Reputation Interrupted: Microblog eWOM Brand Image Disruptions in a Shareworthy World

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DECLARATION AND COPYRIGHT

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination, which has led to the award of a degree.

Parts of this thesis have been presented and published in various Academic events during the development of the research (2011 – 2017).

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Sign:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Jeanie V. Gordon, to my beloved husband Christopher D. Barhorst and to my father, the late John W. Brannon Sr. Their love, support and infinite belief in me helped me to complete this chapter of my life.

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ABSTRACT

The management and preservation of a corporate reputation is an ever-increasingly difficult proposition in today's environment where organisations' stakeholders have access to unprecedented levels of information at their fingertips. Advances in digital technologies, and microblogs such as Twitter, have influenced a massive shift in how stakeholders not only absorb information about products and services, but also how quickly they share their experiences of organisations with others. Managing and maintaining a consistent corporate reputation for today's stakeholder has thus become an increasingly difficult challenge for organisations.

Although the power of social network site users has been highlighted extensively within the literature, there is a surprising dearth with regard to the impact that shared positive and negative brand experiences within microblogs could potentially have on receivers. For example, it is not known whether any change of perception of an organisation's reputation takes place once receivers have been exposed to a positive or negative brand experience within microblogs such as Twitter – termed Microblog Electronic Word-of-Mouth (MeWOM) brand image disruptions in this thesis. MeWOM brand image disruptions have been defined as eWOM in a microblog that either positively promotes the course, progress or transmission of a brand's image, or eWOM in a microblog that interrupts the course, progress, or transmission of a brand's image. Further, upon exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions, the factors that influence a change in reputation remain unclear. It is important that we expand our knowledge and understanding and explore the potential risk that microblog users pose to reputations and the factors that could influence a change in a corporate reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

The overall purpose of this study is to further existing empirical knowledge of the concepts of corporate image and corporate reputation in today's microblog landscape.

To achieve the objectives of this study, two phases of research were involved. Phase 1 comprised an exploratory qualitative study where 10 practitioners from various industries of type and size were interviewed. Phase 2 involved a two-stage explanatory study comprised of a quantitative study followed by a qualitative follow-up study. The quantitative study was comprised of an experiment where 372 Twitter users in the United States were exposed to positive and negative Twitter posts about airlines in an experiment setting. The experiment was designed to examine whether MeWOM brand image disruptions in Twitter had any impact on the participants' perceptions of the airlines' corporate reputations and the variables that influenced a change in corporate reputation if one took place. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling was employed to demonstrate the variables that predicted a change in corporate reputation from the receivers' perspective. Stage two of the explanatory study was a qualitative study involving 14 participants who took part in 14 semi-structured interviews. This phase of the study focused on the provision of explanatory data for the significant variables found in the quantitative phase of the study.

For the academic community, this research furthers existing understanding and knowledge of the theoretical concepts of corporate image and corporate reputation and provides new empirical data to enhance theoretical assertions made within the literature. For practitioners, the findings from this project deepen the understanding of receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions and the factors that predict a change in corporate reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.0 Introduction

The advent of customers sharing their positive and negative experiences of brands on social media sites such as Twitter, and the viral nature of these shared experiences, has received a tremendous amount of media coverage over the last few years. With regard to negative brand experiences, one of the most memorable events in recent history was a video of Dr. David Dao being forcibly removed from a United Airlines flight for refusing to give up his seat due to an overbooked flight. The event was initially filmed and shared on Twitter and subsequently sparked global outrage with over 100 million views of the video in China alone (Bowerman & Aulbach, 2017; Griffiths & Wang, 2017). With regard to positive experiences, a tech blogger, Casey Neistat, shared his experience of being upgraded to, and flying in, first class with Emirates in 2016. His video went viral, achieved over 20 million views and received media coverage (Sharman, 2016).

Although the two examples referenced above are considered extreme in nature, consumers increasingly share their everyday positive and negative experiences about organisations just as they would tell a close friend or next-door neighbor in the past through the use of mobile technology such as smart phones and the platforms that host social network sites such as Twitter. Only now, they can tell the world about their experiences and do so through the use of a range of formats including text, photographs and videos. Managing and maintaining a consistent corporate reputation for today's stakeholder has thus become an increasingly difficult challenge for organisations.

The literature echoes this concern and calls out that organisations are increasingly losing control of their reputations as advents in technology and social network site applications such as Twitter have given individuals unprecedented power over the increasingly scattered images of organisations

(Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016). Although the power of social network site users has been highlighted extensively within the literature, there is a surprising dearth with regard to the impact that shared positive and negative brand experiences within microblogs could potentially have on receivers. For example, it is not known whether any change of perception of an organisation's reputation takes place once receivers have been exposed to a positive or negative brand experience within microblogs such as Twitter – termed Microblog Electronic Word-of-Mouth (MeWOM) brand image disruptions in this thesis. MeWOM brand image disruptions have been defined as eWOM in a microblog that either positively promotes the course, progress or transmission of a brand's image, or eWOM in a microblog that interrupts the course, progress, or transmission of a brand's image. It is important that we expand our knowledge and understanding and explore the potential risk that microblog users pose to reputations and the factors that could influence a change in a corporate reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

This chapter will introduce the proposed research, which aims to fill the identified research gaps. In addition, this chapter will outline the background to the research, the research problem and rationale that includes the aims and objectives of the research, the methodological approach and the thesis framework.

1.1 Background to the Research

Advances in digital technologies and the advent of social networks such as Twitter have facilitated a massive shift in how stakeholders not only absorb information about products and services, but also how quickly they share their experiences of organisations with others online. The popularity of social media has been meteoric in the past few years with Facebook and YouTube stating that they now have over a billion active users per month (Mainka et al, 2014) and Twitter with over 500 million users and Tweets per day (Smith, 2016). Through the platforms that host social network sites, consumers share their daily positive and negative experiences about organisations just as they would tell a close friend or next door neighbour in the past. Only now, they can tell the world about their experiences and do so in the form of text, photographs and videos. In fact, according to one report, 58 percent of social network site users said that they write product reviews to protect others from bad experiences, with 1 in 4 social network site users stating that they share their negative experiences with a specific intention of punishing companies (Nielson, 2011). Managing a corporate reputation in such an environment poses tremendous challenges for organisations. For example, those who are exposed to the experiences of others via social media platforms can do what they want with the shared positive and negative experiences of others including furthering the proliferation of these experiences by re-sharing them with others, commenting on them, reading comments from others and following the story further. It is thus up to organisations to not only understand the rationale for their stakeholders to share their experiences online and to take the necessary action to address it if warranted, but it is also up to them to manage their reputations where a bad experience can go viral in a short amount of time. For example, a simple change to a Christmas cup by Starbucks caused a social media storm with some social media users commenting that the cup was a "war on Christmas". The seemingly innocuous change to its Christmas cup by Starbucks eventually became known as "cup-gate" as social media users and competing brands joined in on the conversation in social media (Whitten, 2015).

Little is known however with regard to the everyday positive and negative experiences in the form of eWOM shared by social network sites users within microblogs and any impact their eWOM has on a corporate reputation from the eWOM receiver's perspective. Both the practitioner and academic literatures are filled with examples such as the Starbucks one noted above, yet there has been very little research conducted with organisations to date to understand their perspective on this phenomenon. Equally, there has been a scant amount of research on the receivers of these everyday positive and negative eWOM experiences, and any impact exposure to these forms of eWOM have on receivers' perceptions of corporate reputations.

1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

Whilst researchers have called out the potential impact that social network sites users can have on a corporate reputation by sharing their experiences of organisations through social media platforms (Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016), there has been a surprising dearth of focus on two important actors in relation to this phenomenon - organisations and receivers of eWOM within microblogs. For example, a more overarching perspective has been discussed in the literature so far with regard to the concepts of corporate images and corporate reputations, including that images are scattered, exchanged and modified within the social media environment (Gioia et al., 2014), but with little regard empirically for the recipient of what has been termed in this thesis as MeWOM brand image disruptions (eWOM in microblogs that either positively promotes the course, progress or transmission of a brand's image, or eWOM that interrupts the course, progress, or transmission of a brand's image) and the impact these disrupted MeWOM brand images have on the receiver's perception of a corporate reputation. In addition, although the researchers above called out a risk to corporate reputations due to social network site users sharing their experiences in the form of eWOM, none them actually included any empirical data to confirm the organisational perspective on this phenomenon. So for example, organisations were not asked to weigh in and confirm whether they considered MeWOM brand image disruptions to be a risk to their corporate reputation.

This research seeks to explore both the organisational and receiver perspective with regard to the phenomenon of MeWOM brand image disruptions. Specifically, the research objectives are to:

i. to explore whether organisations consider individual MeWOM brand image disruptions to have any influence over their corporate reputation and how they manage them

ii. to explore *whether and to what extent* MeWOM brand image disruptions impact receivers' perception of a corporate reputation

iii. to establish which variables predict a change in a corporate reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption

iv. to provide further context from the receivers' perspective of the variables which cause a change in reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption

Exploring the objectives noted above will add some much needed empirical data to the existing body of knowledge in the corporate image and corporate reputation domains. The perspective of organisations in relation to MeWOM brand image disruptions and the perspectives of receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions and any impacts to corporate reputation as a consequence of exposure remain unexplored.

1.2.1 Methodological Approach

This research is grounded in a pragmatic philosophical underpinning, as the researcher believes that a pragmatic approach is conducive to investigating the research objectives outlined above. The use of qualitative and quantitative research methods enabled the researcher to obtain interpretive and measurable insights into the research area, which may not have been possible with the sole employment of a pure positivist or social constructionist philosophical underpinning. As referenced previously, researchers have called out the power that social network site users have over corporate reputations. There has however been a dearth of research with organisations to understand if they perceive this to be the case. In addition, there has been a surprising dearth of research on receivers of eWOM in microblogs to confirm whether MeWOM brand image disruptions actually cause a change in their perception of a corporate reputation and the factors that influence a change if indeed one does take place.

In order to complete the research objectives of this study, a mixed-methods research approach was operationalised. An initial exploratory qualitative phase was utilised in order to understand the organisational perspective in relation the risk that social network site users, and the proliferation of positive and negative eWOM in microblogs, posed to their corporate reputations. It was based on a lack of empirical data within the literature on organisations and sought to confirm what the literature purported. Ten semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with senior marketing, communications and social media managers. The interviews filled the gap with regard to the empirical data needed and provided a strong rationale for taking Phase II of the research forward with receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions in social media – specifically within a microblog.

Stage one of Phase II of the study was comprised of a quantitative element and consisted of an online experiment combined with a questionnaire. The online experiment was created to replicate a microblog environment where respondents were exposed to six actual positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions (eWOM brand image disruptions shared in a microblog environment). The use of an online experiment that utilised actual MeWOM brand image disruptions enabled the researcher to capture insights that might not have been possible by employing a questionnaire alone for example. 391 participants took part in the experiment with 372 of the questionnaire responses being utilisable after data cleaning was conducted. The data captured from the quantitative phase enabled the researcher to create six positive and negative valence structural equation models using Smart-PLS to demonstrate the variables that predicted a change in corporate reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

The second stage of Phase II of the study was a qualitative study involving 14 participants that took part in 14 semi-structured interviews. This phase of the study focused on the provision of explanatory data for the significant variables found in the quantitative phase of the study.

1.3 Thesis Structure

In order to produce a rigorous study that provides clear and understandable insights, this thesis has been structured with great care and consideration for the reader. The structure of this thesis is demonstrated in Figure 1.1.

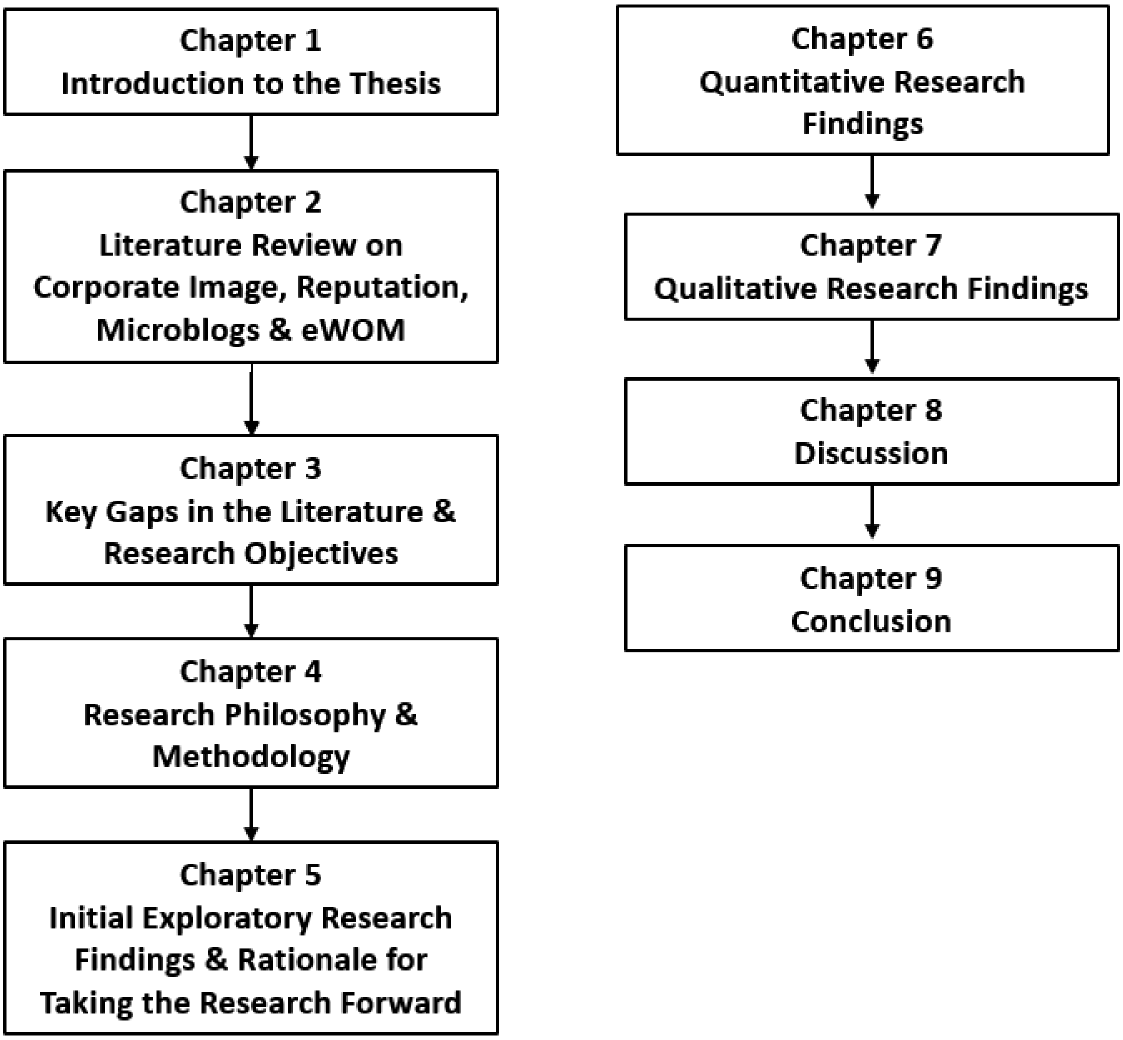

Figure 1.1 - Thesis Structure

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to this study. The background to the research was detailed and stressed the importance of researching MeWOM brand image disruptions in the organisational and receiver context. In addition, the objectives of the research were provided along with the methodological approach and philosophical stance adopted by the researcher. The chapter also discussed the rationale for choosing a mixed-methods approach and the qualitative and quantitative approaches employed to complete the research objectives of the study. Finally, the chapter provided a visual representation of the structure of the thesis to help guide the reader through this document.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: CORPORATE IMAGE, REPUTATION, MICROBLOGS & eWOM

2.0 Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter 1, managing and maintaining a consistent corporate image and reputation in today's environment where social network site users share their everyday experiences with brands is an ever-increasing challenge for firms. From the President of the United States to the everyday consumer, the use of microblogs to share and re-share information is a daily activity for many. With the enormous amount of information being shared and re-shared within microblogs about consumers' experiences with brands, there remains a tremendous opportunity to empirically explore the impact that this information has on the receiver. Specifically, and with regard to this thesis, the impact of exposure to shared brand experiences in microblogs, termed MeWOM brand image disruptions, on a firm's reputation in the mind of the receiver is explored. Additionally, any factors that influence any change in reputation are also of interest.

In this chapter, a review of the literature takes place in order to bring to life key concepts that are vital to understanding the phenomenon explored in the thesis – namely corporate image, reputation, microblogs and eWOM.

The chapter commences with the definitions provided in the literature of corporate image, corporate reputation, microblogs and eWOM in order to provide a foundation from which to consider the topics further. Next, the importance and impact of these constructs in today's social media microblogging landscape will be reviewed. Further, the literature is reviewed to bring to the fore the factors that make eWOM effective. Finally, the chapter will close by providing a summary of the key issues identified within the literature in order to take the thesis forward.

2.1 Key Definitions - Corporate Image, Reputation, Microblogs & eWOM

Before the literature review is conducted on the importance of the constructs explored in this study, it is necessary to understand how these constructs are defined within the literature to provide a solid foundation. The provision of clear definitions of constructs can provide a strong foundation from which to determine the nature of the research questions posed, the methods used to examine the questions, the way measures are designed and the way findings are translated (Dowling, 2016).

2.1.1 Corporate Image & Corporate Reputation – Timing is Everything

In today's digital environment where consumers share their experiences with brands as a part of everyday life, managing a reputation in such an environment poses significant challenges for firms. From sending a virtual pat on the back to an employee for a job well done, to having to wait for their luggage too long after their flight, consumers increasing turn to microblogs such as Twitter to share their positive and negative experiences with brands. As such, there is an ongoing opportunity to understand the constructs of image and reputation in the digital environment in which brand images are proliferated and perceptions of reputations formed. Providing a clear definition of these two constructs is problematic however as there is no agreed upon definition of corporate image and corporate reputation – with discourse on their definitions taking place for several years (Abratt; 1989; Balmer, 1996; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, Davies et al., 2001; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Walker, 2010; Abratt & Kleyn; Dowling, 2016). From the author's perspective, timing is everything in the digital environment with regard to these constructs for two reasons. From a receiver perspective, experiences with brands are shared almost instantaneously on microblogs such as Twitter - with consumption of these experiences by receivers happening just as instantaneously as they scroll and check their feeds for the latest news and updates from their favourite celebrities. From an organisation perspective, it is important to understand the timing aspect with regard to perceptions of their firm – is it a perspective toward their organisation at this moment in time? Is it an assessment made by stakeholders over a period of time? It is thus prudent to understand how the constructs image and reputation are defined in relation to time within the literature. This is not an easy task however as there are numerous perspectives on the constructs – and an ongoing lack of consensus as mentioned previously.

The objective of this section is to unpack the two constructs of image and reputation from a historical and present day perspective.

2.1.1.1 Corporate Image – Numerous Definitions

Since the 1950s when the term was developed (Newman, 1953; Swanson, 1957), numerous definitions have been provided by researchers in various disciplines (Balmer, 1998; 2001) along with confusion of other constructs – namely identity and corporate reputation (Abratt, 1989; Balmer, 2001; Christensen and Askegaard, 2001; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Melewar, 2003; Brown et al., 2006; Walker; 2010; Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Tran et al., 2015). Some excellent work has been undertaken by researchers to unpack the construct of corporate image specifically – namely Kennedy (1977), Abratt (1989), Brown (1998), Stern et al., (2001), with more recent analysis taking place (Tran et al., 2015) as well.

As noteworthy work has taken place by some highly respected academics on the construct of corporate image, with some continued confusion, it is worth assessing the definitions provided in the literature of corporate image. To demonstrate how the construct of corporate image has evolved throughout the years and the confusion around it, Table 2.1 has been created. As demonstrated in Table 2.1, many of the definitions attributed to the concept of image would later be defined as 'identity' (Abratt, 1989; Balmer 1996, 1998; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). or 'reputation' (Rosenthal and Landau, 1979; Kreps and Wilson, 1980; Balmer 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Abratt and Kleyn 2012) by later authors. Table 2.1 also references the time orientation and the construct orientation. The time orientation is any reference to time made in the definition and the construct orientation refers to whether corporate image is something determined by the firm or something determined by the recipient. The time orientation has been provided to demonstrate how the construct evolved into other constructs in the future. It is also a key variable in the fast-moving microblog environment and it is thus important to understand the importance given to this variable when the construct was defined. The construct orientation has been added to discern whether definition providers believed that the corporate image was something conveyed by the firm, or something formed by stakeholders. This is an important element to note as the next section on more recent literature demonstrates that authors today are indirectly acknowledging the importance of external actors to the firm that help to form and share images of the firm.

Definitions provided in Table 2.1 are a collective representation of the author's review of definitions and noteworthy work by Kennedy (1977), Abratt (1989), Brown (1998), Stern et al., (2001) and Tran et al. (2015).

