virtual worlds.

Online office applications are the online applications that allow multiple users to work simultaneously on different projects in form of Word documents, Excel tables, Power Point presentations and other types of documents that are normally available offline. The most popular of them are Google Docs, Adobe Buzzword and Microsoft Office 365.

The choice in which social media types to participate depends on the type of business, the distribution and characteristics of the target groups, earlier online experience and the resources and goals of the corporation. The companies that already built a long and successful presence and reputation in social media find it easier to deal with negative criticism online and are capable to recognize and react much faster to appearing negative trends in order to prevent undesirable image damages.

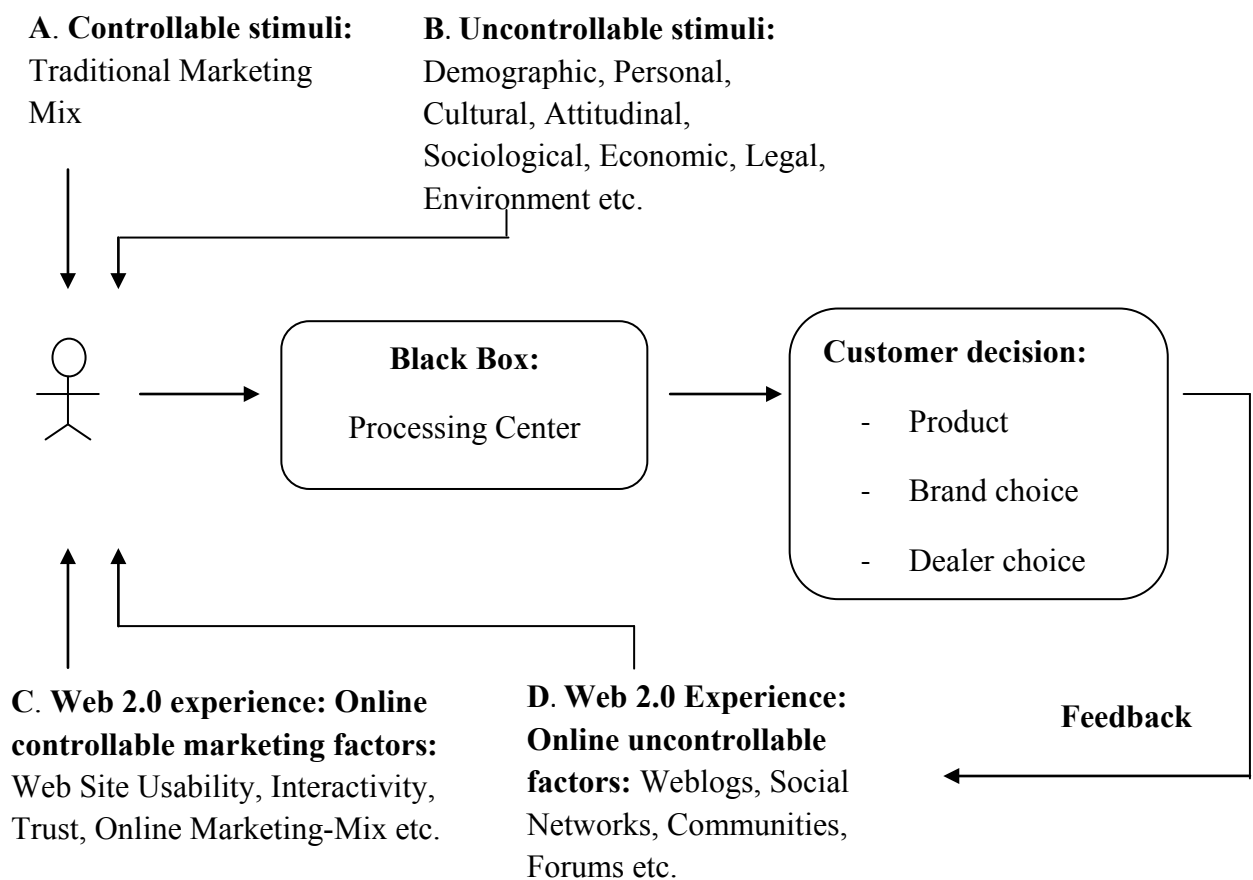
1.2 Social media as a new component of the organization's marketing-mix and of the customer's buying decision-making process

Social media are already established as a new component of the organizational marketing environment. A lot of marketing practitioners, communication professionals and researchers working in the field of marketing, communication, and crisis management are actively exploring and using these new types of media. This growing interest in social media is also strongly related to the changes in consumer's needs, values, search and buying behaviour. The development of online applications creates a growing demand for online services, virtual games, and new ways of entertainment in online environments. The buying behaviour is also strongly affected from the opinions of peers and friends that share their experiences, thoughts and suggestions on different social networking sites. The main task of the marketer in this respect is to recognize and explore the new customers' needs, their motives of participation in different social networks, the new patterns of buying behaviour, the role of online social environment

for the decision-making process, and the influence of new online environments and trends on the organization (Constantinides and Fountain 2007, p.239).

As a result of these new changes and developments, social media are now considered as an essential factor influencing a customer's decision-making process. **Figure 2** depicts the main factors that influence a consumer's decision-making process in the information-based marketplace (Constantinides and Fountain 2007, p.239).

Figure 2. Factors influencing the decision-making process in an information-based marketplace (Constantinides et al. 2008, p 15)



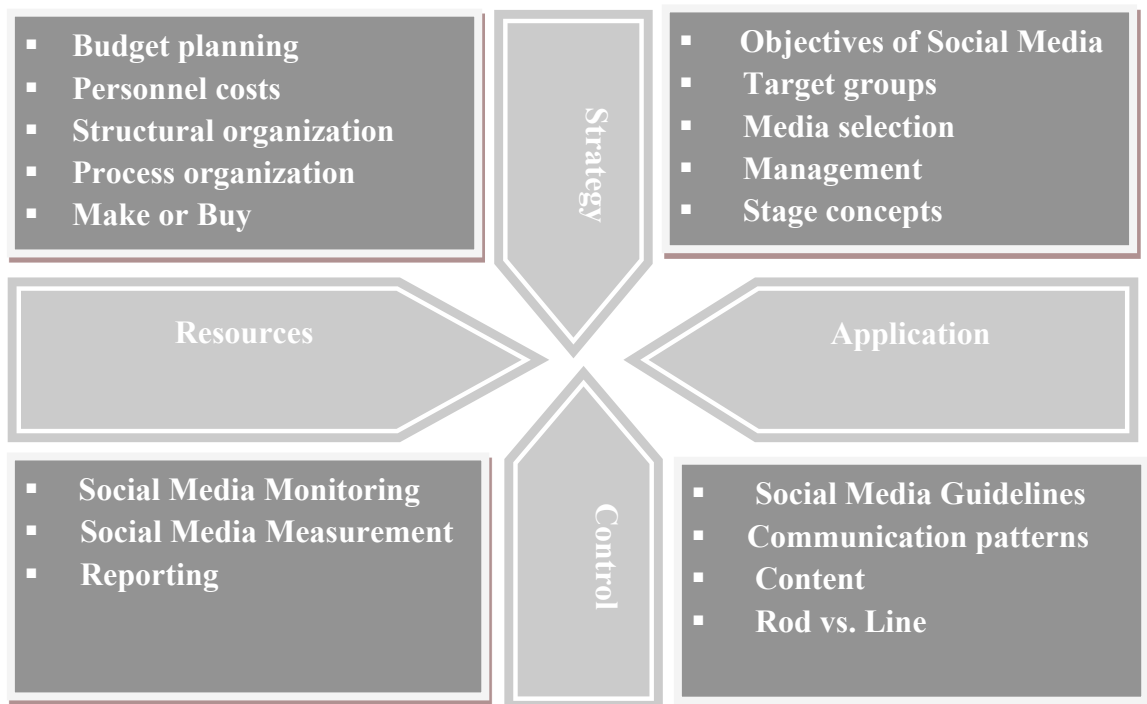
In this model factors A and B represent the traditional influences on the customer behaviour. These are the controllable factors like prices, promotional activities or distribution channels over which the organization has control, and uncontrollable factors like country's economic situation, environmental organizations moves, and customer's personal characteristics over which the firm has no control. With the recent developments of internet and especially Web 2.0 applications two new components C and D gained on importance in the consumer's decision-making process. These factors

also can be controllable (C) like the marketing-mix of the organization in internet, website design, online sells, and online company's PR activities or uncontrollable (D) like influences of a consumer's buying decisions through peer reviews and advices in blogs, forums, and social networking sites (Constantinides et al. 2008, pp. 14-15).

In relation with changes in consumer values, decision-making processes and behaviour are also affected by modifications of the marketing communication mix. This trend can be seen from the rise in spending for internet-based new media advertising and promotion activities. In 2008 these spendings were positioned on the third place, just after the traditional media, exhibitions and trade fairs expenditures, in the proportion of overall costs for marketing activities of the companies (Kirchgeorg et al. 2011, p.8). According to a survey of Bundesverband Digitale Wirtschaft (BVDW) that was conducted in 2009 in Germany, 87% of surveyed enterprises see the main advantage of social media in the possibility to conduct a direct dialog with their customers. 71% of these companies use social media data for marketing research, and 58% use new media for customer relationship, trust and loyalty building, and branding activities. The participants of the survey also recognized the challenges that are associated with online media like inadequate feedback analysis, loss of control and reinforcement of negative information circulating about the company in the internet (Rossmann 2011, p.56). The companies that wish to use the existing chances effectively and avoid the potential risks of social media should include them in the strategic and communication plan. This is the task of a new field of marketing called social media marketing that can be understood as a process of setting up and managing a dialog between the company and a broad range of internal and external private users of social media platforms (Weinberg 2011, p.5).

Figure 3 shows the sub-concepts of social media marketing that must be considered for the successful integration in the marketing communication mix of the company. These four concepts are strategy, resources, application and control (Rossmann 2011, pp.56-57).

Figure 3. Sub-concepts of Social Media Marketing (Rossmann 2011, p.56)



As can be seen from the **Figure 3**, from strategic point of view social media marketing is concentrated on the definition of goals and target groups that are key components of the successful social media campaign. On this stage it is of essential importance to choose the appropriate social media sites where the intended audience can be addressed effectively. Also the commitment of the company's management is of great importance in the social media strategy planning process. In the implementation process of social media campaign some stage concepts can be observed. After a stage of listening follows the participation in the dialogue phase. Target specific communicational concepts are introduced on the last stage. The resource concept refers to the budget planning that is needed for social media engagement. Although the cost of social media marketing activities are much lower than traditional communicational channels, there are many areas, such as internal restructuring, involving external experts, acquire the necessary software, that must be considered. Also the decision who is to be responsible for the implementation of social media activities must be considered. Responsibilities of employees and third party tasks must be coordinated (Make or Buy concept). The social media control consists of the monitoring, measurement and reporting of social media success (Rossmann 2011, p.58).

After these concepts (strategy, resources and control) have been defined, the guidelines for the use of social media communication must be established. One of the key points

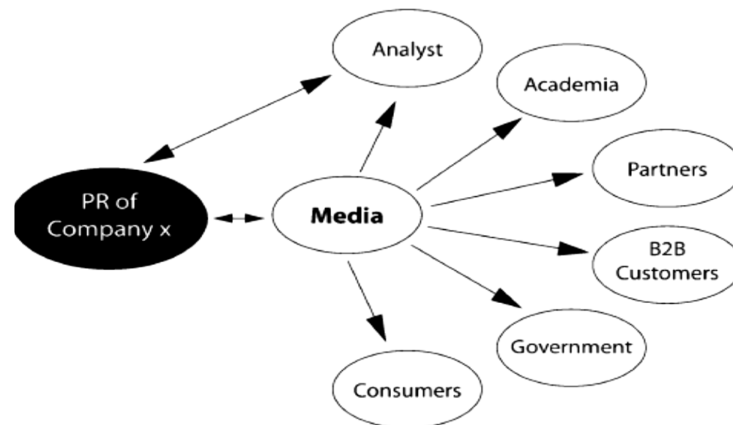
is the creation of social media guidelines for employees. Communication style and behaviour on social media should be adapted to the existing communication culture of the corresponding website. So for example, a well-planned content strategy is necessary because obvious product advertising and company's press releases often lead to the reactance of social media users. Finally, it is necessary to consider who is responsible for the design and implementation of the social media strategy of the company (Rod vs. Line organization) (Rossmann 2011, p.59).

According to the survey of BVDW that was conducted in 2011, 72,3% of the surveyed companies in Germany are already active users of social media platforms (BVDW, 2011). In Austria, there have been only 48% of enterprises with social media presence in 2011. According to the statistics of the Austrian Economic Chamber, Austrian companies use most often Facebook (77 % of survey participants), Xing (56%) and Twitter (24%) (WKÖ, 2012).

1.3 Social media communication

The emergence and proliferation of social media to the wide audience all over the world require new methods of communication for businesses with their stakeholders in these new channels. Traditional one-way communication that is presented in **Figure 4** is still suitable for print and broadcast media, but it has proven to be ineffective in the more open and transparent environment of the new communication channels (Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith 2008, p.144).

Figure 4. One-to-Many Communication Model (Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith 2008, p.144)



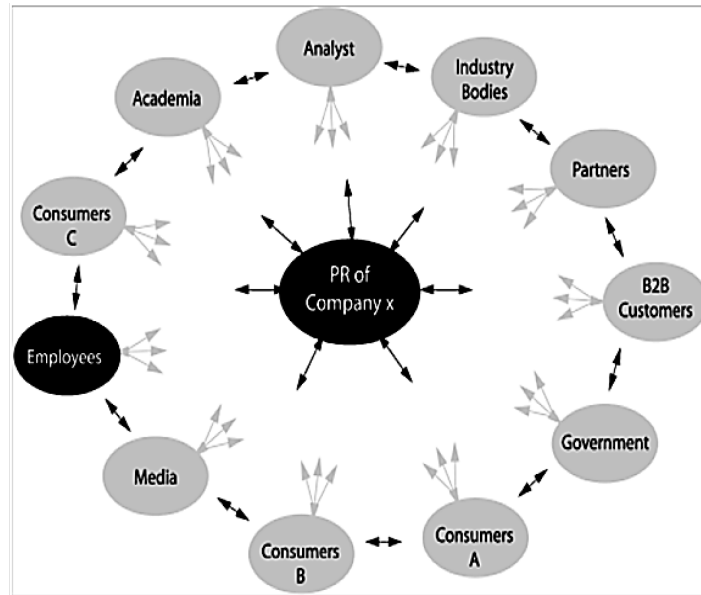
In this traditional and commonly used communicational model the company or media firms have determined which information and in which form the information is to be published. The audience had only a little opportunity to respond to the company's message. This type of communication is still widely used in mass media channels like TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines (Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith 2008, p.144).

With the improvements in internet technologies and applications, the internet users received more possibilities to interact with each other, establish groups of interest online and communicate in a direct and immediate way with companies. This leads to the replacement of the one-to-many by the many-to-many (**Figure 5**) communication model in online channels.

In such a communication network users have a lot of opportunities to give their feedback, their complaints and ideas to the firm, communicate with each other, and influence the decisions of others through sharing of their experiences and opinions.

Here people expect an open, transparent and honest language instead of the company's advertising delivered in a corporate tone (Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith 2008, p.144).

Figure 5. Many-to-Many Communication Model (Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith 2008, p.145)



Confidential and long-term relationships with customers can only be formed if the information on social media platforms is constantly renewed, transparent and credible. Questions and criticism of the users always have to be answered personally and honestly. The ability to apologize, to take responsibility and learn from the mistakes is particularly relevant when the dishonest information about the company have been discovered (Lim and Yang 2006, pp.1-3).

Social media is not a separate marketing instrument. It gives the firm the additional possibility to present itself to the public, be where the main audience of interest is, built or change the image of the corporation as more open, honest, and innovative, and to interact directly with the customers and partners. The new media must be seen as a part of the overall communication policy of the company and must be included in the general marketing planning process of the firm. The integrated approach, which includes the spread of consistent company's messages over all types of media, is especially necessary when the organization has to deal with the situation of negative publicity. Such an approach will help to protect the organizational reputation and maintain the resistant image in the eyes of the public.

2. Negative publicity in social media and corporate reputation

In this chapter the main threats of social media and negative word-of-mouth for a company's reputation will be discussed in the first section. Definition, characteristics and role of corporate reputation is described in the second section. The third section proposes some actions that can be undertaken to prevent the spread of negative publicity online in order to avoid reputational damage for companies.

2.1 Threats of social media and online word-of-mouth

Social media is dominated by user generated content. Users have the ability to generate and control the information in this online environment. This makes it easier for dissatisfied or disgruntled users to spread negative product or company experiences and rumours to the thousands of social media participants. Previously undiscovered and hidden from public negative information about company's actions and activities becomes publicly accessible to everyone with the internet connection regardless in which corner of the world the person is currently located.

Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith (2008, p.145) see the social media as a facilitator or even the trigger of business crises. The internet facilitates the spread of information between users all over the world. Without social media this information would spread much more slowly or even would not be discovered at all. The Web 2.0 can be considered as the trigger of the company's crisis by the way of spreading rumours about the company, founding of shadow or copy-cat web sites or use of any form of cyber-terrorism. The examples of spoof copy-cat web sites targeting companies are www.mercedesproblems.com for Mercedes-Benz, www.killercoke.org for Coca-Cola or www.mcspotlight.org for McDonald's (Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith 2008, pp.145-146). On these web sites people mainly post information about improper actions of the companies regarding their customers, employees or other stakeholders or regarding the inappropriate way of using natural resources, environmental pollution or other immoral actions of the firms. As a result, the crisis managers and communication

experts have to include the possibilities of the emergence of different forms of negative publicity on the internet and the ways of dealing with such situations in their annual and long-term planning.

When a single user posts negative information about a firm it is in most cases unlikely that this message will receive a lot of attention or will cause some problems to the firm. The negative publicity is dangerous when many users highly interested in the topic or personally affected from the actions of the firm are talking about the products, services or inappropriate actions of the company. Dissemination of negative corporate information online is closely linked to the concept of online word-of-mouth, also often called viral word-of-mouth. Viral word-of-mouth is the exchange of different types of information (e.g. information sharing, advice, suggestion, warning and criticism) between users in the online environment (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006, p. 3). A lot of international surveys show that people tend to trust the opinions of their friends and peers more than the corporate messages or advertising. Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Survey of more than 28 000 internet respondents that was conducted in 56 countries in 2011 shows that 92% of consumers trust the recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising. 70% of respondents prefer consumer opinions posted online as a main source when searching for some product related information. In contrast, only 47% of participants trust in company's advertising in TV and magazines and in brand sponsorship (Nielsen Statistics, 2011).

Consumers give their feedback and seek information online in the same manner they do it offline, thereby affecting the buying behaviour of others and thus are taking part in the success or failure of a particular brand. The process of online word-of-mouth is also supported by features of the internet that facilitate the spread of information between people. These features are: the existence of a great number of different social media platforms that facilitate the exchange of information between users; anonymity and confidentiality of users is possible when seeking or giving advice online; absence of geographical and time boundaries; high quality that can be achieved in online conversations (e.g. possibility of using video, audio, data files) (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006, p.3).

An interesting point is also the identification of reasons why consumers seek the information and advice online. In their survey of 309 consumers Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006, p.7) found that main reasons for engaging in online word-of-mouth

for participants are the willingness to reduce the chance of making a bad decision and risk associated with the purchase, willingness to influence others, and searching for price information. A lot of people are also participating in online word-of-mouth because they consider it the easiest way to get the information they need or to inform their friends and colleagues about relevant facts about the particular issue or their own experiences. The reasons for spreading the information online can be different for negative word-of-mouth. In this situation the willingness to share own negative experiences with products or the firm, the desire to do something good for the community, and personal appreciation by others in the form of commenting and liking of the shared information will serve as the main drivers of participating in online buzz (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006, pp.7-11).

As was mentioned earlier not every piece of information posted on social media will receive a lot of attention and go viral. Some other factors also have an influence on the extent of spread and potential damage from the information posted by social media users. Among these reasons are the type of audience that has an access to the information, personal characteristics and reputation of people who spread the message within social networks. Sometimes it is enough for only few influential individuals to spread the message online, so the idea can become popular on different social media platforms or even draw the attention of traditional media (Coombs 2012, p.25). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between four main categories of social media users (Lembke 2011, p.166):

- Influencer – people within the network with high influence and high coverage rate. Normally they are very innovative, well educated persons.
- Authoritans – they have a very high influence, but a small coverage rate. This means they reach only a very limited number of persons who are very likely to follow their opinion.
- Connectors – they spread different ideas, opinions and messages in various social networking sites.
- Advocates – this group is one of the most active in commenting the different content posted by others and very often are recommending interesting ideas and topics to other users.

In this respect it is very important for an organization to find out which individuals can be identified as influencers, monitor their behaviour within the different social networking sites and immediately react to the criticism of these persons. Influencers are very often interested in the organizational products, services and actions. They can also be the members of brand communities. Many organizations are trying to be in contact and keep friendly relationship with these individuals and motivate them to spread positive interesting information about the brand online.

Online word-of-mouth can be seen as a powerful instrument of influence between the different online social applications. In contrast to offline word-of-mouth, online buzz can reach much larger groups of people within a very short time period. Just to illustrate that, consider one person that on average has three close friends in a real life and approximately 150 friends on the social network platform. This fact makes social media an effective way of communication and spreading information between different groups of customers. On the other hand, the loose of control of the content posted and the high possibility for organizational failures to be discovered are forcing companies to use these new types of media very cautious (Kaplan and Haenlein 2011, p.255).

2.2 Corporate reputation: definition and importance

One of the main reasons why companies may worry about the consequences of negative publicity on social media is the reputational damage that can be caused by the spread of negative company's information or rumours on the internet.

Reputation can be defined as the sum of perceptions and favourable or unfavourable evaluations the stakeholders hold regarding the organization over some time period. Reputation is built upon direct and indirect interactions and experiences people have with the company and any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm and its actions and behaviour (Gotsi and Wilson 2001, p.29). A central point for forming positive corporate reputation is the ability of organizations to meet their stakeholder's expectations (Coombs 2012, pp.35-36).

For the company, reputation represents one of the most valuable intangible assets. The firm normally needs a long-time period to build its desirable image. The organization with favourable reputation enjoys a lot of benefits like positive media coverage, positive financial evaluations from experts, possibilities for charging high prices, high chances of attracting customers and top employee talents as well as increased job satisfaction. Another advantage is that stakeholders are more likely to ignore negative information about the organization with a good reputation (Coombs 2012, p.14).

When talking about reputation, great emphasis must be placed on the reputational management as a means of protecting reputational assets. Reputational management is the sum of organizational efforts and activities designed to influence stakeholder's evaluations and perceptions of the organization (Coombs 2012, p.35). The main functions of this process are the ongoing tracking of the company's reputation by its stakeholders (e.g. analysis of complaints, feedback, using of service line), media and internet coverage regarding the organization, the analysis of appearing trends and changes in business environment as well as the prevention and reaction to potential threats (Coombs 2012, p.174).

Negative publicity posted on different social media sites is a form of indirect interaction the people have with the company. Stories and experiences of unsatisfied customers appearing in online media have a potential to erode the organizational reputation and its relationship with stakeholders. The probability of negative publicity to damage the company's reputation increases if there are a lot of people who are talking about the unfavourable event and if the stakeholders do not have a real interaction with the organization. In this situation, the media is the only channel people use for gaining information about the company and built their opinion based on the comments and messages their receive from other users. Therefore, it is very important to scan and monitor social media for positive and negative information about the organization and indicate the level of negative mood regarding the firm (Coombs 2012, p.174).

If the organizational reputation is damaged and the stakeholders' perceptions of the firm turn into a negative direction, this can have direct consequences on the firm's financial situation, trust in the eyes of its stakeholders and other interest groups, and even lead to existential hazard of the organization. Hence, the appropriate reactions to the negative publicity and the effective communicational efforts are very important to

keep a good relational reputation with customers, partners and other stakeholders. Inappropriate actions of the firm in the crisis situation can lead to boycotting firm's website, products, spread of negative word-of-mouth and other direct behavioural consequences of the stakeholders (Coombs 2007, p.169).

As organizations are increasing their presence and efforts to build their image on different social media platforms, a specific definition of online reputation is necessary. This term is understood as the company's reputation in all online channels where the firm is present. Such channels are for example blogs, social networking sites, forums, and web sites. The main tasks of reputational management in respect of social media are monitoring, analysing, and responding to the negative publicity on different social media platforms. These tasks will be described further in more detail when talking about response strategies of the firms to the negative publicity appearing online (Coombs 2012, pp.163-164).

2.3 Preventive actions of the company to avoid reputational damage from negative publicity

As can be seen from the previous discussion and numerous cases in the corporate practice, negative publicity on social media sites has a high potential of damaging a company's reputation. Well known are examples of firms like Nestle, Procter&Gamble, Mercedes, McDonalds and many others where the negative information about a company posted online led to a boycott of web sites, financial losses, an explosion of negative mood regarding the organization in the online environment, and creation of copy-cat web sites of so called "haters" of the company following by the coverage in traditional media. Big companies with strong brands and financial resources as well as non-profit organizations have the same probability to be the victim of negative criticism appearing online. In this respect it is very important to identify and analyse strategies that will be useful in preventing the explosion of negative publicity, responding and taking actions to prevent the reputational damage and other possible losses for organizations. Some strategies from crisis management like Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Benoit's Image

Restoration Strategy are already adapted to the online social media environment. Other theories are emerging that are specially developed to deal with negative criticism in new media like the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model. These theories will be described in the next chapter.

Before discussing the different approaches of dealing with negative publicity in social media, it is important to mention that the main advantage of social media is that they allow for monitoring and tracking the discussions online in order to identify emerging signs and prevent situations that can otherwise turn into crisis. Crisis situation in online environment means the distribution of rumours and messages which try to challenge “a good name” of a company and have potential of damaging a company’s reputation. It is always desirable to prevent the spread of negative publicity or at least minimize its duration and consequences (Coombs 2012, p.164).

In order to identify situations with the risk of potential reputational harm for the organization and to prevent these possible damages some steps must be undertaken:

1. The relevant social media sites have to be monitored. This first step is also called environmental scanning. This process includes the monitoring of online social media platforms for social, political, cultural changes, trends, and events. The results of the ongoing monitoring of the online environment have to be included in the planning of future marketing efforts of the organization. One of the main difficulties at this stage is the identification of social media platforms that are relevant for the organization (Coombs 2012, p.48).
2. A qualitative and quantitative assessment of the threat information that was gathered on the first stage must be conducted. An analysis of threat assessment should be built around three factors: likelihood of occurrence and impact it would have on the organization (e.g. operational, reputational, financial consequences) and its stakeholders (e.g. product, financial, safety risks). Likelihood is determined as the probability that the risk or an event with negative impact for the organization will occur. The potential crisis threat can be calculated as following: $CT = L \times OI \times SI$, where CT is the crisis threat, L is the likelihood of occurrence that normally is assessed by the management of the firm on a scale from 1 as being low to 10 representing a high probability of occurrence. OI and SI represent organizational and stakeholder impact and can also be measured on a scale from 1

(low) to 10 (high) in the same manner as the likelihood. OI and SI can be further divided in some more accurate and detailed scores depending on the type of organization and forecasting techniques that are usually used by the firm (Coombs 2012, pp.58-63).

Based on the analysis of likelihood of the situation to turn into crisis and its possible impact on the organization and different groups of stakeholders, it can be determined whether some particular threat warrants further attention and actions. There already exist a vast majority of monitoring tools that can be used to facilitate the process of assessing potential threats in social media. The most popular of them are BerrellesLuce, CyberAlert and dna13, just to name a few (Coombs 2012, p.66).