Table 2.1 – Analysis of Historical Definitions of Corporate Image

Closely Associated with Corporate Reputation			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Harris (1958) – "a corporate image is undoubtedly the most complex of all the marketing images. It is the image of the individual corporation created in the minds of consumers by ***total*** corporate advertising and public relations as well as by the company's individual brand, advertising, packaging, value and the consumer's actual knowledge and/or experience with the company's brands or services" (Kennedy, p. 164)	**Over Time**	**Firm**	These definitions of image are closely related to what other scholars would term as 'corporate reputation' – i.e. referencing impression(s) formed due to a composite of knowledge or totality of images formed over time (Rosenthal and Landau, 1979; Kreps and Wilson, 1980; Balmer 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Abratt and Kleyn 2012).
Winick (1960) "the image of a company is the ***end result*** of a person's experiences, recollections, and impressions of a company. It enters directly and centrally into how he perceives the company" (Tran et al., p. 111)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	
Spector (1961) "the ***sum total*** of their perceptions of the corporation's personality characteristics is what we refer to as the corporate image" (Kennedy, p. 163)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Closely Associated with Corporate Reputation</th></tr>
<tr><th>Definition</th><th>Time Orientation</th><th>Construct Orientation</th><th>How others define(d) the concept</th></tr>
<tr><td>Gronroos (1984) “the corporate image is the result of how consumers perceive the firm” (Tran et al., p. 113)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td><td rowspan="5">These definitions of image are closely related to what other scholars would term as ‘corporate reputation’ – i.e. referencing impression(s) formed due to a composite of knowledge or totality of images formed over time (Rosenthal and Landau, 1979; Kreps and Wilson, 1980; Balmer 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Abratt and Kleyn 2012).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gunther (1963) - “the corporate image then, may be defined as a composite of knowledge, feelings, ideas and beliefs associated with a company as a result of the totality of its activities” (Kennedy, p. 163)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bevis (1963) “the term “corporate image” is a much used and sometimes abused term. We think of it as the net result of the interaction of all the experiences, beliefs, feelings and knowledge that people have about a company” (Kennedy, p. 164)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
<tr><td>Kennedy (1977) “we form company images on the basis of our total experience of the company” (p. 121)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
<tr><td>Parkin (1970) “a corporate image is the totality of pictures or ideas or reputations of a corporation in the minds of the people who come into contact with it” (Kennedy, p. 164)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
</table>

Closely Associated with Corporate Reputation			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Topalian (1984) "corporate image of an organization is the profile or ***sum of impressions and expectations*** of the organization built up in the minds of individuals who compromise its publics" (Stern et al., p. 212)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	These definitions of image are closely related to what other scholars would term as 'corporate reputation' – i.e. referencing impression(s) formed due to a composite of knowledge or totality of images formed over time (Rosenthal and Landau, 1979; Kreps and Wilson, 1980; Balmer 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Abratt and Kleyn 2012).
Dowling (1986) "an image is the set of meanings by which a company is known and through which people describe and relate to it. It is the ***net result*** of the interaction of a person's beliefs, ideas, feelings, and impressions about the company. A company will not have an image–people hold images of the company" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	
Dowling (1988) "corporate image is the ***total impression*** an entity makes on the minds of people. It is linked to the corporate personality" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Firm**	
Barich & Kotler (1991) "***overall impression*** produced in the minds of an organization's public" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Firm**	

Closely Associated with Corporate Reputation			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Dowling (1994) "***overall impression*** (beliefs and feelings) that an organization generates in the public's mind" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Firm**	These definitions of image are closely related to what other scholars would term as 'corporate reputation' – i.e. referencing impression(s) formed due to a composite of knowledge or totality of images formed over time (Rosenthal and Landau, 1979; Kreps and Wilson, 1980; Balmer 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Abratt and Kleyn 2012).
Meech (1996) "***overall impression*** obtained by an individual about an organization" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	
Worcester (1997) "***the result*** of the interaction of all the experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings, and know-how that people have about a business" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	
Nguyen & LeBlanc (1998) "corporate image is a concept set in the subjectivity of the public, based on the public's ***accumulated experiences***" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	
Sheth, Mittal & Newman (1999) "corporate image is a concept set in the subjectivity of the public, based on the public's ***accumulated experiences***" (Tran et al., p. 114)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Closely Associated with Corporate Reputation</th></tr>
<tr><th>Definition</th><th>Time Orientation</th><th>Construct Orientation</th><th>How others define(d) the concept</th></tr>
<tr><td>Nguyen & LeBlanc (2002) “the result of an aggregated process by which the public compares and contrasts the diverse attributes of organizations” (Tran et al., p. 114)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td><td rowspan="3">These definitions of image are closely related to what other scholars would term as ‘corporate reputation’ – i.e. referencing impression(s) formed due to a composite of knowledge or totality of images formed over time (Rosenthal and Landau, 1979; Kreps and Wilson, 1980; Balmer 1998; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Abratt and Kleyn 2012).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Camarero & Garrido (2004) “sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a company” (Tran et al., p. 114)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
<tr><td>Worcester (2009) “corporate image, the net result of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge people have about a company” (Tran et al., p. 114)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
</table>

Closely Associated with Corporate Identity			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Spector (1961) "the ***sum total*** of their perceptions of the corporation's personality characteristics is what we refer to as the corporate image" (Kennedy, p. 163)	**Over Time**	**Stakeholder**	These definitions are closely related to what several authors have defined as the corporate identity of the firm – i.e. an internal organisational orientation based on the characteristics that encompass the perceptions formed by stakeholders based on interactions and communications of the management and employees of a company (Abratt, 1989; Balmer 1996, 1998; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Hatch et al 1997)
Messner (1963) "each individual of the publics with which your company comes into contact has a ***mental picture*** of your company, which he thinks its characteristics are" (Kennedy, p. 163)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Fatt, Yuen & Suan (2000) "image is the public's ***perception*** of an organization's actions, activities, and achievements (Tran et al., p. 114)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Stephenson (1963) – "everyone in the organisation has to appreciate that the ***single image*** is ***fragmented*** into many images by the prism of behaviour and experience" (Tran et al., p. 112)	**Instantaneous**	**Firm**	

Not Closely Associated with Other Constructs			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Santesmases (2004) "***a mental representation***. The result of the perceptions generated in the public with regard to corporate identity" (Tran et al., p. 114)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	These definitions are not closely related to definitions of reputation or identity, but they do have common themes. Most of them have an instantaneous orientation to time, they are stakeholder oriented and they are formed of impressions, attitudes, feelings and/or beliefs of the stakeholder.
Wirsig (1960) "corporate image is meant all those impressions and reactions that arise, ***usually instantaneously***, in an individual's mind when the name of a company or its product is mentioned" (Kennedy, p. 164)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Flanagan (1967) "what is an image? In its simplest possible form, ***it is the mental picture of something***—a product, a brand, a company, a person—that exists in the mind of an individual human being" (Kennedy, p. 164)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Bos & Arnett (1967) "an image ***is a constellation of attitudes*** and opinions and these will vary amongst the people the company is selling to, according to the degree and type of interest the company has for a given person or function" (Kennedy, p. 164)	**None**	**Stakeholder**	

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Not Closely Associated with Other Constructs</th></tr>
<tr><th>Definition</th><th>Time
Orientation</th><th>Construct
Orientation</th><th>How others define(d) the concept</th></tr>
<tr><td>Christopher & Pitts (1969) “corporate image is the spontaneous idea of the company generally based on slender precepts gained from a subjective contact with the company, its products, reputation and promotional mix. It is also based on opinions formed after exposure to a deliberate corporate image campaign” (Kennedy, p. 164)</td><td>Instantaneous</td><td>Both</td><td rowspan="3">These definitions are not closely related to definitions of reputation or identity, but they do have common themes. Most of them have an instantaneous orientation to time, they are stakeholder oriented and they formed of impressions, attitudes, feelings and/or beliefs of the stakeholder.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Pharoah (1982) “corporate image refers to the expectations, attitudes and feelings that consumers have about the nature and underlying reality of the company as represented by its corporate identity” (Stern et al., p. 212)</td><td>Instantaneous</td><td>Stakeholder</td></tr>
<tr><td>Selame & Selame (1988) “image is intangible impressions that are shaped and reshaped to produce the most favorable public perceptions [. . .] they are gradually perceived and evolutionary–tend to be made up of small, often unrelated parts” (Stern et al., p. 213)</td><td>Over Time</td><td>Both</td></tr>
</table>

Not Closely Associated with Other Constructs			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Alvesson (1990) "organizational image ***is a holistic and vivid impression*** held by an individual or particular group towards an organisation and is a result of sense-making by the group and communication by the organisation of a fabricated and projected picture of itself" (p. 376)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	These definitions are not closely related to definitions of reputation or identity, but they do have common themes that are seen in today's definitions. Most of them have an instantaneous orientation to time, they are stakeholder oriented and they formed of impressions, attitudes, feelings and/or beliefs of the stakeholder.
Calderon & Cervera (1996) "Corporate image: this refers to the ***public's real perception*** of the organization which the entity cannot control. It is based on reception, that is, it is in the public's mind, and could be considered as a public opinion phenomenon" (Tran et al., p. 113)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Balmer & Gray (1998) "the mental picture of the company held by its audiences – ***what comes to mind when one sees or hears the corporate name or sees its logo***". They further note that a company has several images (p. 1105)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Bromley (2000) "the way an organization ***presents itself*** to its publics, especially visually" (p. 240)	**Over Time**	**Firm**	

Not Closely Associated with Other Constructs			
Definition	**Time Orientation**	**Construct Orientation**	**How others define(d) the concept**
Scott & Lane (2000) "the way organizational members believe others see their organization (i.e. construed external image), as the way that top management would like outsiders to see the organisation and the ***overall impression*** that companies make on external constituents" (Tran et al., p. 111)	**Both**	**Both**	These definitions are not closely related to definitions of reputation or identity, but they do have common themes that are seen in today's definitions. Most of them have an instantaneous orientation to time, they are stakeholder oriented and they formed of impressions, attitudes, feelings and/or beliefs of the stakeholder.
Davies et al., (2001) "***the view*** of the company held by external stakeholders, especially that held by customers" (p. 113)	**Instantaneous**	**Stakeholder**	
Christensen and Askegaard (2001) "***an impression created or stimulated by a sign or a set of signs***. An image, in other words, corresponds to the Peircian notion of the interpretant. Thus, when we talk about a corporate image, we refer to a notion of a collective or partly shared interpretant, a more or less complex construct generated by signs that has come to represent the organisation in the minds of its various audiences" (p. 305)	**Instantaneous**	**Both**	
Brown et al. (2006) "what an organization member ***wants*** others to know (or believes others to know) about the organization" (p. 102)	**Both**	**Firm**	

As highlighted in the table, most definitions have a stakeholder perspective in terms of definition – i.e. the image of the firm is in the mind of the receiver formed via any number of ways. Others, such as Harris (1958), Stephenson (1963), Dowling (1988; 1994), Barich & Kotler (1991), Bromley (2000) have a firm orientation in the definitions – i.e. it is something created by the firm and conveyed to stakeholders. Finally, a few researchers indicate an orientation to both, namely Christopher & Pitts (1969) and Selame & Selame (1988), Scott & Lane (2000), Christensen and Askegaard (2001).

The firm perspective has been associated with a negative connotation with some researchers (Bernays, 1977; Grunig, 1993; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Grunig states that organisations can project what they want "out of nothing", which has a negative connotation of being untruthful and that their "behaviour and their relationships with publics count for little" (p. 125). Hatch and Schultz (1997) also note that image is something that can be manipulated and that is created for the various publics in order to appeal to them. They rationalise this by referencing Barich and Kotler (1991), stating that leadership with the organisation as well as spokespeople deliberately "orchestrate" endeavours to sway public opinion. Although one can see how these researchers would have conceptualised this constructed view of image in the 1990s, this is hardly true today where the transparency of entities becomes ever more clear due to the technological advances of social media at the fingertips of stakeholders.

Although many of the definitions in Table 2.1 were later termed to be corporate reputation or corporate identity, a group of them were not closely related to definitions of reputation or identity, but they did have common themes. Most of them had an instantaneous orientation to time, they were stakeholder oriented and they were formed of impressions, attitudes, feelings and/or beliefs of the stakeholder. The next section highlights some of today's definitions of the construct. As has been noted however, there still seems to be confusion in the literature with some researchers using definitions that would be considered reputation by others.

2.1.1.2 More Recent Perspectives of Corporate Image

More recent perspectives of corporate image highlight the dynamic state in which images are formed and shared – indicating both a firm and stakeholder orientation to the firm. The literature calls out that images can change as soon as they are subject to internal or external interpretations, or as soon as they are communicated and go further than what is projected by an organisation. There is acknowledgement of ‘outside agents’ that are, or may become, involved in constructing and disseminating images based on their perceptions and interpretations. It is noted that within the current social and virtual environments, image is a virtual representation relied upon as necessary substitutes for first-hand experience and understanding (Gioia et al., 2014).

Price et al. (2008) provide a salient point in their definition of image – particularly in today’s technological landscape. Rather than conveying one image, they contend that organisations have ‘scattered images’ as there are several images and interpretations sent and received by a plethora of stakeholders.

More recently than the work by Price et al. (2008), Gioia et al. (2014) introduced the concept of an ‘intercepted image’ which they note are unlike projected images as they are defined by the recipient rather than the sender of a message and these receivers can do whatever they want with the image. They specifically reference today’s technological landscape as a facilitator of the ‘intercepted image’ as the proliferation and subsequent modification of these images is rampant in the virtual marketplace. To give an example, they reference the Mitt Romney 47 percent video that was filmed by a bartender. The bartender, the original recipient of projected image of Mitt Romney, used a camera to record a video of his speech. He released the video via Mother Jones, an independent news organisation. Within 24 hours, the video had been modified into over 130 clips and viewed over 2.4 million times (Visible Measures, 2012). They note, “images created by a sender are up for grabs as soon as they are subject to internal or external interpretations (which is to say, as soon as they are communicated – which is to say almost always)” (p. 6). They also contend that organisational images are ‘virtual commodities’ that are exchanged socially and within the media rather than being something definitively owned or possessed by an organisation. This interpretation of the construct of the corporate image is an interesting one in relation to this thesis. As noted in the introduction, experiences with brands are shared via microblogs such as Twitter as a part of everyday life for many. These experiences of the organisation are then received by any number of followers on Twitter and then even perhaps retweeted. The experience shared is either aligned to the corporate image presented by the firm, or it is not. The image presented by the firm has thus been intercepted and a modified version of it has been presented to the receiver.

It is refreshing to see that some of the more recent work on corporate image has indirectly taken the digital environment into account when assigning meaning to the construct. A review of the recent literature however demonstrates a continued lack of consensus on the construct with a call for general agreement in order to improve research in the field (Cian & Cervai, 2014). For example, in their work on the corporate image formation process, Tran et al. (2015) adopt Worcester’s (2009) definition of corporate image as “the net result of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge people have about a company” (p. 87). This definition, referenced in 2015, epitomises the problem as other researchers would term this as reputation through the use of the words “net result”.

2.1.1.3 Corporate Reputation

Whereas corporate image has mainly been associated with an external stakeholder orientation (table 2.1 highlights exceptions), definitions within the corporate reputation literature acknowledge a more robust perspective incorporating internal and external perspectives of the firm (Walker, 2010). Unfortunately, it has also been subject to a lack of consensus on exactly what the term means. One of the more recent articles on the subject still makes this claim, noting that "one of the key unresolved issues in this field is to articulate what is and what is not corporate reputation" (Dowling, 2016, p. 209). Bringing this issue to the fore, Walker (2010) conducted a review of 43 well cited articles; only 19 provided a definition and none of the 19 definitions provided repeat citations (Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). As such, this section of the thesis will not replay all of the definitions provided of reputation in the literature as many would be termed corporate image or identity by other researchers (as evidenced in Table 2.1). Alternatively, this section highlights a few definitions throughout the literature with its main focus on how definitions reference the factor of time.

Balmer and Gray (1998) discuss both image and reputation in relation to the factors of time and provide a robust definition by including components such as the setting involved. "*A salient corporate image can be created more quickly and easily than a sterling reputation" by utilising a "formal communication system that includes components such as signage, logos, corporate advertising and public relations*" (p. 696). They also state that a corporate reputation requires more in that it is something built up over time and can only be molded through "consistent performance" (Balmer and Gray, 1998, p. 696).

Davies et al. (2001) refer to reputation as a "*collective term referring to all stakeholders' views of corporate reputation, including identity and image*" (p. 114). This definition is broader in context and takes into account the internal and external perspectives of the firm. It also indirectly references time through the use of the term 'collective'.

One of the most salient works in terms of the lack of consensus on the definition of corporate reputation was conducted by Gotsi and Wilson (2001). They conducted an extensive analysis of literature in relation to the definition of corporate reputation and found that there are two schools of thought when it comes to defining corporate reputation – the analogous school of thought, "*which views corporate reputation as synonymous with corporate image"*, and the differentiated school of thought, "*which considers the terms different and, according to the majority of authors, interrelated*" (p. 24).

Schools of thought	Relationship between corporate reputation and corporate image
Analogous school of thought (Bernays, 1977; Boorstin, 1961; Boulding, 1973; Budd, 1969; Crissy, 1971; Enis, 1967; Gates and McDaniel, 1972; Kennedy, 1977; Martineau, 1958; Schafhauser, 1967 and later on, Abratt, 1989; Alvessson, 1998; Bernstein, 1984; Dichter, 1985; Dowling, 1986, 1993; Dutton *et al.*, 1994)	Corporate reputation ≡ Corporate image
Differentiated school of thought 1st view (Brown and Cox, 1997; Brown and Dacin, 1997; Grunig, 1993; O'Sullivan, 1983; Semons, 1998)	Corporate reputation ≠ Corporate image
2nd view (Mason, 1993)	Corporate reputation ⟹ Corporate image
3rd view (Balmer, 1996, 1997; Bromley, 1993; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Gray and Balmer, 1998; Rindova, 1997; Saxton, 1998)	Corporate reputation ⟸ Corporate image

Figure 2.1 -Gotsi and Wilson, Corporate Reputation Schools of Thought

Gotsi and Wilson (2001) explain that in the differentiated school of thought, there are three different views:

1. Corporate reputation and corporate image as different, yet separate concepts emphasising the negative concepts associated with the latter.
2. A firm's corporate reputation is only one dimension towards the construction of its corporate image.
3. A firm's corporate reputation is largely influenced by the multiple images held by its stakeholders.

Based on their review, Gotsi and Wilson (2001) created a working definition of corporate reputation as follows:

"A corporate reputation is a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals." "The corporate reputations that a firm has with its stakeholders must rather be regarded as dynamic constructs, which influence and are influenced by all the ways in which a company projects its images: its behaviour, communication and symbolism" (p. 29).

Walker (2010) through his extensive analysis of the literature on corporate reputation offered the following definition:

"A relatively stable, issue specific, aggregate representation of a company's past actions and future prospects compared against some standard" (p. 370).

Walker's (2010) definition is noteworthy in relation to time as the past, present and future are incorporated into the definition. A degree of information processing is referenced with words such as 'representation' and 'compared'.

Gioia et al. (2014) provide the most direct explanation of reputation in relation to the factor of time. They state "the key difference between transient impression and reputation is mainly one of duration (short vs. long) and focus (specific vs. global). Reputation thus connotes a more cumulative, more enduring set of attributes assessed over longer time periods" (p. 5).

Demonstrating the ongoing discourse and lack of agreement on the definition of corporate reputation, Dowling (2016) conducted an extensive review of the literature and found that definitions of corporate reputation can be an individual, collective or a social *evaluation of a firm*. He offers a definition of corporate reputation that is flexible in nature and references time in the following manner – "*a corporate reputation is the admiration and respect that a person holds of an organization at a point in time*" (p. 218). This is quite an interesting definition on several dimensions. Through the use of the words 'admiration' and 'respect', Dowling's definition is a flexible one that can incorporate an individual or grouped perspective as intended. In addition, Dowling's (2016) definition, more than any other in the author's opinion, is representative of the dynamic environment in which reputations are formed and shared today. He indirectly references a lapse of time through the use of words 'admiration' and 'respect'. At the same time, he incorporates the present moment through the use of the phrase '*at a point in time'* denoting that reputations can and do change. For example, to admire and respect a firm, one must know them for a period of time, or indeed have information about it order to make that determination. The digital environment offers the opportunity to do both. One can easily be exposed to information about firms in the digital environment that stakeholders know exceedingly well in the physical realm. Equally, before transacting with a firm, stakeholders have the ability to consult ratings of the firms through Google, Facebook, Yelp and a range of other websites. In essence, one can admire and respect a firm whether they have directly had experience with the firm or not. What is required is an assessment of information, indeed processing information, in order to come to the determination that one admires or respects a firm.

His reference to time in relation to other authors may prompt more questions however as it infers an instantaneous orientation versus a cumulative one upon assessment. For example, Abratt & Kleyn (2012) have a different opinion with regard to time and reputation – "reputation is an outcome of interactions between stakeholders and the organization *over time*. An organization *does not have a single reputation at any point in time*" (p. 1050).

2.1.1.4 Clearing Up the Muddied Waters of Corporate Reputation and Corporate Image

One of the key challenges with the definitions provided of the constructs corporate image and reputation is the lack of consensus on the constructs' meanings. Although noteworthy work has been undertaken by authors such as Gotsi & Wilson (2001), Brown et al. (2006), Walker

(2010), Tran et al. (2015), Dowling (2016), there remains a somewhat exhausting, and seemingly infinite, discourse on the topic. Although it is positive to see that more recent literature has started to indirectly acknowledge the digital environment in which images are shared and reputations formed (Price et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 2014, Dowling, 2016), further consensus on the constructs which acknowledge todays' landscape could help to strengthen the use of the constructs and studies which focus on it. Further consensus could perhaps be gained if the following two dimensions were considered in defining the constructs – the amount of time involved (instantaneous versus composite) and the amount of cognitive effort involved in the determination of the firm. So for example, the definition of corporate image provided by Balmer & Gray (1998) which refers to the mental picture of the company held by its audiences when one *sees or hears* the corporate name or sees its logo infers an instantaneous determination without much cognition involved. Contrast this with the definition of reputation provided by Gotsi & Wilson (2001) who noted that a corporate reputation is a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time comprised of a range of evaluative constructs such as experiences with the firm, actions of the firm, information about the firm and a comparison of the actions of other firms. More recently, Ali et al. (2015) provide a definition of reputation which is more aligned to that of image by Balmer & Gray (1998) where they state that corporate reputation is "the perceptual representation of an organization in the minds of its key stakeholders" (p. 1105). There is clearly room for more consensus to be gained. The author believes this could be achieved if researchers would consider the factor of time and the cognitive effort involved in the determination of the firm from the stakeholder perspective when using the two constructs in their studies.

2.1.1.5 Definitions of Corporate Image and Reputation Utilised for this Study

From the literature review conducted on the concepts of corporate image and corporate reputation it is evident that a sea of confusion with a lack of consensus on what these terms mean has been prevalent for several decades. Several respected authors in the practitioner and academic realms have offered their assertions on what the constructs mean. As there is no consensus on the constructs' meanings, this section outlines the definitions that will be utilised for this study. In agreement with Dowling (2016, p. 207), who states that "ultimately the definition of a construct should be determined by the scholar's theory and research question", the definitions provided here do not make any assertion that previous definitions are incorrect. They are however cognisant of this study and the author's own beliefs about how the constructs should be defined for the purpose of this study.

In terms of defining corporate image, this thesis builds on the assertion made by Price et al. (2008):

Rather than conveying one image, organisations have 'scattered images' as there are several interpretations sent and received by a plethora of stakeholders. They state "there are many image senders, many embedded receivers, and many outside stakeholders who construct their own interpretations of who or what an organisation is – all of which result in divergent or scattered images of the organisation (p. 174)."

The assertion above acknowledges that corporate images are not only a firm controlled presentation to external audiences – it is rather a presentation by the firm that is subsequently interpreted, modified presented and received by a range of stakeholders.

In terms of defining corporate image, a working definition for this thesis is thus:

A corporate image is an ***instantaneous*** *mental formation based on fragments of information that are directly or indirectly received by an organisation's stakeholders. Fragments of information can be received through any communication channel, symbolism and/or direct* *or indirect experiences of an organisation. This instantaneous formation is the image that the stakeholder holds at the point in time that the image is formed. As corporate images are instantaneous, they can change from one moment to the next and require little cognitive effort from the receiver's perspective.*

In terms of defining corporate reputation, this research will adopt Dowling's (2016) definition:

"A corporate reputation is the admiration and respect that a person holds of an organization at a point in time."

As noted previously, Dowling's (2016) definition references a time lapse through the use of the terms 'admiration' and 'respect'. It also acknowledges that reputations can be assessed by any number of stakeholders – from the individual to group assessments. Additionally, it is appropriate for the digital environment as it indirectly reflects an environment that changes through the use of the phrase 'at a point in time'. Finally, it acknowledges that there is a degree of cognitive effort involved as determining one's admiration and respect for a firm requires some cognitive processing – whether it is reflecting on experiences with a firm over time, reading about the experiences of others, or consulting reports about firms to come to a determination.

As noted previously in this section, it is the author's contention that the factor of time is of crucial importance within the digital landscape in which stakeholders share and consume experiences of brands. Both of the definitions of corporate image and reputation provided here have a time dimension to them and are thus in agreement with other authors who have directly or indirectly included time as a key dimension of the constructs. In addition, by acknowledging that one construct is more transient in nature in the mind (corporate image), versus a determination about a firm over time which requires a degree of cognitive effort (corporate reputation), the thesis can proceed with clarity.

2.1.2 Defining Social Media

Due to the evolving nature of social media, it has been highlighted within the literature as a construct that is difficult to define (Kane et al., 2014). Notwithstanding some excellent definitions provided of the construct (Reyneke et al., 2011; Berthon et al., 2012), the most cited work that includes a definition comes from the work conducted by Kaplan and Haenlein in 2010 (Devereux et al., 2017). Their definition states "social media is 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 & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Due to its inclusion of the origins of social media and its broad application with regard to User Generated Content, this thesis adopts the definition provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

2.1.3 Defining User Generated Content

Another key concept is User Generated Content (UGC) which is any and all content created by users through the use of social media platforms (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Reyneke et al, 2011). A few examples of content include videos, photos and commentary. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) outline a few specifications of UGC that help to define it further. They state that it needs to fulfil three basic requirements in order to be considered UGC. "First, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices" (p. 61). The guidelines provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) are helpful and broad enough to include new types of content introduced in the future.

2.1.4 Defining eWOM

Unlike some of the previous constructs defined in this section, the definition of eWOM has indirectly garnered more consensus on what the construct means as its definition has not changed much in the past decade or so. Useful, and similar definitions of eWOM, have been provided within the literature (see Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006; Vilpponen et al., 2006, Litvin et al., 2008; Breazeale, 2009) with recent publications still referencing previous definitions of the construct's meaning. For example, Gottschalk and Mafael (2017, p. 90) reference Goldsmith & Horowitz (2006) in their definition as they define eWOM as "word-of-mouth communication on the internet, which can be diffused by many Internet applications such as online forums, electronic bulletin board systems, blogs, review sites and social networking sites." Cantallops & Salvi (2014, p. 43) reference Litvin et al.'s (2008) definition of eWOM – "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers".

For the purpose of this thesis, and in acknowledgement of the changing landscape of eWOM communications via social networking channels, eWOM will be defined as:

"The process of communicating positive, neutral or negative (informal) information online to a multitude of ***stakeholders*** about a product or company."

It is prudent to highlight some key concepts in the definition for this thesis. Due to the accessibility of archives of eWOM (traceability), it is the author's contention that eWOM has the ability to impact more than just existing, potential or past *consumers* of products. Other stakeholders such as employees, investors and media representatives have access to and can utilise eWOM to influence their sentiment and actions towards and with an organisation. For this reason, the term '*stakeholder*' has been provided in the definition here.

The use of the word 'informal' within the definition above acknowledges the changing landscape of eWOM in the online context while at the same time providing clarification on the type of information being shared.

Finally, the definition adopted for this thesis is sensitive to the changing nature of the digital environment and thus does not call out any specific channels as the definition provided by Goldsmith & Horowitz (2006) does.

2.1.5 Defining the MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

Before concluding this section of the chapter, a new term is introduced to take this thesis forward - the MeWOM brand image disruption. It is a hybrid term that includes variables from definitions explored in this thesis. A MeWOM brand image disruption is defined as follows: "eWOM in a microblog that either positively promotes the course, progress or transmission of a brand's image, or eWOM in a microblog that interrupts the course, progress, or transmission of a brand's image". This definition draws upon the current academic perspective that images are not only proliferated by firms, but they are modified and shared in the social media environment by outside agents of the firm who proliferate these images further (Gioia et al., 2014). As such, once images are conveyed by a firm, they can be disrupted. The Merriam - Webster definition of 'disruption' is: "to break apart" or to "interrupt the course of unity" (Merriam-Webster, 2017). As such, once an image is conveyed by a firm, an outside agent such a customer can disrupt the image by sharing their own experience. This experience can be positive or negative and either add or detract from the firm's conveyed image. As noted in this chapter, the microblog environment is a fertile ground for stakeholders of a firm to share their experiences through eWOM and thus the 'M' preceding eWOM.

2.2 Social Media Zones

In order to take this study forward, and provide a foundation from which to proceed, this section outlines the functions of social media available at the time of publication of this thesis. This section employs a framework by Tuten & Solomon (2014) in order to classify the various social media zones.

2.2.1 Social Media Zones

Tuten & Solomon (2014) provide a framework of social media zones in acknowledgement of the complexity of social media and the "sheer quantity of channels and vehicles, with new ones coming online all the time" (p. 8). By breaking up social media into zones, Tuten and Solomon (2014) facilitate a grouping of social media in terms of its functionality. They note, "all social media are networked around relationships, technologically enabled, and based on the principles of shared participation" (p. 8). A depiction of the social media zones is demonstrated in Figure 2.2 followed by a brief explanation.

Figure 2.2 – Social Media Zones – Adapted from Tuten & Solomon (2014)

2.2.1.1 Zone 1 – Social Community

The social community quadrant concerns a function of social media that focuses on developing relationships and the common activities that people participate in with others who share the same interests or identification. Social communities can be formed in social networks sites and enable users to create a profile of themselves and connect with others including friends, colleagues, and contacts who share interests. Members use these sites share UGC such as photos, videos, documents and blogs to share their interests (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Reyneke et al, 2011; Berthon et al, 2012; Tuten & Solomon, 2014). A prominent example of a social network site is Facebook, which has over 1.94 billion active monthly users (Statista, 2016).

2.2.1.2 Zone 2 – Social Publishing

The social publishing quadrant concerns the ability to disseminate content to an audience. For example, vlogs, or video blogs enable anyone with the ability to capture a video to film and share videos on a range of topics. Social media influencers such as Chiara Ferrangni and Casey Neistat share their personal insights and experiences on topics such as fashion or travel. Some, such as Ferrangni have become millionaires as brands recruit them to help market their products and services (Kay, 2017). Many vloggers use popular sites such as YouTube and Vine to share videos and build their brands.

2.2.1.3 Zone 3 – Social Entertainment

The social entertainment quadrant concerns the ability of social media to facilitate play and enjoyment. For example, entertainment communities include communities such as MySpace and Spotify where communities are formed around entertainment such as music, art and sports (Tuten & Solomon, 2014) and popular game communities include Candy Crush and Mafia Wars (Tuten & Solomon, 2014; Aichner, 2015).

2.2.1.4 Zone 4 – Social Commerce

The social commerce zone is concerned with the online buying and selling of products and services and the ability to share information about these activities. An example of social media in this zone includes reviews and ratings sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp. TripAdvisor is a site where online users can review and post hotel reviews as well as make hotel bookings. The online community has 390 million unique views each month and an archive of 500 million reviews. It is so powerful, it has been said to have replaced the standard hotel star ratings system (Nicholson, 2017). Yelp on the other hand, is a site where reviewers can share their experiences of brands in a range of sectors including retail, restaurants, home and beauty services. It boasts over 127 million reviews and has recently expanded its services to allow users to make restaurant reservations, get price quotes from businesses and get food delivered (Geron, 2017).

2.2.2 Microblogs and Twitter – What Makes Them Unique?

Now that the functionalities of social media have been explored in relation to its zones, it is next important to briefly discuss microblogs and the application Twitter specifically. Microblogs are social media sites that enable users to send and read very short messages with a restriction on the number of characters that can be used in the message. Microblogging applications include Twitter, Weibo in China and Me2day in South Korea. Many other social network sites have microblogging features to them called 'status updates' including Facebook, Google + and LinkedIn (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). In terms of functionality, microblogs serve all functions across social media zones as follows:

- users are a part of a social community – e.g. the Twitter community
- users can share and publish content
- users can use microblogs as an entertainment source by watching short videos and listening to music through Twitter-enabled applications such as Blip.fm
- users can provide reviews of organisations through sharing their own experiences with brands

The most popular microblogging site is Twitter which allows users to send 'Tweets' of up to 140 characters (Jansen, et al., 2009b; Marwick, 2011; Reyneke et al, 2011; Berthon et al, 2012, Smith, 2012, Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015) and has also been referred to as micro-sharing, micro-updating, 'Twittering' and 'Tweeting' (Jansen et al., 2009b; Smith, 2012, Tuten & Solomon, 2014, Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015). Consumers, journalists, celebrities, CEOs and political figures increasingly use Twitter to share stories, thoughts and perceptions 140 characters at a time - sometimes generating a buzz on their own. For example, a late night Tweet by President Trump with the typo ‘covfefe’ prompted news articles by both the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times with expert commentators weighing in on what exactly the President was thinking or going through at the time (Oppenheimer, 2017).

Twitter has been recently called out as being synonymous with microblogging due to its popularity (Hennig-Thurau, 2015). This is not a surprising statement as Twitter is recognised as one of the most popular social network sites in the world with around 320 million users and supported by 35 languages (Adweek, 2016). North America is a prominent location with 25% of those users (Statista, 2016).

Compared to other social network sites, Twitter is a unique due to a few key features. For example, it enables users to send and read short messages limited to 140 characters known as Tweets. These Tweets enable users to share in real time their interests, thoughts and experiences with a network of “followers” in real time. A user can be followed by any number of known and unknown users, without it being reciprocal – i.e. one can follow someone, but that does not necessarily mean they will be followed back. Communicating on Twitter includes the accepted norm of placing the @ symbol in front of the message being conveyed (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). To share an experience with United Airlines for example, a Twitter user shared the following Tweet on June 18, 2017:

Figure 2.3 – Tweet @United Example

The use of the @ symbol denotes that the message is intended for, or relevant to, a specific user. Circled in red on Figure 2.3 are other key features of Twitter as follows from left to right (Twitter, 2017):

- **Reply feature** – enables users to reply to the Tweet
- **Retweet feature** – enables users to click and re-share the message with their network. They can also tag other users in the retweet by using the @symbol
- **Like or favourite** – previously a star and now a heart icon, this is enables users to bookmark a Tweet and demonstrate that they like a Tweet. It turns red to confirm they have liked it.

- **Message feature** – this provides the capability to send a private message to a Twitter user.

Clicking on the Tweet enables the user to expand the Tweet and read other comments. As shown in figure 2.4 after clicking and expanding the Tweet, the United Airlines social media team responded to the customer.

Figure 2.4 Tweet @United Airlines Response Example

Another key feature in the Tweet includes the use of the # sign called hashtags (highlighted in yellow in Figure 2.4). Hashtags enable users to categorise their Tweets and show them more easily in a Twitter search. Clicking or tapping on a hashtag in a Tweet will show other Tweets that include the hashtag. Hashtags enable users to follow top news stories, celebrities, trends and marketing campaigns. As denoted in this example, it also enables users to start their own trend about the experiences they have with service providers – i.e. #BadService, #NeverUnitedAirlines.

One final key feature worth mentioning about Twitter is that Tweets are either public or protected. By default, Tweets are public when users sign up for the service, meaning anyone can view a member's Tweet (regardless of whether they have a Twitter account or not) and interact with their Tweets. Users can however choose to protect their Tweets through their account settings. If users choose to do this, they will receive a request when users choose to follow them (Twitter, 2017).

2.3 Corporate Image, Reputation, Microblogs and eWOM – What of Them?

As noted previously, the use of microblogs such as Twitter has become a part of the everyday life for many in developed countries such as the United States. For example, in his first 100 days in office, Donald Trump posted nearly 500 Tweets, with Twitter noted as the President's favourite medium (Krieg, 2017). With regard to consumers, Twitter conducted its own study and found that out of 12,000 members surveyed, 80% of users surveyed mentioned a brand in their Tweets during the measurement period and 54% of users surveyed reported that they took an action after seeing brand mentions in Tweets. Actions included consideration of the brand (19%), retweeting Tweets mentioned in the brand (18%) and searching for the brand online (20%). Another interesting statistic from the Twitter study is that 33% of users saw Tweets from non-brand sources and of those 63%, they took an action after exposure (Midha, 2014). But what does all of this Tweeting about brands mean in relation to corporate reputations? Do they have any impact on receivers' perception of a corporate reputation and if so, how much? What about Tweets influences a change in perception of a reputation if one does take place? These are questions of interest to this thesis and the literature has called out some relevant information to provide a solid foundation from which to take the study forward. As such, the next section of the chapter explores the importance of corporate image and reputation and eWOM in the organisation and consumer context.

2.3.1 The Importance of Corporate Image & Reputation and the Power of MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

One of the key aspects that the digital landscape offers today is the ability for any social network site user to share their experience of a firm through eWOM on microblogs such as Twitter. They can do so by tweeting a simple message, tweeting a photograph of their experience, or tweeting a previously filmed or live video. These Tweets, termed MeWOM brand image disruptions in this thesis, potentially have the power to detract from a corporate image and subsequently modify receivers' assessment of corporate reputations. From the proliferation of a tweeted video of a passenger being dragged off of a United Airlines flight, to a barrage of tweets from a U.S President attempting to explain his actions from a White House in turmoil, the Twittersphere is a fertile ground for exposing the bad and ugly of organisations. Potentially, and just as importantly, they may also have the potential to enhance corporate images and reputations as well. As such, this section of the literature review brings to the fore the importance of a strong corporate image and reputation to both individuals and organisations.

2.3.1.1 The Importance of Corporate Image from the Organisational Perspective

In a general sense, and with regard to image and the instantaneous nature of it, corporate image is important because it is not only something conveyed by a firm, but it is also how a stakeholder perceives a firm at any given point in time. These perceptions build up to a composite that forms the reputation of an organisation. Should stakeholders experience repeated negative image formations, the overall reputation of the organisation will suffer. The literature echoes this assertion and highlights several reasons why firms need to be concerned with their image and reputations.

From the organisational perspective, corporate images are important because firms spend a tremendous amount of time and resources building images and have been highlighted in the literature as assets of the firm (Kennedy, 1977, Smith, 2010). For example, K.T. Smith et al. (2010) note that a positive image is associated with a 'significant market-value premium' for organisations. When comparing firms with a positive image to a sample of control firms matched by size and industry, they found that positive image firms benefit from an average market-value premium of $1.3 billion. They also found that these firms have superior financial performance and a lower cost of capital or risk. They further note that "firms with a positive brand image are more profitable on several dimensions such as industry-adjusted return on sales and return on assets, have lower risk, as they experience less volatility in sales and net income, have less likelihood of bankruptcy and have lower stock price volatility" (p. 202). Although examples such as these are prevalent throughout the literature, there is a continued dearth of acknowledgement of the importance of maintaining and preserving a positive image within today's digital landscape. As with most everything, there are however exceptions and while reviewing the literature, one example stands out. In their paper, 'Image is Everything', Gioia et al. (2014) do at least acknowledge the current environment in which images are modified where they contend 'in the contemporary media era, in *which the social and especially the virtual environment* has become inundated with a swarm of images, the multitude of varying images makes interpretive coherence a difficult challenge for image generators, disseminators and consumers. Organisational images are perhaps most insightfully seen as virtual "commodities" that are usually altered and exchanged in the media and social milieu rather than as some definitive attributes possessed by a given organisation" (p. 6). This is indeed a welcome acknowledgement within the literature and more empirical studies in this domain would be useful.

2.3.1.2 The Importance of Corporate Reputation from the Organisational Perspective

Maintaining a positive reputation is also of paramount importance to firms. From marketing a service (Lewis and Booms, 1983, Balmer, 1998, Yoon et al., 1993), to providing an optimal marketplace position (Raj, 1985; Balmer, 1998; Greyser; 1998, Roper & Davies, 2007, Ali et al., 2015), maintaining a positive reputation creates a frame of reference for an organisation's stakeholders (De Chernatony, 1999). They also enable organisations to mitigate threats, exploit opportunities (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004) and can be called upon as a "strategic resource" to create competitive advantage (Walker, 2010, Abratt and Kleyn, 2012, Ali et al., 2015). A sturdy reputation has also been linked to sound financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Ali et al., 2015) higher customer loyalty (Bartikowski et al., 2011; Ali et al., 2015), and customer commitment and trust (Ali et al., 2015). Importantly, a strong reputation has also been linked to greater satisfaction of key stakeholders such as investors (Helm, 2007), employees (Chun & Davies, 2010) and customers (Walsh & Beatty, 2007).

A crucial point made within the literature is that a strong positive reputation can help firms in times of crisis – that "corporate favourability" prior to a crisis ensures that organisations have a "reputation reservoir" from which to draw upon (Greyser, 2009).

2.3.1.3 The Importance of Corporate Image and Reputation from the Consumer's Perspective

From the consumer's perspective, the image they perceive of the firm and their assessment of its reputation over a period of time can help them to make decisions about firms' products and services by reducing the complexity of information processing and providing the ability to apply heuristics in low-involvement decision making (Poiesz, 1998; Askegaard, 2001). This is especially the case when confronted with a range of products and services that are similar in quality and price (Balmer, 1998; Greyser, 1998).

Today's digital environment provides a wealth of opportunities for consumers to use ratings sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp to utilise the online reviews and ratings provided by consumers to quickly evaluate the performance of a firm and to determine whether to patronise it (Sparks et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2015; Ganzaroli et al., 2017). One practitioner survey found that 60% of consumers said that star ratings are one of the most important factors in making a purchase decision and 87% of consumers will not consider a purchase with a low number of reviews (Buss, 2017). Another study determined that each ratings star added on a Yelp review of restaurants was equivalent to anywhere from 5 percent to 9 percent effect on revenues. The researcher noted that "Yelp is somewhat of a substitute for traditional forms of reputation" (Blanding, 2011, p.38).

2.3.2 Importance of eWOM from an Organisational Perspective

From an organisational or company view, eWOM is important because it has been recognised as an important marketing tool and an imperative component in brand communications (De Maeyer, 2012; Hennig-Thurau, 2015). The use of viral and buzz marketing to propagate or enhance eWOM (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004, Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015) has also been called out within the literature as important to organisations in the marketing landscape in which eWOM takes place. In terms of usefulness to organisations, other important aspects of eWOM include the ability to acquire new customers, increase sales (Riu et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2017), its influence on product use decisions (Hennig-Thurau, 2015) and customer relationship management (Gensler et al., 2013; Malthouse et al., 2013). eWOM has also been shown to garner interest in products before they are released such as movies and to impact sales (Riu et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015). Additionally, online consumer reviews have specifically been called out as useful to firms as they can reduce price sensitivity and increase post-purchase satisfaction by educating consumers about important product attributes whilst reducing uncertainty about performance in relation to product attributes (De Maeyer, 2012). Importantly, it has also been noted within the literature that consumers who make an informed decision through the use of online consumer reviews are more willing to pay a price premium, be satisfied and ultimately become promoters of the brand (De Maeyer, 2012).