3. If the situation is assessed as being dangerous for the organizational reputation, possible response strategies have to be reviewed. Important points that must be considered on this stage are the previous experience of management with similar situations, previous and current reputation of the organization, and financial resources that are available to deal with the crisis situation. Essential on this stage is the involvement of employees from different departments and positional levels of the firm and external communication experts, if needed, for finding an optimal and most effective response strategy. The general rules for the successful crisis communication are quick response, consistency and openness of the response communication in different media. If the response message comes too late or contains dishonest information it can even worsen the negative mood regarding the organization in the online environment (Coombs 2012, p.140).
4. A detailed action plan must be prepared based on the chosen response strategies and available financial and human resources.
5. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the response strategy that was used must be conducted. Results of this evaluation should be included in the strategic marketing planning for prevention of crisis situations in the future. The data that can be used for the evaluation of the success or failure of a particular response strategy are duration of the crisis situation, stakeholder feedback, organizational performance measure (e.g. sales, profit), direction (positive, negative, neutral) and intensity of

comments on various social media platforms, and coverage of the situation in traditional media (Coombs 2012, p.170).

Another important point that must be considered is the source of the crisis. Negative comments can be posted by employees, customers, partners or rivals of the organization, or other external groups of people who are distributing negative comments in online social networks. DeKay (2011, p.5) differentiates two types of comments that are posted by different stakeholder's groups. The first type includes comments that initiate genuine discussion between users of a particular platform like concrete suggestions, opinions or facts about the company. The second type of comments are those posted by so called "trolls" or "haters" of the firm – individuals who provide the expressions of some anger or discontent regarding the company but without any concrete issue or concentration of any particular problem (DeKay 2011, p.5). It is recommended to ignore or delete the last type of comments, as they do not represent any concrete issues regarding the organization. One effective method that was proven empirically to prevent the distribution of rumours is the introduction of internal (for the employees of the organization) and external (for the external users of company's web site and social media platforms) social media guidelines. Employees should be informed what content and on which social media sites they are allowed to communicate on behalf of the company. The use of social media guideline for the external audience can be illustrated with an example of Procter & Gamble's disclaimer on the company's Facebook page (See Appendix 1). In a content analysis of company's Facebook pages of firms operating in different fields of business, DeKay (2011, p.8) found out that organizations which have implemented social media guidelines have significantly fewer negative comments than those who didn't introduce such guidelines. However, it may be due to the fact that negative comments of users on these pages were either deleted or not published by the organization.

3. Types of response strategies used to deal with negative comments in social media

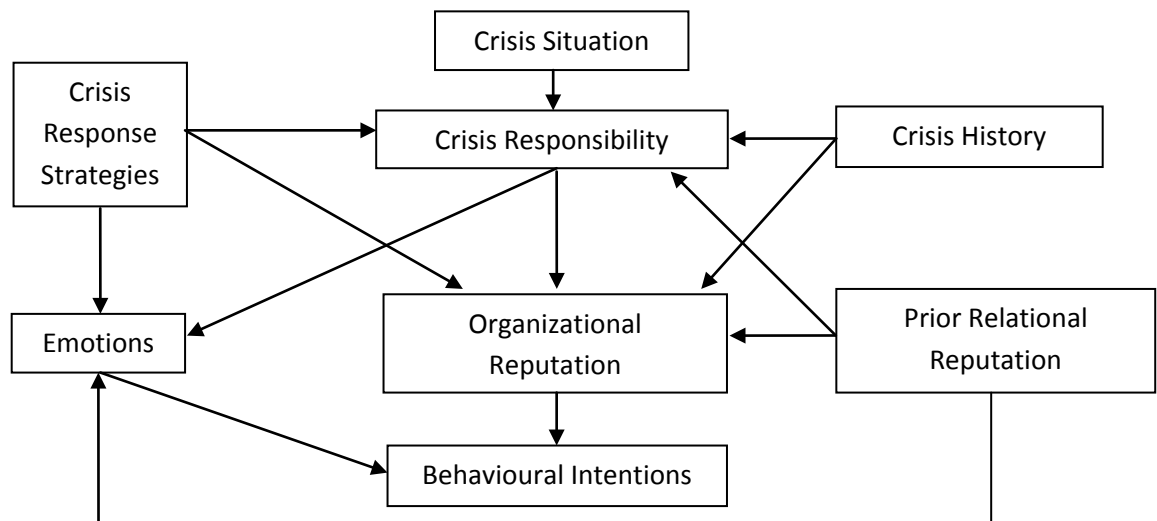
If the negative company information goes viral and it is actually too late to prevent its distribution, the organization has to concentrate its efforts on choosing an appropriate response strategy to deal with it. The main objectives here are the prevention of the spread of negative criticism on other unaffected areas of the organization and limiting the duration of spreading of this information online (Coombs 2012, p.139). The best known and most widely used crisis communication strategies are described in this chapter. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is one of the most famous and most often used theories in reputational management and public relations. This strategy will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Benoit's Image Restoration Strategy is another model that can be used when responding to negative publicity and it is a topic of the second section of this chapter. The Social-mediated Crisis Response Strategy is relatively new in crisis management and, therefore, still lacks empirical support. This strategy will be discussed further in the third section of this chapter. Finally, the usage of crisis response strategies in corporate practice will be described in section four.

3.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is based on the Attribution Theory that suggests that people search causes of events, especially if they are negative and unexpected. Then they will attribute the responsibility for an event and experience an emotional reaction in form of sympathy or anger regarding this event. These two components influence behaviour towards the company and its products. Low responsibility perception and sympathy will lead to positive behavioural intentions of stakeholders. High responsibility attribution connected with anger will have negative consequences (Coombs 2007, pp.165-166).

The main components of SCCT and their relations to each other are presented in **Figure 6** and are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 6. Crisis Situation Model of SCCT (cf. Coombs 2007, p.166)



As can be seen from **Figure 6**, the main aim of crisis response efforts is to protect the organizational reputation. The process of choosing the right and most effective strategy begins with the determination of the crisis situation type and assessing the level of possible reputational threat. The term threat is to be understood as the amount of damage for a company's reputation that can occur if any actions are undertaken to prevent the spread of negative publicity. Three main factors that help to assess the possible threat from a particular situation are the amount of initial crisis responsibility that stakeholders attribute to the organization, the prior relational reputation, and the crisis history of the corporation (Coombs 2007, p.166). The responsibility for the crisis situation depends upon the perceived amount of control the company has over the particular situation. Negative attitude towards the organization will be higher if the stakeholders think that the organization is responsible for the emergence of a particular situation or don't take any actions to prevent it (Coombs 2007, p.166). Crisis history can be defined as a previous experience of the firm with similar situations and the prior relational reputation represents a set of actions that was undertaken to deal with these situations in the past. Positive prior relational reputation of the company will reduce the amount of perceived responsibility and negative emotions toward the organization in a current situation (Coombs 2007, p.167).

The perceived responsibility for the crisis situation also affects the behavioural intentions of stakeholders in two ways: through emotions as well as through reputation. The increased attribution to the crisis responsibility generates stronger

negative emotions. In their turn they lead to some negative behavioural intentions of stakeholders (e.g. participation in negative word-of-mouth, termination of interactions with the organization). Also, if company's reputation is perceived as being unfavourable, it will lead to some negative behavioural intentions as well. Reputation and emotions are closely related terms in marketing literature. In SCCT this connection is largely explained by shared connection of these two terms to the crisis responsibility (Coombs 2007, p.167).

The crisis situation is defined, framed, perceived and interpreted by the organization and its stakeholders. In SCCT there are three main criteria for dividing different types of crisis situations into clusters. These three criteria are: the source of the crisis situation (internal or external), the cause of the crisis (technical or human error), and whether the situation was a result of some accidental or intentional actions of the organization and its members. These three factors are crucial in the attribution of the crisis responsibility to the organization by its stakeholders (Coombs 2007, p.167). Based on these criteria, the crisis situations are split up into three clusters:

1. The **victim cluster** is characterized by a very little attribution of responsibility for the situation to the organization. The firm is seen rather as a victim of some external, accidental events than a cause of the crisis. According to the SCCT, natural disasters, workplace violence, product tampering, malevolence, and rumours are allocated in this cluster (Coombs 2012, pp.157-158). The spread of rumours in different online social networks is one of the most widespread forms of negative publicity that can be published by its former or current employees, dissatisfied customers or rivals. Rumour is the false information about a company that is circulated among different interest groups of the firm and can create some damage to the organizational reputation. Malevolence is a situation where some external individuals or groups of interest are causing damage to the organization (Coombs 2007, pp.167-168).
2. The **accidental cluster** is characterised by low perceived responsibility and low organizational control of the situation. The accidental cluster differs from the preventable cluster through the fact that the organizational actions which led to the crises were unintentional. Here most of the technical errors are allocated, such as technology, equipment or product failure with potential harm to the organization or its stakeholders (Coombs 2007, pp.167-168).

3. **Preventable cluster.** In situations that belong to this cluster, the organization is aware of the negative consequences of its actions or products, on the environment or its stakeholders, but tries to conceal, hide or ignore them hoping that they will not be discovered. Events with high organizational responsibility are allocated in this cluster. Such events are mostly caused in the internal way. Most of the human-error mistakes, harms, and organizational misdeeds can be found in this cluster. Also challenge crises are allocated here. Challenge crises are claims of the stakeholders that blame the company for operating in an inappropriate manner (Coombs 2012, p.157-158).

The first two clusters represent the low to medium damage potential to the organizational reputation. The preventable or also called intentional cluster events have a very high potential of turning into a crisis and can harm the company's reputation substantially (Coombs 2007, pp.167-168).

After the particular situation can be allocated in one of the described clusters and the level of the organizational responsibility for the situation can be estimated, managers have to decide which communicational efforts have to be made for preventing the negative consequences of the crisis and minimize the spread of negative mood between stakeholders. The prior crisis history and prior relational reputation also play an important role in deciding which response strategy to choose in a particular situation. They can be seen as intensifying factors to the attribution of the crisis responsibility and the intensity of negative emotions (e.g. anger, schadenfreude) regarding the organization (Coombs 2007, p.169).

Response strategies to negative publicity include a set of communicational and behavioural organizational efforts used to protect and repair the reputation, reduce negative word-of-mouth and prevent negative behavioural intentions of stakeholders regarding the organization. A response strategy consists of the response form and content. The form of response is how and where the company's message is presented to its public. For the communication strategy to be effective the company's response has to be quick, consistent over all media used in the response delivery, open, honest and clear. The form of organizational response to negative publicity will directly affect stakeholder's perceptions and emotions regarding the organization (Coombs 2012, pp.139-140). The way in which the message is presented affects how people define a

problem, how they see the causes of this problem and how they attribute the responsibility for this situation (Coombs 2007, p.167).

The response content includes type, amount and quality of information that is delivered to the stakeholders. Emotions triggered by some negative situation are limiting people's ability to process information. Therefore company's response message should be clear, transparent and precise. According to the SCCT, the response content can be divided into instructing information, adjusting information and reputational management which include different types of response strategies, which are of particular importance for this master thesis (Coombs 2012, p.146).

Instructing information includes any type of information that must be delivered to the stakeholders if there is any suspicion that the particular situation may have harmful consequences for their health, safety or financial wealth. Examples for such situations are product harms or environment accidents that can place people at risk (Coombs 2012, pp. 146-147). Adjusting information is aimed to explain the situation in details to the stakeholders in order to reduce their psychological stress and cognitive dissonances regarding the situation. This information must be supported with facts about what was done to prevent a negative situation, what is done to deal with it and what will be done to minimize its consequences (Coombs 2012, pp. 148-150).

Reputational management consists of steps for choosing the right type of response strategy to deal with negative publicity that spreads online and/or offline. The main aim of reputational management is to find a strategy that will be most effective and useful for protecting or repairing the company's reputation in a particular crisis situation. As already mentioned, core elements used for the classification of response strategies in SCCT are the level of responsibility that stakeholders attribute to the company for causing a particular event and the level of potential threat that this event may cause to the company's reputation. The response strategy includes the company's response message to the crisis situation that is addressed to its stakeholders and other interest groups and is distributed in different types of media. This message can include both verbal (e.g. text, CEO video speech) and nonverbal components (e.g. pictures, videos) (Coombs 2012, pp.152-154). The SCCT differentiates between four types of response strategies that can be used for dealing with negative publicity. These types are presented in **Table 1** and are discussed in more detail below.

Table 1. Types of crisis response strategies in SCCT (cf.Coombs 2012, p. 155, Coombs 2007, p.170, Huang 2006, pp.191-192)

Response Strategy	Subcategories	Definition	Level of organizational responsibility for an event
Primary crisis response strategies			
Denial Strategies	Attacking the accuser	Statements that confront the person or group of people that claim the problem exists. The lawsuits against the accuser can be used.	Low
	Actual denial	The management of the company states that the problem does not exist.	Low
	Scapegoating	Some other persons outside of the organization are blamed for the crisis.	Low
Diminishing Strategies	Excuse	Statements aimed to reduce the company's responsibility for the crisis by denying any intent to do harm or claiming inability to control the situation.	Low to medium
	Justification	Statements aimed to reduce the perceived damage that was caused by the actions of the firm. The company admits its responsibility for the situation, but states that the standards used by the accuser to evaluate the impact of the particular event were inappropriate.	Low to medium
Rebuilding Strategies	Compensation	Victims of the particular event receive material compensation.	High
	Apology	The management of the company publicly admits the full responsibility of the firm for the particular event and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.	High
Secondary crisis response strategies			
Bolstering Strategies	Reminder	Statements that remind stakeholders about company's past good works and relationships.	Low
	Ingratiation	The organization praises stakeholders.	Low to medium
	Victimage	The organization states that it is also the victim of the crisis.	Low

As can be seen from **Table 1**, response strategies can be divided into primary and secondary. Primary response strategies are divided into three groups: denial, diminishing and rebuilding. Secondary response strategies are seen as being

supplemental and often are used to increase the effect of primary strategies that are used (Coombs 2007, p.170).

Denial response strategies attempt to remove any connections between the organization and the crisis situation. The organization denies taking any responsibility for the occurrence of the negative events and states that other persons are responsible for causes of these events. Typical situations when these strategies can be used are the spreading of negative rumours through the social media networks and challenge crises (Coombs 2007, p.171).

Diminish strategies are used when the management of a firm wants to minimize the perceived connection between the organization and the crisis. The organization claims that it has no control over the event or tries to lessen the perceived negative consequences of this event. These strategies are appropriate in situations when public perceives the organization as being a victim of an accident and are usually associated with low responsibility of the organization for negative event (Coombs 2007, pp.171-172).

Rebuilding response strategies try to improve the organizational reputation in the eyes of its stakeholders and other interest groups by means of some material or symbolic compensation. These strategies are associated with taking a full responsibility for an event from the site of the organization. They can be used in situations that represent a high potential threat to the company's reputation like intentional crises or accidental crises that are coupled with a previous negative crisis history or unfavourable relational reputation (Coombs 2007, p.172).

It must also be mentioned that the organizational responsibility for some particular negative event provides a conceptual link that is supposed to match the crisis response strategy with the particular negative occurrence (Coombs 2007, p.170). There are also some other factors that should be accounted for when looking for an appropriate and most effective response strategy (additionally to the factors which have already been discussed). These factors are (Coombs 1995, pp.458-461):

- Truthfulness of the criticism (e.g. truth, facts or rumours) – existence of proofs that the event actually took place. The evidence can be true, ambiguous or false.

- Amount of damage caused by a particular situation (e.g. financial losses, stakeholders safety risks, environmental harm).
- Direct or indirect impact of the negative event on the company's stakeholders.
- Positive performance history in the past that also will have a positive effect on the company's communication credibility in the current situation.
- Financial situation of the company and financial resources available for dealing with a particular problem and its consequences.

The danger for brands and companies of being damaged by negative publicity increased with the recent growth in social media usage by different categories of stakeholders. Here, a lot of authors in the field of reputational and crisis management adjusted their strategies for these developments and included social media as a new channel of crisis communication (Kerkhof et al. 2011, p.77). Coombs also adjusted his SCCT to the new online environment and developed a lot of recommendations regarding which strategy a company should use when dealing with negative publicity in social media. **Figure 7** represents a decision flowchart that can be used for choosing an appropriate response strategy when dealing with the spread of negative publicity in online and offline environments. In this flowchart the company's prior reputation, trustfulness of the negative publicity, damage that is caused by this publicity and impact on the stakeholders are used as influential factors for the selection of the most appropriate and effective response strategy for a particular crisis situation.

Figure 7. Response strategy selection flowchart (cf. Coombs 1995, pp. 462-469, Coombs 2012, pp.159-164)

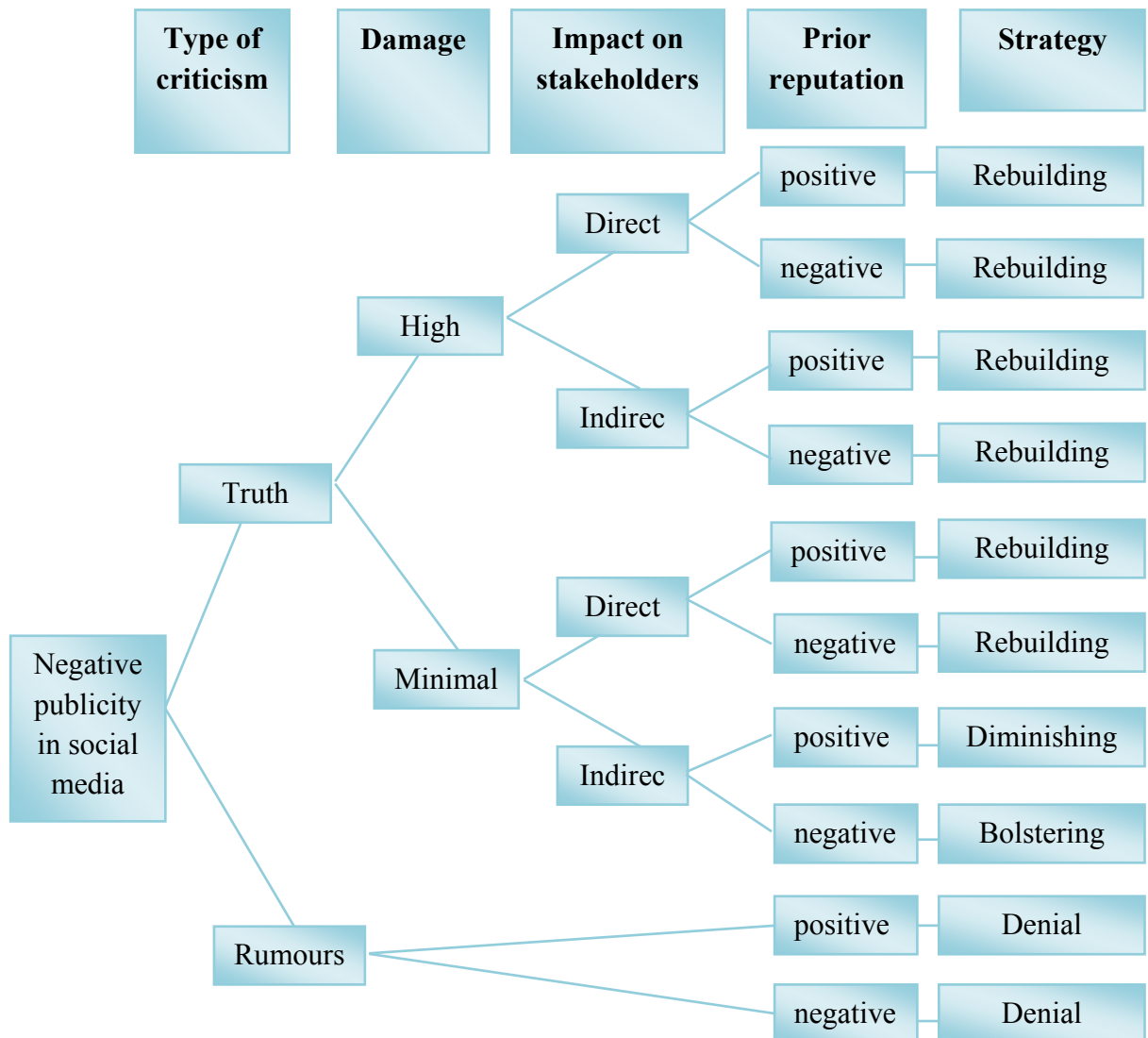


Figure 7 presents only a very general guideline for dealing with negative publicity in social media. Which strategy will be selected and will lead to the best results depends on a particular situation and circumstances of a particular problem. Some other hints provided by Coombs (2012, p.159) for choosing the right strategy for a particular crisis situation are:

- As the reputational threat increases, it is recommended to use more accommodative strategies (rebuilding strategies).
- Diminishing strategies should be used for accident crises if there is no prior crisis history or unfavourable prior reputation. If the company already has some

negative crisis history or unfavourable prior reputation, rebuilding strategies should be used instead.

- Rebuilding strategies are suitable for most of the situations in the preventable crisis cluster.
- Denial strategies can be used to deal with rumours and challenge crises, if they are unwarranted.
- Bolstering strategies can be used to support other types of strategies.
- For staying consistent it is not recommended to use denial response strategies together with rebuilding or diminishing strategies. On the other hand, diminishing and rebuilding strategies can be used in combination with each other.

Most of these recommendations have already been supported by different empirical and case studies.

3.2 Benoit's Image Restoration Strategy

The Image Restoration Strategy is built on the assumption that the most effective and appropriate crisis response strategy can be selected depending on the nature and type of the stakeholders' complaints and "attacks". As in the SCCT, one of the most important elements used for assessing the level of potential for the organization damage is the level of stakeholder's perceived responsibility of the organization for the occurrence of a particular event. The situation can be characterized as dangerous for the organizational reputation if it is perceived by the stakeholders or other interest groups as being offensive, and the organization is held to be responsible for the occurrence of this situation. Each organization has a lot of different stakeholders like customers, partners or the government. According to the Image Restoration Strategy the response to the unfavourable publicity will be effective if it reaches the most important and influential stakeholder groups of the organization. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of the organization is to identify the most important audiences

that will receive or have access to the company's response messages (Benoit 1997, p.178).

Image Restoration Strategy offers five different response strategies that can be used when an organization faces a crisis situation. Each general strategy also has its subcategories as in the SCCT. The first strategy is denial. The definition of the denial response strategy is very close to that used by Coombs in the SCCT and can be defined as a statement in which the firm denies any connections to the event or even disputes that the event has occurred. In contrast to the SCCT the denial strategy includes only two possibilities of action: 1) simple denial – statement of the firm that the problem does not exist or that the act was not harmful to anyone, and 2) shifting of the blame – statements that argue that some other people or organizations are responsible for offensive actions (Benoit 1997, pp.179-180).

The second response strategy is called evasion of responsibility and it consists of four possible forms: 1) provocation – statements that the offensive actions of the firm were just the reasonable reaction to another offensive act; 2) defeasibility – statements in which the company claims the lack of information or control over some important elements of the problem; 3) claiming the offensive action occurred by accident – attempts of the company to persuade its audience that the problem has happened by accident or that the problem should be held less important; 4) the company can suggest that the offensive actions were performed with good intentions (Benoit 1997, p.180).

The third strategy aims at reducing the perceived offensiveness and consists of six versions. The first version is bolstering. This version includes company's attempts to reduce negative feelings connected with a particular problem by means of reminding stakeholders of the positive characteristics of the company or the favourable previous image. This strategy is similar to the reminder in the SCCT. The second possibility is to minimize the negative perceived consequences of the wrongful behaviour or actions. The third form is separation – attempts of the firm to delimit the particular negative situation from other similar but more offensive actions. The next possibility is called transcendence and is used to place the unfavourable situation in a more positive and favourable context. The fifth version is to attack the accuser (Benoit 1997, pp.180-181). This strategy is similar to one of the subcategories of the denial strategies in the SCCT. The last form is the material or symbolic compensation of individuals that were

affected by the wrongdoing of the company. This strategy also has its analogue in the Coomb's SCCT.

The fourth general restoration strategy is corrective actions. It includes the actual corrective actions to restore the state of affairs existing before the unfavourable event and preventive activities aimed to prevent the reoccurrence of the event in the future (Benoit 1997, p.181).

The last general response strategy is mortification. Using this strategy a company has to accept the full responsibility for the occurrence of the negative situation. The most common form of this strategy is apology that also has its analogue in SCCT. An important disadvantage of this strategy is that very often firms also have to deal with lawsuits from victims in situations where they are recognized as being responsible for the negative occurrence (Benoit 1997, pp.181-182).

Benoit also proposes some general recommendations regarding the actions for choosing the most appropriate and suitable ones for a particular situation response strategy (Benoit 1997, pp.182-184):

- Ongoing monitoring of the environment for the emerging negative trends and potential threat planning must be conducted. Such monitoring and planning should reduce the reaction time and mistakes associated with organizational steps in dealing with a particular problem.
- Analysis of a particular situation and identification of the relevant audience that will receive the response message. Different stakeholder groups have different interests in the organization. At this point it is important to identify which groups are the most important and have to be contacted at first. The second issue is whether all stakeholders should receive the same response message, or whether it should be adopted for the particular groups. Overall it is important to stay consistent and not to use response messages that are contradictory to each other.
- It must be considered if the firm really needs to respond to the particular criticism. Other methods may also be used to redefine the problem or refocus the attention of the audience on some other more interesting and relevant

topics. In such a way the company gains some time to see if the interest of the audience in the particular problem is high enough to treat it as dangerous.

- All organizational claims and statements should be supported by facts and evidence. False claims and arguments that may backfire should be avoided.
- If the company is really responsible for the crisis situation it should use the mortification strategy and admit its responsibility. Usage of denial strategies in such situations can lead to the loss of trust and credibility or even stakeholder's backfire.
- Denial and defeasibility strategies should be used in cases when false information and rumours circulate in different kinds of social media.
- Corrective and preventive actions plans should be reported. This point is especially important for firms that admit their responsibility for the unfavourable event and will help to retain a positive image reassuring stakeholders that steps have been taken to eliminate the particular problem and avoid its reoccurrence in the future.

As can be seen from the previous discussion, Benoit's Image Restoration Theory has a lot of overlapping points with SCCT. Many subcategories are similar to those used in SCCT, but some strategies like provocation, defeasibility or separation additionally complement the range of possibilities for organizations when dealing with negative publicity in social media. More attention is paid to the target audience of the response message than in the SCCT.

3.3 The Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model

The development of the internet and especially of different social media platforms led to the emergence of new theories in the field of crisis communication. One of such models is the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model that was specially developed for dealing with negative criticism in the online environment. According to this model, social media is not only to be regarded as the communication media between people and organizations but also as a primary source of information about the company and its products for certain key publics (Jin and Lui 2010, pp.431-432).

The Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model is developed to deal primary with problems that are either initiated or fostered by the communication transmitted through different forms of social media. Before an appropriate response strategy to negative publicity online can be chosen, the most important social media platforms should be identified and monitored. Three types of indicators can help to evaluate the influence and potential threat of a particular social media platform: 1) outputs – the volume of the negative publicity in a particular social media like the number of posts and comments about the relevant crisis situation, the number of unique visitors, RSS subscribers and crisis-related links to and from other sites; 2) outtakes – the importance and popularity of the social media network (e.g. search engine ranking of the social media platform); 3) outcomes – public's awareness, importance of the social media networking site, and post-crisis trust of a particular platform (Jin and Lui 2010, pp.432-434).

The next step in choosing the right response strategy is the definition of important groups of stakeholders that will receive the response message. According to Jin and Lui (2010, p. 434) company's stakeholders can be divided into primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders can be characterized as the most affected by the negative occurrence individuals or groups of individuals who have long-term interests in the company and have a substantial influence on the company's reputation and its operations. Secondary stakeholders are not directly affected by the outcome of the negative company's event, but still have an interest in it. Secondary stakeholders may be, for example, environmental organizations or some government agencies. The Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model differentiates between four types of key publics: 1) influential social media content creators – people who post or comment the

unfavourable messages about the organization; 2) social media followers who read (follow) the messages posted by others; 3) social media inactives who have no exposure to the social media platforms but can be aware about the crisis from other offline media; 4) media (traditional and emerging) who follow and cover the particular problem (Jin and Lui 2011, p. 346). Hence, before choosing the most effective response strategy, as a matter of limited financial and time resources, the organization has to prioritize the most important social media platforms as well as the most important stakeholders that the response message will be directed to.