2.3.2.1.1 Ability to Impact Image and Reputation

eWOM is also important to organisations due to the potential impact that eWOM can have on their image and reputation (Jansen et al., 2009; Berthon et al., 2012; Trainor, 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2017). In the past, organisations could take time to formulate and distribute information to protect the reputation that they wanted to be in place for their *intended* stakeholders. Today, with the advantages provided to consumers by microblogs such as Twitter, positive and negative information about organisations can be shared instantaneously – and globally. Berthon et al. (2012) give a good example of this when they reference the leak of methyl icosyanate gas at the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India in 1984. They contend that although the tragedy was unfortunate, it did not have any adverse effect on Union Carbide's brands internationally. They detail how, at that time, communication took place between the international media and the public affairs department of Union Carbide and that other stakeholders such as the general public in India, the US or other countries had little opportunity to engage in the conversation and that the issue remained 'local' (Berthon et al, p.266). Contrast this with one United Airlines customer, Dave Carroll, who created the 'United Breaks Guitars' video, who caused the company's shareholders to lose $180 million when the general media picked up on Dave's experience (Berthon et al, 2012). Another example is provided by Gioia et al. (2014) of the damage done to Mitt Romney's campaign for President in 2012 when the video "47%-of-the-people-are takers" speech was released. Within 24 hours of being released, the video received over 2.4 million views (Visible Measures, 2012). Examples such as these are referenced throughout the literature and drive home the point that a loss of control of the reputation of organisations and/or individual brands has occurred through the sharing and proliferation of eWOM by individuals. It has been highlighted within the literature that prior to the rise of social media, customers failed to complain after a bad experience due to the perceived costs of complaining exceeding any benefits. Now, online platforms make complaining much easier for consumers, with 85% of consumers saying they will retaliate if their needs are not met (Grant, 2013; Gregoire, 2015).

As discussed previously in this thesis, the plight of Dr. David Dao, the United Airlines customer who was dragged off a flight for refusing to give up his booked and paid for seat, was filmed and went viral on Twitter. Since this memorable moment, the news media has reported that YouGov BrandIndex started closely tracking customers' perceptions of United Airlines. According to the news article, one month after the incident, only 22 percent of United's customers polled by BrandIndex said they would consider booking the airline for their next flight (Lazare, 2017). YouGov BrandIndex also reported that the perception of United Airlines was at its lowest in 10 years after the fiasco of Dr. Dao being dragged off of the plane (Marzilli, 2017). Although this assertion is very intriguing in light of this thesis, their assertion that perception of the airline has dropped is an interesting one when one looks at the measurement utilised to make this assertion. The data they captured about United in the weeks following the incident involved measuring consumer perception through the use of their Buzz score and asks respondents "if you've heard anything about the brand in the last two weeks through advertising, news or word of mouth, was it positive or negative" and then making comparisons before the incident and after (Marzilli, 2017). Although the question is interesting, the question is fundamentally flawed. For example, a funny advertising campaign could generate a lot of positive WOM, chatter or buzz – yet might not truly capture whether an individual's perception of the firm has actually changed.

2.3.2.1.2 Ability to Impact Image & Reputation through Microblogs

A fast-moving microblog such as Twitter poses unique challenges for brands that attempt to manage their image and reputations in this landscape. Microblogs such as Twitter have been identified as a unique environment where information is pushed to consumers - rather than other forms of eWOM where it is pulled such as review sites (Marchand et al., 2016). It is inherently different and unique due to the limitation on the amount of information one can share (e.g. 140 characters in Twitter) and the potential to spread information like wildfire. The power of microblogging to rapidly spread information has been linked to events such as the Arab Spring and the 2012 U.S. Presidential election (Hennig-Thurau, 2015). Powerfully, it has been highlighted within the literature that microblogs such as Twitter represent “an honest and at times brutal feedback system, with offline word of mouth becoming online word of mouse, where brands engage with consumers and actively question, challenge and promote brands” (Rutter et al., 2016, p. 3097). A real life case of this assertion by Rutter et al., 2016 can be seen in Figure 2.4 shared earlier in this chapter.

A recent report within the practitioner domain highlights a change in sentiment of brand mentions towards corporate Twitter accounts after being mentioned negatively by President Trump. Brandwatch, a social intelligence firm, analysed sentiment towards these firms before and after President Trump Tweeted about them. For example, a day before Boeing was mentioned by President Trump, Brandwatch analysis indicated that 73 percent of mentions were positive about the firm. The following Tweet was posted by Trump:

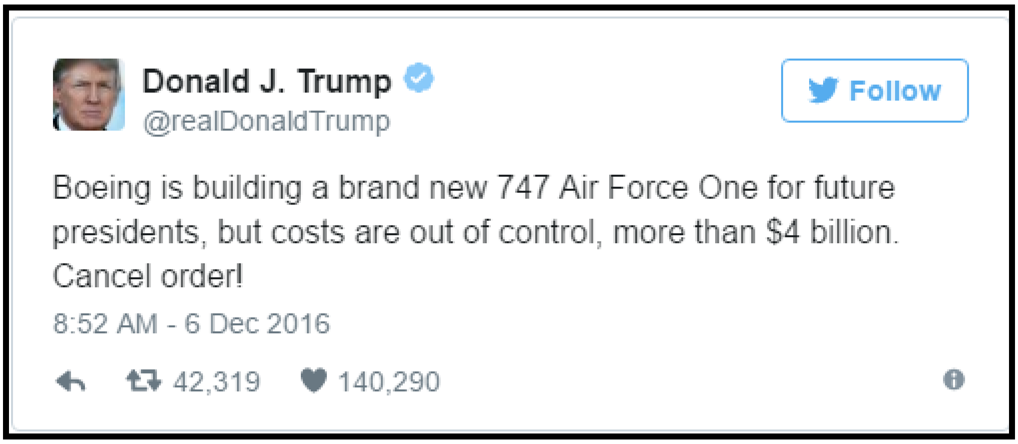

Figure 2.5 – Tweet by President Trump about Boeing

Analysis by BrandWatch one day after the Tweet demonstrated that 63% of mentions about Boeing were negative (Chemi & Fahey, 2017). The report however associates these negative mentions with a negative reputation of the brands mentioned within analysis, which could be an incorrect assumption. It essentially equates a change in volume of negative Tweets about a brand with a negative reputation, which is a flawed assumption as there is no data on the receiver of these Tweets.

Although there are several examples in the academic and practitioner literature of the loss of control of a corporate reputation, there is a dearth of empirical evidence of the extent that various brand image disruptions within microblogs such as Twitter have on organisations' reputations or what organisations are doing to manage their reputations in the microblogging landscape. Although it is promising the literature is starting to acknowledge the different social media platforms available and the impact that eWOM can have within these platforms (see Marchand et al., 2016), more data is needed in order to understand the implications for the management of reputations within social media, and secondly the management of them through the different platforms such as Twitter.

2.3.3 Importance of eWOM from an Individual's Perspective

eWOM provides three key advantages for individuals – the ability of consumers to share their experiences of firms online, the ability to engage with firms online and the ability to review experiences of others in order to evaluate a firm for future purchase in the consumer decision making process. These are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.3.1 Sharing Experiences

As noted previously in this section, consumers share their brand experiences on microblogs such as Twitter and ratings sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp. Compared to traditional word-of-mouth where a consumer may have told their neighbour of their experience of a service provider in the past, eWOM enables consumers to have tremendous reach by proliferating their experiences on blogs, microblogs, forums, ratings sites and communities (Berthon et al., 2012; Mauri and Minazzi; 2013; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). Users share eWOM with any number of stakeholders and it enables "open source branding by empowering consumers to create their own personalized experiences and by providing venues via which they can easily share content with like-minded friends" (Fournier & Avery, 2011, p. 194).

Microblogs, such as Twitter, have been called out specifically as important to consumers within the literature. Twitter enables to consumers to share what has been termed as 'brand-affecting thoughts' (Jansen et al., 2009), or sentiment, almost anywhere –while driving, getting coffee or siting at their computer to almost anyone connected (Jansen et al., 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015).

2.3.3.2 Engagement with Firms

Microblogs such as Twitter enable consumers to expediently engage with firms in order to seek retribution after a terrible experience (Gregoire et al., 2014), or to give a virtual pat of the back for a job well done. They can engage with brands by using likes, sharing posts and making comments or they can disengage by posting negative comments (Kumar et al., 2017).

Customers use social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram not only to vent frustrations, but also to get results from firms. Shockingly however, one study found that compared to 89 percent of customers expecting a response from the telephone or email, only 42 percent expected a response when their complaint was sent via social media, highlighting the transitional state firms are in with this form of engagement with customers. As a result, retail, hospitality, restaurants, financial services and healthcare are among the industries adding social media teams and/or shifting workers away from traditional customer service call center roles (Gillies, 2016).

Powerfully, individuals can also use eWOM to engage with firms when they are unhappy about their actions around current events. For example, after President Donald Trump released his first executive order on immigration, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a majority immigrant and heavily Muslim union, stopped service to and from JFK airport to demonstrate solidarity with protestors and people affected by Trump's ban. Uber subsequently switched off their surge pricing capability around the airport, which gave an indication of business as usual to protestors. A backlash ensued with the hashtag campaign #deleteUber being proliferated and ultimately 200,000 accounts being deleted (Isaac, 2017).

2.3.3.3 Consumer Decision Making

eWOM helps consumers in their decision making (Wang et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau,2015). For example, ratings sites such as TripAdvisor can help consumers decide where to go on holiday, attractions to visit, accommodations to book and where to dine (Sparks et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2015; Ganzaroli et al., 2017). Prominent academics have highlighted the importance of social media and eWOM in the consumer decision making process. For example, Kumar et al. (2017) state "media fragmentation has made customers less prone to making decisions based on classic purchase funnel, but they are more likely to make purchase decisions based on their own opinions, motivated by information from social media rather than from firm initiated marketing" (p. 268). It has also been highlighted that reviews provided by consumers are more relevant than firm provided information as they provide the user perspective (De Maeyer, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012, Reichelt et al., 2014; Ladhari & Michaud, 2015).

Recognising the importance of reviews to consumers, some retailers have developed their websites to include the provision of online reviews to a select group of members. A good example is the Amazon Vine program. According to Amazon (2014), "Amazon Vine invites the most trusted reviewers on Amazon to post opinions about new and pre-release items to help their fellow customers make informed purchase decisions. Amazon invites customers to become Vine Voices based on their reviewer rank, which is a reflection of the quality and helpfulness of their reviews as judged by other Amazon customers. Amazon provides Vine members with free products that have been submitted to the programme by participating vendors. Vine reviews are the independent opinions of the Vine Voices. The vendor cannot influence, modify or edit the reviews." This is a very interesting concept and clearly shows an acknowledged power of reviews in helping consumers evaluate future purchases.

Exposure to brand experiences in Twitter can also help consumers. Twitter has been highlighted as an application that can provide consumers with information at an unprecedented speed - which ultimately can influence their early adoption of new products at a point in time when no other post-purchase WOM information is widely available (Henig-Thurau et al., 2015).

2.3.4 The Importance of eWOM in the Positive and Negative Context

At this stage in the literature review, it is worth noting the impacts that positive and negative eWOM can have on an organisation. As would be expected, due the timing and reach capabilities enhanced by the setting in which eWOM takes place, it is of interest for researchers to study these aspects of eWOM. As the field of eWOM is relatively new in comparison to traditional WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015), this area of research is not extensive, with recent calls in the literature for more research in this area (Marchand et al., 2016). Results have been mixed with regard to the impact of valence of eWOM (Marchand et al., 2016), with a number of authors highlighting that negative information is more attention grabbing in general (Jansen et al., 2009a; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Although studies around eWOM valence have been published since around 2006, more recent studies are referenced in this section.

Ho-Dac et al. (2012) found that online customer reviews of Blu-ray and DVD players affected sales. Positive and negative online reviews increased or decreased sales of weak brands (brands that did not have strong brand equity) respectively, but had no impact on strong brands.

Daugherty and Hoffman (2013) conducted research to determine the impact that negative eWOM and positive eWOM have on attention in the setting of a social networking site. Their data capture consisted of 7 males and 21 females viewing four brands (two automobile brands and two restaurants) on Pinterest and the use of an eye-tracking tool to measure attention. They found that consumers paid more attention to negative eWOM content and spent the most time attending to negative eWOM stimuli. They also found that when analysed through the lens of luxury versus non-luxury brand types, consumers paid more attention to positive, negative and neutral WOM stimuli for non-luxury brands. They found that the level of perceived luxury influences the length of time that consumers spend evaluating consumer-generated eWOM. These are indeed interesting findings by Daugherty and Hoffman and are consistent with opinions from Jansen et al. (2009a) in that negative WOM garners more attention than positive WOM in the electronic context. In terms of the various social network sites available to propagate positive eWOM or negative eWOM, it is not clear within the literature whether consumers use different platforms to do so – or indeed the use of their various profiles created across the social media landscape.

A few recent and noteworthy studies have researched Twitter specifically with regard to valence – namely Riu et al., 2013, Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015 and Marchand et al., 2016. Riu et al. (2013), through their analysis of movie Tweets using algorithms, found that positive Tweets about movies are associated with higher movie sales and negative Tweets are associated with lower movie sales. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2015) collected the positive and negative eWOM in Twitter about all movies that were widely released in North America in the first 24 hours after each movie's release. They examined whether these reviews influenced the share of opening weekend revenues generated by the movie. They collected over 4 million Tweets during the study (October 2009 – October 2010), with 829,576 being classified as eWOM reviews. They found that negative eWOM sent via Twitter about a movie affects its early adoption, yet did not find the same effect with positive Tweets. Following up their study with another study on moviegoers and Twitter users specifically, they found that the higher diagnosticity of negative information (i.e. "because negative Tweets stand out from all the positive marketing information about a movie) was a reason for stronger influence. Interestingly, Marchand et al. (2016) conducted research on Twitter collecting over 13 million Tweets and 17,000 consumer reviews from Amazon on video games. The first to run a study comparing two different types of social media platforms and eWOM shared in those platforms (Amazon reviews and microblog posts on Twitter), their research is groundbreaking. With regard to valence, they found that the valence of reviews on Amazon only mattered toward the end of the observation period in influencing consumers, with the valence of microblogging not being influential at any point. They explain the findings by noting that "microblogs are better suited to transmit social information, whereas consumer reviews can provide functional information, and there is limited overlap between the two types once a product has been released and its quality can be assessed by consumers" (p. 16).

It is indeed encouraging to see studies such as the one by Marchand et al. (2016) which call out a dearth of research on eWOM and differences among platforms. They note that previous research on eWOM "mostly treats the different types as one and the same, rarely addressing differences across digital WOM types" (p. 16). Their research however is concerned with new product launches, namely video games. It would thus be of interest to understand the influence that microblog eWOM about existing brands has on consumers.

Presented with the challenges posed by microblogging applications such as Twitter, and specifically the impact that eWOM shared in microblogs can have on firms' reputations, it is important to explore the factors that make eWOM effective next.

2.4 What Makes eWOM Effective?

Having explored key concepts such as image, reputation, microblogs and eWOM, the literature has highlighted that the very nature of the electronic environment in which eWOM is proliferated via social media platforms such as Twitter provides the capability for corporate images to be modified in an ever-changing environment. It is therefore of importance to review the literature to understand what makes eWOM effective from a receiver's perspective. Most of the literature on the effectiveness of eWOM has been focused on outcomes of eWOM rather than the specifics of what makes eWOM effective from a receiver's perspective (Cheung et al., 2009; King et al., 2014). In addition, unlike the noteworthy work undertaken by researchers in the traditional WOM domain on what makes WOM effective (Mazzarol et al., 2007; Sweeney et al., 2008; Sweeney et al., 2012; Sweeney et al., 2014), there has not been a specific focus within the eWOM literature in this regard - although components of it have been explored and they are detailed in this section.

Table 2.2 highlights some of the key themes found within a review of the literature on what makes eWOM effective from a receiver's perspective, and is followed by a more detailed explanation.

Table 2.2 - eWOM Effectiveness Drivers

Theme	Explanation	Reference
Source Characteristics	Various ‘source characteristics’, or the expertise, credibility, objectivity and reliability of the source of information has an impact on eWOM effectiveness.	Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Luo and Zhong, 2015; Reichelt et al. 2014; Wang et al., 2015
Source Style	Source style such as the visual information through photos shared in social media has been purported to influence eWOM outcomes.	Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al. 2015
Information Usefulness/Involvement	The degree of involvement, or how useful the information is to the receiver of eWOM, impacts eWOM effectiveness.	Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. al, 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014
eWOM Credibility	This is concerned with the credibility of the eWOM, or the extent to which the receiver finds the eWOM to be believable, true or factual. eWOM credibility has been found to impact eWOM effectiveness.	Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2015

Valence	This concerns whether the eWOM is positive, negative, or neutral. The valence of the eWOM has been found to impact eWOM effectiveness.	Fu and Chen, 2012; Wong et al., 2012; Riu et al., 2013; Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Marchand et al., 2016
Emotions	Research has demonstrated that emotions of the sender and receiver of eWOM can influence eWOM outcomes.	Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016
Prior knowledge about the product or service	Prior knowledge, or involvement with the product or service, influences the impact eWOM has.	Luo and Zhong, 2015
Volume of eWOM	The amount of eWOM, whether positive or negative, creates an awareness effect and has an impact on effectiveness.	Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Riu et al., 2013; Stuart et al., 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015
Cognitive Information Processing	The way in which eWOM receivers process information has been called out within the literature as an enabler of effective eWOM through attitude change.	Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Teng et al., 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014

2.4.1 Source Characteristics

The information source, or the giver of eWOM, and their characteristics are a determinant of eWOM effectiveness. This includes whether they are perceived to be an expert, or to have a degree of expertise on a topic, whether they are viewed as credible and trustworthy and their degree of objectivity as perceived by the receiver of eWOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Luo and Zhong, 2015; Reichelt et al. 2014, 2014; Wang et al., 2015). It has been noted within the literature however that the online environment is a unique one where the source is not always known, and thus the characteristics may not be as impactful as receivers of messages may rely on alternative cues (Lin et al., 2012).

2.4.2 Source Style

Source style is a relatively new feature of eWOM that has been highlighted as affecting eWOM effectiveness that has very little research to date (Lin et al., 2012). It has been noted that online reviews within social media can be the combination of text and visual cues and that visual information exerts a significant impact on users' online information acceptance (Stuart et al., 2014).

Lin et al. (2012) conducted an online experiment where they created a mock online blog. The blog included set of product reviews with and without photographs. Their study tested the impact of the reviews without photographs and with photographs on four dependent variables – message quality, credibility, interest in and purchase intention of the products. Their results demonstrated that subjects rated the blog articles with pictures significantly higher in message quality and credibility than the same articles without pictures. They also found the same results with product interest and purchase intention – the blog reviews with photographs were more impactful than those without.

Another study by Wang et al. (2015) examined the role of message content characteristics and valence of online consumer reviews in order to further understand consumer attitudes towards the review and product, perceived credibility of the reviewer and purchase intention. Based on real product reviews of a 13.3-inch MacBook Air, six reviews were developed and included in a mock Amazon.com site to provide a realistic feeling for participants. To test message content characteristics, the reviews were categorised as being attribute centric (focusing on technical attributes of products such as description or numbers supported by technical data) and benefit centric (subjective evaluations and interpretations based on personal feelings and perceptions towards the computer). They found that message valence had a significant effect on consumers' attitude toward the review and product, perceived source credibility and purchase intention, with positive reviews having the greatest impact. In terms of message content, they found that benefit centric reviews had the greatest effect on consumers' product attitudes and purchase intentions.

Studies such as the one conducted by Lin et al., (2012) and Wang et al. (2015) are very interesting. As noted however, this is a relatively new research area in the eWOM domain and more empirical research would be welcome. In the microblog Twitter for example, one has the option to share a Tweet with text only, a Tweet with a photo and a Tweet with a video. To date, however, there is no known research to compare and contrast source styles on the factors that influence a change in corporate reputation.

2.4.3 Information Usefulness/Involvement

The degree of involvement, or how useful and relevant the information is, to the receiver of eWOM will have an impact on eWOM effectiveness (Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. Al, 2014). Cheung et al. (2012), in their extensive review of the impact of eWOM, state that "information usefulness, eWOM credibility, and eWOM adoption are theoretically related and explained by the information adoption model. The information adoption model is widely used to explain how people are influenced to adopt the information posted in computer-mediated communication (CMC) contexts. This model was adapted from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)" (p. 463). They further note that the impacts of the quality of information and source credibility on eWOM adoption are mediated by information usefulness.

2.4.4 eWOM Credibility

eWOM credibility (Cheung et al., 2009), also referred to as message credibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and argument quality (Teng et al., 2014), has been found to play an important role in eWOM effectiveness. Cheung et al. (2009) define eWOM credibility as "the extent to which one perceives a recommendation/review as believable, true or factual" (p. 12). Teng et al. (2014) call upon research by Cheung et al. (2009) and note "if online reviews are perceived as valid, the message receivers will develop a positive attitude towards the products/services related to these reviews. Hence, the argument is perceived as credible information. Conversely, if these reviews are perceived as invalid, message receivers will develop a negative attitude towards the products/services. The argument related to the reviewed products/services is perceived as not credible" (p. 748).

Cheung and Thadani (2012) call out the dearth of research on message credibility with the main focus so far being on source credibility within the eWOM literature, which is surprising due to the sometimes anonymous nature of the online environment. Teng et al. (2014) provide useful context where they state "one detractor of eWOM credibility arises as the majority of eWOM supporting websites permit the identity of the sender to be concealed. While sender motivations are generally believed altruistic rather than aimed manipulating fellow consumers, in order to judge the credibility of the myriad of information available, the onus is placed on consumers themselves to assess the nature of both the message and its sender" (p. 150). This is a salient point as noted previously in this chapter – true identities of those who are followed on Twitter may not be known. Additionally, a Tweet that appears in a feed may come from a source not known or recognised by a Twitter user. Interestingly, research has shown that online reviews by unknown consumers are trusted more than traditional media (Cheung et al., 2012). For example, 91% of respondents in one survey indicated that the respondents consulted online reviews, blogs, and other forms of user-generated content before purchasing a new product or service, indicating a level of trust and reliance in these forms of eWOM. This highlights the importance of further research on impact that eWOM credibility has on receivers.

2.4.5 Valence

The valence of eWOM has also been found to have an impact on eWOM effectiveness. As noted previously in this chapter, some studies have demonstrated that negative valence eWOM can have a stronger impact on eWOM outcomes than positive eWOM (Stuart et al. 2014, Hennig-Thurau, 2015), whilst others have demonstrated positive valence eWOM to be more effective (Wang et al., 2015). In addition, research has shown that consumers pay more attention to negative eWOM content and negative eWOM stimuli (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013). Finally, research has also demonstrated that negative online reviews stimulate more careful consideration and thus elaboration of information (De Maeyer, 2012).