The next step in selecting the right response strategy is the evaluation of the credibility of the posted criticism and understanding of the information dissemination process in the online environment or so called electronic word-of-mouth process. The main feature of messages posted by social media users is their evaluation by others as being more trustful and credible as a company's messages. The reputation of people who posted negative messages about the organization, the amount of followers, and the spread of this information in different social media platforms can be monitored for evaluating the potential reputational threat of the criticism for the organization (Jin and Lui 2010, p. 435). In this respect it is also very important to understand the motives of unsatisfied users that post and spread the unfavourable information about organizations on different social media sites. A lot of studies have investigated this question and identified four groups of motives that drive individuals to share information with others: product-involvement, self-involvement (e.g. self-confirmation, self-expression, selfishness, need for recognition), other-involvement (e.g. willingness to help others) and message- or issue-involvement. The strength of these motives depends on the level of involvement of the person in a particular issue that means the perceived individual's ability to do something concerning an issue (Jin and Lui 2010, p. 435-436). As a majority of users can be classified as followers of the information posted by others it is also important to understand the motives of users to read and spread the information online. The most relevant of them are issue relevance, information seeking and sharing, media check, convenience, affiliation and emotional venting and support (Jin and Lui 2010, p. 439). Regarding the motives of both, opinion leaders or speakers and opinion followers (seekers), the negative criticism posted online can be evaluated as dangerous for organizational reputation if there is a fit between the content provided by speakers and the social media followers' interest in this content, or if the motives of both the opinion leaders and opinion seekers overlap (Jin and Lui 2010, p. 439). Like

in the Coombs SCCT the likelihood of an issue to become a crisis and the potential impact of the unfavourable situation on the company's reputation are also two important aspects when choosing an effective response strategy and must be evaluated as well.

It must be mentioned that most issues regarding the organization that are appearing in social media are rumours. For this reason, the main aim of the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model is the development of a model and recommendations for dealing with negative rumours in different social media platforms. According to Coombs and Holladay (2002, p.170) a rumour is "the circulation of false information designed to harm an organization" and is placed into the victim cluster of crisis situations in SCCT. Some rumours need a direct and immediate response, but the majority of them cannot be supported by some evidence. Important points in deciding whether to respond to rumours or not are the fit between rumour content and the readers or follower's attitudes and information seeking motives, rumour source credibility, frequency and the amount of spread and rumour updates, public belief in rumour and rumour accuracy (DiFonzo and Bordia 2002, pp. 4-6). Rumours also have some life cycle stages within the social media. These stages can be defined as generation, evaluation and transmission of rumours in the online social media environment (DiFonzo and Bordia 2002, p.3).

Jin and Lui (2010, pp. 446-448) defined possible response strategies to negative publicity (rumours) in social media based on Coombs SCCT, extended and adjusted them to the online environment and linked them to the life cycle phases of the rumour circulation on different social media platforms (especially blogs). **Table 2** gives an overview about which response strategy will be the most effective depending on the rumour generation phase.

Table 2. Social-mediated Response Strategies by Rumour Generation Phase (Jin and Lui 2010, p.446)

Response option	Strategy	Rumour phases			Crisis recovery
		Generation	Belief	Transmission	
Basic information	Instructing information	X			
	Adapting information: - Corrective action - Emotion	X			
Denial	Attack the accuser		X		
	Denial		X		
	Scapegoat		X		
	Ignore		X		
Diminishing	Excuse		X		
	Justification		X		
	Separation		X		
Rebuilding	Compensation				X
	Apology				X
	Transcendence				X
Reinforcing	Bolstering		X		
	Ingratiation		X		
	Victimise		X		
	Endorsement		X		
Punishing	Legal action			X	

As can be seen from **Table 2**, it is recommended to use instructing and adjusting information as a response to negative publicity (rumour) on the rumour generating life cycle stage. This information can include the accurate and timely facts about the relevant event that lead to the spread of rumours online. The aim of this information is the reduction of uncertainty among internal and external stakeholders of the firm, facilitation of their emotional and economic security, and trust building in the organizational leaders. This type of information has to be used in each negative situation on the generating stage of the rumour life cycle and is not regarded as a separate response strategy. During the rumour belief stage the organization has to use strategies aimed at reducing the credibility of the rumour, positioning itself as a victim of the negative false criticism and developing a cooperative and trusting environment. On the rumour transmission stage the organization should dissuade people from

spreading the rumour. These actions can also include punitive steps as lawsuits if necessary. Such a procedure is not recommended by the authors if the firm wants to retain or build a positive and trustful relationship with its stakeholders. The authors also recommend using some of the crisis recovery strategies on the rumour transmission life cycle stage or coupling them with each other for better crisis preparation and response planning. Organizations take actions to prevent negative consequences and to deal with negative impact of rumours circulation in social media with an attempt to recover from the social media crises throughout the life cycle of rumour. Crisis recovery stage is very important for organizations, because during this stage organizations have to take actions for mitigating the long-term reputational and financial organizational damage (Jin and Lui 2010, p.447).

As can be seen from the previous discussion, the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model includes all of the response possibilities that were proposed by Coombs in the SCCT and extends and adjusts them to the social media online environment. As in the SCCT there are four main strategies for dealing with negative publicity. These strategies are denial, diminishing, rebuilding and reinforcing. Providing of basic instructing and adjusting information is not regarded as a separate response strategy, because these types of information must be available for stakeholders in any type of crisis situation and can be seen as supplemental to the main response strategies. Also punishing is not regarded as a separate response strategy because legal actions and lawsuits against stakeholders or other external groups are not recommended by authors and must be used only in situations where such action cannot be avoided. Therefore, legal actions don't represent a strategy for protecting reputational assets and image of the company (Jin and Lui 2010, p.447).

The first response strategy is denial. Additionally to the strategies of attacking the accuser, denial and scapegoat that were described in SCCT, Jin and Lui (2010, p.448) propose ignoring as a fourth denial option. By this strategy the organization states that the problem does not exist by simply disregarding the negative criticism. The second general response strategy is diminishing that includes also separation as the third response option additionally to excuse and justification that were used by Coombs. This response possibility is also a part of Benoit's Repair Restoration Theory that was discussed above (Jin and Lui 2011, p.347). The third option is rebuilding strategy that includes three response possibilities: compensation, apology and transcendence. The

transcendence response option was not used in SCCT, but was already described in the Image Restoration Theory. The last response option is the reinforcing response strategy and it is equal to the bolstering response strategy in SCCT. As in the SCCT, this strategy includes bolstering, ingratiation and victimising as response options when dealing with circulation of negative criticism in online environment. Jin and Lui (2011, p.348) also added endorsement as a fourth response possibility, which means emphasizing third-party support for the organization that experienced the unfavourable event. The Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model builds mainly on the one particular type of negative publicity, namely rumours, but can be also applied to other situations in online environment.

3.4 Use of crisis response strategies in corporate practice

The majority of previously discussed crisis response strategies have already found their practical implementation among organizations facing the problem of circulation of unfavourable criticism about their behaviour or their products on different social media sites. The successful as well as unsuccessful company's case studies and the results of empirical investigations conducted by researchers in the field of marketing communication are described in **Table 3**. These case studies give an overview about the response strategies that are more often used by companies when responding to negative publicity online and have already gained their popularity because of their successful and effective implementation.

As can be seen from the **Table 3**, the most often used crisis response theories in organizational practice are Coombs SCCT and Benoit's Repair Restoration Theory. This may be due to the fact that these two models have already been well investigated in academic works and well known to the communication experts of organizations. In contrast, the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model is comparably new and only begins to gain attention of researchers and marketing experts. Apology, ignorance, diminishing, denial and bolstering response strategies are found to be the most often applied when dealing with the spread of negative publicity in social media.

Table 3. Case Studies: Response strategies used to deal with negative publicity in social media

Organization	Type of negative publicity	Response strategies	Theoretical approach	Source
Jonson&Jonson, „Motrin-gate“ case study	▪ Criticism of the advertising campaign “Perfectly, naturally photography” through disregarded mothers ▪ Attention to these postings through other influential bloggers	▪ Apology ▪ Withdrawal of the advertising campaign ▪ Involvement of consumers in development of other advertising campaigns	SCCT	Neff J., 2008
General Motors	▪ Financial bankruptcy of the company ▪ Comments regarding the perceived financial risks of the stakeholders	▪ Diminish response strategies: excuse and justification (48% of companies responses) ▪ Bolstering strategies: reminder, ingratiation and victimage (46% of responses used) ▪ Denial strategies: scapegoating and attacking the accuser (6% of the responses)	SCCT	Wilke S. H., 2011
Toy’s crisis 2007	▪ Comments expressing concerns regarding product’s safety	▪ Bolstering ▪ “Good intentions” ▪ Apology ▪ Compensation	Benoit’s image restoration strategy	Muhammad, 2007
Domino’s Pizza, 2009	▪ Four YouTube videos which show how two employees make some	▪ Apology ▪ Corrective actions: discharge of two	Benoit’s image restoration	Stull, 2010

	unethical things with the groceries they use for making pizza	employees that were present on the videos ▪ Bolstering strategy: reminder on the past good reputation and customer service ▪ Victimimage	strategy	
United Airlines, 2008	▪ Complaints regarding poor customer service ▪ 3Video-Song on YouTube	▪ Ignorance ▪ Apology ▪ Bolstering: reminder about the good company performance and success ▪ Compensation of losses incurred	SCCT	Olinic, Toia, 2011
Toyota, 2009	▪ Technical product failure complaints ▪ Safety concerns from customers	▪ Apology ▪ Compensation ▪ Attack the accuser ▪ Bolstering ▪ Problem minimization ▪ Corrective actions ▪ Diminish strategies	SCCT, Benoit's image restoration strategy	Feng, 2010
Henkel, "Pril" case study 2011	▪ Votes for the unwanted new product bottle design were adjusted that caused numerous complaints and protests on the company's Facebook	▪ The comments have been rearranged to achieve that the previous contributions were less noticeable ▪ Ignorance	No usage of crisis response theories was identified	Frickel, 2011, Breithut, 2011

	page			
Nestle, “KitKat” case study, 2010	▪ A social media campaign started by Greenpeace with a shocking video on YouTube as a response to improper behaviour of the company in the usage of palm oil from companies that are trashing Indonesian rainforests, threatening the livelihoods of local people and pushing orangutans towards extinction	▪ Ignorance ▪ Nestle deleted the video that lead to the explosion of negative publicity toward the company ▪ Apology and negotiation with Greenpeace ▪ Corrective actions: Promise not to use palm oil in the production of “KitKat” and other products ▪ Late reaction of the company lead to the spread of this information to several hundred thousand people worldwide and negative postings regarding the inappropriate behaviour of the company that can be found online also today	No usage of crisis response theories was identified	Kreutzer, Hinz, 2010

4. Empirical research in the field of crisis communication in social media

For a long time period research in the field of crisis management and communication has been concentrated on the analysis of case studies. Although the findings of this research are very interesting and a lot of guidelines for using response strategies have already been well established in corporate practice, only very few studies exist that provide consistent and general rules for dealing with negative publicity in social media which are supported empirically. The use of empirical support is very essential in this field of research as findings from case studies are very often concentrated on some particular cases and may not work when applying to other situations, firms or environments. In the first section of this chapter the content and sentiment analysis are described in detail. These two techniques represent a new but already well-established analysis tools especially when evaluating information gathered from social media platforms. In the second section, the findings from empirical studies that have been conducted in the field of crisis communication in social media are described.

4.1 Sentiment analysis of negative comments

Before responding to negative publicity in online social networks some factors must be analysed. Firstly, it is important to analyse how bad the situation really is in terms of the negative mood regarding the organization among its stakeholders. Secondly, the goals that the organization wants to achieve using a particular response strategy in social media must be established.

Concerning the issue of assessing the level of negative sentiment that stakeholders hold towards the organization, there already exist a lot of studies which propose some methods for analysing messages and comments posted by users on different social media platforms. The most known and important of them is a content analysis and more recently also a sentiment analysis.

Content analysis includes techniques used to classify different types of content in order to understand the conversation and intentions of users to participate in discussion in social

media. Newly developed tools for automatic identification and classification of opinions, attitudes and thoughts posted by users on different social media platforms are aimed at analysing large amount of content posted online. Such an analysis helps to identify the most discussed topics, problems and ideas and organize them into some specific categories. This can help organizations to indicate the problematic points in their customer policy or even overall business strategy. The main problem that appears by using content analysis is the difficulty of allocation of content to certain categories that is due to the lack of sentence structure and use of informal language that is very common for social media communication (Pletikosa and Michahelles 2011, p.175). Very close to the content analysis is the definition of sentiment analysis that is the automatic tracking and analysis of evaluative subjective texts. The main goal of using sentiment analysis is the classification of user generated content into positive, negative and neutral. The aim of this analysis is to understand perceptions, attitudes and emotions of stakeholders regarding the organization, identify the direction of these perceptions, monitor the online environment for trends and problems relevant to organization, detection of rumours, and taking preventive actions if necessary (Pletikosa and Michahelles 2011, p.176). Sentiment analysis has proved to be an effective tool for identification of negative criticism in social media, evaluation of its possible threats for organizational reputation, and deciding which response strategy is needed to deal with this criticism. Very often data gained through this analysis is used for making predictive judgments of future user behaviour, sales, expected profits and stock market activities (Pletikosa and Michahelles 2011, p.176).

The precision of results of sentiment analysis that can be used for analysing trends and problems, and especially for predicting the development of unfavourable events and stakeholders' behaviour, depends on the type of social media that is monitored and the duration of the life cycle of the rumour or some other form of negative publicity. For example, on the social media platform Digg.com the life cycle of the posting is only one day on average. On the other hand, video messages loaded on YouTube can be found and gain new audience over a very long time period. Predictions about the development of negative events and their consequences for the firm are proved to be more accurate if using the contents with a short life cycle. The life cycle of the rumour distribution also depends on the public interest in the issue and its relevance and importance for stakeholders (Yu and Kak 2012, p.6).

Sentiment direction, sentiment volume and strength are the most important factors for evaluating an issue as being dangerous for organizational reputation and for assessing the effectiveness of response strategies used for dealing with this issue.

Regarding the volume and direction of sentiment five elementary content characteristics can be used: number of positive, negative, neutral, non-neutral and total posts about the relevant issue. These metrics can be used further in some combination to calculate the overall or relative sentiment of the user generated content in social media. In such manner the ratios between positive and total, negative and total, neutral and total or positive and negative posts can be calculated. These ratios reflect the relative strength of these sentiments and show the percentage of the positive, negative or neutral company mentions on the overall discussions regarding the firm and its products (Yu and Kak 2012, p.10).

The Net Reputation Score (NRS) and the Sentiment Index are metrics that are used to analyse the overall sentiment regarding the organization on social media. These indicators will be high and positive if the organization has a lot of positive posts and favourable perceptions among its public and negative if the majority of users express their disregard or complaints about the organization and will signalize the need for some actions to improve the public's attitude towards the company. The Net Reputation Score (NRS) is calculated as follows (Lembke 2011, p.166):

$$\text{NRS} = \text{Npos} (\%) - \text{Nother} (\%), \text{ where}$$

Npos (%) – ratio of positive posts to the total posts and

Nother (%) – ratio of all other posts that are not positive to the total posts ((Total mentions – Positive Mentions)/Total mentions).

The Sentiment Difference or also called Sentiment Index is calculated as (Yu and Kak 2011, p.10):

$$\text{Isent} = \frac{\text{Npos} - \text{Nneg}}{\text{Ntotal}}$$

Isent - sentiment index,

Npos - number of positive posts regarding the issue,

Nneg - number of negative posts,

Ntotal - total number of posts about an issue.

This index was modified and used by Lica and Tuta (2011, p.49) for predicting movie success and was adjusted for taking into account the difference in the promotional budget for different movies. The adjusted formula has shown better correlation coefficients between the Sentiment Index and movie box revenue. The adjusted formula is:

$$I_{sent} = 100 * \left(\frac{N_{pos} - N_{neg}}{N_{total}} + 0,5 \right)$$

Another metric that takes into account the speed of post generation on social media is the post generating rate that can be calculated as follows (Yu and Kak 2011, p.10):

$$Post_Rate = \frac{N_{total}}{TimePeriod}$$

This indicator measures how quickly the message is produced regarding a particular event. The post generating rate can be estimated for different units of time (e.g. hourly, daily or weekly). The higher the post generating rate, the more people are concerned about an issue and find out that the particular topic is interesting and relevant (Yu and Kak 2011, p.10).

Regarding the sentiment strength, there already exist a lot of tools developed for assessing a positive or negative intensity of comments posted on different social media platforms. One of the most often used and best known is SentiStrength that was developed for analysing the sentiment strength from short informal messages posted on different social media platforms. This tool allows the classification of content into positive and negative. This classification is based on the analysis of the words used in stakeholder's comments and the attribution of numerical values to each comment on the scale from 1 or -1 indicating no sentiment to 5 or -5 indicating very strong positive or negative connotation (Thelwall et al. 2011, p.410). The main advantage of SentiStrength is the ability to analyse informal and even grammatically incorrect messages which can include smiles or abbreviations. Results of sentiment analysis of comments posted on MySpace have shown that SentiStrength is able to detect the strength of positive comments with an accuracy of 60.6% and the strength of negative comments with an accuracy of 72.8%. These results

are better than the results achieved for most machine-learning approaches and lies above the scientific standard (Thelwall et al. 2010, p.2560-2561).

Content and sentiment analyses help to identify the overall stakeholders' perceptions regarding an organization in the social media environment. These techniques can also be used for assessing the effectiveness of the response strategies that were used by organizations in some particular crisis situations.

McDonalds, Sparks and Glendon (2010, p.264) have found in their experiment that the most often used response strategies to negative publicity by organizations are ignorance, denial, justification, apology, and compensation. They also stated that in general denial and "no comment" strategies have lower acceptance in the public and lower ability to combat the negative perceptions regarding the organization than more accommodative strategies. In contrast, apology and taking of responsibility options that can also be supplemented by compensation of the stakeholders affected by the unfavourable event have the highest acceptance among the social media users and have a positive effect on stakeholder's attitudes towards the organization (McDonald et al. 2010, pp.264-268). On the contrary, Coombs, Feduik and Holladay (2009, pp.59-60) came to other conclusions in their experiment that was conducted with some university students. They investigated the question, the main idea of which was to find out whether the use of more accommodative strategies (e.g. apology or compensation) will lessen the negative sentiment towards the organization in social media, and will encourage people to get involved in a positive word-of-mouth about the organization, rather than the use of non-accommodative strategies (e.g. denial, diminish or bolstering). The results showed that there is no difference in willingness to participate in positive word-of-mouth about an organization between respondents who were exposed either to more accommodative or less accommodative response messages (Coombs et al. 2009 pp.65-66). Therefore, the question arises whether the strategies, such as an apology or compensation that are very often associated with taking a full responsibility for the particular negative situation and high implementation costs are really the most effective in practice.

4.2 Overview of published studies

An important question is the assessment of the effectiveness of a company's response message to the negative publicity in social media. Some research studies already exist in this field and many different approaches were already used to investigate their effectiveness. Most common of them are structured and semi-structured interviews with communication experts or publics and content analysis. Also, an experiment gains more importance. A common form of experiment in this respect can be described as following: respondents receive the text that describes the crisis situation after which they see one of the company's response messages posted on a particular social media platform. After that respondents are asked to express their feelings, attitudes or thoughts about the company in form of comments to this message or evaluate the response message as well as the overall company's attitude with the help of a questionnaire (Liu and Jin 2011, p.348). Corporate Blogs, Twitter and MySpace are the most often used social media platforms for conducting such forms of experiments. In the last years Facebook also gained a lot of attention from researchers in the field of crisis communication and management because of its growing popularity and importance to the public. Also enterprises increasingly use content and sentiment analysis for future communication strategy planning and implementation (Pang and Lee 2008, p.3). Apology, denial and ignorance are the strategies most commonly used by the companies. These strategies have received a lot of attention of researchers.

Table 4 gives an overview about different approaches for assessing the effectiveness of different response strategies used in traditional and new media.

Table 4. Empirical studies in the literature

Author	Research question	Method	Results	Period	Theory
DeKay, 2011	Which response strategies do companies use most commonly to deal with negative comments on social media (in general and industry specific)	▪ Content analysis of the wall comments on Facebook fan pages of 10 largest companies in 4 different industries: banking, retail, software and services, and household and personal products ▪ Number of positive and negative comments and percentage of negative comments that the company has answered were observed	▪ Deleting negative criticism was found to be most used technique (by 48% of companies in the study) ▪ 60% of companies answered to less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of negative comments. Only 4% answered to more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of such comments ▪ Retailers were most involved in answering to negative criticism: 87.5% of retailers have answered to most of the negative comments on Facebook fan page	From 29 th January to 20 th February 2011	SCCT
Liu, Jin, 2011	Influence of the information form and source on the acceptability of the various response strategies and the	▪ 2 x 3 within-subject design: 3 crisis information forms (traditional media, social media and word-of-mouth communication) and 2 crisis information sources (third-party vs. organization)	▪ Defensive and denial strategies were most accepted when used in traditional media, but least accepted if they have been applied by online word-of-mouth ▪ Rebuild response strategies were	May 2010	SCCT

	emotions that are triggered by a crisis situation	▪ Online-questionnaire. Target audience: students at the East Coast University (162 completed questionnaires) ▪ Each student received the stimulus material with the description of 6 different crisis situations and answered the questions regarding the acceptance of the response strategy that was used to deal with each negative situation	most accepted if used by online word-of-mouth, but least effective when applied to traditional media		
Pletikosa, Spiegler, Michahelles, 2011	Influence of moderator post type, category and day of the week when it was posted on the user interactivity in the form of number of comments, likes and duration of the	▪ Content analysis of comments on 14 Facebook brand pages; ▪ Statistical methods: Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney test.	The type, category and day have a significant impact on the number of comments, likes and duration of interaction on Facebook brand pages: ▪ The text messages in the form of status updates have caused the greatest number of comments, followed by videos. The photos and links have been commented at	From February to June 2011	SCCT

	interaction at 14 Facebook brand pages		least ▪ The most popular categories are company and product information. Least popular are the news about competitors and advertisements		
Schultz, Utz, Göritz, 2011	Examined the effect of type of medium channel used (online magazine, blog and Twitter) on the perception of various response strategies (apology, support and corrective action or position of the facts and information about the specific crisis situation) by the users	▪ Experimental design: respondents have read a fictitious article about the crisis situation in a car company and the company's response message either in an article in online magazine, blog or Twitter ▪ Respondents fill a questionnaire with questions about their perceptions of the organizational reputation, their behavioural intentions (e.g. negative word-of-mouth, good's boycott) regarding the organization, their intention to share the message with others (e.g. retweet or post the message on the other platform) and the readiness for interaction in the	▪ Respondents who have read the message on Twitter have a less negative attitude towards the company and have shown the lowest willingness to corporate boycott compared to people who have read the same message on a blog or online journal ▪ The strategy of providing accurate information and facts about the situation has a more positive effect in terms of spreading the positive word-of-mouth about the company in comparison to apology and bolstering strategies	Not available	SCCT

		form of a comment to the company's response message or an e-mail to the organization			
Kerkhof, Beukeboom, Utz, 2011	Analysis of the effectiveness of two different response strategies (apology and denial) to the negative criticism in the case of H&M crisis in 2011	▪ Online questionnaire. 2 x 2 designs with control group: two strategies (apology vs. denial) in two communication forms (corporate tone vs. personal tone) ▪ Respondents also had a possibility to leave a comment to the company's response message	▪ Apology strategy has led to increased credibility and more positive votes. At the same time, the company was seen as responsible for the situation ▪ Generally, the personalized response message in first person received more positive and less negative comments than the corporate message written in third person ▪ Denial response strategy received more positive comments compared to apology if the personal message language was used	Not available	SCCT

5. Empirical study

This chapter presents the empirical study that aims to statistically verify several hypotheses which are stated in the second section of this chapter. A conceptual framework is presented in the first section. Here, main constructs and relationships between them are described in detail. As already mentioned, hypotheses are built in section two. The third section gives an overview about questionnaire constructs used for the questionnaire development which was used for the data collection procedure. Stimulus material used in the questionnaire is described in section four. Pre-test results of the study are described in the fifth section. Finally, section six deals with the analysis and interpretation of the results.

5.1 Conceptual framework

As has been mentioned previously, corporate reputation is one of the most valuable intangible resources of any organization. The spread and circulation of negative information about the company has a great potential to harm company's reputation among its stakeholders. Exposure to negative company's information has been proven to weaken consumers trust in the organization, their satisfaction, purchase intentions and overall evaluation of the company and its brand equity (Xie and Peng 2009, p.574). This movement became even more dangerous with the development of new internet technologies that enable people from all over the world to share and exchange information with each other without any geographical or timely boundaries just within a few minutes. These facts make it necessary for organizations to find the most effective way how to deal with negative information that is circulated in these new media. An organization's communicative response to negative publicity in social media can serve to limit or even to repair the reputational damage.

Although, some theories already exist in the field of crisis communication like the Coombs SCCT, Benoit's Repair Restoration Strategy or Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model, that were discussed previously, still there is a lack of an empirical support regarding the effectiveness of these strategies especially in case of their usage in

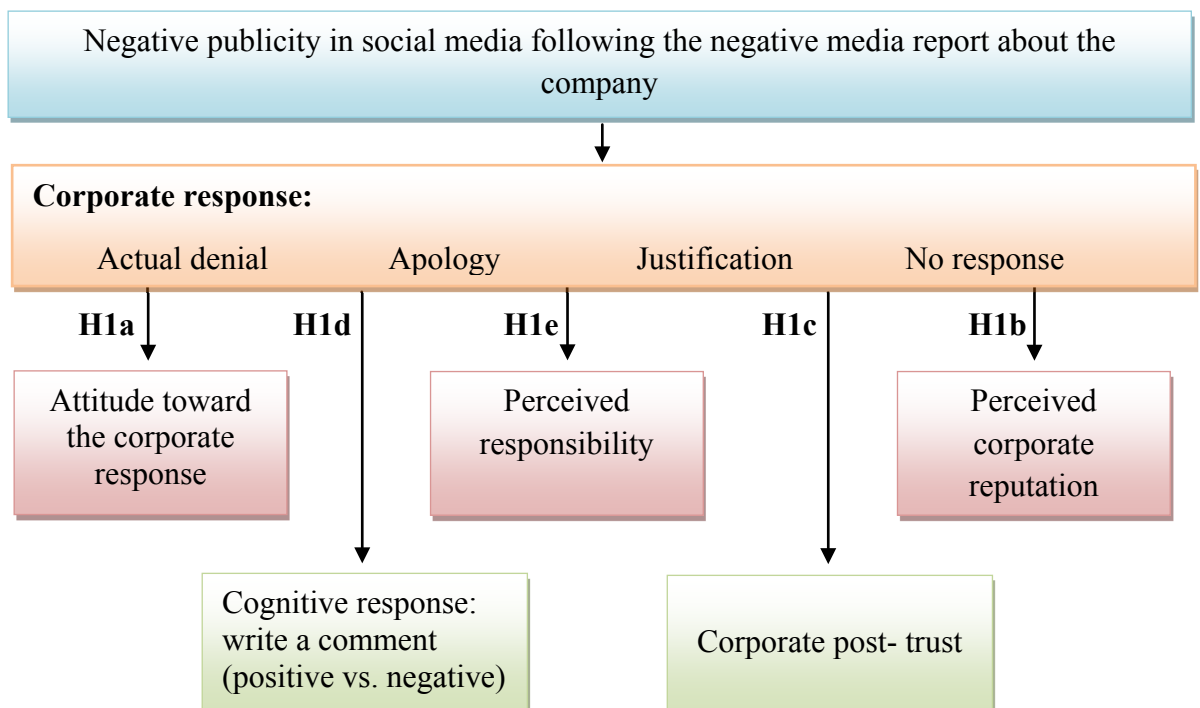
the social media environment. Another point is that most empirical research concentrates on the evaluation of effectiveness of a very narrow number of strategies like apology versus denial as they were found to be the most often used strategies in companies practice and represent two different types of response in terms of perceived corporate responsibility. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare these types of responses with strategies from the diminishing cluster as for example justification. Hence, it is interesting to investigate how the organizational reputation would be perceived by different types of stakeholders depending on the response message but at the same time assuming the same degree of responsibility for apology and justification strategies, and refusal of any responsibility by a denial response message. Another point is that the results of studies conducted in this field are very often contradictory. Although rebuilding response strategies were found to positively influence stakeholder's perceptions of corporate reputation and lead to more positive attitude toward the organization, their universal application for any situation is problematic (Schultz et al. 2011, p.21). Taking a complete responsibility for an event may lead to losing trust in the organization, anger regarding the company among its public as well as to the legal and financial liabilities that may be incurred (Coombs and Holladay 2002, p.166).

Main aim of company's response message to negative publicity is to protect the reputation. Company's reputation and trust are two main constructs that gain growing attention of researchers in the field of e-business, internet sale and reputational management in the online environment. These two constructs are closely related to each other and can't be neglected when talking about relationship building between company and its stakeholders in an online environment (Josang et al. 2007, pp.618-619). Reputation can be defined as the sum of perceptions that the public holds about an organization (Coombs and Holladay 2002, p.167). According to Josang, Ismail and Boyd (2007, p.621) trust is "the extent to which one party is willing to depend on something or somebody in a given situation with a feeling of relative security, even though negative consequences are possible". The trust in companies and their products is used in everyday life of each customer and can be understood as the sum of expectations that the products will satisfy customers' needs and being in line with their expectations regarding the quality. The trust construct is especially important for companies that are present online as many consumers may never have a real contact with the company offline but rely only on the information that is available in the internet (Josang et al. 2007, pp.619-621).

There are two possible relations between company's reputation and trust. The first is when the stakeholders and other public trust in the organization because of its good reputation. This situation assumes that the people already have some previous knowledge and are aware about the organizational reputation. The second relation can be described with the following statement: "I trust you despite your bad reputation". This means that people may have some knowledge about the organization that is gained through direct experience or referrals from others that overrule any reputation that the company may really have. Therefore, it is interesting to look which influence the response strategy of the organization has on the perceived company's reputation and trust in a case when the public gains knowledge about the company only through the exposure to some unfavourable information available online (Josang et al. 2007, p.622). This is the main point in building the conceptual model that is investigated in the empirical part of this master thesis.

Figure 8 presents the main constructs and relationships between them that form the experiment which was conducted for the purpose of this master thesis. Several other relationships that find support in the literature are analysed as well (cf. **Figure 8a** and **Figure 8b**).

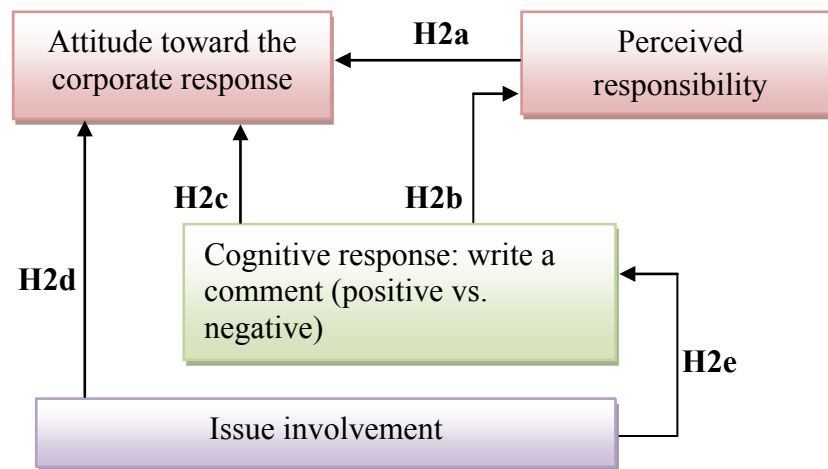
Figure 8. Conceptual framework: main research question (experiment)



As can be seen from **Figure 8**, the main question for further analysis is how different types of organizational response strategies (apology, denial, justification and no response) to negative publicity in social media affect perceived corporate responsibility, reputation, trust and respondents' cognitive response to these strategies. Also, the attitude toward the company's response is included in the analysis. Hence, the first set of hypotheses is built in order to investigate the influence of the company's response strategy on the constructs of interest that will be described in more detail in section 5.3.

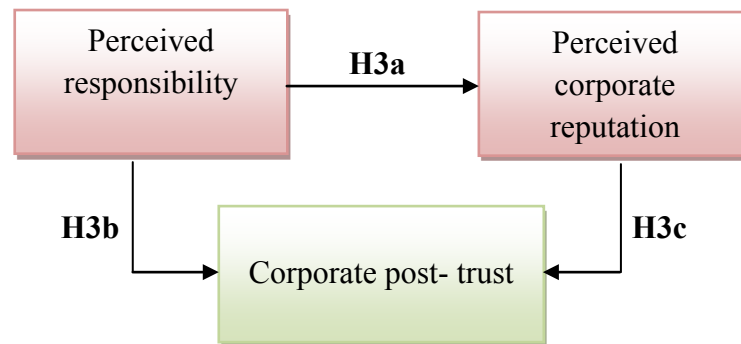
The second set of hypotheses concentrates on the relationships between constructs which have a potential of influencing respondents' attitude toward the company's response and their cognitive reactions to this response (**Figure 8a**). Here, the influence of the perceived responsibility on respondent's attitude toward the company's response will be investigated. Also the influences of issue involvement and respondents' cognitive reactions to company's response on their attitude toward the company's response are analysed as well.

Figure 8a. Conceptual framework: attitude toward the corporate response



Third set of hypotheses deals with respondents' overall attitude toward the company. Here, relationships between perceived responsibility and company's reputation and trust are investigated. Also the influence of company's reputation on respondents' trust in the company is analysed. All these constructs and relationships between them are presented in **Figure 8b**.

Figure 8b. Conceptual framework: attitude toward the company



All constructs and measurement instruments that were used for the data collection procedure are described in more detail in section 5.3 of this chapter.

5.2 Hypotheses

As already mentioned, the main research question of this master thesis is how different types of organizational response strategies (apology, denial, justification and no response) to negative publicity in social media affect the perceived corporate responsibility, corporate reputation, trust, attitude toward these strategies and respondent's cognitive response to these strategies. Additionally, relationships between constructs within the model are also analysed. Hence, as already obvious from the previous section, three sets of hypotheses are built.

Apology is recognized as the most effective strategy by the majority of researchers in the field of crisis communication and marketing (Kerkhof et al. 2011, Coombs and Holladay 2002, Xie and Peng 2009). A company that apologizes for the negative occurrence is perceived to be more customer-oriented and concerned of well-being of its stakeholders. Building on the discussion in the previous chapters and on the research findings in the field of crisis communication, crisis management and marketing that were described previously it is assumed that:

H1a: *Company's apology for an issue will lead to more positive attitude toward the corporate response compared to actual denial and justification response strategies.*

H1b: *Company's apology for an issue will lead to more favourable perceived corporate reputation compared to actual denial, justification and no response strategies.*

H1c: *Company's apology for an issue will lead to higher perceived corporate post-trust, compared to actual denial, justification and no response strategies.*

H1d: *Company's apology for an issue will lead to more positive cognitive response compared to actual denial and justification response strategies.*

In the most of the marketing and crisis communication literature apologizing is recognized as a strategy that means full acceptance of responsibility. In contrast denial is described as a strategy that means complete refusal of responsibility for an issue (Coombs 1995, Coombs 2012, Kerkhof et al. 2011, Coombs and Holladay 2002). Justification strategy implies some acceptance of responsibility, but in this case the company tries to lessen the perceived corporate responsibility for an unfavourable event by putting credibility of an accuser in doubt. By no response or ignoring response strategy the company just ignores the negative publicity hoping that attention to this issue will diminish with time. In this case the company is usually perceived as being accountable for an unfavourable event (Coombs and Holladay 2002, Coombs 2012). Hence, the next hypothesis assumes that:

H1e: *Apology and no response strategies will lead to higher perceived company's responsibility for the negative occurrence compared to actual denial and justification response strategies.*

The second set of hypotheses refers to the relationships between constructs (**Figure 8a**) that are not a part of the main experiment. The main aim of this analysis is to find out which factors have an influence on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response.

According to Siomkos and Malliaris (1992, p.60), consumers' attitude toward the company's response to negative publicity is formed during the phase when they try to determine the cause of the negative occurrence. Hence, it is assumed that perceived company's responsibility for the unfavourable issue will have a negative influence on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response. Therefore, the next hypothesis is:

H2a: *Higher perceived company's responsibility for a negative event will negatively influence consumers' attitude toward the company's response.*

According to Kerkhof et al. (2011, p.16), person's direct cognitive response to a company's response message can be seen as a mediator variable in the relationship between message and attitude change. Hence, it is expected that respondents who write a negative comment will perceive the organization as being more responsible for the unfavourable event and will have more negative attitude toward the corporate response compared to those who write a positive or a neutral comment. Therefore, it is assumed that:

H2b: *Perceived company's responsibility for a negative event will be higher among respondents who wrote a negative comment compared to those who wrote a positive or a neutral comment.*

H2c: *Attitude toward the corporate response will be more positive among respondents who wrote a positive comment compared to those who wrote a negative or a neutral comment.*

As can be seen from the literature, persons with high issue involvement are more difficult to persuade than persons with low issue involvement (Petty and Cacciopo 1979, pp.1916-1917). For this reason it is assumed that:

H2d: *Higher issue involvement will have a negative influence on attitude toward the company's response to negative publicity.*

H2e: *Higher issue involvement will have a negative influence on respondents' cognitive response to the company's response strategy.*

Also the third set of hypotheses is built in order to investigate relationships between constructs that are not a part of the main research question (experiment). As already mentioned, the main aim of these hypotheses is to investigate respondents' overall attitude toward the company.

As apparent from the Coomb's SCCT, higher perceived company's responsibility for a negative issue has some negative influence on perceived company's reputation and trust in the company. Building on the discussion in section 3.1 of this master thesis it is assumed that:

H3a: *Higher perceived company's responsibility will negatively influence perceived company's reputation.*

H3b: *Higher perceived company's responsibility will negatively influence respondents' trust in the company.*

Taking into account the relationship between company's reputation and trust in the company that was described in section 4.3, it is expected that:

H3c: *A positive perceived company's reputation will lead to higher perceived trust in the company.*

The influence of demographical variables like age, gender and social media usage on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response and their cognitive response to company's response message will be investigated in an exploratory way.

5.3 Questionnaire constructs

Perceived responsibility of the company for an unfavourable situation serves as the midpoint of Coombs SCCT and Attribution Theory. People very often search for some causes of an event and need to assign responsibility to somebody or something for this event, especially when this event is negative and they may have some concerns regarding their physical or psychical safety. Allocation of responsibility is proven to have direct effect on stakeholder's perceptions and behavioral intentions regarding the company. In this respect it is important to know which effect different response strategies of the company have on the stakeholder's perceptions of responsibility for an unfavourable event (Coombs and Holladay 2002, p.169). Three items for assessing the degree of company's responsibility have already been used by researchers in the field of crisis company communication (Coombs and Holladay 2002, Kerkhof et al. 2011) and have shown reliable and valid results. These items are: "Circumstances, not the organization, are responsible for the crisis", "The blame for the crisis lies on the organization", "The blame for the crisis lies on the circumstances" measured on a 7 point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" (Kerkhof et al. 2011, p.15; Coombs and Holladay 2002, p.175).

The effectiveness of the response message plays a central role in company's attempts to protect and maintain its good reputation. How people evaluate the response message has a direct influence on their attribution of responsibility for the negative event, their intentions to participate in positive or negative word-of-mouth about the company, and their behavioral intentions toward the company. Attitude toward the corporate response can be measured using a semantic differential scale with four items: "totally adequate"/"not adequate at all", "very honest"/"not very honest", "very sincere"/"not very sincere", "very trustworthy"/"not very trustworthy" (Kerkhof et al. 2011, p.15).

There exist a lot of different methods for measuring corporate reputation and trust. Overall, they can be divided regarding the two main dimensions: specificity-generality dimension and subjectivity-objectivity dimension that are illustrated in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Classification of trust and reputation measures (Josang et al. 2007, p.629)

	Specific, vector based	General, synthesized
Subjective	Survey questionnaires	eBay, voting
Objective	Product tests	Synthesized general score from product tests

Specific measure means that the specific aspect of a construct is investigated, whereas general measure represents an average evaluation or score of all construct aspects. Subjective measure means that evaluations are made based on subjective people's judgments. In contrast, objective measure is a sum of ratings of the construct made by objective assessment using some formal criteria. For the purpose of this master thesis a subjective specific measure of corporate reputation and trust will be used (Josang et al. 2007, p.629-630).

Although there already exists a lot of research investigating the role and measurement of corporate reputation, the customer-based dimensions of reputation that include stakeholder's perceptions and emotions regarding the organization have been underestimated til recently. A customer-oriented approach for measuring reputation is especially important in marketing as positive perceptions of organizational image helps to reduce the transaction costs, positively influence financial and customer-outcome variables like trust, loyalty, customer satisfaction, and willingness to participate in positive word-of-mouth. Protecting reputation in the online environment is also very

important. The reputation is a collective phenomenon, that means it is a sum of perceptions of different groups of people that may interact and share their knowledge, experience and attitudes regarding the organization between each other. Building of individual perceptions about an organization includes both direct and indirect organizational experiences. Indirect experiences include all the information the individual receives from his friends, family, peers or third party through different forms of communication and different types of media. Most of the reputational ratings that are available (e.g. U.S.-based Fortune America's Most Admired Companies, German's Manager Magazine ratings) primarily include the perceptions and evaluations of the reputation from senior management and directors or financial experts and consultants. These ratings often disregard perceptions and attitudes of one of the most important stakeholder's group of any organization, namely current and potential customers (Walsh and Beatty 2007, pp.127-129). This point is very important because stakeholders may regard a profit-oriented company as a top company but at the same time they may not feel any emotional closeness or sympathy toward this firm and not necessarily regard it as a target for investments (Schwaiger 2004, p.65). Walsh and Beatty (2007, p.140) also pointed out that only very few empirical studies exist that have investigated the influence of critical news reports and negative incidents on corporate reputation and its effect on consumers behavior intentions. Because of the fact that corporate reputation is based on perceptions far more than on real knowledge, company's communication policy should be a primary means of managing the reputation (Schwaiger 2004, p.67).

One of the most popular scales for measuring corporate reputation is the five items scale developed by Coombs and Holladay (2002, p.174). This scale aims to assess the degree to which the source (company) is concerned with interest of its stakeholders. This measure is appropriate for cases where only limited information about a company is available to stakeholders and they have no or a very limited previous knowledge about that company. These five items are: "The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics", "The organization is basically dishonest", "I do not trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident", "Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says", "The organization is not concerned with the well-being of its publics" (Coombs and Holladay 2002, p.174).

Communication serves as a key antecedent in the trust relationship between the company and its public. Different response strategies to negative publicity were investigated in

their ability to maintain or improve trust in the company. Based on the described relationship between corporate reputation and trust it is expected that people who evaluate the reputation of the company more positive will also experience more trust in this company. In the marketing literature trust is also regarded as a central factor for successful relationship building between a company and its stakeholders. Corporate post-trust (trust after exposure to negative publicity) can be measured using a scale that combines items reflecting consumers' overall evaluation of corporate trustworthiness (3 items) and their corresponding trust intent (4 items) (Xie and Peng 2009, pp. 580-582): "I would disapprove of this company", "I feel sympathetic towards this company", "Generally speaking, I trust this company", "Generally speaking, this company is dependable", "Generally speaking, this company is reliable", "I will buy this company's product's when I need ... products", "I am willing to recommend this company to my relatives and friends", "I am willing to try new products introduced by this company".

Cognitive responses (e.g. written positive or negative comments) to corporate response messages are a very important point especially in the social media environment. Direct cognitive responses of a person to a company's response message can be seen as a mediator variable in the relationship between message and attitude change (Kerkhof et al. 2011, p.16). In the questionnaire used for the empirical research of this master thesis respondents are asked to leave their comment to the company's response message posted on Facebook. Each comment will be then classified by the SentiStrength algorithm for sentiment direction (positive, negative or neutral) and sentiment strength.

Petty and Cacciopo (1979, pp.1916-1917) also stated that involvement in a particular issue or problem will increase willingness of a person to leave a personal comment as well as forward the information about the company further. They also stated that company's response message will lose its persuasive power for persons with higher issue involvement. In this respect involvement of the person in a particular issue that is discussed on social media will influence person's willingness to leave a comment to the company's response message.

Depending on the level of involvement individuals differ in extensiveness of their purchase decision process, and their processing of information (e.g. extent of information search, number and type of cognitive responses). Therefore, depending on the level of issue involvement consumers may be passive receivers or active searchers and distributors of information about the company and its products (Laurent and Kapferer

1985, p.41). According to Zaichkowsky (1985, p.342) issue involvement is “a person’s perceived relevance of the issue based on inherent needs, values and interests”. Zaichkowsky (1985, p.342) propose to measure the issue involvement with the help of semantic differential scale for the following reasons: it is easy to administrate, it takes only a few minute to complete, scale items descriptors can be used for different types of products, advertisings or other topics. The scale developed by Zaichkowsky (1994, pp.67-68) also successfully met standards for criterion, content and construct validity as well as for internal reliability and reliability over time. The advantage of this scale is that it captures both the emotional and rational aspects of issue involvement. The scale consists of 10 items measured on a 7 points scale. The items are: To me [object, issue, product] is: “important”/”unimportant”, “boring”/”interesting”, “relevant”/”irrelevant”, “means nothing”/”means a lot to me”, “exciting”/”unexciting”, “appealing”/”unappealing”, “fascinating”/”mundane”, “worthless”/”valuable”, “involving”/”uninvolving”, “not needed”/”needed” (Zaichkowsky 1994, p.70).

There exist a lot of possibilities for measuring internet and social media usage. Two frequently used methods in online questionnaires are to ask respondents their approximate hourly usage per day and use of frequency scales. For the purpose of this master thesis it is interesting to see the overall frequency of internet and social media usage. Therefore, the six-step frequency scale was used: How often do you use the Internet to look for information about a company or products/How often do you use social media: “several times a day”, “once a day”, “every 2-3 days”, “once a week”, “once a month”, “never or very rarely” (Pitton 2005, pp.54-55; Junco 2011, p.165). Also the number of social media sites where the person has an account was asked. Here, respondents have a possibility to choose by how many social media sites they are registered ranging from no one to more than five.

As the questionnaire is to be distributed on the german-speaking social media platforms, all questions used in the questionnaire were translated into German. Back translation was used in order to achieve a good translation quality and improve the validity and reliability of the research. All questions were first translated into German and then translated back into English by an independent translator. Results from the back translation were than compared with the original questionnaire constructs.

5.4 Stimulus material

A product-harm crisis was chosen for developing a negative company's publicity for the following reasons: firstly, a product-harm crisis directly involves the marketing function of the organization and secondly, this type of negative publicity directly influences consumer's evaluations of the brand equity and reputation of the firm (Dawar, Pillutla 2000, p.215). Product-harm crises involve occurrences in which the product of the firm is found to be defective or dangerous for consumers (Dawar, Pillutla 2000, p.215). Also there are a lot of real cases where negative publicity involving product-harm crises can be found on the internet. Recent developments of internet technologies that enable rapid dissemination of information among internet users, more stringent product safety regulations, increasing complexity of products and growing attention of media to product-harm crises make this type of crisis even more relevant (Dawar, Pillutla 2000, p.215).

A chocolate brand "Shorty" from the chocolate producer "Levada Chocolate GmbH" was used as a target in all four conditions: actual denial, apology, justification and ignorance. All names used in the study – brand's and brand's producer names, CEO's and blog's names – were fictitious. Fictitious names were chosen in order to avoid possible confounding effects such as the brand or response evaluations due to the previous consumer's knowledge, experience or previous company's reputation. When no previous knowledge about the company and no previous company's reputation in the mind of consumer exist, evaluation of the company and its corporate response to negative publicity can be considered as consumers' subjective statements. These statements are based, for example, on consumers' experiences with some similar situations like product-harm crises for other brands in the same industry (Dawar, Pillutla 2000, p.217)

The blog article about petroleum residues in the chocolate brand "Shorty" from the "Levada Chocolate GmbH", consumption of which allegedly led to health complaints from consumers, was used as a negative publicity in all four cases (See Appendix 2 for more details). The page with negative company's information was formatted as near as possible to the real blog outlook. The blog name, www.blog.lebensmittelsicherheit.at was fictitious and relevant to the topic of the negative event. Respondents were asked to carefully read the article. After reading the blog article respondents were exposed to one of the company's response strategies: actual denial, apology or justification. In the control

condition respondents didn't see the Facebook page with company's response but were directly led to the questionnaire.

A comment of the CEO of the "Levada Chocolate" Georg Marksteiner on his Facebook page was used as a response to negative company's publicity. The facebook layout was kept as real as possible in order to feel of a real corporate response in social media. Georg Marksteiner apologizes for the occurrence and promises to take the affected product out of sale and to do all possible things to prevent such situations in future in the apology condition. He denies the responsibility for the incident and emphasizes, that bringing the recent incidents in connection with the company's product is completely inappropriate in the actual denial condition. In justification condition Marksteiner admits the company's responsibility for the situation, but states that the standards used by the accuser to evaluate the impact of the particular event were inappropriate. See Appendix 3 for more details.

All three responses were written in a personal manner as proposed by the literature (Kerkhof et al. 2011, Kelleher 2009). Responses were written by the company's spokesperson Georg Marksteiner and posted on his personal Facebook page. Personal tone of voice is proven to have a positive effect on consumers post crisis perceptions and evaluations of a brand. When speaking in a personal tone of voice, the brand is perceived as being more human and committed to its customers (Kerkhof et al. 2011, p.7).

5.5 Pre-test

Before starting the distribution of the questionnaire online, a pre-test was run in order to check if the manipulation was successful. Only three pre-test questionnaires (apology, actual denial and justification) were prepared. 12 participants filled out the questionnaire: apology (N=4), actual denial (N=4) and justification (N=4). The results of the pre-test have shown that the manipulation functioned quite good between actual denial and apology response strategies, but the result was not so good for justification response strategy. This strategy was falsely rated either as apology or as actual denial. Hence, the justification response message was modified and a second set of pre-test questionnaires were developed. Here respondents had to select one of the 3 possible response

possibilities to the following question: “In his comment on Facebook the CEO of “Levada Chocolate” Georg Marksteiner: 1. apologized for an unfavourable event; 2. denies that there is a connection between the incident and his company; 3. plays the importance of the problem down”. 17 participants filled out the questionnaire: apology (N=3), actual denial (N=3) and justification (N=11). Each respondent saw only one type of questionnaire. In the apology and actual denial conditions 100% of people identified the response properly as apology in the apology condition and as actual denial in the actual denial response condition. In the justification condition 9 persons out of 11 identified it as justification. Overall, the results of the pre-test were successful (**Table 6**).

Table 6. Pre-test results

Response strategy	In his reaction to the negative publicity in the blog-article: the CEO of “Levada Chocolate” Georg Marksteiner.....			Total
	apologized	Denies	plays the importance of the problem down	
Apology	3	0	0	3
Actual denial	0	3	0	3
Justification	1	1	9	11

The pre-test questionnaire also included a question about the possible associations with the name of the chocolate producer: “What comes into your mind when you hear the name “Levada Chocolate?”. Most of respondents think about chocolate or petroleum in the products when reading the name “Levada Chocolate”. No associations with other firms or other for the topic irrelevant associations were stated.

5.6 Analysis and Results

The hypotheses were tested using between subject experimental design with 3 experimental and one control group conditions. Convenience and snowball sampling procedures were used. The questionnaire with all constructs of interest described in section 4.4. was posted on different german-speaking social media platforms like forums, social networking sites (Facebook, VK) and blogs. The questionnaire was distributed between 25th of March and 20th of May 2013. In order to achieve a random distribution, the type of questionnaire was changed each 2-3 days on each social media platform. The complete list of social media where the questionnaire was posted can be found in Appendix 4. Additionally, the questionnaire was also sent to friends and colleagues via e-mail and Facebook. Participants were asked to send the link to the questionnaire further to their friends and relatives.

A total of 339 respondents participated in the study: apology (N=71), actual denial (N=90), justification (N=76) and control group (N=102). On average, respondents required 12 minutes to complete the questionnaire: 14 minutes for apology, 11 for actual denial, 15 for justification and 10 minutes for the control group questionnaire. After the data cleaning procedure, a total of 222 respondents were included in the analysis: apology (N=52), actual denial (N=59), justification (N=53) and control group (N=58). Respondents who always checked the middle point on the scale, and respondents whose answers were inconsistent (reversed questions used in the questionnaire) were deleted from further analysis. Also respondents who claimed they knew the brand or the producer were deleted from further analysis as well.

More women (58%) than men (42%) participated in the study. The majority of respondents has a university degree (54%), 28% have a Matura, 10% done some apprenticeship or completed a technical school, and 5% have a mandatory school education. 3% of respondents checked the point "Other" in the questionnaire. Regarding the occupation, 45% of respondents are currently employed, 44% are students, 2% are in retirement and 3% are unemployed. 6% of respondents selected the point "Other" in the questionnaire. 61% of respondents are between 20 and 30 years old, 22% between 30 and 40, 10% between 40 and 50, 3% between 15 and 20, 3% between 50 and 60 and 1% are 60 plus years old. 76% of respondents who filled out the questionnaire live in the city and 24% in the rural area. See Appendix 5 for more details on respondents' demographics.

56% of respondents use social media several times a day, 9% once a day and 17% don't use social media or use it very rarely. 6% of respondents use social media each 2-3 days, 8% use it once a week, and 4% only once a month. 34% of respondents are registered by one social media platform, 28% by two, and 16% by three social media sites. Only 3% of respondents have an account by four and 2% by five social media sites. 13% of respondents don't have an account by any social media platform, and only 4% are registered by more than five different social media platforms. The majority of respondents use internet for searching information about a company or a product of interest every day. 13% make it at least once a day and 23% several times a day. 21% of respondents use internet for searching such information every 2-3 days, 26% once a week, and 11% once a month. Only 6% of respondents don't use internet for searching for product's or company's information or do it very seldom (Appendix 6).

Before testing hypotheses, reversed items used in the questionnaire were recoded and the reliability of items forming the constructs was checked. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which is the most common measure of scale reliability, was calculated for this purpose (Field 2009, p.674). **Table 7** includes Cronbach's Alpha for constructs that are used for hypotheses testing procedure in this master thesis.

Table 7. Reliability measure of constructs

Construct	Number of items in the construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude toward the corporate response	4	0,91
Corporate reputation	5	0,73
Corporate post-trust	8	0,92
Responsibility	3	0,82
Issue involvement	10	0,89

As can be seen from **Table 7**, all constructs used in the questionnaire have Cronbach's Alpha coefficient higher than 0,7 indicating high reliability of scales used for measuring these constructs. Therefore, the average construct variables were calculated and used in further analyses.

Table 8 presents mean and standard deviation values of constructs in different response strategies. As can be seen from **Table 8**, the overall attitude toward the corporate

response is low among respondents. Only the use of the apology response strategy led to some improvement in respondents' attitude toward the company's response. "Levada Chocolate" is perceived as a company with a rather neutral reputation. It can be due to the fact that the company's name used in the experiment was fictitious. Overall, the evaluation of trust in the company is also very low. The company is perceived as being highly responsible for the occurrence of the negative issue in all four experimental conditions: no response, apology, actual denial and justification.

Table 8. Mean and standard deviation of constructs in different response strategies

Strategy	Attitude toward the corporate response			Corporate reputation			Corporate post-trust			Responsibility		
	M	sd	n	m	sd	n	m	sd	n	m	sd	n
Apology	3,8	1,5	52	3,8	1,1	52	2,7	1,2	52	5,5	1,2	52
Actual denial	2,4	1,1	59	3,1	1	59	2,4	1,3	59	4,9	1,2	59
Justification	2,6	1,4	53	3,1	1,2	53	2,5	1,2	53	5	1,4	53
No response	-	-	-	3,6	1,2	58	2,4	1,1	58	5,5	1,3	58
Total	2,9	1,5	164	3,4	1,1	222	2,5	1,2	222	5,2	1,3	222

m – mean

sd – standard deviation

n – sample size

The hypothesis H1a was tested using one-way ANOVA analysis. Respondents in the control group that didn't see the response message were not included in the analysis. Only 164 respondents were used for testing the first hypothesis. The average construct variable "attitude toward the corporate response" was calculated and used in the analysis. As the result of Levene's test ($p=0,030$) has shown that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated, Welch and Brown-Forsythe ANOVAs were run (Field 2009, pp.379-384). Both tests show that there is a significant difference between groups regarding the attitude toward the corporate response ($F=15,7$; $p<0,001$ Brown-Forsythe; $F=14,5$; $p<0,001$ Welch ANOVA). This result is also supported when the Kruskal-Wallis test is used ($p<0,001$). Games-Howell post hoc analysis that can be used if the assumption of homogeneity of variance is violated (Field 2009, pp.386-388), shows that there are significant differences in attitude toward the corporate response between apology and

actual denial ($p < 0,001$) and between apology and justification ($p < 0,001$) groups. Respondents who read the apology response message ($m=3,8$; $sd=1,5$) evaluated the company's response more positively than respondents who read the actual denial ($m=2,4$; $sd=1,1$) and justification ($m=2,6$; $sd=1,4$) response messages (Appendix 7). Hence, hypothesis H1a can be supported.