2.4.6 Emotions

The emotional aspect of eWOM is an area that has very little empirically from researchers, yet has been acknowledged to require further exploration (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016). It is thus a burgeoning area of research with a few notable studies.

Kim and Gupta (2012) conducted research to understand how emotions expressed by givers of eWOM influence product evaluations. They made a strong case for exploring this aspect of eWOM where they state "emotions in eWOM typically lack necessary elements such as nonverbal cues like facial expressions, tone of voice, physical proximity, personal ties between senders and receivers to elicit reciprocal affective responses" (p. 985). Their results demonstrated that negative emotions in a negative review lowered perceived reviewer rationality, which reduced the review's informative value and therefore led to less negative product evaluations. There was no significant difference in product evaluation with or without emotions in the positive conditions.

Emotions have also been studied with regard to emotional content in reviews and its relationship to review helpfulness. Ullah et al. (2016) found that reviews about movies that included emotional content were deemed more helpful. They examined reviews they retrieved from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) using a customized software tool and included 16,821 reviews in the analysis. They found that reviews with emotional content had a higher star rating of helpfulness than those that did not.

2.4.6.1 Emotions and their Effect on Message Virality

A few studies in the eWOM domain focus on the viral nature of internet and the role emotions play in helping messages to go viral. Berger & Milkman (2012) for example analysed 7,000 New York Times articles published over a three-month period and examined how emotions affected whether the article would make the most emailed list. They based their hypotheses on research on emotions (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Barrett & Russell, 1998) and the premise that emotions generate various levels of psychological arousal or activation. For example, anger, anxiety and sadness are negative emotions. Anger and anxiety are associated with states of heightened arousal or activation whilst sadness is associated with low arousal or deactivation. They further note that low arousal is characterized by relaxation and high arousal with activity. Their findings indicate that more awe (a positive emotion) inspiring content is more viral whilst sadness inducing content was less viral. They also found that content that evokes high-arousal emotions such as awe, anger and anxiety are more viral. Interestingly, research outside of the eWOM domain has also demonstrated that emotions play a key role in stimulating attention to written forms of communication (Kissler et al., 2007) with emotionally charged words eliciting more arousal than neutral ones.

Focusing on Twitter specifically, Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan (2013) analysed political data comprised of 165,000 Tweets they gathered on Twitter. They found that emotionally charged Twitter messages were retweeted more often and more quickly compared to neutral ones.

Standing et al., (2016) undertook an impressive case study of a Swedish firm and its communications campaigns for a two-year period. The researchers monitored comments after three campaigns on Kickstarter, Twitter and Facebook accounts in relation to three campaigns. Their findings suggest that users expressing emotion were faster at spreading eWOM to their community.

These findings in relation to the virality of eWOM and emotions is indeed of interest. An understanding of the role emotions play in relation to any change in perception of a corporate reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption would be of interest.

2.4.6.2 Other Relevant Research on Emotions

As noted previously, emotions and their role in eWOM is a burgeoning area of research. As such, there is a dearth of research into this area. Although this is the case, there has been some research in relation to emotions that is of interest to this thesis – specifically the evocation of emotions within advertising appeals. Research on emotions within advertising has demonstrated that emotional appeals and customers' reactions to advertisements have a direct relationship to attitude towards the brand (Lwin & Phau, 2013). As such, it is worth mentioning some of the more relevant research in this domain as the impact to the perception of a corporate reputation and emotions evoked by exposure to microblog eWOM is unknown.

2.4.6.2.1 Fear

Advertisers have utilised the emotion fear to stimulate interest in products and services in advertising campaigns for life insurance, political parties and public service announcements for serious causes such as drug abuse and alcoholism (La Tour & Zahra, 1988; Ti et al., 2017). Fear has been acknowledged as a primitive instinct that has the ability to guide and activate human behaviour and an emotion that marketers use to seize attention and persuade consumers (La Tour & Zahra, 1988). Fear appeals have been described as persuasive messages designed to frighten people into doing what the message recommends by depicting the unwanted consequences of non-compliance (Wright, 1992). Recent examples of advertising campaigns using fear inducing tactics such as Nationwide's 2015 Super Bowl advertisement which depicted a young boy that turned out to be dead, can cause backlash and bring questions about the use of this emotion in appeals however (Alter, 2015).

As the emotion fear has been acknowledged within the advertising literature as an emotion that can compel consumers to take action and persuade them, it would be of interest to understand whether fear plays any role in a change in perception of reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

2.4.6.2.2 Disgust

The evocation of disgust in relation to advertising appeals has also been researched within the advertising domain, although relatively more recent than other streams. Disgust has been defined as "a feeling of visceral repulsion to an offensive object" (Shimp & Stuart, 2004, p. 44). Shimp and Stuart (2004) conducted research to determine whether disgust mediated the effect of advertising content on purchase intentions. The design of their study included exposing participants to advertisements about a fast food restaurant with versions including images of raw meat in sandwich advertisements and versions without. Using OLS regression analysis, their research demonstrated that feelings of disgust related to the raw meat versions of advertisements lessened intentions to eat at the fast food restaurant and thus had an impact on purchase intention.

Since the study by Shimp & Stuart (2004), there have been a few studies in relation to disgust in advertising, with one of the more recent studies researching the enhancement effect that disgust has on fear appeals. Morales et al. (2012) found that adding disgust to a fear appeal enhances message persuasion. They note that it does so due to the characteristics of avoidance reaction. Both fear and disgust elicit avoidance reactions – but disgust elicits an immediate impulse to distance oneself versus fear that is a multi-step process of distancing. They attribute this immediate impulse reaction related to disgust as a component that makes fear appeals with disgust more effective.

The studies above on the emotional reaction to disgust are indeed interesting. It would be of interest to understand whether the emotion disgust has any impact on a change in perception of a reputation upon exposure to negative brand experiences shared via eWOM in microblogs such as Twitter.

2.4.6.2.3 Surprise

The emotion surprise has been explained as being evoked as result of divergence of perceptions and expectations. Based on previous experiences, it is said that individuals develop schemas and expectancies about certain events. If expectancies are disconfirmed, then the emotion surprise is evoked (Hutter & Hoffman, 2011). A review of the marketing literature on the specific emotion surprise shows that research has mainly been focused on the positive aspects of surprising consumers or its use in attracting them (e.g. Vanhamme et al., 1999; Vanhamme, 2000; Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2003; Hutter & Hoffmann, 2014). The evocation of surprise has been utilised within advertisements through the use of various methods such as humour, absurdity, shocking messages and through the use of atypical locations and atypical media as utilised in guerrilla marketing tactics (Hutter & Hoffman, 2011).

As the evocation of the emotion surprise has been demonstrated to be effective in advertising, it would be of interest to understand what role it may play upon exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions and any change in perception of reputation.

2.4.6.2.4 Emotional Contagion and Joy

A relatively new stream of research in the advertising domain concerns emotional contagion and the emotion joy. A contagion effect is said to occur when emotion-evoking stimuli are utilised in advertising as the properties and valence of the source of emotion transfer to the targeted object. Upon exposure to advertisements with emotion-evoking stimuli, consumers are said to form attitudes that are aligned with the nature of emotion linked to the brand in the advertisement (Hasford et al., 2015). Emotional contagion has been defined as “the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person’s and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield et al., 1993). Researching the effects of emotional contagion, Berg et al., (2015) studied what they termed the ‘smile appeal’ in advertising. Specifically they researched the extent to which advertisements and packaging that include a smiling model produces different consumer responses. They based their hypotheses on emotional contagion and found that the emotion joy was higher after respondents were exposed to an advertisement with a smiling model versus a non-smiling model. Attitude towards the ad produced the same results – the attitude towards the ad was more positive for the ad with the smiling model. Finally, they found that the model’s facial expression on the attitude toward the ad was mediated by participant’s own joy – an indication that emotional contagion had taken place. As emotions and any impact they have on the evaluation of a corporate reputation are of interest to this thesis, it would be interesting to understand if the emotion joy has a role to play upon exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions and any change in perception of a corporate reputation.

2.4.1 Prior knowledge about the product or service

Prior knowledge about the product or service has an impact on eWOM from the receiver’s perspective. Doh and Hwang (2009) conducted quantitative research to explore the impact of prior knowledge and involvement on the effect of eWOM. They administered two questionnaires employing two product categories – movies and digital cameras. Participants were exposed to experimental websites containing different types of eWOM messages. They collected the messages from actual websites and modified them to make them appropriate for the study. They included positive and negative valence messages in their study, and varied the ratio of positive to negative messages with each set (comprised of 10 messages) they exposed participants to. They had some interesting findings, including that a balanced mixture of positive and negative valence eWOM messages led to more significant results in terms of attitude towards the product, attitude towards the website and purchase intention than a more unbalanced set of eWOM messages. They also found that with regard to attitude toward the product, there were significant interaction effects with higher involved subjects and there were partial significant interaction effects with the level of prior knowledge and purchase intention.

2.4.2 Volume of eWOM

The amount, or volume of eWOM, can have an impact on its effectiveness through what has been termed an 'awareness effect' (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) or Twitter effect with regard to microblogs (Hennig-Thurau, 2015). Although not researched in the receiver context specifically, researchers have demonstrated a link between the volume of eWOM and sales (Duan et al., 2009) and early adoption . Duan et al., (2009) collected data from three sources: Yahoo! Movies, Variety.com and BoxOfficeMojo.com and found that the number of user posts had a high correlation with US gross revenues of the movies they tracked in conjunction with their online reviews. They however did not find that the actual reviews had a significant relationship with box office revenues. Explaining their results, they posited "movies box office sales are not influenced by time-series variation in user ratings, which suggests that consumers do not blindly follow the ratings posted by other users. Instead, they are more likely to read the review and make an independent judgement about the true quality of the movie. However, we find that the number of reviews plays an important role in influencing sales." They go on to posit that “posting reviews online ultimately reflects a user’s incentive to discuss the movie with other users. As such, the number of online reviews reflects the awareness effect of underlying word-of-mouth interests. The online user reviews collected in our data represent a snapshot of the overall word-of-mouth spread around” (p. 1014).

2.4.3 Cognitive Information Processing

The way in which eWOM receivers process information has been called out within the literature as an enabler of effective eWOM through attitude change (Cheung & Thadani; Stuart et al., 2014, Teng et al., 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014). According to an extensive literature review conducted by Cheung & Thadani (2012), a dual process theory of human information processing such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was the most commonly used theoretical foundation in the study of the impact of eWOM communication. The Elaboration Likelihood Model was a model created by Petty and Cacioppo (1980) and posits that the attitude formation process is dependent upon the extent to which message receivers elaborate, or think about, *issue-relevant* arguments within a persuasive communication. When receivers of a persuasive communication possess a relatively high motivation to process information, they employ the central route. The central route requires more elaboration, or thinking and consideration of issue-relevant arguments. As stated by Chu & Kamal (2008), “in this condition, people combine and integrate issue-relevant information into an overall evaluation reaction” (p. 28). This is an interesting statement in the context of the online environment where a range of issue-relevant communication is available about a topic. They add further, “when blog readers are motivated and able to take the central route, their brand attitudes shift as a result of a thoughtful process, in which the blog readers attend carefully to the brand-related information presented on the blogs. Blog readers also engage in effortful cognitive activity when they use their relevant experiences and knowledge to evaluate brand-related information in "systematic" and "mindful" processing. On the contrary, when blog readers' motivation or ability to process brand-related information is low, they rely on simple cues in a persuasion context. For example, the responses of other peer bloggers who view the same message on blogs might serve as a validity cue, such that if many bloggers agree, the information must be true" (p. 28).

Cheng & Loi (2014) tested the central and peripheral routes to persuasion when they exposed respondents in their study to managerial responses to actual negative TripAdvisor reviews about a hotel. They created and tested a model in Smart-PLS that included managerial responses that incorporated peripheral and central cues. Peripheral managerial response cues emphasised credible sources such as star ratings of the hotel. Central managerial response cues included strong arguments to explain the incident described in the negative review. Their results indicated that managerial responses that focused on the quality and strength of arguments (the central route to persuasion) were more effective on intent to purchase. They argued that doing so would increase the trust of prospective customers in their hotel. This is quite an interesting study in the context of this thesis. It would be of interest to understand what impact peripheral and central cues of Tweets would have on a change in perception of a reputation.

The creators of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Petty and Cacioppo (1984) explained that there are some situations when the motivation to process information by receivers of messages is low, moderate, or high. When the motivation to process information is low, receivers of messages tend to rely on simple cues in the persuasion context such as the credibility or the expertise of the sender – using the peripheral route to persuasion. For those who are highly motivated to process message arguments, strong arguments are more effective than weak ones despite the presence of peripheral cues. Petty et al. (1987) detailed that there are several determinants of the central and peripheral routes to persuasion. Personal relevance will affect a person's motivation to process issue-relevant arguments. They state, "when personal relevance is high, people are motivated to scrutinize issue-relevant arguments and attitude change is dependent upon the quality of the arguments in the message." "When personal relevance is low, argument scrutiny is reduced and attitudes may be affected more by variables serving as peripheral cues" (p. 236).

Petty et al. (1987), when defending their model, made it clear that attitude change can occur as a result of processing from argument processing *and* peripheral cues. They further argued "that in some situations (e.g. low personal relevance), peripheral cues will be the primary determinant of attitude change, whereas in other situations (e.g. high personal relevance), argument processing will be the primary determinant of attitude change." "The ELM holds that in some situations, people will be relatively unmotivated or unable to evaluate the true merits of an issue position. In these situations, judgements will be based largely on the presence of simple cues in the situation that allow an evaluation in the absence of argument scrutiny. In other situations, however, people will be highly motivated and able to evaluate the true merits of the issue position." In addition, they stated, "we have argued that when the elaboration likelihood is high, people will process all subjectively relevant information (subject to the limits of their ability, of course) in order to determine the central merits of the advocated position" (p. 238). This is indeed an interesting statement if considered in the context of microblogs as a receiver of MeWOM has a few options to process information about what has been shared in lower and higher information processing contexts. For example, a lower to middle level of elaboration would be required to review comments of others that are easily seen and available in a microblog such as Twitter after someone shares their experience of an organisation. In contrast, a higher level of elaboration would be required to seek more validity cues such as retweeting to share with others who may comment back and continue to validate shared feelings.

With regard to the corporate image literature specifically, Poiesz (1989) noted that “an image may function as a precursor or gatekeeper to more extensive elaboration” and that “an image may serve as a heuristic, a simplifying choice rule, in low involvement decision making.” He further references Petty and Cacioppo’s Elaboration Likelihood Model (1984) and notes, “an image may possibly serve as a persuasion cue if a peripheral route to attitude change is being followed. If the motivation and/or the information processing are low, images might function as persuasion cues to generate a small and temporary attitude change.” “Holistic impressions of a brand or of a corporation may suggest the quality of the message presented, without its arguments being read. From the image, inferences are made as to how the message should be interpreted.” (p. 468). This is indeed an interesting contention in the context of a fast-moving microblog environment and the disrupted images of firms and any “small and temporary attitude” changes that may occur in relation to a corporate reputation.

2.4.3.1 Emotions and the ELM

An interesting, and relevant, contention made within the literature regarding the Elaboration Likelihood Model was made by Morris et al. (2005) in that the emotional aspect of information processing is just as important as the cognitive aspect. They explained this where they stated “the central route emphasises high relevance of the message to the individual. The greater the relevance and the more interest that the individual shows in the subject of the message, usually a product, the higher the chances that they will think or elaborate on the message. Another aspect of the central route is that it deals with the message content — text, words, written material used in the message — as opposed to the peripheral route that deals with the message cues — colour use, people/lifestyle depiction, visuals, etc.” “This thinking seems to eliminate the possibility that emotional processing may be as important in the central route as in the peripheral route” (pg. 81). They further stated, “even as an individual processes a message cognitively, the cognition has an emotional core” (pg. 81). They explained that when the ELM was created, emotions in communication were not clearly understood by social scientists. They asked ‘why does cognitive processing have to be void of emotional influence?’ (pg. 84). “Current research indicates that emotional reactions influence both systematic and heuristic processing. It shows, for example, that positive emotions influence peripheral information processing while negative emotions influence central processing” (p. 84). In the context of positive and negative valence eWOM in a microblog environment, this is indeed interesting as the emotional aspects within this environment have yet to be researched. Morris et al. (2005) further explained that the current research posited that there may in fact be no central and peripheral cues and that the two routes to persuasion “can interact with each other with one route dominating in the face of contradictory information and both routes occurring concurrently when the provided persuasive information does not contradict the attitude structure of an individual” (p. 84). Their study included 254 participants that were split into two groups and labelled ‘cognitive elaborators’ or ‘cognitive misers’ and were formed on the basis of participants’ spontaneous reactions to two car advertisements. If the initial reaction by a respondent was with reference to a product and its features, the respondents were categorised as ‘cognitive elaborators’. They noted that by definition, the ‘cognitive elaborators’ would focus on the information and have minimal emotional involvement whilst the ‘cognitive misers’ would focus on the execution with an absence of any effort to elaborate. Respondents were shown an advertisement for a car and were asked a series of questions after exposure and were coded as ‘cognitive elaborators’ or ‘cognitive misers’. AdSAM, a non-verbal measure that assesses emotional response, was utilised to gauge the emotional reactions of the participants. This data was then used to in an analysis in conjunction with future purchase intention. They had some very interesting results from their research – ‘cognitive elaborators’ had consistently higher scores on emotional reactions than ‘cognitive misers’ did. They in fact, had higher mean scores on all three emotional dimensions tested than the ‘cognitive misers’.

They also found that emotional response and purchase intent are directly related to each other. They concluded from their research that “affect is more than just a peripheral occurrence in the process of persuasion as suggested in the ELM. Indeed, the results contradict the notion that affect is the *product of peripheral cues* in the advertisement execution more than the factual information related to the product” (p. 92). They further note in the discussion that their results provide an insight into the importance of affect and suggest that the ELM model should be modified to include the role of emotions in the *direct route to persuasion* and the relationship of affect to behavioural intent. They also contended that “these hypotheses were based on research that gave evidence regarding the importance of affect, and as a result, it was extrapolated that this concept could not be kept on the periphery of the ELM. The data analysis seems to support this theory by providing significant proof of the existence of emotion in the cognitive sphere. In addition, by linking purchase intent with affect, support is also provided for an attitude change via an affective route that could be at the centre of the ELM” (p. 93).

In the context of this thesis, which seeks to explore a change in reputation in a fast-moving microblog environment, the addition of emotions as a core component of the ELM makes sense. As noted previously, the author of this thesis, along with other researchers, contends that experiences with organisations are shared in an instant within a fast-moving microblog environment and perceptions of organisations can change as a result. It would make sense that that other mechanisms would be employed by receivers, such as emotions, to make an inference in addition to the information contained in the microblog eWOM.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter commenced with a literature review and definitions adopted by this thesis. Defintions of corporate image, reputation, social media, user generated content (UGC), microblogs and eWOM were reviewed as well as the introduction of a new term, the MeWOM brand image disruption.

Next, the chapter employed a framework by Tuten & Solomon (2014) to categorise social media by zones and the microblog Twitter was specifically explored in terms of its attributes and capabilities.

After providing a foundation with a provision of definitions and description of social media by zones, the chapter next focused on the importance of corporate image, reputation and eWOM in the context of organisations and individuals.

Having explored the importance of the phenomena explored in this chapter, the chapter concluded with an examination of the factors that make eWOM effective in order to take the study forward.

The next chapter shares the initial conceptual development for the study.

CHAPTER 3

INITIAL CONCEPTIAL DEVELOPMENT

3.0 Introduction

The review of the literature in the previous chapter included a number of subjects within the marketing discipline as the literature within the corporate image and reputation domains did not have sufficient empirical research to support the objectives of this study. Thus, in addition to literature covering corporate image and reputation, literature covering microblogs and eWOM were also reviewed to provide a robust understanding of the digital environments in which corporate images and reputations exist today. From the review of the literature, it is evident that there are opportunities for this thesis to understand the organisational and individual perspective of MeWOM brand image disruptions and any impact on a corporate reputation. In addition, there is an opportunity to investigate which factors influence a change in reputation from the receiver’s perspective if one does indeed take place.

Chapter 2 provided a review of the factors that influence eWOM effectiveness. Factors such as credibility of the source, relevance of the information, source style, eWOM credibility, how information is processed by receivers of eWOM and a relatively new subject within eWOM, emotions was brought to the fore. A few researchers have conducted promising work on the factors that influence eWOM outcomes (e.g. future purchase, attitude change, early product adoption), but there have not been any studies, to date, that provide data for what causes a change in a corporate reputation after exposure to eWOM within a microblog.

Based on the literature review, this chapter provides hypotheses and a foundation for creating a conceptual framework that outlines the variables that influence a receiver’s perception of a corporate reputation after exposure to eWOM in microblogs. As highlighted within Chapter 2, there has been very little empirically to understand the factors that influence a change to a corporate reputation after exposure to positive and negative eWOM within microblogs, and there is nothing to date in terms of a comprehensive framework on the variables involved.

As noted in Chapter 1, this study contributes to knowledge in three folds. First, although there are several contentions within the literature regarding the power that microblog users have with regard to microblog eWOM and the impact that it can have on a corporate reputation, there is a surprising dearth of empirical data that validates whether this is indeed true – from both the organisational and receiver perspective. Second, if a change to a corporate reputation does occur after receivers are exposed to microblog eWOM, there is a dearth of research within the literature to denote the extent of the change. Finally, as there is no known empirical research published to date on the variables that influence a change in a corporate reputation after exposure to microblog eWOM, this study will examine the factors that have been highlighted in the literature that influence eWOM outcomes to determine if they will predict a change in a corporate reputation within a microblog environment.

In order to structure the research, this chapter outlines the emanating gaps in knowledge that have been highlighted as a result of the literature review on corporate image, reputation, microblogs and eWOM. The chapter will then outline the objectives of the study, the associated hypotheses and the initial conceptual model based on the variables that will be tested.