Analysis of variance was run in order to see if there is some influence of corporate response on the company's post-trust and reputation. The average construct variables for reputation and post-trust were used in the analysis. Levene's test for the company's reputation is non-significant ($p = 0,338$) indicating that for these data the equal variances can be assumed. Overall, the result of the ANOVA was significant for corporate reputation ($F=5,3$; $p=0,002$) indicating that corporate response has a significant influence on the perceived company's reputation. Post hoc analysis has shown that individuals who saw the apology response message ($m=3,8$; $sd=1,1$) on Facebook evaluated company's reputation more favourable compared to individuals who saw the actual denial ($m=3,1$; $sd=1$; $p=0,008$) and justification ($m=3,1$; $sd=1,2$; $p=0,007$) response messages. No significant difference between apology and no response groups were found. The average evaluation of company's reputation is slightly higher in the apology response group ($m=3,8$; $sd=1,14$) as in the control group ($m=3,6$; $sd=1,1$). Bonferroni's post hoc test was used as the homogeneity of variance can be assumed. This test controls very well for the Type I error and performs best compared to other post hoc test when the number of comparisons is small as in the case of this master thesis (Field 2009, p.374). As a result, hypothesis H1b can be partially supported. Appendix 8 shows the ANOVA results in detail.

For the company's post-trust, results of the ANOVA analysis fail to be significant ($F=0,92$; $p=0,430$). No significant difference was found between respondents who saw the actual denial ($m=2,4$; $sd=1,3$), justification ($m=2,5$; $sd=1,2$), apology ($m=2,7$; $sd=1,2$) and control group ($m=2,4$; $sd=1,1$) in their evaluation of trust in the company. Hence, hypothesis H1c must be rejected (Appendix 9).

In order to test hypothesis H1d, respondents' comments were classified by the SentiStrength algorithm for sentiment direction and sentiment strength. Regarding the sentiment direction comments were classified as positive, negative or neutral and the corresponding variable was created in the SPSS data sheet. See Appendix 10 for more details on each comment.

As already discussed previously, SentiStrength attributes sentiment strength to each word in the sentence on the scale from 1 to -1 indicating no strength and 5 to -5 indicating very strong positive or negative sentiment strength of the word. The overall strength of the comment is then automatically calculated as the sum of sentiment strength of individual words in the comment. Some sentiment adjustment is automatically made by the algorithm for sentence length. As this scale has no zero point, each comment becomes values of at least -1 and 1 indicating a neutral or no sentiment.

Results from SentiStrength were then verified manually and improved for some grammatical mistakes, ironic expressions and negating words (Wiegand et al. 2010, p.61). For example, if the word was rated with +1 as positive but in the context of the sentence it was used with "no" or "not", the sentiment was changed to -1. After the mistakes were corrected, the comments were newly classified with SentiStrength. **Table 9** shows overall sentiment strength and average sentiment for each response strategy.

Table 9. Sentiment strength of user's comments to the company's response strategies

Type	Positive strength	Negative strength	Average positive strength	Average negative strength
Actual denial	64	-120	1,1	-2
Apology	82	-85	1,6	-1,6
Justification	66	-104	1,2	-2

As can be seen from **Table 9**, the average negative sentiment strength is higher in the actual denial and justification conditions comparing to the apology response condition. As expected, the actual denial response strategy leads to more negative expressions from respondents than apology and justification.

As both variables – respondent's cognitive response and type of the response strategy – are nominal, cross tabulation was run in order to see if the company's response strategy has some influence on respondent's cognitive response to this strategy. Results of the cross tabulation has shown that there exist a significant relationship between the type of the response message that a person has read and the person's cognitive response to this message ($X^2=20,695$; $p<0,001$). As each of the nominal variables (type of response and the cognitive response sentiment) has more than 2 dimensions, Cramer's V was used for evaluation of effect size (Field 2009, p.698). In this case Cramer's V is 0,251 indicating

low to medium effect of the type of company's response on the respondents' cognitive response. In order to investigate this relationship in more detail, the standardized residuals were observed. From **Table 10** it can be seen that two residuals have values outside of $\pm 1,96$ that corresponds with significance level of $p < 0,05$, and one residual has value outside of $\pm 2,58$ and is significant on the $p < 0,01$ level (Field 2009, p.699). Significantly more positive ($z=2,7$) and significantly less negative ($z=-2$) comments were written when the apology response strategy was used. Also significantly less positive comments were written when the actual denial strategy was used ($z=-2,3$). Company's apology for an issue leads to more positive comments from respondents comparing to actual denial and justification response conditions. 28,8% of all comments in the apology response condition were positive compared to 3,4% in actual denial and 13,2% in justification response conditions. For this reason hypothesis H1d can be supported. See Appendix 11 for more detail.

Table 10. Type of corporate response vs. sentiment of users' comments

Comments sentiment		Type			Total
		Actual denial	Apology	Justification	
Neutral	Count	19	19	11	49
	Expected Count	17,6	15,5	15,8	49
	% within Type	32,2%	36,5%	20,8%	29,9%
	Std. Residual	,3	,9	-1,2	
Positive	Count	2	15	7	24
	Expected Count	8,6	7,6	7,8	24
	% within Type	3,4%	28,8%	13,2%	14,6%
	Std. Residual	-2,3	2,7	-,3	
Negative	Count	38	18	35	91
	Expected Count	32,7	28,9	29,4	91
	% within Type	64,4%	34,6%	66%	55,5%
	Std. Residual	,9	-2	1	
Total	Count	59	52	53	164
	Expected Count	59	52	53	164
	% within Type	100%	100%	100%	100%

Analysis of variance was run in order to see if there is any difference in the positive sentiment strength of respondent's comments between different response strategies. Levene's test is significant ($p < 0,001$) indicating that the homogeneity of variances can not

be assumed. Therefore, Welch ($F=12,8$; $p<0,001$) and Brown-Forsythe ($F=12,3$; $p<0,001$) ANOVAs were run and Games-Howell post hoc analysis was used for groups comparison. The result has shown that comments from respondents who saw the apology response message ($m=1,6$; $sd=0,7$) has a significantly more positive sentiment strength than those from people who saw the actual denial ($m=1,1$; $sd=0,3$; $p<0,001$) and justification ($m=1,3$; $sd=0,6$; $p=0,018$) response messages (Appendix 12). Positive strength of the comment was calculated with the SentiStrength algorithm and was measured on the scale from 1 indicating no positive sentiment to 5 indicating a very strong positive sentiment of the comment.

Also the Net Reputation Score and Sentiment difference, that were described in Section 4.2, for the comments that were posted as reaction to the apology, justification and actual denial response messages were calculated (**Table 11**).

Table 11. Net Reputation Score and Sentiment difference of the comments

Type	Net Reputation Score	Sentiment difference
Actual denial	-0.93	-0.61
Apology	-0.42	-0.06
Justification	-0.74	-0.53

As it can be seen from **Table 11**, all values are very small and negative, indicating that the company has some very weak negative reputation and sentiment difference scores. This may be due to the fact, that the company's name used in the analysis was fictitious and a lot of comments were objective and neutral because of a lack of knowledge and opinion about the company among respondents. Some of the respondents claimed that the information they had received about the company was not sufficient to make evaluations of company's reputation and corporate responsibility for the unfavourable event.

To test hypothesis H1e a one-way ANOVA was run. The underlying assumption is that the response strategy of the company has an influence on the perceived company's responsibility for the unfavourable event. It is assumed that this perceived responsibility will be higher for respondents who saw the apology response message and for respondents in the control group. After the reversed items used in the responsibility construct were recoded, the average responsibility variable was calculated and used in the

analysis. Levene's test was non-significant ($p=0,829$) indicating that homogeneity of variances can be assumed for these data. Overall, the result of the ANOVA was significant ($F=3,3$; $p=0,023$) indicating that corporate response has a significant influence on the perceived company's responsibility. Perceived company's responsibility for an event is higher in the apology ($m=5,5$, $sd=1,2$) and no response ($m=5,4$; $sd=1,3$) groups comparing to actual denial ($m=4,9$; $SD=1,2$) and justification ($m=5,13$, $sd=1,66$) groups. Bonferroni post hoc test shows that the difference between the actual denial and apology ($p=0,085$) and actual denial and no response ($p=0,096$) groups was significant on the $p<0,1$ level. All other mean differences were not significant (Appendix 13). Hence, hypothesis H1e can be partially supported.

Table 12 summarizes the results of the ANOVA analyses for hypotheses H1a-H1c and H1e.

Table 12. Hypotheses H1a-H1c and H1e: summary of the ANOVA results

Hypothesis	Dependent variable	Levene's test	Statistical tests used	F	Sig. (p)	N
H1a	Attitude toward the corporate response	$p=0,030$	Welch Brown-Forsythe	14,5 15,7	$<0,001$ $<0,001$	164
H1b	Corporate reputation	$p=0,338$	One-way ANOVA	5,3	0,002	222
H1c	Corporate post-trust	$p=0,838$	One-way ANOVA	0,9	0,430	222
H1e	Responsibility	$p=0,829$	One-way ANOVA	3,3	0,023	222

The result of an regression analysis has shown that the perceived company's responsibility does not have a significant influence on attitude toward the company's response ($\beta=-0,135$; $t=-1,549$; $p=0,123$). Also the explained variance in the variable attitude toward the corporate response is very low ($R^2=0,015$). Hence, hypothesis H2a must be rejected (Appendix 14). When each response strategy is analysed separately (split sample), the perceived company's responsibility ($\beta=-0,409$; $t=-3,817$; $p<0,001$) has a significant negative influence on attitude toward the corporate response if the actual

denial strategy is used ($F=14,57$; $p<0,001$; $R^2=0,204$). 20,4% of variance in the variable attitude toward the corporate response can be explained through perceived company's responsibility for the unfavourable event in the actual denial response condition. Also when the justification strategy is used, responsibility ($\beta=-0,267$; $t=-1,982$; $p=0,053$) shows to have a significant negative influence on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response ($F=3,9$; $p=0,053$; $R^2=0,072$). This result is significant on the $p<0,1$ level. Perceived company's responsibility does not have a significant influence on attitude toward the corporate response when the apology response strategy is used ($F=0,001$; $p=0,980$; $R^2=0$).

Results of a one-way ANOVA have shown that there was no significant difference between respondents who wrote positive, negative or neutral comments in their evaluations of the perceived company's responsibility for the unfavourable event ($F=0,654$, $p=0,521$). The perceived company's responsibility was high in all three groups ($m=5,12$; $sd=1,3$). For this reason hypothesis H2b has to be rejected. See Appendix 15 for more detail.

One-way ANOVA was run in order to check the assumption of Hypothesis H2c. As the assumption of the homogeneity of variances was violated (Levene's test is significant on the $p<0,001$ level), results of the Welch ($F=21,8$; $p<0,001$) and Brown-Forsythe ($F=22,1$; $p<0,001$) ANOVAs were used (Field 2009, pp.379-384). Games-Howell post hoc analysis indicated that there is a significant difference regarding the attitude toward the corporate response between respondents who wrote positive ($m=4,5$; $sd=1,6$) and negative ($m=2,4$; $sd=1$) comments ($p<0,001$) as well as positive and neutral ($m=3,1$; $sd=1,4$) comments ($p=0,002$). Also the difference between respondents who wrote neutral and negative comments was significant ($p=0,005$). The results show that respondents who wrote a positive comment have a more positive attitude toward the corporate response strategy compared to those who wrote negative and neutral comments. Also respondents who wrote neutral comments evaluated company's response more favourably than those who wrote negative comments. Hence, hypothesis H2c can be supported (Appendix 16).

Contrary to the expectations of hypothesis H2d, persons' issue involvement didn't show to have a significant influence on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response ($F=0,178$; $p=0,674$; $R^2=0,001$). As a result of the regression analysis, hypothesis H2d has to be rejected. See Appendix 17 for more detail.

Also hypothesis H2e couldn't be supported statistically (Appendix 18). No significant difference between respondents who wrote positive, negative or neutral comments regarding the issue involvement were found. As the result of the Levene's test ($p=0,044$) shows that the homogeneity of variances cannot be assumed, Welch ($F=1,36$; $p=0,265$) and Brown-Forsythe ($F=1,097$; $p=0,338$) ANOVAs were used. Overall, persons' issue involvement was high among respondents in all three groups ($m=4,5$; $sd=1$).

A summary of the results for hypotheses H2a-H2e can be found in the Appendix 19.

Hypotheses H3a and H3b state that higher perceived company's responsibility will negatively influence company's reputation and trust in the company. Regression analyses were run in order to check these assumptions. The output of the regression analysis regarding the company's reputation has shown that the perceived responsibility for the unfavourable event accounts only for 2,3% of variance in the perceived company's reputation ($R^2=0,023$). As expected, higher perceived company's responsibility for an issue has a significant negative influence on company's reputation ($\beta=-0,131$; $t=-2,275$; $p=0,024$). Hence, hypothesis H3a can be supported (Appendix 20).

Regression output regarding the corporate post-trust shows that 14,2% of variance in the trust construct can be explained through perceived company's responsibility ($R^2=0,142$). As expected, higher perceived company's responsibility for an issue has a negative influence on company's post-trust ($\beta=-0,342$; $t=-6,042$; $p<0,001$). Hence, hypotheses H3b can be statistically supported (Appendix 21).

It is also interesting to see how the relationships between perceived company's responsibility and reputation and trust in the company will change when analysing each response strategy separately (split sample). As a result of the regression analyses for each group (actual denial, apology, justification and no response) it can be seen that perceived company's responsibility for the unfavourable issue matters for the evaluation of perceived company's reputation only if no response strategy is used. Perceived company's responsibility has a significant negative influence on the evaluation of the trust in the company if the actual denial, justification or no response strategies are used. In case when the apology response strategy is used perceived company's responsibility does not have a significant influence on company's reputation and trust in the company. See **Table 13** for more detail.

Table 13. Influence of perceived company's responsibility on company's reputation and trust (split sample results)

Response strategy used	Reputation			Trust		
	F	β	R ²	F	β	R ²
Actual denial	2,565	-0,163	0,043	5,633*	-0,314*	0,09
Justification	2,511	-0,185	0,047	8,461*	-0,313*	0,142
Apology	0,278	-0,069	0,006	2,537	-0,218	0,048
No response	7,089*	-0,280*	0,112	49,985*	-0,579*	0,472

*significant on the $p < 0,05$ level

Regression analysis was also conducted in order to check the relationship between corporate reputation and trust in the company that was described in section 4.3 of this master thesis. Result of the regression output has shown that the unstandardized beta coefficient is 0,594 ($t=10,137$; $p < 0,001$) and it is significant on the $p < 0,01$ level, indicating that reputation does have a significant positive influence on the trust in the company. Reputation accounts for 31,8% of variance in the corporate post-trust construct ($R^2=0,318$). Hence, hypothesis H3c can be supported (Appendix 22).

Table 14 shows a summary of the results of the regression analyses for hypotheses H3a-H3c.

Table 14. Results of the regression analyses for the hypotheses H3a-H3c: results summary

Hypothesis	Dependent variable	Predictors	F	β	p	R ²	N
H3a	Corporate reputation	Responsibility	5,18	-0,131	0,024	0,023	222
H3b	Corporate post-trust	Responsibility	36,5	-0,342	<0,001	0,142	222
H3c	Corporate post-trust	Corporate reputation	102,8	0,594	<0,001	0,318	222

Table 15 shows a summary of the statistical support from the hypotheses testing procedure.

Table 15. Hypotheses testing summary

Hypotheses	Statistical support
H1a: Company's apology for an issue will lead to more positive attitude toward the corporate response compared to actual denial and justification response strategies	Yes
H1b: Company's apology for an issue will lead to more favourable perceived corporate reputation compared to actual denial, justification and no response strategies	Partially supported
H1c: Company's apology for an issue will lead to higher perceived corporate post-trust, compared to actual denial, justification and no response strategies	No
H1d: Company's apology for an issue will lead to more positive cognitive response compared to actual denial and justification response strategies	Yes
H1e: Apology and no response strategies will lead to higher perceived company's responsibility for the negative occurrence compared to actual denial and justification response strategies	Partially supported
H2a: Higher perceived company's responsibility for a negative event will negatively influence consumers' attitude toward the company's response	No
H2b: Perceived company's responsibility for a negative event will be higher among respondents who wrote a negative comment compared to those who wrote a positive or a neutral comment	No
H2c: Attitude toward the corporate response will be more positive among respondents who wrote a positive comment compared to those who wrote a negative or a neutral comment	Yes
H2d: Higher issue involvement will have a negative influence on attitude toward the company's response to negative publicity	No

H2e: Higher issue involvement will have a negative influence on respondents' cognitive response to the company's response strategy	No
H3a: Higher perceived company's responsibility will negatively influence perceived company's reputation	Yes
H3b: Higher perceived company's responsibility will negatively influence respondents' trust in the company	Yes
H3c: A positive perceived company's reputation will lead to higher perceived trust in the company	Yes

Additionally, the potential influence of respondents' demographic variables and social media usage on their attitude toward the corporate response and their cognitive response to the company's response strategy was investigated.

Overall, no any significant influences of respondents' demographic characteristics (gender, age, study and occupation) on their attitude toward the corporate response and their cognitive response to the company's response strategy were found. Only the influence of age on the respondents' attitude toward the corporate response has shown that people who are between 50 and 60 years old ($\beta=-1,543$; $t=-2,092$; $p=0,038$) evaluated company's response strategy more negative comparing to respondents who are between 20 and 30 years old (regression analysis with dummies). See the results of the regression analysis in Appendix 23.

Also no any significant influences of social media usage on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response and respondents' cognitive response were found. Interesting is that users who have an account by two ($\beta=-0,559$; $t=-1,940$; $p=0,054$) and four ($\beta=-1,021$; $t=-1,765$; $p=0,080$) social media sites evaluated the corporate response more negative compared to those who have only one social media account (regression analysis with dummies). See Appendix 24 for more detail.

6. Conclusion and limitations

As already mentioned, the main aim of this master thesis is the evaluation of the effectiveness of different response strategies of a firm to negative publicity in social media. The effectiveness of the response strategy was measured using respondents' attitude toward the corporate response (Siomkos and Malliaris 1992; Kerkhof et al. 2011), their cognitive response to this strategy (Kerkhof et al. 2011; Petty and Cacciopo 1979), perceived company's responsibility for negative occurrence (Coombs and Holladay 2002), reputation (Coombs 2012) and trust in the company (Xie and Peng 2009). Four strategies – actual denial, apology, justification, as well as no response (or ignorance) – were analysed. The main aim was to find out which mood these strategies trigger by respondents, direction and intensity of respondent's feedback to this strategies and their influence on company's reputation and trust in the company.

One of the most important results is that the company's response to negative publicity online matter in the trust building, reputation building and reputation protection activities of the firm. Respondents, who were exposed to the apology response message after the negative publicity in the online blog evaluated the response message more positive, find the company more sympatic and feel more favourable about the company's reputation. These results are in line with previous works in the field of reputational management and communication. Also in this master thesis, apology was found to be the most effective strategy when dealing with the spread of negative company information online. According to Siomkos (1994, p.38) this finding is especially important for unknown firms, as the effect of the negative publicity may have minimal consequences for well-known firms with a good reputation, but can have a devastating effect on small unknown firms.

According to the SCCT, the type of response to negative company's publicity will have an influence on perceived company's responsibility for an issue. This assumption was also supported by the findings of this master thesis. Respondents who read the apology response message or didn't see any response message (control group) find the company as being more responsible for an issue as respondents who were exposed to actual denial and justification response strategies. This finding is especially important, because perceived company's responsibility for an issue has a significant influence on people's evaluation of company's reputation and trust in the company. Interesting is that the perceived

company's responsibility for the unfavourable issue loses its importance for the evaluation of company's reputation, trust and attitude toward the corporate response when the apology response strategy is used. In contrast perceived company's responsibility plays an important role in respondents' evaluation of company's trust and attitude toward the corporate response when the actual denial and justification strategies are used instead. Also perceived company's responsibility has a negative influence on company's reputation and trust when no response option is used.

SCCT also states that favourable company's reputation will affect people's trust in the company and their willingness to buy company's products as well as recommend the company to their friends and relatives. Also this assumption can be supported by the results of this study. This finding is very important because the trust in the company includes also the willingness to buy company's product and has a direct influence on company's survival and financial results. According to Siomkos (1994, p.40) company's favourable reputation also serves as preventive device against the negative consequences of a future crisis and thus can lessen the importance of the negative publicity in the future.

Table 16 gives an overview about the main indicators of effectiveness of the response strategies that were investigated in this master thesis.

Table 16. Effectiveness of the company's response strategy to negative publicity online: main indicators summary

Response strategy	Attitude toward company's response	Reputation	Trust	Responsibility	Average Comments' Sentiment	
					positive	negative
Actual denial	2,4	3,1	2,4	4,9	1,1	-2
Apology	3,8	3,8	2,7	5,5	1,6	-1,6
Justification	2,6	3,1	2,5	5	1,2	-2
No response	-	3,6	2,4	5,5	-	-
Mean value	2,9	3,4	2,5	5,2	1,3	-1,9

As it can be seen from **Table 16**, the average evaluation of attitude toward the corporate response, reputation and trust is higher when the apology response strategy is used. The average evaluations of these variables are more or less on the same level when actual denial and justification response strategies are used instead. Also the usage of the no response strategy leads to a more positive evaluation of company's reputation as actual

denial and justification, but the evaluation of the trust in the company is on the same level in all three strategies (actual denial, no response and justification). Perceived company's responsibility for the unfavourable issue is either high in all four response conditions being slightly higher when the apology and no response strategies are used. Regarding the mood that each response strategy triggers by respondents, apology leads to more positive and sufficiently less negative comments'sentiment comparing to actual denial and justification response strategies.

Finally, it can be concluded that apology is still the most effective strategy for dealing with negative publicity in social media, especially if the company is unknown and has no previous reputation. For well-known companies with a good previous reputation actual denial can also be used if the company is not responsible for the negative issue. The results have shown that acknowledgement of responsibility as in the case of justification didn't bring better results than the denial of responsibility.

It must also be mentioned that, as a scenario-based experiment with a fictitious brand name was used, the external validity of the results is limited to some degree (Xie and Peng 2009, p.586). Also a limited number of response strategies were investigated and the response message was posted only in one type of social media (social networking site Facebook). So the results should be generalized only with some caution. Only separate influences of company's response strategy and company's perceived responsibility for negative issue on company's reputation and trust were investigated. It would be interesting to analyse the influence of type of response strategy, responsibility and other variables on the reputation and trust in the company simultaneously. Unfortunately, this would go beyond the scope of this master thesis.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Procter & Gamble's disclaimer on the company's Facebook page

“The Procter & Gamble Facebook page is meant to be a fun environment for our fans to discuss Procter & Gamble. Though the Procter & Gamble Company (P&G) does not monitor every Facebook posting, please understand that we reserve the right to remove postings and photos that:

- (1) are libelous profane, defamatory, disparaging, hateful, harassing, threatening, or obscene;
- (2) violate another’s copyright or intellectual property;
- (3) condone or promote illegal activity;
- (4) are fraudulent, deceptive or misleading;
- (5) are otherwise sexual or offensive graphically or in tone;
- (6) contain spam or are intended to cause technical disruptions to this page;
- (7) are off topic; or
- (8) violate any local, state, federal, and/or international laws or regulations.

Please note that P&G does not endorse any opinions on this page not specifically posted by us. Additionally, P&G is not responsible for the accuracy of the claims, information, advice or comments posted by fans and visitors of the page. P&G strongly encourages fans of this page to respect fellow community members and to follow Facebook’s Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. Anyone repeatedly posting material that falls into the above categories will be removed and banned from participating in this Fan Page” (P&G Fan-Seite).

Appendix 2. Questionnaire.

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

im Rahmen meiner Diplomarbeit im Fachbereich Marketing an der Universität Wien führe ich eine Befragung zum Thema „Negative Konsumentenkritik zu Unternehmen in Social Media“ durch.

Seien Sie versichert, dass dieser Fragebogen anonym behandelt wird und Ihre Daten nicht an Dritte weitergegeben werden.

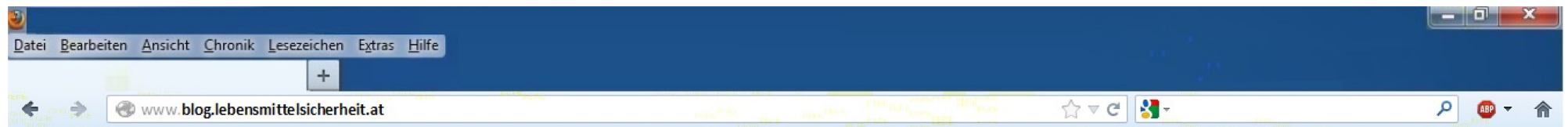
Bei der Befragung gibt es keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten. Es geht allein um Ihre persönliche Einschätzung. An manchen Stellen im Fragebogen werden ähnliche Fragen zum gleichen Thema gestellt. Seien Sie deshalb bitte nicht irritiert.

Damit der Fragebogen ausführlich ausgewertet werden kann, ist es wichtig, dass Sie alle Fragen beantworten. Und zwar auch dann, wenn Sie sich bei einer Antwort nicht ganz sicher sind. Eine ungefähre Angabe ist in diesem Fall wertvoller als ein unvollständig ausgefüllter Fragebogen.

Der zeitliche Aufwand für die Befragung beträgt lediglich 10-15 Minuten.

Ich möchte mich für Ihre Zeit und Ihre Hilfe bedanken und wünsche Ihnen noch einen schönen Tag!

1. Bitte lesen Sie sich den Blog-Artikel aufmerksam durch.



← Zurück zur Übersicht

Mineralöl-Rückstände in Schokolade!

Jüngsten Zeitungsberichten zufolge hat die österreichische Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit in der Schokolade „Shorty“ des Süßwarenherstellers „Levada Chocolate“ Rückstände von Mineralöl und ähnliche Substanzen gefunden. Den Untersuchungen waren vermehrte gesundheitliche Beschwerden von Kunden vorausgegangen. So sollen einige Konsumenten nach dem Verzehr der Schokolade unter Übelkeit und Schwindel gelitten haben.



Die Ermittlungsergebnisse zu dem Fall werden am Ende der kommenden Woche bekannt gegeben. Bislang wird vermutet, dass die Stoffe aus den Schokoladenverpackungen stammen könnten, die häufig mit mineralöhlhaltigen Farben bedruckt sind. Offen ist jedoch, wie die Substanzen in die Schokolade gelangen konnten. Eine mögliche Ursache sei die längere Lagerung der Produkte. So hätte der Produzent „Levada Chocolate“ von seinem Stammsitz aus in neue Märkte expandiert und längere Lagerzeiten und Transportwege in Kauf genommen. Dass es dabei zu Temperaturschwankungen kam, welche zu einer Vermischung der Substanzen führen hätte können, ist derzeit nicht auszuschließen.

Zurzeit könnten Wissenschaftler nicht eindeutig abschätzen, wie stark der Verzehr von Mineralölen in geringen Mengen den Menschen gefährdet. Bei Tierversuchen wurden Mineralöle mit Entzündungserscheinungen der Magenschleimhäute in Zusammenhang gebracht.

Achte internationale Konferenz zur Lebensmittelsicherheit in Wien



Schmecken Erdbeeren noch wie vor 30 Jahren?



Drucken | Versenden | Merken | Feedback

Komentieren | 52 Kommentare

Twittern 33

f Empfehlen 48

+1

Alle Themenseiten

2. Bitte schreiben Sie einen kurzen Kommentar zu der Reaktion des Geschäftsführers von "Levada Chocolate", Georg Marksteiner, auf den obigen Blog-Artikel. Es geht ausschließlich um Ihre Meinung:

The screenshot shows a Facebook profile for Georg Marksteiner. The profile picture is a logo for "Levada Chocolate". The cover photo is a chocolate bar. The profile name is "Georg Marksteiner". The bio mentions "Levada Chocolate" and "Hat bei Levada Chocolate (Inhaber/Geschäftsführer) g...". The post shows a link to "Mineralöl-Rückstände in Schokolade!" with a description of a health and nutrition agency finding mineral oil residues in chocolate. The user's response is a comment stating that after careful consideration, they have decided to stop selling the affected product and will take necessary measures to prevent future incidents, while maintaining their commitment to quality and customer trust.

Georg Marksteiner - Mozilla Firefox

Datei Bearbeiten Ansicht Chronik Lesezeichen Extras Hilfe

Georg Marksteiner

www.facebook.com/georg.marksteiner.7

facebook Suche nach Personen, Orten und Dingen

Georg Marksteiner Freunde finden Startseite

Jetzt Geburt

Levada Chocolate

Georg Marksteiner

Informationen bearbeiten Aktivitätenprotokoll

Schule hinzufügen
Füge deinen derzeitigen Wohnort hinzu
Füge deine Heimatstadt hinzu
Hat bei Levada Chocolate (Inhaber/Geschäftsführer) g...

Info

Levada Chocolate Georg Marksteiner

Mineralöl-Rückstände in Schokolade!

Jüngsten Zeitungsberichten zufolge hat die österreichische Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit in der Schokolade „Shorty“ des Süßwarenherstellers „Levada Chocolate GmbH“ Rückstände von Mineralöl und ähnliche Substanzen gefunden. Den Untersuchungen waren vermehrte gesundheitliche Beschwerden von Kunden vorausgegangen. So sollen einige Konsumenten...

www.blog.lebensmittelsicherheit.at

Gefällt mir · Kommentieren · Teilen

Levada Chocolate

Georg Marksteiner Nach reiflicher Überlegung sind wir zu dem Entschluss gekommen, den betroffenen Artikel vorsorglich aus dem Verkauf zu nehmen. Wir versprechen, alle notwendigen Maßnahmen zu ergreifen, um Vorfälle wie diesen in Zukunft zu vermeiden. Nun liegt es an uns, zu unseren alten Stärken zurückzukehren und wieder einwandfreie Qualitätsprodukte anzubieten. Wir bitten vor allem unsere treuen Kunden um Verständnis und Vertrauen.

vor einigen Sekunden · Gefällt mir

Aktivitäten Aktuelle Aktivitäten

Georg hat eine Arbeitsstelle bei Levada Chocolate zu seiner Chronik hinzugefügt.

Georg hat seinen Wohnort geändert.

Ihr Kommentar:

3. Inwieweit treffen die folgenden Aussagen zu:

1=Stimme gar nicht zu; 7=Stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Umstände, nicht das Unternehmen, sind für die Vorfälle verantwortlich.							
Die Schuld für die Vorfälle liegt beim Unternehmen.							
Die Schuld für die Vorfälle liegt an den Umständen.							

4. Wie schätzen Sie die Reaktion des Levada Chocolate-Geschäftsführers Georg Marksteiner auf die im Blog-Artikel beschriebene Situation ein:

überhaupt nicht ausreichend								völlig ausreichend
nicht sehr ehrlich								sehr ehrlich
nicht sehr aufrichtig								sehr aufrichtig
nicht sehr vertrauenswürdig								sehr vertrauenswürdig

5. Inwieweit treffen die folgenden Aussagen zum Unternehmen „Levada Chocolate“ auf Sie zu?

1=Stimme gar nicht zu; 7=Stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ich würde dieses Unternehmen ablehnen.							
Ich halte das Unternehmen für sympathisch.							
Ich vertraue diesem Unternehmen grundsätzlich.							
Das Unternehmen ist grundsätzlich zuverlässig.							
Das Unternehmen ist grundsätzlich vertrauenswürdig.							
Ich werde die Produkte dieser Firma kaufen, wenn ich das nächste Mal Lust auf Schokolade habe.							
Ich bin bereit, dieses Unternehmen meinen Verwandten und Freunden zu empfehlen.							
Ich bin bereit, neue Produkte von diesem Unternehmen zu testen.							

6. Inwieweit treffen die folgenden Aussagen auf das Unternehmen „Levada Chocolat“ zu:

1=Stimme gar nicht zu; 7=Stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Das Unternehmen sorgt sich um das Wohlergehen der Öffentlichkeit.							
Das Unternehmen ist grundsätzlich unehrlich.							
Ich habe kein Vertrauen, dass das Unternehmen die Wahrheit über den Vorfall erzählt.							
In den meisten Situationen würde ich wahrscheinlich glauben, was das Unternehmen sagt.							
Das Unternehmen sorgt sich nicht um das Wohlergehen der Öffentlichkeit.							

7. Die Thematik „Sorgfältige Herstellung und Verpackung von Schokolade-Produkten“ halte ich für...

unwichtig								wichtig
langweilig								interessant
irrelevant								relevant
unbedeutend								bedeutend
nicht aufregend								aufregend
nicht ansprechend								ansprechend
alltäglich								faszinierend
wertlos								wertvoll
nicht mitreißend								mitreißend
nicht notwendig								notwendig

8. Wie oft nutzen Sie das Internet, um Informationen zu einem Unternehmen oder zu Produkten zu suchen bzw. zu erhalten?

	mehrmals am Tag
	einmal am Tag
	alle 2-3 Tage
	einmal in der Woche
	einmal im Monat
	nie oder sehr selten

9. Wie häufig nutzen Sie Soziale Netzwerke (z.B. Facebook, Linked In, Xing, etc.)?

☐	mehrmals am Tag
☐	einmal am Tag
☐	alle 2-3 Tage
☐	einmal in der Woche
☐	einmal im Monat
☐	nie oder sehr selten

10. Bei wie vielen Sozialen Netzwerken sind Sie registriert?

keine ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	mehr als 5 ☐
--------------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------------

11. Ist Ihnen der Süßwarenhersteller „Levada Chocolate“ bekannt?

☐	ja
☐	nein

12. Ist Ihnen die Schokolade „Shorty“ des Süßwarenherstellers „Levada Chocolate“ bekannt?

☐	ja
☐	nein

Fragen zu Ihrer Person.

Alle Angaben sind anonym und werden nur für die statistische Zwecke verwendet!

Höchste abgeschlossene Schulausbildung:

☐	Pflichtschule
☐	Lehre/Fachschule
☐	Matura
☐	Universität/FH
☐	Anderes:

Beruf:

☐	Student/Schüler
☐	Erwerbstätig
☐	Arbeitslos
☐	in Pension
☐	Anderes:

Ihr Geschlecht:

☐	Weiblich
☐	Männlich

Wohnsitz:

☐	Stadt
☐	Ländlicher raum

Alter: _____

Staatsbürgerschaft: _____

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!

Appendix 3. Response messages.

Actual denial:

„Die jüngsten Vorfälle mit unserem Produkt in Verbindung zu bringen, ist vollkommen unangebracht. Unsere Schokolade ist von einwandfreier Qualität. Wir haben unseren gesamten Produktionsprozess bereits vor Monaten einer externen Prüfung unterzogen. Dabei wurden weder bei der Herstellung noch bei der Verpackung unserer Produkte Mängel gefunden. Vermutlich handelt es sich bei der Häufung der Erkrankungen um reinen Zufall.“

Justification

„Es trifft zu, dass die Verpackungen unserer Schokolade mit mineralöhlhaltigen Farbstoffen bedruckt sind. So wie dies heutzutage auch bei vielen anderen Lebensmittelverpackungen üblich ist. Wir können nicht ausschließen, dass es in seltenen Fällen zu Vermischungen von Farbstoffen mit der Schokolade gekommen ist. Laut unseren Experten wird die Gesundheit der Konsumenten bei einer solchen geringen Menge jedoch auf keinen Fall beeinträchtigt.“

Justification modified:

" Es trifft zu, dass die Verpackungen unserer Schokolade mit mineralöhlhaltigen Farbstoffen bedruckt sind. So wie dies heutzutage auch bei vielen anderen Lebensmittelverpackungen üblich ist. Laut unseren Experten besteht für die Gesundheit der Konsumenten jedoch absolut keine Gefahr. Wir weisen darauf hin, dass die Ergebnisse der österreichischen Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit bereits in anderen Fällen faktisch nicht bewiesen wurden."

Apology

„Nach reiflicher Überlegung sind wir zu dem Entschluss gekommen, den betroffenen Artikel vorsorglich aus dem Verkauf zu nehmen. Wir versprechen, alle notwendigen Maßnahmen zu ergreifen, um Vorfälle wie diesen in Zukunft zu vermeiden. Nun liegt es an uns, zu unseren alten Stärken zurückzukehren und wieder einwandfreie Qualitätsprodukte anzubieten. Wir bitten vor allem unsere treuen Kunden um Verständnis und Vertrauen.“

Appendix 4. List of sites and forums where the questionnaire was distributed.

Page link	Category	Date of the first posting
http://www.univie.ac.at/strview/bbs/showthread.php?tid=21796	Studium, Allgemein,	06.04
	Master,	12.04
	Bachelor	12.04
http://forum.web-z.net/board.php?boardid=109	Studium	30.04
www.geizhals.at	Off topics	17.04
http://www.powi.at/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=15620	Off topics	27.04
www.urbia.de	Allgemeines	26.04
www.vk.com	Universität Wien, German Films, Vienna, Austria	01.04
Facebook.com:	Company's and organization's fan pages	25.03
- User Konto		05.04
- Umfragen Vergleich		26.03
- Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz		17.04
- Austria-Forum		17.04
- Ring Freiheitlicher Studenten RFS		15.04
- Duales Studium		15.04
- academicworld		15.04
- Freudenberg (DE)		15.04
- Study in Germany		15.04
- MarketingProfs		15.04
- Auslaender.AT		15.04
- usi-forum		15.04
- Haekchen		15.04
- myfreising.de		14.04
- offensiv - Studentennetzwerk Zittau/Görlitz		14.04
- Studieren.at		14.04
- OMF - Online Marketing Forum		14.04

- Ayom		12.04
- Studenten-Hilfe		10.04
- Studentenhilfen		10.04
- Bergische Universität Wuppertal		05.04
- ÖH Uni Wien		05.04
- Universität Wien		
http://www.studium-ratgeber.de/forum.php	Allgemeines&sonstiges	15.04
http://www.bwl24.net/forum/	Umfragen zu Studienarbeiten	18.04
http://www.auslaender.at/forum/beratung-studenten/7975-brauche-unterst%C3%BCtzung-bei-masterarbeit-umfrage-bitte-mitmachen.html	Beratung Studenten	18.04
http://www.austrianwings.info/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=14552	Sonstiges	17.04
http://forum.frequency.at/viewtopic.php?f=8&t=19027&p=795428&hilit=Brauche+Unterst%C3%BCtzung#p795428	Allgemeines	17.04
http://www.uni-pur.de/fornew.php?&forum_id=1&fpage=1&reset=1	Sonstiges	30.04
http://www.students.ch/community/user/blog/Julpenn/68336	Community/Mitglieder	14.04
http://www.fernuni-hilfe.de/threads/2998-Brauche-Unterst%C3%BCtzung-bei-Masterarbeit-Umfrage!	Masterstudium WiWi/Plauderecke	17.04
http://bagru.info/forum/viewtopic.php?t=3655	Off topics	15.04
http://www.univie.ac.at/fv-jus/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=79&t=139369&p=1108324&hilit=Brauche+Unterst%C3%BCtzung#p1108324	Soziales	15.04
http://www.derdualestudent.de/studenten-forum/brauche-unterstuetzung-bei-masterarbeit-umfrage-bitte-mitmachen-t203.html	BWL / VWL / Management Basics	15.04
http://usi-forum.at/viewtopic.php?f=200&t=1985	Off-topic	15.04
http://forum.auslandszeit.de/allgemeines-sonstiges-fl6/brauche-unterstuetzung-bei-masterarbeit-umfrage-t1255.html	Allgemeines&sonstige	15.04
http://www.tutorials.de/ausbildung-beruf/393630-brauche-unterstuetzung-bei-masterarbeit-umfrage-bitte-mitmachen.html#post2033501	Ausbildung&Beruf	05.05

http://forum.abi-pur.de/thread.php?threadid=5152&boardid=23&styleid=2&sid=ueokfl4ukko7t9lpp5unto5p66	Klatsch-Trasch-Diskussionen	05.05
http://www.uni-pur.de/studium.php	Studium Allgemeines	30.04
http://www.univie.ac.at/fv-jus/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=79&t=139369&p=1108324&hilit=Brauche+Unterst%C3%BCtzung#p1108324	Soziales	15.04
http://www.derdualstudent.de/studenten-forum/post553.html#p553	BWL / VWL / Management Basics	15.04
http://forum.auslandszeit.de/post2173.html#p2173	Allgemeines & Sonstiges	15.04
http://www.forum-hilfe.de/threads/54912-Brauche-dringend-Teilnehmer-f%C3%BCr-meine-Masterarbeit-Umfrage!-Bitte-mitmachen!?p=405780#post405780	Off topic	17.05
http://www.hilfe-forum.com/index.php?page=Thread&postID=1732&highlight=brauche+dringend+Teilnehmer#post1732	Off-Topic/Umfragen	19.05
http://www.traum-projekt.com/forum/96-marketing/133101-brauche-dringend-teilnehmer-fuer-masterarbeit.html#post988011	Marketing	17.05
http://www.statistik-tutorial.de/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7100&highlight=brauche+dringend+teilnehmer	Persönliches&Smalltalk	17.05
http://forum.frag-mutti.de/index.php?showtopic=51991	Wissenschaftliche Forschungsumfragen	17.05
http://www.modernboard.de/off-topic/114322-brauche-dringend-teilnehmer-fuer-masterarbeit-umfrage-bitte-mitmachen.html	Off topic	17.05
http://forum.stv-translation.at/yaf_search.aspx#0 5	Off topic	17.05
http://www.sps-forum.de/suche-biete/63472-brauche-dringend-teilnehmer-fuer-meine-masterarbeit-umfrage-bitte-mitmachen.html	Suche-Biete	17.05
http://forum.frequency.at/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=19053	Allgemein	17.05
http://forum.web-z.net/thread.php?threadid=11441&highlight=Brauche+Hilfe	Studium	30.04
http://www.tumwinfo.de/forum/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=1354	Allgemeines/ Off topic	12.04
http://www.ag-bwz.at/forum/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=16029&p=57722&hilit=Brauche+Unterst%C3%BCtzung&sid=7b5052	Allgemeines/Allgemeine Fragen zum Studium	12.04

d49da3691d516f27e8c8f4d7c0#p57722		
http://www.univie.ac.at/stv-ksa/forum/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=16953&p=79136&hilit=Brauche+Unterst%C3%BCtzung#p79136	Allgemeines	12.04
http://bizfs2.htu.tuwien.ac.at/bizforum/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=951	Tratsch	12.04
http://www.klamm.de/forum/f63/brauche-dringend-teilnehmer-fuer-meine-masterarbeit-umfrage-bitte-mitmachen-412570.html	Schule/Studium	17.05
http://forum.oeh-wu.at/register.php?a=act&u=36534&i=1d22b2afc91df06a1593d38ed2b3b46f1d84c20e	Offtopic	12.04
www-studis-online.de	Studium	12.04
http://forum.student.de/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=3367&p=4511&hilit=Brauche+dringend+Teilnehmer#p4511	Umfragen/Polls	17.05
http://www.students.ch/community/blog	Community Fragen	15.04

Appendix 5. Demographics

Gender			
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
women	128	57.7	57.9
men	93	41.9	42.1
Total	221	99.5	100.0
Missing	1	0.5	

Education			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mandatory school	10	4.5	4.5
Teaching / technical school	22	9.9	14.4
Maturation	63	28.4	42.8
University/FH	119	53.6	96.4
Other	8	3.6	100.0
Total	222	100.0	

Education other		
	Frequency	Percent
Abitur	1	0,45
Abitur u	1	0,45
bin 10. klasse gymna	1	0,45
Fachhochschulreife a	1	0,45
Fachhochschulreife u	1	0,45
Kolleg	1	0,45
Meisterprüfung	1	0,45
Universität/FH ist k	1	0,45
Total	8	3,6

Occupation			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Student	98	44.1	44.1
Employed	99	44.6	88.7
Unemployed	6	2.7	91.4
In retirement	5	2.3	93.7
Other	14	6.3	100.0
Total	222	100	

Occupation other		
	Frequency	Percent
Berufstätig und Student	1	0.45
Bildungskarenz	1	0.45
erwerbstätig , Student	1	0.45
erwerbsunfähig	1	0.45
Erwerbsunfähig	1	0.45
Erziehungsurau	1	0.45
Hausfrau	2	0.9
Hausfrau, Studentin	1	0.45
in Ausbildung	1	0.45
in Elternzeit	1	0.45
Karenz	1	0.45
selbstständig	2	0.9
Total	14	6,3

Age				
Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
15	1	0,5	0.5	0,5
16	1	0,5	0.5	1,1
17	1	0,5	0.5	1,6
18	2	0,9	1.1	2,7
19	1	0,5	0.5	3,2
20	10	4,5	5.3	8,5
21	9	4,1	4.8	13,3
22	8	3,6	4.3	17,6
23	10	4,5	5.3	22,9
24	12	5,4	6.4	29,3
25	19	8,6	10.1	39,4

26	17	7,7	9.0	48,4
27	16	7,2	8.5	56,9
28	6	2,7	3.2	60,1
29	8	3,6	4.3	64,4
30	5	2,3	2.7	67
31	7	3,2	3.7	70,7
32	7	3,2	3.7	74,5
33	2	0,9	1.1	75,5
34	1	0,5	0.5	76,1
35	5	2,3	2.7	78,7
36	5	2,3	2.7	81,4
37	3	1,4	1.6	83
38	5	2,3	2.7	85,6
39	1	0,5	0.5	86,2
40	3	1,4	1.6	87,8
41	2	0,9	1.1	88,8
42	4	1,8	2.1	91
44	1	0,5	0.5	91,5
45	4	1,8	2.1	93,6
47	1	0,5	0.5	94,1
48	2	0,9	1.1	95,2
49	1	0,5	0.5	95,7
52	1	0,5	0.5	96,3
53	1	0,5	0.5	96,8
55	1	0,5	0.5	97,3
57	1	0,5	0.5	97,9
58	1	0,5	0.5	98,4
59	1	0,5	0.5	98,9
61	1	0,5	0.5	99,5
65	1	0,5	0.5	100

Total	188	84,7	100.0	
Missing	34	15,3		

Domicile			
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
City	168	75.7	75.7
Rural area	54	24.3	100.0
Total	222	100.0	

Nationality		
Country	Frequency	Percent
Austria	100	45
Germany	93	42
Ukraine	5	2
Switzerland	5	2
Estonia	2	1
Russia	2	1
Georgia	1	0,5
Slovakia	2	1
Poland	1	0,5
Hungary	1	0,5
Romania	1	0,5
Luxembourg	1	0,5
England	1	0,5
Turkey	1	0,5
Croatia	1	0,5
Sweden	1	0,5
Missing	4	2
Total	222	100

Appendix 6. Internet and social media usage.

How often do you use social media (e.g. Facebook, Linked In, Xing, etc.)?		
	Frequency	Percent
Several times a day	123	55.7
Once a day	20	9.0
Every 2-3 days	14	6.3
Once a week	18	8.1
Once a month	9	4.1
never or very rarely	37	16.7
Missing	1	0,5
Total	222	100.0

By how much social media platforms do you have user account?			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No one	28	12.6	12.6
1	75	33.8	46.4
2	62	27.9	74.3
3	36	16.2	90.5
4	8	3.6	94.1
5	4	1.8	95.9
More than 5	9	4.1	100.0
Total	222	100.0	

How often do you use internet for searching information about the product or company of interest?		
	Frequency	Percent
Several times a day	52	23,4
Once a day	29	13,1
Every 2-3 days	46	20,7
Once a week	57	25,7
Once a month	25	11,3
never or very rarely	13	5,9
Total	222	100

Appendix 7. One-way ANOVA analysis: SPSS Output. Hypothesis H1a.

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of Attitude_toward_Response_AVE is the same across categories of Type.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	,000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Descriptives			
Attitude_toward_Response_AVE			
	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Actual denial	59	2,4364	1,09623
Apology	52	3,7596	1,50893
Justification	53	2,5519	1,41112
Total	164	2,8933	1,34063

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Attitude_toward_Response_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3,598	2	162	,030

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
Attitude_Response_AVE				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	14,452	2	101,934	,000
Brown-Forsythe	15,664	2	145,702	,000
a. Asymptotically F distributed.				

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple comparisons					
Dependent Variable: Attitude_toward_corporate_Response_AVE					
	(I) Type	(J) Type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Games-Howell	Actual denial	Apology	-1,32317 [*]	,25329	,000
		Justification	-,11545	,24070	,881
	Apology	Actual denial	1,32317 [*]	,25329	,000
		Justification	1,20773 [*]	,28523	,000
	Justification	Actual denial	,11545	,24070	,881
		Apology	-1,20773 [*]	,28523	,000

Appendix 8. Hypothesis H1b: One-way ANOVA SPSS output.

Descriptives			
Reputation_AVE			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Actual denial	59	3,1186	,95059
Apology	52	3,8000	1,14310
Justification	53	3,0868	1,21054
No response, Ignorance	58	3,5517	1,12472
Total	222	3,3838	1,13923

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Reputation_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1,131	3	218	,338

ANOVA					
Reputation_AVE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19,467	3	6,489	5,291	,002
Within Groups	267,355	218	1,226		
Total	286,822	221			

Post Hoc Test

Multiple Comparisons				
Reputation_AVE Bonferroni post hoc test				
(I) Type	(J) Type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Actual denial	Apology	-,68136 [*]	,21064	,008
	Justification	,03185	,20959	1,000
	No response, Ignorance	-,43308	,20477	,213
Apology	Actual denial	,68136 [*]	,21064	,008
	Justification	,71321 [*]	,21616	,007
	No response, Ignorance	,24828	,21149	1,000
Justification	Actual denial	-,03185	,20959	1,000
	Apology	-,71321 [*]	,21616	,007
	No response, Ignorance	-,46493	,21044	,169
No response, Ignorance	Actual denial	,43308	,20477	,213
	Apology	-,24828	,21149	1,000
	Justification	,46493	,21044	,169

Appendix 9. Hypothesis H1c: One-way ANOVA SPSS output.

Descriptives			
Post_Trust_AVE			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Actual denial	59	2,3792	1,26627
Apology	52	2,7091	1,22016
Justification	53	2,4811	1,17373
No response, Ignorance	58	2,3728	1,13615
Total	222	2,4792	1,19981

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Post_Trust_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
,283	3	218	,838

ANOVA					
Post_Trust_AVE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3,995	3	1,332	,924	,430
Within Groups	314,143	218	1,441		
Total	318,138	221			

Post Hoc Test

Multiple Comparisons				
Post_Trust_AVE Bonferroni post hoc test				
(I) Type	(J) Type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Actual denial	Apology	-,32990	,22833	,900
	Justification	-,10189	,22719	1,000
	No response, Ignorance	,00639	,22197	1,000
Apology	Actual denial	,32990	,22833	,900
	Justification	,22800	,23431	1,000
	No response, Ignorance	,33629	,22925	,863
Justification	Actual denial	,10189	,22719	1,000
	Apology	-,22800	,23431	1,000
	No response, Ignorance	,10829	,22811	1,000
No response, Ignorance	Actual denial	-,00639	,22197	1,000
	Apology	-,33629	,22925	,863
	Justification	-,10829	,22811	1,000

Appendix 10. SentiStrength evaluation of respondents' comments.