3.1 Gaps Identified within the Literature

According to Creswell (2013), the literature review "helps to determine whether the topic is worth studying, and it provides insight into ways in which the researcher can limit the scope to a needed area of inquiry" (p. 25). This section highlights the gaps identified as a result of the literature review that will be taken forward for further research in as a part of this thesis.

3.1.1 The Concepts of Corporate Image and Reputation

From the start of this project, the author had an interest in researching corporate images and reputations in today's social media environment. It was therefore prudent to first explore what the literature said about organisations and consumers in relation to the importance of corporate images and reputations. Chapter 2 therefore included objectives of defining the key concepts that comprise image and reputation and to understand what the literature said about their importance. A review of the constructs brought to the fore the ongoing confusion in their definitions, although some noteworthy work has taken place to unpack them. There was however very little within the literature acknowledging how our understanding of the concepts of image and reputation may need to be modified and managed in today's digital landscape. There were exceptions (Price et al., 2008; Gioia et al, 2014; Dowling, 2016) to this in more recent articles, but on the whole, there was very little conceptually, or empirically, to denote what image and reputation mean in today's digital environment – and that they may even may be considered different from previous definitions of concepts. Price et al. (2008), one of the exceptions noted above, provided a salient point in their definition of corporate image – particularly in today's digital landscape. Rather than conveying one image, they contend that organisations have 'scattered images' as there are several images and interpretations sent and received by a plethora of stakeholders. They further note that "there are many image senders, many embedded receivers, and many outside stakeholders who construct their own interpretations of who or what an organisation is – all of which result in divergent or scattered images of the organisation" (p. 174). More recently, and with further regard to today's technological and social media landscape, Gioia et al. (2014) expanded upon the '*scattered images'* concept and introduced the concept of an '*intercepted image'* which they note are unlike projected images as they are defined by the *recipient rather than the sender of a message* and these receivers can do whatever they want with the image. They specifically reference today's technological landscape as a facilitator of the 'intercepted image' as the proliferation and subsequent modification of these images is rampant in the virtual marketplace. They contend "in the contemporary media era, in *which the social and especially the virtual environment* has become inundated with a swarm of images, *the multitude of varying images makes interpretive coherence a difficult challenge for image generators, disseminators and consumers*. Organisational images are perhaps most insightfully seen as virtual "commodities" that are usually altered and exchanged in the media and social milieu rather than as some definitive attributes possessed by a given organisation" (p.6). This thesis adopts this theoretical stance and believes there is an opportunity to provide empirical data to further understand what this means in relation to microblogs and the impact that these interrupted images, termed MeWOM brand image disruptions in this thesis, have on corporate reputations.

In addition to the noteworthy assertions made by Price et al. (2008) and Gioia et al. (2014), Dowling (2016) provided a salient definition of corporate reputation that the author perceives as a flexible one. His definition is "*a corporate reputation is the admiration and respect a person holds of an organization at one time"* (p. 218). Although not called out as a definition specifically designed for the digital environment, this definition was designed by Dowling (2016) to be utilisable from an individual or group perspective and recognises that "under some circumstances reputations are fragile" (p. 218). It would be of interest to understand how fragile reputations are in the mind of a receiver upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption. Whilst it is promising that new definitions and assertions regarding corporate image and reputation have been brought forward in the literature, an empirically evaluated understanding of these concepts is needed in terms of the extent to which sentiment towards a corporate reputation fluctuates when receivers are exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions. Very little focus has been put on the receiver of MeWOM brand image disruptions as a more overarching perspective has been shared so far – that is that images are scattered, exchanged and modified – but with little regard empirically for the recipient of disrupted corporate images and what impact these disrupted corporate images have on receivers' perception of a corporate reputation.

3.1.2 Microblog eWOM and Impact on Corporate Reputation

In terms of a specific social media application, and as noted in Chapter 2, the very nature of microblogs such as Twitter means that users are limited to 140 characters or less with the ability to share text, photos and videos (this was true at the time the data was captured for this study in October 2015). The environment of microblogs means that posts move very quickly with Twitter specifically offering some unique features in relation to other social networking sites (e.g. - favourite Tweets with the heart symbol, retweet, click and expand Tweets to follow the story of what is happening with a Tweet, follow others of interest, use of #hashtags). Researchers have thus called out Twitter specifically as a unique environment with eWOM in microblogs such as Twitter being especially unique due to the 'push' of information rather than 'pull' scenario as seen with product/service reviews such as those found on ratings and review sites (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Marchand et al., 2016). Further, and as highlighted within Chapter 2, some impressive research has been published in the recent literature on microblogs and the impact that eWOM can have (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015, Kumar et al., 2017). Additionally, researchers and practitioners alike have made some compelling arguments about the impact that eWOM in general can have on a corporate reputation. Kumar et al. (2017) asserted that "*the correct use of social media can dramatically improve the firm's performance through creating value and engaging with the customers; however negative feeds can tarnish the brand's image*" (p. 269). Statements such as these are prevalent throughout the literature with contentions made for the past several years (e.g. Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014). There is however a scarcity of empirical data in in relation to two important actors. The first is the organisational perspective and the second is the receiver perspective on these phenomena. For example, the organisational perspective is needed to confirm their perceptions of MeWOM brand image disruptions and any associated risk to their reputations. There is also a clear dearth of empirical research which does in fact tell us what impact eWOM within microblog applications has on an organisation's reputation and the factors that influence a change (whether they are positive or negative in valence) from the receiver's perspective.

3.1.3 Valence and its Role in MeWOM Effectiveness

Chapter 2 highlighted the assertions and studies that referenced the importance of valence and eWOM effectiveness (Fu and Chen, 2012; Wong et al., 2012; Riu et al., 2013; Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Marchand et al., 2016). When comparing the impact of positive eWOM and negative eWOM, results have been mixed (Marchand et al., 2016). For example, positive eWOM has been more impactful in some studies (Wang et al., 2015), with a number of authors highlighting that negative information is more attention grabbing in general (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013), and that negative valence Tweets specifically provide value over organisation generated information in relation to new product adoption (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015). There is however a dearth of research on the impact that valance has when receivers are exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions and any change in reputation that takes place.

3.1.4 Factors Influencing MeWOM Effectiveness

As noted in the previous section, it is unclear whether MeWOM brand image disruptions would impact a corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective. In addition, the factors which could potentially influence a change in reputation are also unknown. From the literature review, it was clear that there are some key components that make eWOM effective from a receiver's perspective including the following:

- eWOM credibility (Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2015)
- information usefulness/involvement (Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. al, 2014)
- emotions (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016)
- source style (Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al. 2015)
- cognitive information processing (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Teng et al., 2014)
- volume (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Teng et al., 2014)
- prior knowledge about the product or service (Luo and Zhong, 2015)

It however remains unclear what these aspects of effectiveness mean from the receiver's perspective in relation to a corporate reputation in the microblog environment. It is evident that this is a new realm for eWOM and the impacts have not yet been fully empirically analysed.

3.1.5 Cognitive Information Processing - Receivers

The way in which eWOM receivers process information has been called out within the literature as an enabler of effective eWOM through attitude change (Cheung & Thadani; Stuart et al., 2014, Teng et al., 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 2, the Elaboration Likelihood Model was a model created by Petty and Cacioppo (1980) and posits that the attitude formation process is dependent upon the extent to which message receivers elaborate, or think about, *issue-relevant* arguments within a persuasive communication. When receivers of a persuasive communication possess a relatively high motivation to process information, they employ the central route. The central route requires more elaboration, or thinking and consideration of issue-relevant arguments.

In terms of processing information, emotions have been highlighted as playing a key role. Morris et al. (2005) provided salient research in relation to emotions and highlighted that emotional reactions to stimuli influence both systematic and heuristic processing. They highlighted that positive emotional reactions influence peripheral information processing and that negative emotions influence central processing. This is indeed interesting and highlights a tremendous gap in the microblog eWOM domain. There are not only any known studies which study emotional reactions to a MeWOM brand image disruption and their impact on a corporate reputation, there are also no known studies which assess negative microblog eWOM and positive microblog eWOM and the routes to persuasion. With previous literature highlighting these distinctions, it would be interesting to understand the routes to persuasion employed by receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions in the positive and negative context.

3.1.6 Cognitive Information Processing - Organisations

As noted above, the way in which receivers of eWOM process information is an enabler of attitude change through the information available to them and their motivation to process it. There is not only a dearth of empirical data with regard to receivers of information, there is also a need for clarity in terms of organisations and how they provide information in relation to eWOM within microblogs. Do they respond to every MeWOM brand disruption? If not, when?

3.2 Research Objectives

With regard to the gaps noted within the literature, the overall purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study is to enhance existing empirical knowledge on the concepts of corporate image and reputation in today's microblog landscape. The literature consistently raised the concern that 'intercepted images' (Gioia et al, 2014) have the propensity to change or modify the ***images that organisations convey*** and subsequently be of detriment to the ***organisation's reputation*** in some way. Further empirical data is therefore needed to understand whether organisations perceive what the author of this thesis calls ***MeWOM brand image disruptions*** (microblog eWOM that either positively promotes the course, progress or transmission of a brand's image or those that interrupt the course, progress, or transmission of a brand's image) as a threat, or indeed enhancement if positive in valence, to their corporate reputations. In addition, further empirical data is needed to understand the impact that MeWOM brand image disruptions have on receivers in relation their perceptions of corporate reputations.

There are thus four objectives that comprise the foundation for this thesis and they are:

i. to explore whether organisations consider individual MeWOM brand image disruptions to have any influence over their corporate reputation and how they manage them

ii. to explore *whether and to what extent* MeWOM brand image disruptions impact receivers' perception of a corporate reputation

iii. to establish which variables predict a change in a corporate reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption

iv. to provide further context from the receivers' perspective of the variables which cause a change in reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption

Exploring the objectives noted above will add some much needed empirical data to the existing body of knowledge in the corporate image and reputation domains. The perspective of organisations in relation to MeWOM brand image disruptions and the perspectives of receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions and any impacts to corporate reputation as a consequence of exposure remain unexplored.

3.3 Hypotheses & Conceptual Model

Having outlined the objectives of this thesis, this section provides details of hypotheses tested in this study and a conceptual model to explore the factors that influence a change in corporate reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption. The section begins by providing a synopsis of the variables from the literature that have been demonstrated to influence eWOM outcomes, followed by any associated hypotheses. The section ends with the provision of a conceptual model.

3.3.1 Variables that Influence eWOM Outcomes

As noted previously within this thesis, there is a dearth of research on the factors that cause a change in a corporate reputation after receivers of eWOM are exposed to positive and negative brand image disruptions within a microblogging environment. As such, and following Creswell's (2003, 2014) guidance with regard to the temporal order of variables, this section outlines the variables that have been highlighted within the literature that influence eWOM outcomes in Table 3.1. The table is then followed by a brief explanation of the variables along with any associated hypotheses. In keeping with Whetten's (1989) guidance on parsimony, variables that are not logical, or indeed questionable for inclusion in a model for a microblogging environment, are specifically called out in the explanation of the variable. In addition, although many of the variables are categorised as independent, some of them could also be moderating, mediating, and confounding depending on the type of study conducted.

Table 3.1 - Variables That Influence eWOM Outcomes

Temporal Order	**Variable**	**Reference(s)**
Independent	Source style	Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al. 2015

	Information Usefulness/Involvement		Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. al, 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014
	eWOM Credibility		Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2015
	Emotions		Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016
	Prior knowledge about the product or service		Doh & Hwang, 2009; Luo and Zhong, 2015
	Information Processing	Central Route	Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Teng et al., 2014; Cheung & Loi, 2014
		Peripheral Route	
	Valence		Fu and Chen, 2012; Wong et al., 2012; Riu et al., 2013; Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al.,

		2015; Marchand et al., 2016
Dependent	Change in Corporate reputation	None at this time
Not used in current model	Source Characteristics	Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Luo and Zhong, 2015; Reichelt et al. 2014; Wang et al., 2015
	Volume of eWOM	Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Riu et al., 2013; Stuart et al., 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015

3.3.2 Explanation of Independent Variables & Hypotheses

This section includes an explanation of the independent variables referenced in the table above and the hypotheses associated with them.

3.3.2.1 Source Style

As highlighted in Chapter 2, source style is a relatively new feature of eWOM that has been highlighted as affecting eWOM effectiveness that has very little research to date (Lin et al., 2012, Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015). It has been noted that online reviews within social media can be the combination of text and visual cues and that visual information exerts a significant impact on users' online information acceptance (Stuart et al., 2014). In relation to eWOM effectiveness, fairly recent studies have come to the fore and demonstrated the impact of source style. One study demonstrated that visual information such as photographs can be more impactful than text alone (Lin et al., 2012) and another demonstrated that benefit centric reviews are more impact than attribute centric reviews (Wang et al., 2015). In the microblog Twitter, one can be exposed to a Tweet with text only, a Tweet with a photograph and a Tweet with a video. As this study seeks to understand the factors that influence a change in reputation from the receivers' perspective upon exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions, the study will include the various types of Tweets available. In addition, it is hypothesised that:

- *H1: the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with a video will differ from those that influence a change with text only*
- *H2: the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph will differ from those that influence a change with text only*
- *H3: the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with text only will differ from those that influence a change with a photograph*

3.3.2.2 Information Usefulness/Involvement

The degree to which receivers are involved with a topic, whether they find the argument useful and/or relevant has been shown to affect the attitude of the receiver of eWOM (Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. al, 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014). It would therefore be of interest to determine whether the relevance, usefulness and involvement with a MeWOM brand image disruption would have any impact on a change in a corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective. A variable that represents these attributes will be included in the model and the following hypothesis will be tested:

- *H4: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation*

3.3.2.3 eWOM Credibility

eWOM credibility, also referred to as message credibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and argument quality/strength (Cheung et al., 2009; Teng et al., 2014), has been found to play an important role in eWOM effectiveness. eWOM credibility is how truthful or believable the eWOM recipient finds the eWOM to be (Cheung et al., 2009). eWOM is seen to be more credible than organisational messages (Kumar et al., 2017) as they have passed through a filter of 'people like me' (Alsop et al., 2007). As noted in Chapter 2, there has been a dearth of research with regard to eWOM or message credibility in the eWOM domain with the primary focus being on 'source credibility' (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). One could argue that 'eWOM message credibility' is of importance within a microblogging environment - e.g. if the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption finds the message to be believable and trustworthy, that a change in a corporate reputation could occur depending on the argument being made. A variable representing eWOM credibility will therefore be included in the model with the following hypothesis:

- *H5: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation*

3.3.2.4 Emotions

As stated in Chapter 2, the emotional aspect of eWOM is an area that has very little empirically from researchers, yet has been acknowledged to require further exploration (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016). There have been some fairly recent noteworthy studies in the context of emotions and eWOM outcomes – namely Kim & Gupta (2012), Berger & Milkman (2012), Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan (2013), Standing et al. (2016) and Ullah et al. (2016). There has however been little empirically to understand what role, if any, emotions play in the change in perception of a corporate reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption. Variables representing emotions felt by receivers of a

MeWOM brand image disruption will be included in the model and the following hypothesis tested:

- *H6: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation*

3.3.2.5 Valence

As detailed in Chapter 2, the valence of eWOM has been linked to eWOM outcomes. Although there has been some impressive research on the valence of eWOM in a microblog previously (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015), there has been little with regard to whether the valence of a MeWOM brand image disruption actually causes a different outcome with regard to a change in a reputation when receivers are exposed to either positive or negative eWOM brand image disruptions. Although research results have been mixed in the context of positive versus negative valence eWOM and its impact, there have been some promising recent studies which have proven negative valence microblog eWOM to be more impactful (e.g. Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015). In the model for this study, positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions will be used to test whether there are different outcomes with regard to the factors that cause a change to a corporate reputation and the following hypothesis tested:

- *H7: negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions will have a greater impact on corporate reputation than positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions*

3.3.2.6 Cognitive Information Processing

The way in which eWOM receivers process information has been called out within the literature as an enabler of effective eWOM through attitude change. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Petty and Cacioppo (1980) posited that the attitude formation process is dependent upon the extent to which message receivers elaborate, or think about, *issue-relevant* arguments within a persuasive communication. When receivers of a persuasive communication possess a relatively high motivation to process information, they employ the central route. The peripheral route requires less cognitive processing and includes such cues as source characteristics or the level of expertise the information source is perceived to have. Emotional reactions to stimuli have been highlighted as a key enabler of the route to persuasion with negative stimuli prompting the central route to persuasion and positive stimuli evoking the peripheral route to persuasion (Morris, 2005).

Microblogs such as Twitter provide some useful central and peripheral opportunities to process information. For example, within a microblogging environment such as Twitter, for information processing via the central route, a receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption has the option to:

- expand a Tweet to read comments from others
- expand a Tweet to read any response from an organisation in included in a MeWOM brand image disruption
- the option to retweet the MeWOM brand image disruption in an effort to receive comments from others about the Tweet, and thus more information
- the option to favourite or like the Tweet for future reference

With regard to the peripheral route, there are also several opportunities for those exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions to make inferences about the disruption without a lot of cognitive effort involved. With regard to MeWOM brand image disruptions, peripheral cues could be:

- characteristics of the MeWOM brand image disruption such as the credibility of the message
- usefulness or relevance of a MeWOM brand image disruption
- emotions felt by the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption

In a fast-moving microblog environment such as Twitter, it is difficult to know how receivers of messages process MeWOM brand image disruptions and it is therefore asserted here that a good model should include both central route (giving an indication of a motivation to process more information) and peripheral route (giving an indication of less thinking and more heuristics involved with regard to information processing) variables. The model created for this study will include both with the expectation that doing so will increase the explanatory power any outcomes. In addition, the following hypotheses will be tested:

- *H8: variables representing the central route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions*
- *H9: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions*

3.3.2.7 Prior knowledge about the product or service

With regard to the objective of this thesis, and the literature reviewed on reputation, it is of no surprise that prior knowledge about the product or service has an impact on eWOM effectiveness from the receiver's perspective. As highlighted in Chapter 2, a corporate reputation is a composite formation that is held in one's mind at any one point in time – and it is something that can be used to support a firm in times of controversy (Greyser, 2009). It is therefore expected that a corporate reputation would influence the extent to which a corporate reputation changes upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption. A variable that represents corporate reputation before MeWOM brand image disruption exposure will therefore be included in the model.

3.3.3 Explanation of the Dependent Variable

The model will include one dependent variable. This is detailed in the next section.

3.3.3.1 Reputation Change

Chapter 2 highlighted the assertions made within the literature of the potential impact that MeWOM brand image disruptions have on a corporate reputation due to microblog users sharing experiences of brands in their daily lives. Information shared about organisations is available to a multitude of receivers as MeWOM shared via microblogs has enabled microblog users to have seemingly infinite reach with their UGC. The model created for this thesis will include a dependent variable that represents a perceived change of corporate reputation in the mind of the MeWOM brand image disruption receiver. The following hypotheses will be tested:

- *H10: exposure to a positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption will positively affect corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective*
- *H11: exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption will negatively affect corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective*

3.3.4 Explanation of Variables Not Included in the Model

Two variables will not be included in the model for this study. These are detailed in the following sections.

3.3.4.1 Source Characteristics

The information source, or the giver of eWOM, and their characteristics were mentioned in Chapter 2 as a determinant of eWOM effectiveness. As mentioned in Chapter 2, and within the literature specifically (Park & Lee, 2009, Lin et al., 2012), the online environment is not always transparent with regard to eWOM givers. This can especially be true in the microblogging environment where users can create IDs with most any name they desire, or when eWOM brand image disruptions appear in a Twitter feed from an unknown source. For the purpose of this study however, source characteristics will not directly be included as a variable as it is of interest to determine whether a change in reputation takes place based on the MeWOM brand image disruption on its own. As called out by Lin et al. (2012), the online environment is one where the sources of information often have little to no prior relationship with receivers of eWOM and thus the message itself becomes the only source from which the eWOM receiver can draw inferences about trustworthiness or usefulness. This is important due to the environment in which eWOM is shared on Twitter. It may be retweeted numerous times before it reaches one's Twitter feed. The original source may therefore be unknown. If one reflects upon being exposed to the video of Dr. David Dao being dragged off of a United Airlines flight, it is highly likely that by the time it reached one's Twitter feed, it would be difficult to determine who the original source was who tweeted it. As such, and although the importance of source characteristics is acknowledged by the author, it will not form a key part of this thesis. The experiment instead will instruct respondents to imagine a Tweet has appeared in their Twitter feed – details of which will are provided in the next chapter.

3.3.4.2 Volume of eWOM

As noted in Chapter 2, researchers have demonstrated a link between the volume of eWOM and eWOM outcomes such as increased sales (Liu, 2006; Duan et al., 2009) and early product adoption (Hennig-Thurau, 2015) through what has been termed an 'awareness effect'(Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and Twitter effect (Hennig-Thurau, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the volume of eWOM will not be included in the model as the focus is on *each instance of a MeWOM brand image disruption.*

3.3.5 Conceptual Model

Having outlined the variables identified within the literature that could have a potential influence on a change in a corporate reputation, a conceptual model is proposed. The model below depicts the temporal order of variables that could have an impact on a corporate reputation after a receiver has been exposed to a *MeWOM* brand image disruption. The model is followed by a brief explanation of each variable.