Apology response strategy comments

№	Comment	Comment strength	
		positive	negative
1	Georg entschuldigt sich vor Konsumenten und verspricht dass Qualität aller Produkte wird unter strengerer Kontrolle gesetzt.	1	-1
2	Meine Meinung nach, Konsumenten vertrauen wieder zurück zu gewinnen ist verdammt schwer für die Unternehmer.	2	-2
3	Der Beginn ist ein standardisierter Text. Es werden keine Fehler eingestanden. Durchgeschlafen das Wort "vorsorglich" wird der Bericht infrage gestellt. Dadurch entkräftet es den nächsten Satz. Hier wird Von Vorfällen geredet, damit werden Einzelfälle beschrieben. Das Ende ist schlau man appelliert an die Treue der Kunden. Des Weiteren sagt die Firma dass die Qualität auch früher stark war und	2	-2

	es bleiben wird. Sie sagen quasi jeder macht Mal Fehler, irren ist menschlich.		
4	Die Reaktion ist beispielhaft! So muss es sein!	3	-1
5	nett aber eine Lösung zur Behebung wird nicht genannt- keine Firma nimmt einfach ein Produkt vom Markt wenn sie nicht damit Geld machen könnte	2	-1
6	Wer so viel Schokolade isst, dass eventuelle Mineralölrückstände eine Rolle spielen, hat ganz andere Probleme!!!	1	-1
7	Alten Stärken: Das heißt Gewinnoptimierung ohne Rücksicht auf die Qualität des Produkts und die Gesundheit der Kunden?	1	-2
8	Hoffentlich wird der Fall bald aufgeklärt, denn solche Vorfälle tragen nicht unbedingt zum Verbrauchervertrauen bei. Wenigstens bestreitet die Firma nicht, dass mögliche Fehler passiert sind.	1	-2
9	Nach reiflicher Überlegung ist nicht sehr vertrauenswürdig. Sobald ein begründeter Verdacht besteht, MUSS der Artikel aus dem Sortiment genommen werden. An sich ist der Kommentar ein Widerspruch (einerseits müssen sie lange überlegen, andererseits wollen Sie zu den Stärken zurückkehren - also doch ein Problem mit dem Produkt?).	1	-3
10	You should have used testing on animals more efficiently! I would never buy a chocolate from the producer like you!	1	-1
11	Eine richtige Maßnahme wurde ergriffen.	2	-1
12	Ihm blieb wohl nichts anderes übrig, als die Schokolade vom Markt zu nehmen und zu warten, bis Gras über die Sache gewachsen ist.	1	-1
13	Finde ich natürlich nicht gut, ich selbst esse eh keine Schokolade, wenn dann Bitterschokolade da ich mich vegan ernähre. Mein erster Gedanke war, dass in Kleidungsstücken auch Erdöl ist, jeder Mensch nur unterschiedliche Faktoren Erdöl im Körper hat. Die Leute werden hintergangen was Nahrungsmittel und Kleidung angeht, viele interessiert es gar nicht - ich ernähre und kleide mich bewusst, vll hilft dieser Vorfall das Menschen sich mehr damit beschäftigen was sie zu sich nehmen, wie es hergestellt	1	-1
14	Er geht nicht darauf ein, dass dieser Vorfall zurückverfolgt und geklärt wird - beteuert nur, dass so was in Zukunft nicht mehr passiert. "Nach reiflicher Überlegung" klingt nicht gut, da eher eine rasche Reaktion gefragt ist. Hier klingt es eher, als ob er diesen Fall erstmals analysiert hat -> negativ, wenn es um eine Gesundheitsgefährdung der Konsumenten geht!	1	-2
15	Danke, dass sie den Artikel aus dem Verkehr ziehen.	2	-1
16	Mich würde interessieren, wie Ihre Maßnahmen aussehen?! Wäre toll, wenn Sie uns darüber informieren und auf dem Laufenden halten würden.	2	-1
17	Es gibt ein Schuldeingeständnis und das Versprechen, sich in Zukunft wieder sicheren Lebensmitteln zuzuwenden, außerdem ist es schriftlich verfasst und "das Internet vergisst nie", sodass es besser für die Firma wäre, sich an das Versprechen zu halten.	2	-3
18	Naja wirkt etwas selbstverliebt	1	-1
19	Eine gute Entscheidung! Schön zu sehen, dass es noch Unternehmen gibt, die sich auch Fehler eingestehen können und daraus dann die Konsequenzen ziehen.	3	-1

20	Völlig irreführend - typisch Lebensmittelmafia!	1	-2
21	Endlich steht eine Firma zu ihren Fehlern und versucht ihn zu beheben anstatt sich lediglich mit sinnlosen Argumenten herauszureden!	2	-1
22	Es ist schade, dass der der Produzent bzw. Firmen erst reagieren wenn die Öffentlichkeit davon erfährt, dass etwas schief läuft. bzw. Kontrollen dieses bestätigen und sie dann gezwungen sind zu handeln!	1	-2
23	was gibt es da zu überlegen?	1	-2
24	Naja, er versucht den Schaden zu beheben, den der Artikel verursacht hat. Es ist verständlich, dass er das möchte, schließlich geht es um sein Geschäft. Meiner Meinung nach ist nichts Außergewöhnliches an der Reaktion und ich finde es okay.	2	-1
25	Richtig so! Es wäre schön, wenn auch die anderen Artikel möglichst schnell überprüft werden würden!	3	-1
26	Etwas zu spät	1	-2
27	Herr Marksteiner, reagiert konsequent. Eine Anfechtung des Artikels oder der Untersuchungsmethode würde beim Kunden Zweifel an der Qualität aufkommen lassen oder als Leugnung einer tatsächlichen Gesundheitsgefahr wahrgenommen werden. Die Frage die sich mir persönlich stellt, würde bei internen Informationen auch eine Produkt oder eine Charge zurückgezogen werden oder entstehe das verhalten nur durch den öffentlichen Druck durch die Publikation.	2	-2
28	Aus dem Verkauf nehmen ist okay. Was sollen sie auch sonst tun? Das ist eben die Standartantwort, wenn so etwas passiert. Ein Rückruf würde sicher wenig bringen, da darauf sicher wenige tatsächlich reagieren.	2	-1
29	find ich schon mal gut, man sollte aber die geschädigten entschädigen	2	-1
30	Schön und gut, aber eine Entschuldigung wäre an dieser Stelle doch nötig gewesen!	2	-1
31	Sehr gut! Das Unternehmen zeigt sich sehr kundennah, offen und ehrlich.	3	-1
32	Nach reichlicher Überlegung? Bei solchen Vorfällen ist klar, dass der Artikel sofort aus dem Sortiment genommen werden muss, wenn mit gesundheitlichen Folgen zu rechnen ist. Gut aber, dass an der Qualität wieder gearbeitet wird.	2	-1
33	So was sollte einfach nicht passieren. Wenigstens haben sie den Artikel aus dem Verkauf genommen, was noch das Mindeste ist.	1	-2
34	Als Konsument ist man allgemein schon sehr vorsichtig im konsumieren allmöglicher gourmistischer Produkte. Käse ist kein Käse mehr, Fleisch kein Fleisch mehr, Geschmacksverstärker bestehen nur mehr aus Chemie und entbehren jeglichen naturellen Hintergrund. Ich werde den Einkauf dieser oben genannten Schokolade aussetzen und abwarten in welche Richtung sich der Fall entwickelt und ob der Bericht auch den Tatsachen entspricht und nicht einfach von einem neidischen Mitbewerber als Ente infiziert wurde	3	-3
35	Hat reagiert, aber das ist sicher nicht ausreichend...	1	-2
36	Auf den Artikel zu reagieren ist sicherlich besser als diesen zu ignorieren. Allerdings werden Fehler, sowie die resultierende	2	-3

	Entschuldigung nur implizit angesprochen. Auch an mögliche zu Schaden gekommene Kunden wendet der Geschäftsführer sich nicht direkt. Die Stellung der Firma ist daher nicht klar. Warum wird das Produkt vom Markt genommen? Weil es schädlich war oder nicht?		
37	Als Kunde der Firma wuerde ich mich fragen, was es da "reiflich" zu Ueberlegen gibt. Wenn Verdacht auf Gesundheitsschaedliche Stoffe in der Schokolade besteht, sollte sie sofort und unverzueglich aus dem Verkehr gezogen werden bis alles geklaert ist. Weiters scheint es als ob Georg Marksteiner bereits Schuld eingesteht obwohl laut Artikel die Situation noch nicht geklaert ist: "zu alten Staerken zurueckzukehren". Auch frage ich mich, warum Georg Marksteiner nicht alle Kunden um Vertrauen	1	-3
38	Kann ich die Schokolade eher essen oder als Treibstoff fürs Auto verwenden? Im Ernst- sowas darf nicht passieren, Vertrauen=weg	1	-2
39	Den Artikel zur Sicherheit aus dem Verkauf zu nehmen, ist wohl die richtige Reaktion, aber im Grunde auch die einzig mögliche. Da das Problem publik gemacht wurde, wäre der Schaden sicher größer, wenn darauf nicht reagiert oder die Sache geleugnet würde, als sich zu entschuldigen und Gegenmaßnahme zu ergreifen.	2	-2
40	Reaktion ist in Ordnung, so lange die Ursache nicht geklärt ist	1	-1
41	Sehr geehrter Vorstand, schade dass es erst so weit kommen konnte und ihre Wachstumsziele nicht mit der Qualitätssicherung abgesprochen wurde. Dieser schwerwiegende Folgefehler geht auf Kosten der Konsumenten und vor allem die Gesundheit ihrer Kunden. Mit freundlichen Grüßen, CK	1	-2
42	Herr Marksteiner entschuldigt sich in kleinster Weise dafür, dass ein Produkt seiner Firma Menschen gesundheitlichen Schaden zugefügt hat. Er schreibt auch nicht, was genau gemacht wird, um das Problem zu lösen. "Notwendige Maßnahmen ergreifen" klingt zwar nett, löst in mir aber nicht unbedingt vertrauensbildende Gedanken aus. Von welchen Stärken spricht er und warum hat das Unternehmen diese verloren?	2	-3
43	Aufklärung ist gut, meine Lieblings-"Lindt „Schokolade ist besser!	2	-1
44	Hat sich zwar entschuldigt aber konkrete Lösung wurde nicht angeboten. Die Reaktion von Marksteiner scheint mir kurz zu sein.	1	-1
45	Die Kundschaft fragt nach Informationen - sie sollte auf der Verpackung sein. Verständnis und Vertrauen ist nicht ausreichend.	1	-1
46	Darüber hätte man vielleicht vorher nachdenken sollen... Aber wenigstens haben sie sofort reagiert. Fraglich allerdings, ob die das schon vorher wussten	1	-1
47	Ich finde den Kommentar gut. Er gibt zu, dass Fehler passiert sind und versucht nicht sich herauszureden. Offen bleibt allerdings wie ernst diese Versprechungen gemeint sind).	2	-2
48	Hätte man sich vlt mal früher überlegen sollen.	1	-1
49	Mit Gesundheit darf man nicht spielen!	1	-1
50	Auf der einen Seite ist es gut, dass das Unternehmen frühzeitig reagiert und im Zweifel lieber zu Gunsten der Kundengesundheit agiert. Das ist sicher auch im Interesse des Unternehmensimages. Auf der anderen Seite war noch total unklar, wie es überhaupt dazu kam, ob es nicht vielleicht ein lokales/einmaliges Problem war. Aber da es	2	-2

	hier um gesundheitliche Risiken ging, ist wohl eine zu starke Reaktion eher besser, falls mehr passiert wäre, hätte das Unternehmen nämlich einpacken können.		
51	Vielleicht verstehen die Unternehmer wieder irgendwann dass Qualität und Preisdrückerei nicht zusammen gehen, einer verliert. Reine Profitgier der Kunde ist da ganz bestimmt nicht KÖNIG!	1	-3
52	Eingeständnis der Schuld und meiner Meinung nach erst einem Einschreiten nach dem es öffentlich wurde.	1	-3
		82	-85

Actual denial response strategy comments

№	Comment	Comment strength	
		positive	negative
1	Ich würde auf die Untersuchungsergebnisse warten bevor ich so eine Aussage tätigen würde.	1	-1
2	Es muss hier ein objektives Ergebnis geben.	1	-1
3	geht an den Argumenten vorbei. Aussage gegen Aussage es würde sich jeder gefrotzelt fühlen	1	-2
4	Ich finde die Antwort nicht ganz o.k., man sollte mehr auf die Ängste der Kunden eingehen.	1	-3
5	Hr. Marksteiner versucht den Zeitungsartikel neutral zu kommentieren- eine Marktschädigung seines Produktes ist durch den Artikel aber schon bei den Konsumenten erfolgt. Der Kommentar des GF müsste klarer gegen Rufschädigung der Marke erfolgen.	1	-2
6	die Stellungnahme ist leicht widersprüchlich. Mit "die jüngsten Vorfälle" deutet er unfreiwillig an, dass es immer wieder Vorfälle gab. - Die Stellungnahme ist rein defensiv und abstreitend. Schlau wäre eine Einladung zur Fabrikbesichtigung, zu den süßen Verführungen...	1	-3
7	Da in dem Produkt tatsächlich Rückstände gefunden wurden, handelt es sich mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit nicht um "reinen Zufall". Die Tests sind noch nicht abgeschlossen und evtl liegt die Verunreinigung tatsächlich an der Verpackung, allerdings dürfte selbst bei längerer Lagerung soetwas nicht passieren. Der Hersteller reagiert meiner Meinung nach nicht angebracht, denn vermutlich glaub nicht mal er selbst an reinen Zufall. Er sollte besser sachlich erklären, was er in Zukunft zu bessern gebe.	1	-2
8	Vor allem sollte man Wissen von welchen Mengen wir hier reden. Was sind "Rückstände"? Ich glaube auch nicht, dass die Erkrankungen etwas damit zu tun haben.	2	-1
9	Der Leiter versucht sich rauszureden um negative Schlagzeilen über die Firma zu beschönigen!	1	-2
10	Er versucht das Problem von sich zu schieben und die Qualität nicht in Frage zu stellen. Die tatsächlichen Laborbefunde ignoriert er völlig.	1	-2
11	sehr unprofessionell die Vorwürfe einfach unter den Tisch zu kehren. zumindest sollte man der Sache nochmal nachgehen.	1	-2

12	nicht sehr glaubwürdig!	1	-2
13	Untersuchen Sie Ihren Produktionsprozess erneut und transparent! MfG eine enttäuschte Kundin	1	-2
14	@Georg Marksteiner: Eine externe Untersuchung hat eine Verbindung von Mineralölrückständen zu Ihrem Produkt nachgewiesen.	1	-2
15	Diese Vorfälle als reinen Zufall zu bezeichnen macht deutlich, dass Ihr Unternehmen etwaige Zusammenhänge nicht 100%ig ausschließen kann. Ein vertrauenswürdigen Unternehmen würde hier nicht nur auf bereits stattgefunden Tests hinweisen sondern bekanntgeben, dass ihr Produkt nochmals einer Prüfung unterzogen wird! So erwecken Sie nur den Anschein, dass es Zusammenhänge geben könnte und Sie es aber nicht interessiert..	1	-3
16	Ja wenn Spuren davon gefunden wurden in seiner Schokolade, kann er es ja nicht verneinen. Eher wohl ein marketingtechnischer Kommentar.	1	-1
17	realitätsfremd, nicht diplomatisch, verständlich aus menschlicher und ethischer Sicht	1	-4
18	Das Wort Zufall wird hier offensichtlich überstrapaziert. "Vermehrte Beschwerden" können wohl kaum als Zufall bezeichnet werden. Im Übrigen ist, das was Sie gefunden oder nicht gefunden haben irrelevant, sofern Sie diese Testergebnisse nicht offenlegen, welche natürlich von einem unabhängigen Labor verifiziert werden sollten. Im Sinne Ihres eigenen Interesses sollten Sie über einen möglichen Imageschaden durch Ihr derzeitiges Verhalten nachdenken.	1	-2
19	herr marksteiner möchte ja nur den kunden die Sicherheit geben, dass mit den Produkten von levada chocolate alles in Ordnung ist. mich würde es interessieren ob es einen bericht dazu gibt, indem steht dass es wirklich keine mängel gibt. es steht hier aussage gegen aussage. und es ist bei diesen vorwürfen schwer zu glauben, dass die Erkrankungen nichts mit der schokolade zu tun haben, da ja laut der österreichischen Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit die Rückstände gefunden wurden.	2	-4
20	Ich glaube es erst, wenn das BfR Entwarnung gegeben hat.	1	-1
21	Reaktion ist zu erwarten als Geschäftsführer. Allerdings würde ich an seiner Stelle vorsichtig sein. Der Artikel sollte aber auch nicht so formuliert werde, solange nicht geklärt ist ob wirklich ein Zusammenhang besteht..	1	-1
22	aber stand da nicht das Mineralölrückstände gefunden wurden?	1	-1
23	Vermutlich heißt nicht, dass Sie es sicher wissen,, dass die Erkrankungen nicht in Zusammenhang mit der Schokolade stehen. Die Stellungnahme müsste präziser sein- sprich genaue Untersuchungsergebnisse,...	1	-4
24	Aufgrund des Zeitungsberichtes, der keine genaue Aussage der österreichischen Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit beinhaltet und im Folgenden auch nur Spekulationen über die Auswirkungen von Mineralöl auf den menschlichen Organismus beinhaltet, sollte man die Aussage des Geschäftsführers genau betrachten. Der Artikel beinhaltet einige Widersprüche und Herr Marksteiner versucht in seiner Reaktion vor allem sein Produkt und besonders auch den Ruf des Produktes zu schützen. Um eine	1	-1

	genauere Beurteilung abgeben zu können, sind weitere Untersuchungen nötig.		
25	Typische Antwort eines Business-Kaspers. SEINE Firma ist garantiert nicht schuld, es kann und unter gar keinen Umständen niemals nicht zu einem Fehler gekommen sein. Untersuchungen sind auf gar keinen Fall nötig, es wurde ja schonmal untersucht.	1	-3
26	Wenn verschiedene Untersuchungen zu unterschiedlichen Ergebnissen kommen ist das bedenklich. Vor allem wenn der Verdacht besteht, dass Menschen durch das Vorgehen der Firma Schaden genommen haben, sollte man die Firmenziele überdenken.	1	-3
27	Sollte Herr Markensteiner Recht haben, dann wäre es angebracht, das Ergebnis der Prüfung öffentlich zu machen und zu verlinken. Die Formulierung "Vermutlich" macht nicht gerade einen vertrauenserweckenden Eindruck, sie schließt nicht aus, dass es sich vielleicht doch nicht um einen Zufall handelt.	1	-2
28	Die Mineralölrückstände wurden doch schon nachgewiesen? Die Reaktion ist unangebracht und macht den Hersteller unsympathisch. Er sollte sich lieber entschuldigen und versprechen in Zukunft dafür zu sorgen, dass so etwas bestimmt nicht mehr vorkommen kann, egal ob es passiert ist.	1	-3
29	kommentar wirkt so als ob er mögliche gefahren möglichst herunterspielen möchte um den absatz und die marke nicht zu gefährden. für den konsumenten macht dies aber einen unsympathischen eindruck	1	-3
30	Vollkommen unangebracht - zu strenge Kritik am Konsumentenschützer, es wäre generell besser gewesen, wenn man auf die Vorwürfe besser eingehen und sie neu prüfen lässt.	1	-2
31	AGES hat Gewicht. Hier zu sagen der Produktionsprozess ist in Ordnung und es gibt keine Mängel bedeutet wohl dann, dass das alles so sein soll. Hier wäre mit Zurückrudern und "wir untersuchen alles und wird nicht mehr vorkommen, rhabarberusw" mehr zu holen. So wirkt es eher wie der lendenlahme Versuch das Problem klein- oder wegzureden ohne es lösen zu wollen.	1	-2
32	Glauben Sie, dass die Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit unsauber arbeitet?	1	-1
33	Auch wenn die Behauptung im Blog der Wahrheit entsprechen sollte, wird wohl kein GF der Welt dies irgendwo auch nur ansatzweise zugeben	1	-1
34	Warum wird da etwas in Abrede gestellt, wenn doch die AGES diese Mineralölrückstände definitiv vorgefunden hat? Einfach sagen "stimmt nicht, weil früher hat in der Fabrik alles gepasst" ist einfach nur schwach und ein Negieren. Es wird von der AGES nicht behauptet, dass es in der Produktion passiert ist, sondern dass es nachher im langen Vertriebsweg passiert sein könnte.	1	-2
35	hmm, komisch, wenn scheinbar "rückstände von mineralöl und ähnlichen substanzen" nachgewiesen werden konnten :-/	1	-2
36	Vermutlich handelt es bei der Häufung der Erkrankungen um reinen Zufall Vermutlich? Sie sollten schleunigst mit den Behörden kooperieren und unabhängige Untersuchungen anstreben, damit sie nicht nur Mutmaßungen anstellen müssen.-	1	-4
37	Wenn sie in seinem Produkt gefunden wurden ist es sehr wohl	1	-2

	angebracht es damit in Verbindung zu bringen		
38	könnte mehr darauf eingehen oder zb umtausch anbieten	1	-2
39	Stellungnahme ist glaubhaft	2	-1
40	Jetzt weiß ich, was ich nicht mehr kaufen werde...	1	-2
41	Dinge die zur Profitsicherung bzw. -vermehrung unternommen werden (z.B.: Reduktion der Produktionskosten), müssen auf jeden Fall versteckt, dementiert und am besten verheimlicht werden.	1	-1
42	Zufall - klar	1	-1
43	Als Verbraucher wird man ja schon skeptisch, schließlich will man etwas genießen , von dem man, im Gegensatz zu Alkohol, Taback und anderen Drogen, man ausgeht nicht in seiner Gesundheit gefährdet zu sein. Insofern sind solche Verdachtsmomente tatsächlich ernstzunehmen. Ich schätze mal, dass der Verbraucher erst wieder guten Gewissens und seiner Gesundheit zu Liebe, nach einer lückenlosen Aufklärung die Produkte besagter Firma sich verabreichen wird.	1	-2
44	naja reiner zufall schaut anders aus mich würde interessieren welchen wahrheitsgehalt die im bericht getätigten aussagen bzgl längerer lagerung, etc haben. wird hier spekuliert oder entspricht das der wahrheit?	1	-1
45	Der Kommentar klingt arrogant und einfach nur nach einer Ausrede. Er hätte einerseits mitfühlender und sensibler reagieren sollen (z.B. "Wir bedauern, dass...") und andererseits geht er überhaupt nicht darauf ein, dass tatsächlich Rückstände GEFUNDEN wurden. Eine längere Erklärung in einem freundlicheren Tonfall hätte hier mehr geholfen.	1	-4
46	Die Reaktion des Geschäftsführers ist zu übertrieben bzw. zu hart formuliert. Der Inhalt seiner Aussage mag schon richtig sein, muss aber für den Konsumenten (gerade nach Öffentlich werden des Zeitungsberichtes) sensibler ausgedrückt werden.	1	-2
47	unsympathische Reaktion, eine scheinbar begründete Kritik am Produkt wird vom Geschäftsführer aggressiv zurückgewiesen, wirkt fast als würde er etwas verbergen wollen	1	-3
48	Ja nun. Ich würde den Medien nicht mehr glauben als dem Hersteller. Kann ja gut sein, dass die Überprüfung keine Mängel aufzeigte. Der Fehler kann ja an ganz anderen Stellen liegen. Allerdings finde ich es unangebracht, dann gleich von Zufällen zu sprechen - da sollte man erstmal an anderer Stelle nach der Ursache suchen.	2	-2
49	kommt nicht gut an, klingt eher nach Verteidigung als nach ernsthaftem Versuch den Fall aufzuklären. Macht die Sache nur noch schlimmer	1	-3
50	Seit wann treten diese Beschwerden auf (Überprüfung liegt bereits mehrere Monate zurück) und von wem wurde diese externe Prüfung durchgeführt? Diese Informationen wären zur Untermauerung seiner Argumentation äußerst hilfreich. Er spricht von Überprüfung der Herstellung und der Verpackung. Vermutet wird doch, dass Mineralöl im Laufe der Lagerung in die Schokolade gelangen konnte. Dass er sein Unternehmen verteidigt ist legitim, jedoch sollte er sich als Geschäftsführer im Interesse seiner Kunden	2	-2

51	Es geht hierbei doch gar nicht um die Testergebnisse kurz nach Produktion, sondern um Ergebnisse die zutage kamen nach längerer Lagerung unter verschiedenen Temperaturen. Bei ihrer Einstellung kann man nur sagen keine Levada Schokolade mehr anzufassen, nie mehr.	1	-3
52	Das sollte in einem Labor genauer untersucht werden.	1	-1
53	Typische Abwehrreaktion, wird von mir persönlich immer negativ bewertet. Keine Spur von Offenheit und Ehrlichkeit, einfaches Marketinggequatsche.	1	-2
54	nun ja, die Kontrolle war vor Monaten, es ist demnach nicht auszuschließen, dass es in der Zwischenzeit doch zu Vorfällen gekommen ist. Natürlich "kann" es auch Zufall sein, "kann" aber eventuell auch kein Zufall sein...	1	-1
55	Wo sind die Prüfungsergebnisse einzusehen? Gab es weitere Untersuchungen?	1	-1
56	Er versucht natürlich sein Produkt zu verteidigen aber ich denke, wir sollten die Ergebnisse der Untersuchungen nicht außer Acht lassen...	1	-1
57	Wirkt unprofessionell, wenig Kundenorientiert. Wo sind die Prüfungsergebnisse? Wer hat sie durchgeführt? Hat er etwas zu verstecken?	1	-2
58	Ok und das postet er jetzt bei allen Quellen, die diese Geschichte verbreiten? Außerdem ist sein Ton nicht diplomatisch, sondern zu empörend.	1	-3
59	Ich wünsche Ihnen, dass Sie Recht behalten. Vorerst ist das offizielle Ergebnis der Untersuchungen abzuwarten. Bis dann werde ich leider auf Ihre Schokolade verzichten müssen.	1	-1
		64	-120

Justification response strategy comments

№	Comment	Comment strength	
		positive	negative
1	Eine absolut unpassende Reaktion, die diesen ernsten Sachverhalt als Lappalie abtut. Dies wirkt verantwortungslos.	1	-3
2	Ich hätte gern einen faktischen Beweis, dass Schokolade ungefährlich ist, von den Experten, die bei der "Leveda Chocolate" arbeiten. So ein Reaktion der Geschäftsführer überzeugt mich auf keinen Fall!!!	1	-2
3	Was ja nicht ist, kann ja noch werden. Die Wahrheit ist eine Tochter der Zeit!	2	-1
4	Eine unabhängige Agentur erscheint dennoch glaubwürdiger als die Herstellerangaben.	1	-2
5	vollkommen unglaublich und schlechte, sogar falsche Antwort!	1	-2
6	Na wenn Sie das sagen! Die gesundheitlichen Probleme der betroffenen Konsumenten sind wohl auf was anderes zurückzuführen. Wie könnte man auch denken, dass aus Profitgier auf die Gesundheit der Konsumenten verzichtet wird! Ich bitte vielmals um Entschuldigung, ich natürlich sofort Tonnen ihre	1	-2

	Schokolade nachkaufen und den Tank meines Autos damit füllen.....		
7	Positiv zu beurteilen dass die Problematik eingestanden wird und sie anscheinend die Sache bereits intern haben prüfen lassen. Meiner Meinung nach fehlt noch ein kurzes Statement wie sie weiter vorgehen möchten.	3	-2
8	Marksteiner begibt sich in die Abwehrhaltung und verharmlost die Ereignisse.	1	-1
9	Er gibt zu, dass die Verpackung mit mineralöhlhaltigen Farbstoffen bedruckt sind. Wenn das jedoch so üblich ist und dennoch ungesund, sollte man sich vielleicht überlegen das zu ändern. Wäre ja kein großes Problem, außer man macht eines draus. Es wurde nicht bewiesen, dass es schädlich ist, dadurch kann ich seine Reaktion nachvollziehen. Sprich, dass alles in Ordnung sei.	3	-2
10	meiner Meinung nach keine besonders gute Reaktion, wirkt unglaublich und so als würden die Vorwürfe absolut nicht ernst genommen werden. Die Agentur für Gesundheit.. zu kritisieren und die Ergebnisse ihrer Untersuchungen als unwahr darzustellen ist etwas unprofessionell.	1	-3
11	ungeeignet	1	-2
12	Mir fehlt der der Zugang zu den Ergebnissen der Agentur für Gesundheit. So klingt die Stellungnahme eher als Ausrede.	1	-2
13	In der Stellungnahme, sowie auch im originalen Blog Artikel werden Beweise und Quellen komplett ausgelassen, für mich sind beide daher lediglich erstmal reine Behauptungen der beiden Parteien.	1	-1
14	Er sollte andere Firmen nicht als Entschuldigung hernehmen, wenn diese auch die schädlichen Farbstoffe verwenden...	1	-2
15	Soetwas sollte nicht passieren und es zeigt einmal mehr dass der Konsument gut daran tut selbst zu kochen. Man sollte sich angehalten fühlen den Bauern die sich bemuehen gute Bio produkte herzustellen zu danken und derartige ungesunde Lebensmittel nur selten konsumieren oder aus seiner Diät auszuschliessen, da es gewiss auch Ohne geht. Qualität hat seinen Preis, im Falle von Bio-rohessware rechnet sich dies jedoch, sowohl gesundheitlich als auch im Geldbörse. Seien wir diszipliniert, ein anderes Verhalten könnte unseren Untergang bedeuten.	2	-2
16	Nicht befriedigend - er kann ja faktisch auch nichts beweisen ...	1	-2
17	In welchen anderen Fällen wurden die Ergebnisse nicht bewiesen?	1	-1
18	Wer's glaubt.	1	-2
19	Diese Aussage von dem Geschäftsführer finde ich absolut daneben und total fahrlässig gegenüber den Konsumenten, wenn es doch Beweise dafür gibt, dass die Verpackung der Schokolade gesundheitsschädigende Stoffe aufweist. Ein sofortiges Zurückziehen der Artikel wäre angebracht und eine Warnung ist er den Kunden schuldig plus eine Entschuldigung, dass er dies nicht gewusst hätte. Zumindest müsste er dann alles nochmals prüfen lassen. So setzt er die Gesundheit und ev. sogar den Tod von seinen Kund	1	-4
20	Typische Antwort, um sich aus der Sache raus zu reden. Andererseits würde ich wohl als Geschäftsführer ähnlich reagieren.	1	-1

21	Abgesehen davon, dass die Facebook-Seite von Georg Marksteiner nicht sehr repräsentativ erscheint und wenig positive Emotionen weckt, und auch abgesehen davon, dass eine solche Aussage nicht auf der privaten Facebook-Seite des Geschäftsführers, sondern viel eher auf der Fanpage des Unternehmens stehen sollte, klingt die Gegenaussage von Herrn Marksteiner sehr patzig. Dies wäre für mich ein Grund die Schokolade dieses Herstellers nicht mehr zu kaufen.	1	-3
22	Kommentar deutet darauf hin, dass keine Gefahr für die Verbraucher zu befürchten ist - ich würde es weiterkaufen	2	-1
23	Heißt das aber nicht, dass hier aber trotzdem Bedenken bestehen? Würden Sie denn Ihre Schokolade auch essen?	1	-3
24	Dramatisch, dass das Unternehmen offenbar davon wusste, bzw. es wohl auch noch üblich ist, diese Inhaltsstoffe zu verwenden.. Erschreckend wie einem von allen Seiten vorgegaukelt wird, wie "Hochwertig" die Produkte sind, die wir zu uns nehmen, dabei schlucken wir überwiegend Chemie.	1	-4
25	Ob es faktisch bewiesen werden kann, interessiert meinen Körper herzlich wenig! MfG	1	-2
26	Ich finde es sehr unwahrscheinlich, dass eine Lebensmittelfirma so ein Risiko eingehen würde, ohne vorher Tests zu machen, um eine gesundheitliche Gefährdung auszuschließen. Außerdem finde ich den Artikel sehr unglaubwürdig.	2	-1
27	Er hat sich nicht bei den Personen entschuldigt. Dass eine gesundheitliche Gefährdung ausgeschlossen ist kann nicht stimmen, da die Schokolade Auslöser für die Krankheitssymptome waren.	1	-3
28	Es mag ja sein dass es die Lebensmittelverpackungen mit solchen Farbstoffen bedruckt sind, jedoch ist es normalerweise nicht üblich, dass die mineralhaltigen Farbstoffe auch in den Lebensmitteln erhalten sind!	1	-2
29	Expertenmeinung gegen Expertenmeinung. Da hilft wohl nur ein unabhängiges Gutachten, sofern es sowas gibt...	1	-1
30	Und wenn andere von der Brücke springen, springen Sie nach? Gibt es denn keine (ökologisch und gesundheitlich nicht bedenkliche) Alternativen zu den mineralöhlhaltigen Farbstoffen?	1	-2
31	Recht dürftige Reaktion, die sehr allgemein gehalten ist und ohne jegliche Gegenbeweise. Finde es seltsam, dass der Herr Marksteiner sich zu einem Blog-Artikel überhaupt äußert, kategorisch Berichte über andere Fälle als faktisch nicht bewiesen bezeichnet (ohne Fakten) und es offenbar für nötig hält den Artikel zu kommentieren (wird normalerweise doch in einer 1. Stellungnahme von Pressevertretern erledigt).	1	-1
32	Die AGES ist immerhin die zuständige Behörde. Sie können ja einen Gegenprobe, die Sie ohnehin von der AGES bekommen müssten, von einem anderen Labor untersuchen lassen. Allerdings glaube ich nicht, dass ihre Firma über Experten verfügt, die kompetent sind, die eventuelle Gesundheitsschädlichkeit dieser Kontaminationen tatsächlich erschöpfend zu beurteilen. Die Behauptung, dass die Ergebnisse der AGES auch in anderen Fällen faktisch nicht bewiesen worden sind, ist in diesem Zusammenhang hanebüchener Unsinn und höchstens als "haltet den Dieb" zu	1	-2

	interpretieren.		
33	Überzeugt mich nicht	1	-2
34	Das Verhalten ist eigentlich normal. Man setzt sich erst garnicht mit der Thematik auseinander, sondern wiegelt ab und zweifelt alle Untersuchungsergebnisse an. "Unsere Experten" sind die Angestellten von Levada und werden sich hüten, etwas anderes zu sagen. Für mich hat das den Anschein, dass der Verbraucher einem egal ist, hauptsache meine Kasse stimmt.	1	-2
35	Es sollte überhaupt keine mineralöhlhaltige Farbe bei Lebensmitteln verwendet werden.	1	-1
36	Na klar, wenn es überall drin ist und alle es machen, ist es natürlich OK. Leider immer dasselbe mit den Firmen.	1	-3
37	Ich finde die Stellungnahme zur Kritik gut, allerdings sollte sich Hr. Marksteiner wirklich sicher sein, dass keinerlei Gefahr besteht. Sonst besteht die Gefahr, noch mehr Kunden zu verlieren und weiter an Glaubwürdigkeit zu verlieren. Seine Ausdrucksweise finde ich gut.	3	-2
38	Veröffentlichung in einem sozialen Netzwerk wirkt nicht besonders seriös. Eine Pressemitteilung auf der Unternehmens-Homepage wäre z.B. eine geeignetere Form.	1	-2
39	Es ist wieder typisch dass versucht wird diese Situation abzumildern. Anstatt sich wirklich um solche Probleme zu kümmern und nach anderen Lösungen als die Verwendung von Mineralöl in Verpackungen etc. zu suchen. Ich finde es von der Industrie generell unmöglich das die Profitgier über allem steht. Geld um jeden Preis verdienen ja -aber nach dem Nutzen bzw. nach möglichen Folgen schauen.. das wird gekonnt ignoriert. Schade eigentlich. Ich frage mich ob die Hersteller überhaupt noch ein Gewissen h	1	-2
40	Haben sie nähere Informationen oder "faktische Beweise" dafür, dass die Ergebnisse der österreichischen Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit oft nicht bewiesen wurden? Bzw. warum haben "ihre" Experten eher Recht? Dies anzuführen ohne weitere Hinweise ist weder ein Argument noch eine Rechtfertigung. Auf ebenso dünnes Eis begeben sie sich mit "woanders ist das auch üblich". Nachdem ihre Kunden offenbar gesundheitliche Beschwerden aufgewiesen haben, sollten sie nicht mit Schuldzuweisungen	1	-3
41	Statt Mängel bei der Produktion und Lagerung zuzugeben und sich in Zukunft verstärkt um diese Probleme zu kümmern, werden hier einfach mal der Urheber der Untersuchung und die Kunden der Lüge beschuldigt, natürlich auch eine Möglichkeit, um unliebsame Kritik von sich abzuwenden.	1	-2
42	Es ist vollkommen egal ob die Gesundheit der Konsumenten durch die Verpackung gefährdet wurde oder durch etwas anderes. Fakt ist, dass einige Konsumenten unter Schwindel und Übelkeit litten nachdem sie die Schokolade gegessen haben. Ihre Gesundheit wurde als gefährdet. Ob das von der Verpackung oder sonst etwas anderem verursacht wurde ist dabei nebensächlich.	1	-1
43	Die Ergebnisse der AGES öffentlich anzuzweifeln halte ich für bedenklich. Weiters ist fraglich von welchen firmeneigenen "Experten" die Rede ist. Tatsache ist, dass Mineralöle bei einer	1	-2

	Vielzahl von Produkten ein Problem darstellen und negative gesundheitliche Auswirkungen nicht auszuschließen sind.		
44	Typische Reaktion eines Geschäftsführers. Dass die Verpackungen Spuren aufweisen scheint ja nicht das Problem zu sein, sondern dass die Rückstände in die Schokolade gekommen sind. Vielleicht hätte er nicht nur "seine" Experten befragen sollen. Wünschenswert wäre es, dass er Aufklärung verspricht...	1	-2
45	Mich verwirrt die Aussage. Es geht in der Kritik doch um Mineralöl in der Schokolade selbst und nicht in der Verpackung? Klingt für mich sehr nach "Hauptsache was dazu gesagt" und dann eben auch noch so verwirrend, dass es irgendwie nicht weiter hilft.	1	-2
46	Die Rechtfertigung für das durch längere Transportwege die Verpackungsinhaltsstoffe in die Schokolade eindringen halte ich für ein leichtsinninges Kommentar das wahrscheinlich 90% der Bevölkerung nicht hinterfragen. Was wäre also wenn die bereits gekaufte Schokolade Zuhause "länger" herumliegt?	2	-1
47	Also ich würde mich nach dem Kommentar von Herrn Marksteiner nun nicht sicher fühlen die Schokolade zu verzehren. "unsere Experten"- wer sind ihre Experten? In welchen anderen Fällen der Agentur waren die Ergebnisse faktisch nicht bewiesen? Er dürfte nur Sachen schreiben die er mit entsprechenden Links auch beweisen kann, ansonsten hat das keinen Sinn. Jeder Geschäftsführer würde das schreiben...ob wahr oder nicht.	2	-2
48	Antwort erscheint mir kompetent und ehrlich	2	-1
49	Wirkt zu aggressiv und vermittelt nicht, dass man sich um die Konsumenten sorgt. Ganz im Gegenteil, es scheint als wäre die Verpackung aus Sicht des Unternehmens in Ordnung, "weil alle anderen es ja auch machen".	1	-3
50	Wie erklären Sie sich dann die gesundheitlichen Beschwerden ihrer Kunden? Bis der Fall aufgeklärt wurde, werde ich Ihre Schokolade nicht anfassen!	1	-2
51	Er nennt keine Fakten sondern verhält sich kindisch "aber andere machen das auch" und "die waren einmal falsch, also liegen sie immer falsch"	1	-2
52	Faktisch nicht bewiesen klingt aber noch nicht nach uneingeschränkter Entwarnung. Und das Argument, dass alle anderen auch mineralöhlhaltige Farbstoffe verwenden finde ich sehr schwach.	1	-2
53	Abwarten und Tee trinken,)	1	-1
		66	-104

Appendix 11. Cross-tabulation: SPSS Output for Hypothesis H1d.

Case processing summary				
	Valid		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Kommentar_Sentiment * Type	164	73,9%	222	100,0%

Kommentar_Sentiment * Type Crosstabulation						
			Type			Total
			Actual denial	Apology	Justification	
Kommentar_Sentiment	neutral	Count	19	19	11	49
		Expected Count	17,6	15,5	15,8	49,0
		% within Kommentar_Sentiment	38,8%	38,8%	22,4%	100,0%
		% within Type	32,2%	36,5%	20,8%	29,9%
		% of Total	11,6%	11,6%	6,7%	29,9%
		Residual	1,4	3,5	-4,8	
		Std. Residual	,3	,9	-1,2	
	positiv	Count	2	15	7	24
		Expected Count	8,6	7,6	7,8	24,0
		% within Kommentar_Sentiment	8,3%	62,5%	29,2%	100,0%
		% within Type	3,4%	28,8%	13,2%	14,6%
		% of Total	1,2%	9,1%	4,3%	14,6%
		Residual	-6,6	7,4	-,8	
		Std. Residual	-2,3	2,7	-,3	
	negative	Count	38	18	35	91
		Expected Count	32,7	28,9	29,4	91,0
		% within Kommentar_Sentiment	41,8%	19,8%	38,5%	100,0%
		% within Type	64,4%	34,6%	66,0%	55,5%
		% of Total	23,2%	11,0%	21,3%	55,5%
		Residual	5,3	-10,9	5,6	
		Std. Residual	,9	-2,0	1,0	
	Total	Count	59	52	53	164
		Expected Count	59,0	52,0	53,0	164,0
		% within Kommentar_Sentiment	36,0%	31,7%	32,3%	100,0%
		% within Type	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	36,0%	31,7%	32,3%	100,0%

					%
Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)		
Pearson Chi-Square	20,695a	4	,000		
Likelihood Ratio	22,077	4	,000		
Linear-by-Linear Association	,482	1	,487		
N of Valid Cases	164				

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,355	,000
	Cramer's V	,251	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,335	,000
N of Valid Cases		164	

Appendix 12. One-way ANOVA: type of company's response vs. positive comment's sentiment.

Descriptives					
Comment's_Sentiment_positive					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Actual denial	59	1,08	,281	1	2
Apology	52	1,58	,667	1	3
Justification	53	1,25	,551	1	3
Total	164	1,29	,554	1	3

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Kommentar_Positiv			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
30,282	2	161	,000

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
Kommentar_Positiv				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	12,786	2	88,540	,000
Brown-Forsythe	12,266	2	117,575	,000
a. Asymptotically F distributed.				

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons					
Dependent Variable:Kommentar_Positiv					
	(I) Type	(J) Type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Games-Howell	Actual denial	Apology	-,492*	,099	,000
		Justification	-,161	,084	,143
	Apology	Actual denial	,492*	,099	,000
		Justification	,332*	,120	,018
	Justification	Actual denial	,161	,084	,143
		Apology	-,332*	,120	,018

Appendix 13. Hypothesis H1e: ANOVA output.

Descriptives			
Responsibility_AVE			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Actual denial	59	4,8814	1,20942
Apology	52	5,4936	1,23050
Justification	53	5,0063	1,41495
No response, Ignorance	58	5,4655	1,34779
Total	222	5,2072	1,32201

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Responsibility_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
,296	3	218	,829

ANOVA					
Responsibility_AVE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16,539	3	5,513	3,251	,023
Within Groups	369,707	218	1,696		
Total	386,246	221			

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons					
Dependent Variable:Responsibility_AVE					
	(I) Type	(J) Type	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	Actual denial	Apology	-,61223	,24770	,085
		Justification	-,12493	,24646	1,000
		No response, Ignorance	-,58416	,24080	,096
	Apology	Actual denial	,61223	,24770	,085
		Justification	,48730	,25419	,339
		No response, Ignorance	,02807	,24870	1,000
	Justification	Actual denial	,12493	,24646	1,000
		Apology	-,48730	,25419	,339
		No response, Ignorance	-,45923	,24746	,389
	No response, Ignorance	Actual denial	,58416	,24080	,096
		Apology	-,02807	,24870	1,000
		Justification	,45923	,24746	,389
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.					

Appendix 14. Hypothesis H2a: Influence of perceived company's responsibility on the attitude toward the corporate response. Regression analysis: SPSS output.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Attitude_Response_AVE	2,8933	1,45881	164
Responsibility_AVE	5,12	1,305	164

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,121a	,015	,009	1,45259	2,398
a. Predictors: (Constant), Responsibility_AVE					
b. Dependent Variable: Attitude_Response_AVE					

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5,061	1	5,061	2,398	,123a
	Residual	341,822	162	2,110		
	Total	346,883	163			

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	3,584	,460	7,786	,000
	Responsibility_AVE	-,135	,087	-1,549	,123
a. Dependent Variable: Attitude_Response_AVE					

Appendix 15. Hypothesis H2b: One-way ANOVA SPSS output.

Descriptives			
Responsibility_AVE			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
neutral	49	4,97	1,164
positiv	24	5,01	1,646
negative	91	5,22	1,282
Total	164	5,12	1,305

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Responsibility_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2,826	2	161	,062

ANOVA					
Responsibility_AVE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2,235	2	1,118	,654	,521
Within Groups	275,230	161	1,710		
Total	277,465	163			

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple comparisons					
Dependent Variable: Responsibility_AVE					
	(I) Kommentar_Sentiment	(J) Kommentar_Sentiment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	Neutral	positiv	-,041	,326	1,000
		negative	-,247	,232	,864
	Positiv	neutral	,041	,326	1,000
		negative	-,206	,300	1,000
	Negative	neutral	,247	,232	,864
		positiv	,206	,300	1,000

Appendix 16. Hypothesis H2c: One-way ANOVA, SPSS Output.

Descriptives				
Attitude_Response_AVE				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
neutral	49	3,1071	1,42522	,20360
positiv	24	4,5104	1,61931	,33054
negative	91	2,3516	1,04015	,10904
Total	164	2,8933	1,45881	,11391

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Attitude_Response_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
7,062	2	161	,001

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
Attitude_Response_AVE				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	21,788	2	52,282	,000
Brown-Forsythe	22,127	2	65,383	,000

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons					
Dependent Variable: Attitude_Response_AVE					
	(I) Kommentar_Sentimen t	(J) Kommentar_Sentimen ent	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Games- Howell	Neutral	positiv	-1,40327 [*]	,38822	,002
		negative	,75549 [*]	,23096	,005
	Positiv	neutral	1,40327 [*]	,38822	,002
		negative	2,15877 [*]	,34806	,000
	Negative	neutral	-,75549 [*]	,23096	,005
		positiv	-2,15877 [*]	,34806	,000

Appendix 17. Hypothesis H2d: Regression analysis: SPSS Output.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Attitude_Response_AVE	2,8933	1,45881	164
Issue_Involvement_AVE	4,5335	1,04366	164

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,033 ^a	,001	-,005	1,46250	,178

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	,380	1	,380	,178	,674 ^a
	Residual	346,503	162	2,139		
	Total	346,883	163			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Issue_Involvement_AVE						
b. Dependent Variable: Attitude_Response_AVE						

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	3,103	,511	6,078	,000
	Issue_Involvement_AVE	-,046	,110	-,421	,674

Appendix 18. Hypothesis H2e: One-way ANOVA, SPSS Output.

Descriptives			
Issue_Involvement_AVE			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Neutral	49	4,6408	1,27098
Positiv	24	4,2625	,83916
Negative	91	4,5473	,95141
Total	164	4,5335	1,04366

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Issue_Involvement_AVE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3,175	2	161	,044

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
Issue_Involvement_AVE				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	1,357	2	62,106	,265
Brown-Forsythe	1,097	2	103,192	,338
a. Asymptotically F distributed.				

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons					
Dependent Variable: Issue_Involvement_AVE					
	(I) Kommentar_Sentiment	(J) Kommentar_Sentiment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Games-Howell	Neutral	positiv	,37832	,24962	,290
		negative	,09356	,20716	,894
	Positiv	neutral	-,37832	,24962	,290
		negative	-,28475	,19821	,332
	Negative	neutral	-,09356	,20716	,894
		positiv	,28475	,19821	,332

Appendix 19. Summary of the results for the hypotheses H2a-H2e.

Hypothesis	Regression analysis					Analysis of variance			
	Dependent variable	Predictor	F	β	R ²	Tests used	Dependent variable	Predictor	F
H2a	Attitude toward corp. response	Responsibility	2,398	-0,135	0,015	-	-	-	-
H2b	-	-	-	-	-	One-way ANOVA	Responsibility	Comments sentiment	0,654
H2c	-	-	-	-	-	Welch Brown-Forsythe	Attitude toward corp. response	Comments sentiment	21,788* 22,127*
H2d	Attitude toward corp. response	Issue involvement	0,178	-0,046	0,001	-	-	-	-
H2e	-	-	-	-	-	Welch Brown-Forsythe	Issue involvement	Comments sentiment	1,36 1,097

*significant on $p < 0,05$

Appendix 20. Hypothesis 3a: Influence of company's responsibility on the perceived company's reputation. Regression analysis: SPSS output.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Reputation_AVE	3,3838	1,13923	222
Responsibility_AVE	5,21	1,322	222

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,152a	,023	,019	1,12862	5,174
a. Predictors: (Constant), Responsibility_AVE					
b. Dependent Variable: Reputation_AVE					

ANOVA ^b					
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	6,591	1	6,591	5,174	,024a
Residual	280,231	220	1,274		
Total	286,822	221			

Coefficients				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	4,064	,308	13,174	,000
Responsibility_AVE	-,131	,057	-2,275	,024
a. Dependent Variable: Reputation_AVE				

Appendix 21. Hypothesis 3b: Influence of company's responsibility on the perceived company's post-trust. Regression analysis: SPSS output.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Post_Trust_AVE	2,4792	1,19981	222
Responsibility_AVE	5,21	1,322	222

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,377a	,142	,138	1,11367	36,510

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45,282	1	45,282	36,510	,000a
	Residual	272,856	220	1,240		
	Total	318,138	221			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Responsibility_AVE						
b. Dependent Variable: Post_Trust_AVE						

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	4,262	,304	14,002	,000
	Responsibility_AVE	-,342	,057	-6,042	,000
a. Dependent Variable: Post_Trust_AVE					

Appendix 22. Hypothesis 3c: Influence of company's reputation on the perceived company's post-trust. Regression analysis: SPSS output.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Post_Trust_AVE	2,4792	1,19981	222
Reputation_AVE	3,3838	1,13923	222

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,564a	,318	,315	,99280	102,768
a. Predictors: (Constant), Reputation_AVE					
b. Dependent Variable: Post_Trust_AVE					

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	101,294	1	101,294	102,768	,000a
	Residual	216,844	220	,986		
	Total	318,138	221			

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	,468	,209	2,238	,026
	Reputation_AVE	,594	,059	10,137	,000
a. Dependent Variable: Post_Trust_AVE					

Appendix 23. Influence of age on respondents' attitude toward the corporate response.
Regression with dummies.

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,205 ^a	,042	,012	1,45032	1,383

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14,541	5	2,908	1,383	,234 ^a
	Residual	332,342	158	2,103		
	Total	346,883	163			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Age_over_60, Age_50_60, Age_under_20, Age_40_50, Age_30_40						
b. Dependent Variable: Attitude_Response_AVE						

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	3,043	,134	22,693	,000
	Age_under_20	-,343	,662	-,517	,606
	Age_30_40	-,523	,320	-1,636	,104
	Age_40_50	-,230	,440	-,524	,601
	Age_50_60	-1,543	,737	-2,092	,038
	Age_over_60	-,793	1,457	-,544	,587
*Age_20_30is the baseline category					

Appendix 24. Influence of social media number on attitude toward the corporate response. Regression with dummies.

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change
1	,237 ^a	,056	,020	1,44409	1,556

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19,474	6	3,246	1,556	,163 ^a
	Residual	327,409	157	2,085		
	Total	346,883	163			
a. Predictors: (Constant), SM_Number_5more, SM_Number_5, SM_Number_4, SM_Number_no_one, SM_Number_3, SM_Number_2						
b. Dependent Variable: Attitude_Response_AVE						

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	3,092	,191	16,166	,000
	SM_Number_no_one	-,380	,375	-1,011	,313
	SM_Number_2	-,559	,288	-1,940	,054
	SM_Number_3	,158	,346	,456	,649
	SM_Number_4	-1,021	,578	-1,765	,080
	SM_Number_5	,325	,855	,379	,705
	SM_Number_5more	,336	,578	,582	,562
*SM_Number_1 is the baseline category					

Curriculum Vitae

Yuliya Fischer

Education

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 2009 - 2013 | Master-Study "Business Administration" with a specialization in „Marketing“ at the University of Vienna

Title of the master thesis: „The effectiveness of company’s response strategies to negative publicity in social media “ |
| 2008 – 2009 | Specialist-Study „Management of Foreign Economic Activity“ at the „European University of Economics, Finance and Computer technologies“ in Lviv, Ukraine Graduated with honours |
| 2005 - 2008 | Bachelor-Study in Management at the private university „European University of Economics, Finance and Computer technologies“ in Lviv, Ukraine

Completed with good success |
| 1994 – 2005 | Secondary school, Radekhiv, Ukraine

Graduated with honours |

Further education and courses

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Feb. 2009 – Feb. 2011 | Study at the Commercial Business Academy (IBC-College) in Vienna

Graduated with good success |
| Sept. 2009 – Dez. 2009 | Adult education center Meidling, 1120 Vienna

German as a Foreign Language C1 |

Internships

Mai 2009	Internship by the company „Energoresurs Invest“, Lviv, Ukraine
Mai – September 2008	Internship by the advertising company „Lviv advertisements“, Lviv, Ukraine

Languages

Ukrainian:	native language
Russian:	excellent
German:	very good
English:	very good
Spanish:	good
Polish:	basic

Computer skills

MS-Office
Internet, Outlook
BMD
SPSS

Hobbies and Interests

Business, Economy, Marketing, Traveling. Cooking, Jogging

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel der zugrundeliegenden Masterarbeit ist die Auswertung der Effektivität von unterschiedlichen Response-Strategien einer Firma auf negativen Kritiken von Konsumenten in sozialen Medien. Dabei wurde die Effektivität von Response-Strategien mittels folgender Indikatoren gemessen: Einstellung der Respondenten zu der Antwortstrategie des Unternehmens auf negative Kritik in sozialen Medien (Siomkos und Malliaris 1992; Kerkhof et al. 2011), Sentiment und Intensität der kognitiven Reaktion bzw. Kommentare der Befragten zu dieser Strategie (Kerkhof u.a. 2011; Petty and Cacciopo 1979), wahrgenommene Verantwortung für das negative Ereignis (Coombs und Holladay 2002), wahrgenommene Unternehmensreputation (Coombs 2012) und Vertrauen in das Unternehmen (Xie und Peng 2009). Als Strategien wurden folgende Vorgehensweisen des Unternehmens gewählt und in einem Experiment untersucht: tatsächliche Verweigerung, Entschuldigung, Rechtfertigung und Ignoranz (keine Unternehmensreaktion auf die negative Kritik in sozialen Medien). Das Hauptziel der Masterarbeit liegt darin, herauszufinden, welche Stimmung diese Strategien bei den Befragten auslösen, welchen Einfluss diese auf die Bewertung der Unternehmensreputation und das Vertrauen in das Unternehmen haben.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Reaktion eines Unternehmens auf negative Kritik in sozialen Medien eine sehr wichtige Rolle für die Vertrauensbildung bei Konsumenten und für den Aufbau und Erhalt einer angestrebten Unternehmensreputation spielt. Jene Befragten, welche mit einer Entschuldigung von Seiten des Unternehmens konfrontiert werden, beurteilen die Reaktion des Unternehmens positiver und empfinden das Unternehmen als sympathischer als Befragte, die einer Verweigerungs- oder Rechtfertigungs-Strategie ausgesetzt werden.

Diese Ergebnisse stehen im Einklang mit den früheren Arbeiten auf dem Gebiet des Reputations-Managements (Coombs and Holladay 2002; Kerkhof et al. 2011). Auch in dieser Masterarbeit wird die Entschuldigungs-Strategie als die effektivste Strategie beim Umgang mit der Verbreitung von negativen Informationen über Unternehmen in sozialen Medien im Internet empfunden. Diese Beobachtung ist besonders wichtig für kleinere und unbekannte Unternehmen, da negative Publizität eine existenzgefährdende Wirkung auf diese haben kann (Siomkos 1994, S.38).

Nach der Situational Crisis Communicatuon Theory (SCCT) hat die Unternehmensreaktion einen Einfluss auf die wahrgenommene Verantwortung für das

negative Ereignis. Diese Annahme wird auch durch die Ergebnisse dieser Masterarbeit unterstützt. Befragte, welche mit der Entschuldigungs-Strategie oder keiner Antwortstrategie (Kontrollgruppe) konfrontiert werden, halten ein Unternehmen für eher verantwortlich für ein negative Ereignis als Befragte, die einer Verweigerungs- oder Rechtfertigungs-Strategie ausgesetzt werden.

Diese Erkenntnis ist besonders wichtig, da die wahrgenommene Verantwortung für ein Problem einen erheblichen Einfluss auf die Bewertung der Unternehmensreputation und das Vertrauen in ein Unternehmen hat. Zudem ist von Relevanz, dass die wahrgenommene Verantwortung ihre Bedeutung für das Vertrauen oder die Reputation bei der Anwendung der Entschuldigungs-Strategie verliert. Im Gegensatz dazu, spielt die wahrgenommene Verantwortung eines Unternehmens eine wichtige Rolle für die Bewertung der Reputation, Vertrauen in das Unternehmen und die Einstellung zu der Unternehmensreaktion, wenn die tatsächliche Verweigerungs- und Rechtfertigungs-Strategien angewendet werden.

Nach der SCCT hat eine positive Unternehmensreputation einen positiven Einfluss auf das Vertrauen der Konsumenten in das Unternehmen und auf ihre Bereitschaft, Produkte des Unternehmens zu kaufen und weiterzuempfehlen. Auch diese Annahme kann durch die Ergebnisse dieser Masterarbeit bestätigt werden.

Tabelle 17 fasst die wichtigsten Indikatoren für die Beurteilung der Effektivität der Response-Strategien nochmals zusammen.

Tabelle 17. Indikatoren für die Beurteilung der Effektivität der Response-Strategie:

Zusammenfassung

Antwort-Strategie	Einstellung gegenüber der Response-Strategie	Reputation	Vertrauen	Verantwortung	Durchschnittliches Kommentar-Sentiment	
					Positive	negativ
Verweigerung	2,4	3,1	2,4	4,9	1,1	-2
Entschuldigung	3,8	3,8	2,7	5,5	1,6	-1,6
Rechtfertigung	2,6	3,1	2,5	5	1,2	-2
Keine Antwort	-	3,6	2,4	5,5	-	-
Mittelwert	2,9	3,4	2,5	5,2	1,3	-1,9

Zusammenfassend lässt sich feststellen, dass die Entschuldigungs-Strategie der wirksamste Umgang mit negativer Kritik in sozialen Medien ist, insbesondere dann, wenn das Unternehmen unbekannt ist. Für namhaftere Unternehmen mit einer positiven Reputation kann auch die tatsächliche Verweigerungs-Strategie angewendet werden, wenn das Unternehmen nicht für das negative Ereignis verantwortlich ist. Weiters haben die Ergebnisse gezeigt, dass die Übernahme der Verantwortung, wie im Fall der Rechtfertigungs-Strategie, nicht zu den besseren Ergebnissen führt als die Verweigerung der Verantwortung.

Zudem muss betont werden, dass die externe Validität der Ergebnisse zu einem gewissen Grad begrenzt ist, da ein szenario-basiertes Experiment mit einem fiktiven Markennamen durchgeführt wird. Außerdem wird nur eine begrenzte Anzahl von Response-Strategien und nur getrennte Einflüsse der einzelnen Variablen zueinander untersucht und die Reaktion des Unternehmens nur auf einer sozialen Plattform (Social Networking Seite Facebook) veröffentlicht. Daher sollten die Ergebnisse mit einer gewissen Vorsicht verallgemeinert werden. Es wäre interessant, den Einfluss der verschiedenen Reaktions-Strategien, der Verantwortung und anderen Variablen auf die Reputation und das Vertrauen in das Unternehmen in einem Modell gleichzeitig zu analysieren. Leider würde dies den Rahmen dieser Masterarbeit sprengen.