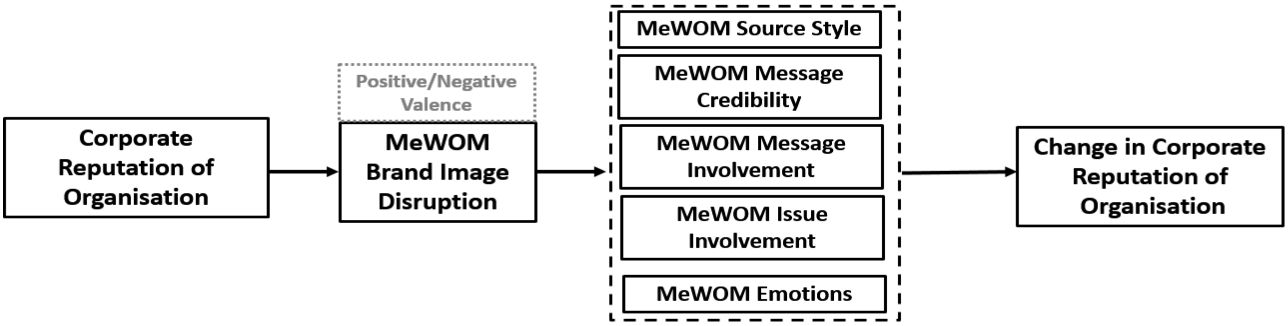

Figure 3.1 - MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Model

3.3.6 Corporate Reputation of Organisation

This variable has been created in the model to represent 'prior knowledge about the product or service' discussed in the previous section. Before a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption, they will have a perception of a reputation of a firm in their mind. Their perception of the firm's reputation could be based on a number of factors including their own experiences, experiences within or outside of their social network, advertisements, information from reviews and ratings sites, etc. Thus, in order for a corporate reputation to change after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption would have a perception of a corporate reputation in their mind before exposure. A variable that represents this perception has therefore been included in the model.

3.3.7 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

As noted previously in this chapter, MeWOM brand image disruptions are a form of MeWOM conveyed to disrupt a corporate image – and they can be disruptive in a positive or negative way. As this study is concerned with eWOM brand image disruptions that take place in a microblog, the independent variable '***MeWOM Brand Image Disruption'*** has been included in the model. In a microblog environment such as the popular application Twitter, a MeWOM brand image disruption can come in the form of a Tweet with text, a Tweet with a photograph and a Tweet with a video (at the time of this study in September 2015).

3.3.8 MeWOM Message Credibility

As noted in the previous section, eWOM credibility, also referenced as argument quality and message credibility by other researchers, has been found to be a key determinant of eWOM effectiveness. As such, a variable has been created for this model that represents the *credibility of the eWOM message* and has been named 'MeWOM Message Credibility'.

3.3.9 MeWOM Message Involvement

An independent variable called 'MeWOM Message Involvement' has been added to the model and will represent the extent to which receivers find an eWOM brand image disruption shared in a microblog environment useful and relevant to them.

3.3.10 MeWOM Issue Involvement

Similar to MeWOM Message Involvement, an independent variable has been created to represent how involved the receiver of the eWOM brand image disruption is with the issue, or topic, being highlighted within the MeWOM brand image disruption. As noted in the previous section, this variable demonstrates the degree of processing of information the receiver of the MeWOM brand image disruption would undertake in order to find out more information about the topic being highlighted in the disruption.

3.3.11 MeWOM Emotions

Although the literature on emotions in the WOM and eWOM context is limited, they have been acknowledged as performing a role in affecting eWOM outcomes. Thus, an *independent* variable representing emotions experienced by receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions has been included in the model. The actual emotions that will be utilised in the model are shared in Chapter 4.

3.3.12 Change in Corporate Reputation

In one way or another, the literature on corporate image and reputation, microblogs and eWOM highlighted the potential impact on a corporate reputation that MeWOM brand image disruptions can have. A *dependent* variable has thus been added to the model to represent any change in corporate reputation, from the receiver's perspective that has occurred after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

3.3.13 Variables with Peripheral and Central Processing Elements

As noted in Chapter 2, the way in which receivers of eWOM process information has been demonstrated to be a determinant of attitude change and thus the model has been designed to be inclusive of variables that could be considered to be central or peripheral in terms of the way a MeWOM brand image disruption is processed. For example, and as discussed previously, involvement with an issue which requires one to seek more information about the MeWOM brand image disruption would be considered a central cue. Emotions, source style and involvement with the MeWOM message would be considered peripheral cues as they are heuristic in nature and require little information processing. A combination of these cues comprise the independent variables in the model.

3.3.14 Valence

As noted in the previous section, valence has been highlighted as a variable that has been linked to influencing eWOM outcomes. This model has been designed to test with both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Doing so will help discern what impact, if any, the valence of a MeWOM brand image disruption has on a corporate reputation.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter commenced by providing an overview of the gaps identified from a review of the literature on corporate image, reputation, microblogs and eWOM. The key gaps identified included a lack of empirical data on two important actors – organisations and receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions. The organisational perspective is lacking in the literature in terms of their perspective of MeWOM brand image disruptions and risk to their reputations that they pose. From the receiver perspective, there is a dearth of empirical data to determine whether and to what extent corporate reputations change in a fast-moving microblog environment when receivers are exposed to positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions. In addition, should a change in corporate reputation take place after exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions, the factors that influence a change remain unknown.

Next, this chapter provided four research objectives that will be achieved with this thesis. The objectives include understanding how organisations perceive MeWOM brand image disruptions and any risk to their reputations and the provision of data to explore MeWOM brand image disruptions from the receiver perspective.

The chapter ended by proposing 11 hypotheses and an initial theoretical model of factors that could potentially influence a change in corporate reputation when microblog site users are exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

The next chapter will discuss the research methodology that will form the foundation for taking this thesis forward.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY & METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the gaps identified within the literature, the objectives of the study, hypotheses and a preliminary conceptual model. This chapter describes the philosophical and methodological considerations of the thesis, before moving to a detailed explanation of the research design.

This chapter begins with a systematic approach to the research, discussion of research philosophies followed by the methodology selected for this study. The chapter then provides an explanation of the structure of two phases of research operationalised in this study. The chapter ends with a brief discussion on the limitations of the research.

4.1 Research Process

In order to ensure that the research carried out for this project followed a logical and systematic approach, a series of steps were taken. Figure 4.1 below, in the form of a flow chart, demonstrates the steps taken in detail.

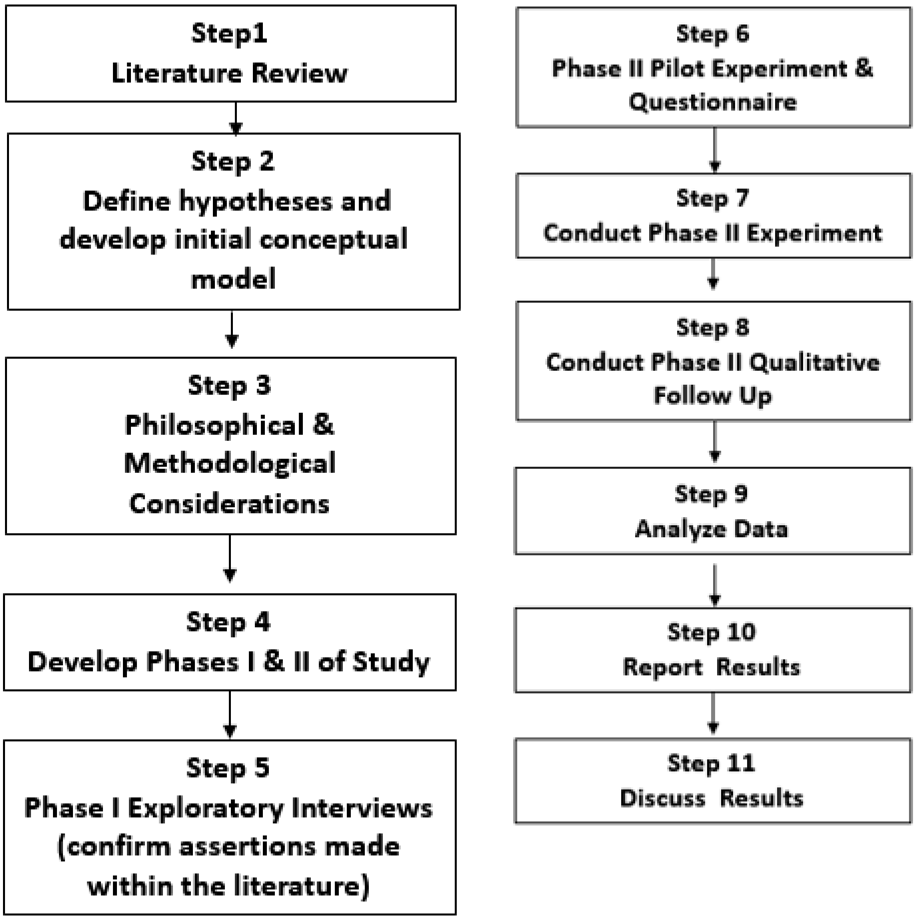

Figure 4.1 - Research Process Adopted

4.2 Research Philosophy

It is widely contended and accepted that a crucial step for researchers is to identify and outline their research philosophies in order to support 'claiming to know what we know' (Easton, 1998 p. 73). Doing so affects how we, as researchers, go about our research and how we design it (Easterby-Smith et al., 2004). In agreement, Creswell (2014, p. 5) stated, "although philosophical ideas remain largely hidden in research, they still influence the practice of research and need to be identified."

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) provide a strong rationale for researchers to comprehend philosophical positions: first, it is important for the researcher to understand the basic epistemological issues in order to understand his or her role in the research; second, it helps clarify research designs; third, it will help researchers to recognise which designs will work and which will not; and finally it broadens researchers possibilities by helping them to identify and potentially create designs outside of their past experience.

Described as a worldview (Creswell, 2014), or paradigm (Feilzer, 2010; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), there are a number of philosophical positions adopted by researchers. These positions are mainly influenced by researchers' ontological (one's perception of being and existence) and epistemological (the way one perceives and acquires knowledge) assumptions. Ontology has been described as the assumptions we make about the nature of reality and epistemology has been described as a general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring about the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al, 2004). Epistemological views can be objective to subjective in nature (Crotty, 1998). Objective epistemologies are premised on the idea that knowledge exists independently of any consciousness. Subjective epistemologies however are based on the idea that knowledge is imposed on the object by the subject (Crotty, 1998).

Table 4.1 provides an explanation of philosophical assumptions (Easterby-Smith et al.,2015):

Table 4.1 - Philosophical Assumptions

Term	**Explanation**
Ontology	Philosophical assumption based on the nature of reality.
Epistemology	A general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring about the nature of the world.
Methodology	A range of techniques used to investigate a specific situation.

Methods and Techniques	Individual techniques for data collection, analysis, etc.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) illustrate the relationship between the four terms by using the metaphor of a tree with four rings in order to represent the relationship between them:

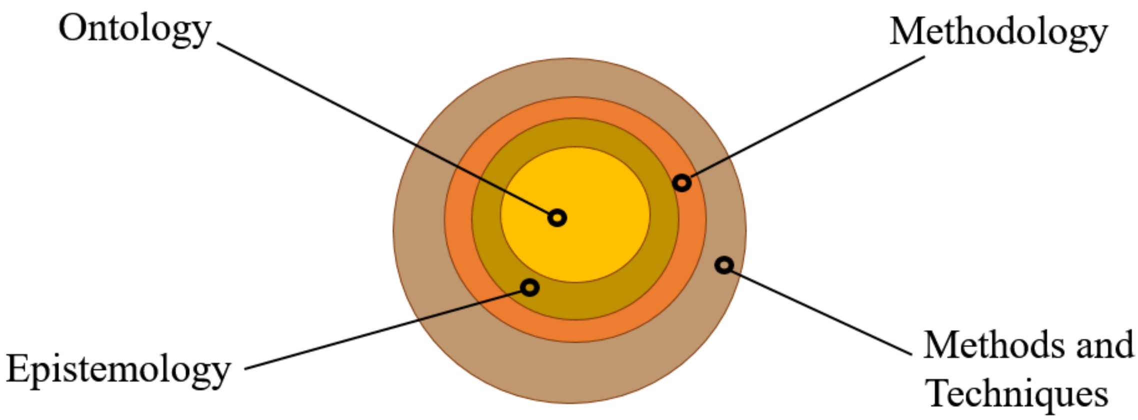

Figure 4.2 – The Four Rings Model (Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2015)

As depicted in Figure 4.2, the most obvious aspects of the research project are represented in the outer ring, the methods and techniques adopted (e.g. surveys, interviews). They depend on the decisions and assumptions about the methodology (3rd ring), epistemology (2nd ring) and ontology (1st ring) that are behind the scenes and less visible.

The next section discusses the first two rings of the model – ontology and epistemology.

4.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Considered the most frequent issue of debate among philosophers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), one's assumptions about the way the world operates (Saunders, 2011) or the structure of reality (Crotty, 1989). Put simply by Marsh and Stoker (2002, p. 11), "ontology is concerned with what we can know about the world and epistemology is concerned with how we can know it." It is thus acknowledged that researchers' beliefs and assumptions about the world influence his or her research activities and the ways in which areas are explored (Klakegg, 2015).

4.2.1.1 Ontology

Individuals are likely to adopt different perspectives of the world due to differences in his or her background, education, professional and personal experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), culture, and history (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The two primary perspectives of ontology are objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivist perspectives are concerned with a reality that exists independently of how an individual perceives it - or "out there in the world" (Creswell, 2009, p.7). Subjectivist perspectives view reality as the product of human construction and individual perception of the world (Creswell, 2009). Social scientists are thus faced with a basic ontological question: whether the 'reality' to be investigated is external or internal to the individual – e.g. whether reality is a given 'out there' in the world, or the product in one's mind (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 1). It is thus imperative that researchers reflect and understand their perspectives of reality in order to provide an initial foundation before contemplating other concerns.

4.2.1.2 Epistemology

Associated with ontological considerations are epistemological considerations that the researcher must consider. Epistemological considerations concern "the grounds of knowledge" or "how one might communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 1). It concerns such considerations as determining what is true and what is false (or indeed the dichotomies between true and false) and whether it is possible to identify and communicate the nature of knowledge as being tangible and communicable or whether knowledge is a softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental concept (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 1). It is thus important for researchers to reflect and understand their perspectives of knowledge and how it is shared with the world as this perception directly affects the methods employed in the research.

4.2.2 Paradigms

Ontological and epistemological assumptions are represented through philosophical worldviews, or paradigms. The term ‘paradigm’ evolved through the work of Thomas Kuhn who noted that science progresses in tiny steps that refine and extend what is already known. The combination of new theories and questions is known as a new ‘paradigm’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Within the social sciences, there are two contrasting views of how social science research should be conducted: positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Also referenced in the literature under other names (post-positivism and interpretivism), their differences are mainly concerned with their ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Creswell, 2009; Easterby-Smith, 2015). In addition to the opposing views of positivism and social constructionism, there are other worldviews that are more compromising in nature –namely pragmatism. When conducting research, it is useful for researchers to consider the paradigms available that may inform and provide legitimacy for the type of methods employed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). These are discussed next followed by a rationale for the paradigm adopted by the researcher.

4.2.3 Positivism

Positivism is a philosophy that is based on observed facts and causal explanations (Comte, 1853; Creswell, 2014) and its assumptions have held true more for quantitative research than qualitative (Creswell, 2014). Ontologically, positivists claim that there can be no real knowledge except that which is based on observed facts and “any proposition which is not reducible to the simple enunciation of the fact – either particularly or in general – can have no real intelligible meaning for us” (Comte, as cited in Hunt, 1991, p. 252). Positivists believe that the world is comprised of universal laws and truth - and only observable data will produce trusted data (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). It is a philosophy underpinned by the assumption that the observer is independent from what is being observed and knowledge is dependent upon what is observed and measured externally (Hunt, 1991; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Creswell, 2014; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). To achieve this, positivist researchers "develop a theory, collect data that either supports or refutes the theory, and then make necessary revisions and conducts additional tests" (Creswell, 2014, p. 7).

In terms of their approach to research methodology, positivists utilise a deductive approach where theory is developed from the literature (Easterby-Smith et al, 2004). They use specific, measurable observations and quantitative results in order to analyse the research problem. Further, they look for relationships among constructs, or causalities between variables, based on knowledge obtained from the literature and quantitative evidence. Following this approach enables positivists to test theories and establish material for the creation of 'laws' (Crotty, 1998).

Table 4.2 summarises the key elements of the positivist paradigm:

Table 4.2 - Characteristics of the Positivist Paradigm

Attribute	Explanation
Determination	Positivists hold a 'deterministic' philosophy in which causes affect outcomes.
Independence	The researcher is independent from what is being observed.
Reductionist	Reducing ideas into small, discrete sets to test – e.g. the variables used to support hypotheses and research questions

Empirical observation and measurement	Based on careful observation of the world that exists 'out there'
Law Driven/Theory Verification	There are theories and laws that govern the world and these must be tested and measured to make sense of it.

Such a rigid view of the world and research is not without its limitations. For example, the types of research that are underpinned by a positivist view are limited – i.e. ones that can be validated, tested and confirmed versus exploratory or discovering new ideas (Cook & Reichardt, 1979). An approach based on such rigid underpinnings has also been called out as limiting for marketing researchers in particular, keeping them from exploring 'lived experiences' from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 1994).

Having explored the basic tenets of positivism, the contrasting perspective of social constructionism is explored next.

4.2.4 Social Constructionism

In contrast to positivism, social constructionism is typically seen as qualitative in nature and its proponents "believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experience – meanings directed towards certain objects or things" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Put simply, the basis of this paradigm is to understand the meaning of an individual's behaviour. It seeks to understand how people make sense of their worlds and human action is regarded as purposeful and meaningful (Gill and Johnson, 1997).

Constructionists view the world as socially constructed and subjective (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002, Creswell, 2014). In contrast to positivism where researchers are independent of what they observe, social constructionism requires management researchers to be a part of what they observe in order to focus on meanings and to try and understand the social reality by assessing the composite experience of each situation and developing ideas through induction from data. Researchers acknowledge that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation and "they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). In the social constructionism paradigm, there is a clear relationship between the research and what is being researched.

Similar to positivism, social constructionism has endured its fair share of criticism. Key criticisms concern a deficiency of reliability and validity (Carson et al., 2001) and generalisability (Onwueghbuzie & Leech, 2005). Social constructionism processes are also viewed as time consuming and require the researcher to incorporate patience and practice in order to develop an optimal level of experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

4.2.4.1 Contrasting Views

As noted previously, the positivist and social constructionist views are contrasting in nature. They therefore pose considerable implications for the researcher. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the contrasting implications of positivism and interpretivism. It was adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2015).

Table 4.3 – Contrasting Implications of Positivism and Social Constructionism

	Positivism	**Social Constructionism**
The observer	Must be independent	Is part of what is being observed
Human interests	Should be irrelevant	Are the main drivers of science
Explanations	Must demonstrate causality	Aim to increase general understanding of the situation

Research progress	Hypotheses and deductions	Gathering rich data from which ideas are induced
Concepts	Need to be defined so that they can be measured	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of Analysis	Should be reduced to simplest elements	May include the complexity of 'whole' situations
Generalization	Statistical probability	Theoretical abstraction
Sampling	Large numbers selected randomly	Small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons

Due to the perceived constraints of adopting just one of the approaches above, it has been asserted that a more balanced approach to management research would be prudent – i.e. one where the researcher focuses on the research problem and uses all approaches available to understand the problem (Creswell, 2014). As such, a third philosophical paradigm is discussed next – pragmatism.

4.2.5 Pragmatism

Several authors have contended that researchers should adopt a pluralistic approach to derive knowledge about the problem (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Fielding and Fielding, 1986; Patton, 1990, Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). This approach is known as pragmatism. According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 110), "pragmatism argues that the most important determinant of the research philosophy adopted is the research question." Pragmatists are not committed to one system of philosophy and reality, and therefore have the freedom to use the methods that are suitable to their research question and use both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). As such, a pragmatic perspective enables researchers to utilise both inductive and deductive research approaches for developing theories (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008).

It has been acknowledged that the pragmatist approach enables researchers to explore and undertake research that could not have been operationalised utilising other paradigms due to its flexible nature (Goldkhul, 2012). In terms of limitations, some researchers have criticised pragmatism for its lack of a clear definition and have asserted that it should not be a true paradigm (Hall, 2012), whilst others contend that pragmatism should be viewed as the new dominant philosophy (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Creswell and Clark, 2007) moving forward.

Table 4.4 highlights some key points from the literature reviewed with regard to pragmatism (Morgan, 2007; Goldkhul, 2012; Creswell, 2014):

Table 4.4 - Key Themes on Pragmatism

Benefit	Explanation
Flexibility of Choice	No commitment to any one system of philosophy. Researchers are free to choose what is appropriate for their research – i.e. methods, techniques and procedures.
Appropriate Data Collection	Many approaches can be considered for collecting and analysing data.
'What Works' Stance	Researchers are free to use the appropriate method for what works for them at the time.
A focus on the 'what' and 'how'	Intended consequences are a part of the consideration process and the 'what' and 'how' are considered – i.e. 'what do I want to

	achieve with this research and how do I go about doing it?’
An appreciation for the external and internal world of the mind	Belief in the external world independent of the mind as well as the world inside the mind.

Due to the requirements of this study, the pragmatism philosophical paradigm is the best fit for this study. The adoption of the pragmatism approach will now be discussed in the following section.

4.3 Paradigm Adopted

In order to construct a research design that would enable the researcher to explore the aforementioned objectives, the literature was reviewed to obtain an understanding of the main philosophical considerations and paradigms in management research. Creswell contends that this process will guide researchers in understanding what knowledge claims are being made by their study and the most optimal methods of data collection and analysis to be used (Creswell, 2003). Having reviewed the literature to understand the main philosophies utilised in the social sciences, along with consideration for the stated research objectives of this thesis, the pragmatist approach was regarded as the most suitable in designing the study for the following reasons:

1) Ontologically, the researcher is not committed to one sense of reality.
2) From an epistemological perspective, the researcher is more interested in the research objectives of the study as opposed to having a firm stance on research philosophies and believes that all methodological approaches should be considered in order to answer the research question.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, several gaps were identified from the literature review. It was believed that adopting an approach that was aligned with the researcher's sense of reality and desire to embrace an approach that utilises the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative techniques would be optimal. In essence, the researcher does not believe that the research questions should be answered by adopting a paradigm that is extreme in its perspective – e.g. positivism or social constructionism. In agreement with Saunders (2011) who state "pragmatism argues that the most important determinant of the research philosophy adopted is the research question" (p. 110), the pragmatist approach is most suited. As such, the pragmatism paradigm was deemed most appropriate and was adopted.

The next section of the chapter moves to a discussion of the 3rd ring of Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2015) Four Rings Model – methodology.

4.4 Qualitative, Quantitative & Mixed Methods Approaches

There is a considerable amount of discourse within the literature on qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research. This section will start with an explanation of qualitative and quantitative research and will then progress to an explanation of the approach adopted by this study, the mixed-methods approach.

According to Creswell (2014), strategies of inquiry associated with quantitative research during the 19th and 20th centuries were of the positivist worldview and originated within the area of psychology. Quantitative research has been defined as "research which is undertaken using a structured approach with a sample of the population to produce quantifiable insights into behaviour, motivations and attitudes" (Wilson, 2012, p. 130) and most often is represented in the form of questionnaires and experiments. As such, quantitative data tends to include close-ended responses (Creswell, 2014). It is an approach that is structured, demonstrates numerical information and can provide insights into consumer motivations, attitudes and behaviour (Shao, 1999).

Qualitative research has been defined as ‘research which is undertaken using an unstructured research approach with a small number of carefully selected individuals to produce non-quantifiable insights into behaviour, motivations and attitudes” (Wilson, 2012, p.103). It originates from anthropology, sociology, the humanities and evaluation (Creswell, 2014) and is associated with the social constructionist world view (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Some of its characteristics include a focus on words rather than numbers, studies that are small in scale and an overarching or holistic focus (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Qualitative data tends to be open-ended without pre-determined responses.

Mixed-methods research has been described as the combining of qualitative and quantitative research and data in a study. It is a relatively new approach with the majority of work commencing in the late 1980s, although traces of its use go back to the 1950s (Creswell, 2014). Unsurprisingly, the mixed-methods approach is aligned to the pragmatic philosophical stance as it offers a degree of flexibility in terms of the selection of the best approach to answer the research question (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

4.5 Methodology Selection

To fulfil the objectives of this research, and having adopted the pragmatist view, it was determined that a mixed-methods research approach would be the best option. According to Creswell (2014, p. 215), the mixing or blending of data “provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself.” Initial qualitative exploratory interviews with organisations followed by the operationalisation an explanatory study with receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions would provide the data required to complete the objectives of this research. Figure 4.3 provides a visual representation of the mixed methods approach adopted in this study and is followed by an explanation of each phase of the study.

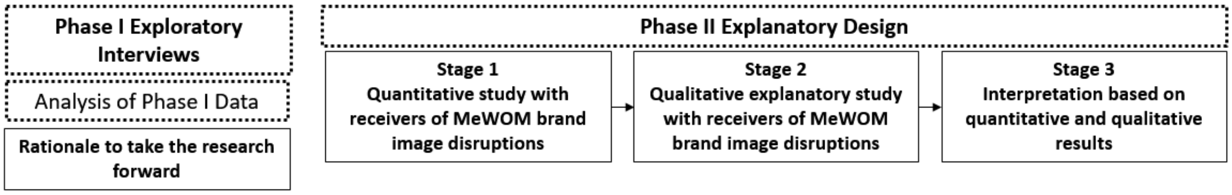

Figure 4.3 – Mixed Methods Design

4.5.1 Phase I – Exploratory Qualitative Interviews

With regard to the lack of empirical data to understand how organisations perceive the power of eWOM brand image disruptions in microblogs in relation to their reputations, an initial exploratory qualitative phase was deemed appropriate. The researcher chose to undertake this phase as a precursor to the focal part of the study in order to confirm the assertions in the literature. The rationale for this decision concerns one of the primary criticisms of academic marketing research today – that a gap exists between academic research and the needs of marketing executives (Reibstein et al., 2009; Jaworkski, 2011). A poignant assertion made within the literature is that “the growing balkanization of academic marketing into quantitative modeling and consumer behavior has diminished research on strategic marketing issues. Consumer behavior researchers are reluctant to consider the managerial implications of their work. With some notable exceptions, there are few efforts to address the critical challenges facing marketing managers from both the modeling and the behavioral perspectives” (Reibstein et al., 2009, p. 1). The literature review called out several challenges that firms face today with regard to managing their corporate image and reputation in today’s social media landscape – with burgeoning research on microblogs being especially salient. Given the ongoing discourse on the relevance of academic research in the practitioner domain, it was sensible to conduct an initial exploratory phase with firms to determine the relevance of the study’s aims before moving forward with the focal phase of the study – Phase II. In addition, it was also acknowledged that practitioners could potentially provide new insights into the research and potentially open up new and/or not yet considered topics.

4.5.2 Phase II – Explanatory Design

An explanatory design is a mixed-methods approach that enables the researcher to utilise qualitative data to explain initial quantitative results. It is thus a quantitative study that is followed by a qualitative study. As the design begins quantitatively, researchers usually place greater emphasis on the quantitative method than the qualitative method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In order to explore whether receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions actually perceive corporate reputations differently after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption and the factors that influence a change in reputation, a quantitative study was the initial stage of Phase II. In addition, to provide further context to the quantitative findings, a follow-up explanatory qualitative stage was designed.

The remainder of the chapter is concerned with providing details of the 4th ring in Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2015) Four Rings Model – the tools and techniques employed for each phase of research.

4.6 Phase I – Exploratory Qualitative Interviews

Exploratory studies enable one to "find out what is happening, to seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomenon in a new light" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 133). It is also a useful means to clarify one's understanding of a problem – for example if one is unsure of the nature of the problem. One must be prepared however to change course as the research may demonstrate that the topic is not worth pursuing (Saunders et al., 2009). Although several assertions were made within the literature regarding the risk to corporate reputations that eWOM brand image disruptions pose, there was nothing empirically to confirm whether organisations, in reality, perceived this risk as well. Additionally, although the literature on eWOM and what makes it effective brought forth some interesting potential variables to test, it was not known whether there were any reputation management strategies employed for the management of eWOM brand image disruption receivers. It therefore became very apparent that the researcher needed to first undertake an exploratory phase with organisations to understand these aspects before taking any research further. Thus, the emphasis of the interviews was on understanding whether organisations perceived eWOM brand image disruptions to have any influence on their reputations and whether they were doing something specifically to manage their reputations in microblogs such as Twitter. Finally, it was determined that the flexibility of qualitative research in understanding the problems being addressed would prove to be a necessary initial step to ensure saliency for marketing executives and the minimisation of any gaps between the literature and industry.

4.6.1 Selection of Type of Interview

This first phase of research was comprised of personal, semi-structured, in-depth interviews as opposed to other types of qualitative interviews – e.g. focus groups. There were three main reasons for this:

1) One-to-one interviews with representatives from various industries was believed to be conducive to fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
2) In order to successfully recruit respondents from various locations, it would have proven difficult to organise group interviews.
3) As the researcher sought to solicit thoughts and experiences from senior managers, flexibility was paramount due to the busy schedules of those being interviewed.

In addition to the practical reasons above, the literature also provides a good rationale for selecting this type of interview. Peterson (1982) argued that highly structured interviews are useful when the subject matter is relatively uncomplicated and the research puts forth hypotheses that have been tested before. Alternatively, when less is known about a subject area and researchers seek to understand a topic deeply, a less structured approach is recommended (Baker, 1991). Semi-structured interviews were selected as they allow one to focus on the issues or topic to be covered, but with a degree of flexibility in terms of the sequence of topics covered and structure (Daymon & Holloway, 2010).

4.6.2 Exploratory Interview Topic Guide

Having chosen the type of qualitative interview to conduct, the next step was to design the topic guide to use in the interviews to ensure that the right data was captured. As the type of interview was semi-structured, it was important to create a topic guide that enabled an approach for a free flow of dialogue that enabled respondents to discuss their views without being restricted by pre-set questions. (Gordon and Langmaid, 1988). The topic guide created for this study can be found in Appendix 1.

In terms of creating the topic guide, Gillam's (2005) guidance was utilised and themes to be covered were created based on the literature. As there were areas that were not covered within the literature specifically, e.g. corporate reputation management practices within microblogs specifically; topics were also included to cover these areas. In addition to the topics to be covered, the topic guide also included prompts to enable the researcher to delve further into the information provided when additional clarification or explanation was needed (Wilson, 2012). However, the researcher only prompted participants on the relevant topics if they did not naturally come about in the discussion.

4.6.3 Exploratory Interview Operationalisation Considerations

Within the guidance provided on conducting effective qualitative interviews, there are some procedures that must be followed to ensure the interview is as effective and productive as possible. These are listed below along with a brief explanation.

4.6.3.1 Structure

It is important to design a topic guide that includes headings, instructions to for the interviewer to use such as opening statements, interview topics, follow up topics and space for recording comments on the interview schedule (Creswell, 2003).

Along with creating a structured topic guide, an interview agenda was operationalised with interview participants. Gilliam's (2005) guidance was utilised to develop the interview agenda for semi-structured interviews as follows:

1) **Preparation** – the time and Skype details were confirmed with the interview participants. Before the interviews took place, the researcher tested Camtasia by TechSmith, which was used to record the Skype calls.
2) **Initial contact** – a few minutes were incorporated within the interview schedule to get acquainted and introduce each other. As respondents were recruited via various social networks, the interviewer did not personally know the participants.
3) **Orientation** – a good portion of the initial part of the interview was utilised to explain how the interview was structured, putting the participant at ease, explaining the confidentiality of their participation and answering any questions they had.
4) **Substantive** – the main topics of the topic guide were covered and this was the bulk of the interview.
5) **Closure** – this included the closing of the interview and the opportunity for any questions to be answered.

4.6.3.2 Rapport & Trust

Social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee has been stressed as an important aspect to conducting a successful interview (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Jones, 1985). It is thus important to build rapport and trust with the interview participant throughout the interview so that participants feel comfortable enough to talk freely and openly (Bodgan &

Taylor, 1975; Easterby Smith et al., 2002). There are several factors that can influence rapport including dress, voice or language and mannerisms. As the interviews were conducted using Skype without the use of a webcam, the researcher adopted a clear and professional sounding voice. Questions were asked at the beginning of the interview to ensure that participants could hear the interviewer clearly. To build trust and credibility, the researcher provided a brief introduction to herself and her background as a researcher. In addition, the researcher advised the participants of the confidentiality of their participation. Finally, in advance of the interviews, the researcher took time to learn about the companies online and inserted some interesting facts she had learned from online media sources and company websites in order to show a high regard and level of respect for the company and their representatives. Doing so helped to facilitate conversation at the beginning of the interview and to put the participant at ease.

4.6.4 Exploratory Interview Sampling Approach

Wilson's (2012) sampling process was utilised to develop the sample for the exploratory interviews as demonstrated in figure 4.4. As this thesis is concerned with corporate image and reputation within a microblog context, and the exploratory phase had an objective of understanding what organisations think and perceive regarding this topic, it was determined that the population of interest would be senior level marketing, corporate communication and social media managers.

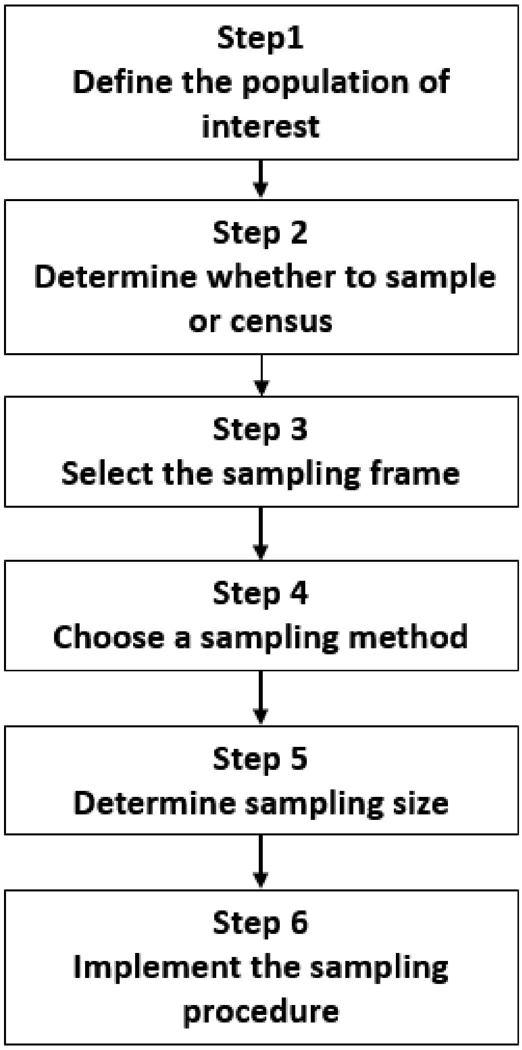

Figure 4.4 - The Sampling Process (Wilson, 2012)

A non-probability, judgement sampling selection procedure was used to recruit participants – e.g. a subjective procedure was used that was based on a sample that the researcher deemed most appropriate (Wilson, 2012). Recruitment of the interview participants was operationalised using the professional social networking site, LinkedIn. LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network with more than 443 million members in 200 countries and territories around the globe (Linkedin.com, 2016). As this thesis concerns a form of social media, it was deemed an appropriate platform to use to recruit participants.

Within LinkedIn, a message was posted in social media marketing, marketing management, and communications management groups to ask senior level managers to participate in the interviews.

Figure 4.5 below demonstrates the message that was posted in the groups to solicit participants:

Do comments about your brand on social media affect your reputation?

Dear Group Members,

I am a Doctoral Researcher at Strathcldye Business School who is interested in talking to senior-level marketing, communications or social media managers about managing your corporate brand images and reputations within the social media environment.

Your participation would be very much appreciated and critical to help further our collective understanding of managing corporate brand images and reputations in today's fast-moving technological environment.

Please feel free to contact me at jennifer.barhorst@strath.ac.uk for more details.

Figure 4.5 - LinkedIn Group Message for Exploratory Interview Recruitment

In addition to posting the above message in Groups on LinkedIn, the researcher also used the ‘people’ search function on LinkedIn to send an InMail (an internal email on LinkedIn) to those who had job titles associated with the participant criteria (e.g. senior social media, marketing or communications manager). Figure 4.6 illustrates the message sent utilising the InMail feature.

Social Media Expertise Requested

Hi [redacted]

I am getting in touch as I am currently doing a PhD part-time at the University of Strathclyde and my PhD has a social media management element to it. As such, I am looking to interview thought leaders with the social media realm and thought you'd be a great person to contact about this. I would aim to do an interview for no more than an hour by Skype or WebEx to just chat through your thoughts on how organisations maintain/build/control their images in today's social landscape.

If you would be open to doing an interview, please let me know and I'll arrange one for late January/early February. Or if you know of someone else who might be open to taking part, that would be great as well.

Thanks so much in advance for your consideration in taking part. My overall objective in this piece of work is to further our collective understanding of organisational images within the social media landscape - and I'd be happy to share findings with you and your firm once I am finished.

Kind regards,

Jennifer B. Barhorst

Figure 4.6 - Exploratory Interview Expertise Request on LinkedIn

A total of 18 people contacted the researcher after the message and InMail were posted over the course of two weeks. Senior level managers are very busy people and there were quite a few scheduling challenges – e.g. those who may have been open to an interview were not able to commit the time once they received more information about the requirements of the interview. In addition, three of the people who contacted the researcher did not fit the selection criteria. As detailed in the Table 4.5 below, ten respondents took part in the interviews.

Table 4.5 - Exploratory Interview Participants

Respondent	Gender	Industry	Position Held	Size	Duration
R1	Female	Energy (oil and gas)	Social Media Director	Large Enterprise	30 minutes
R2	Male	Travel Services	Senior Marketing Manager	Large Enterprise	30 minutes
R3	Female	Technology Services (software)	Senior Marketing Manager	Large Enterprise	32 minutes
R4	Male	Travel Events	Corporate Communications Director	Small Enterprise	40 minutes
R5	Male	Luxury Automotive	Communications Director	Large Enterprise	28 minutes
R6	Male	Financial Services	Social Media Vice President	Large Enterprise	25 minutes
R7	Female	Gaming	Senior Marketing Manager	Large Enterprise	30 minutes
R8	Male	Aviation	Communications Director	Large Enterprise	27 minutes
R9	Male	Paints and chemicals	Corporate Communications Director	Large Enterprise	30 minutes
R10	Male	Marketing and PR Agency	PR & Communications Agency Director	Small Enterprise	22 minutes

Whilst the number of respondents may appear to be limited, it was believed that theoretical saturation (Creswell, 2014) had been reached within the sample as the level of new information provided had diminished. This was confirmed during analysis phase of the research when there were no additional emergent themes. The sample also included senior representatives of organisations who were well positioned to speak about risks to corporate reputations and procedures utilised to manage their reputations in a microblog environment.

4.6.5 Exploratory Interview Analysis

The transcriptions undertaken by the interviewer generated over 60 pages of qualitative data. As mentioned previously, the software called Camtasia by Techsmith was utilised to record the Skype interview sessions. Camtasia is a software product that can be integrated with Skype in order to record Skype calls. Once a call is recorded, a file is created which enables one to stop, pause and play just as one would on a tape recorder. The researcher used these files to transcribe the Skype calls by typing them up on Microsoft Word.

The content analysis method was adopted by the researcher in order to interpret the data in a structured way. Content analysis has been identified as "potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences" (Krippendorf, 2012, p. xii) and it has three distinct characteristics (Krippendorf, 2012):

1. empirical, exploratory and predictive or inferential in intent
2. assigns significance to what is being analysed
3. enables researchers to plan, execute, communicate, reproduce and critically evaluate analyses

The researcher chose to use conventional content analysis which is comprised of coding categories directly from the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) in order to minimise the risk of missing crucial information and the essence of ideas and experiences (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

Following Mile and Huberman's (1984) framework, the researcher read the transcripts several times in order to discern themes and statements related to the research objectives. These themes and statements were coded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to organise themes and statements and align them to the research objectives. Several themes emerged that confirmed assertions made within the literature. The findings from the qualitative phase of the research can be found in the next chapter.

4.7 Explanatory Design - Stage One: Quantitative Phase

This chapter now turns to the initial stage of Phase II of the study and outlines the procedures and steps taken to design the quantitative portion of the study. As outlined previously, a key objective of this thesis is to determine whether there is any impact to a corporate reputation after receivers are exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption. In addition, a further objective is to determine which variables, if any, influence a change in corporate reputation. In order to plan and design the quantitative phase, some pertinent decisions needed to be made with regard to the type experiment to conduct, the design of the study, the type of microblog selected, the country in which the survey would take place, the industry of focus and the survey instruments that would be utilised. This section of the chapter provides details of these decisions and the rationale for selection of the mechanisms employed.

4.7.1 Phase II, Stage One Research Design

Following the decision to undertake exploratory interviews, an online experiment combined with a questionnaire was determined to be the most appropriate method in order to meet the objectives of the initial stage of Phase II. Experiments have been acknowledged as being "especially suitable for analysing cause-and-effect relationships" and the use of them has been increasing within the marketing discipline (Koschate-Fisher & Schandelmeir; 2014, p. 793). Moreover, and helpful for the objectives of this study, experiments have been acknowledged as enabling researchers to identify influential variables and rule out alternative explanations (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Based on cause and effect relationships, the cause is measured on the dependent variable(s) after the systematic manipulation of an independent variable(s). The manipulation of the independent variable on the dependent variable enables the researcher to conclude that the independent variable caused the change (Perdue and Summers, 1986; Shadish, et al, 2002). According to Koschate-Fisher & Schandelmeir (2014), "the decision to implement an experiment or other research methods essentially depends on the number of research variables, the manipulability of one or more independent variables, and the structure of the research context under consideration" (p. 796). Experiments are not suitable for every type of situation however and the researcher must consider this when designing their study.

For example, experiments are especially suitable when the study contains few independent variables and one or more dependent variables (Krishnaswamy et al. 2009). The researcher carefully considered the objectives of the initial stage of Phase II of the study and determined an experiment to be the best option for a few reasons as follows:

1) Within the marketing discipline specifically, there is a growing trend of the utilisation of experiments. A review of the four leading marketing journals for the years 2008-2011 indicated that over 50% utilised them (Koschate-Fisher & Schandelmeir, 2014).
2) Best practice indicates that the use of experiments is most suitable when there are only a few independent variables to test with one or two dependent variables (Krishnaswamy et al. 2009). The conceptual model for Phase II meets this criterion.
3) Other researchers have successfully conducted online experiments and provided useful insights regarding social media from their research (e.g. - Centola, 2010; Schultz et al., 2011; Kim & Gupta, 2012; Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013).
4) Due to the online environment in which MeWOM brand image disruptions take place, the creation of an environment for testing that was similar to the actual environment in which they occur would provide insights that could not be achieved otherwise.

The next sections of this chapter will detail the decisions made regarding the design of the experiment followed by a supporting rationale.

4.7.2 Preliminary Experiment Design Considerations

Before designing the experiment, some initial considerations had to be finalised by the researcher in order to undertake a detailed design. This section provides details of the initial considerations, decisions taken and rationale for doing so.

4.7.2.1 Experiment Setting

According to Koschate-Fisher & Schandelmeir (2014), one of the most important decisions to make when conducting an experiment is the setting in which the research takes place. Whether in the field, in a laboratory or online, the researcher must carefully consider the appropriate setting for their research and ensure that good internal or external validity can be achieved - depending on the setting selected. Internal validity is achieved when the manipulation of the independent variable is the only reason for changes in the measured values of the dependent variable. In contrast, external validity is concerned with the extent to which causal relationships inferred from an experiment can be generalised to various situations, points in time or people. Malhotra and Birks (2007), explain that in applied marketing research, it would be ideal to have both internal and external validity, but we often trade one type of validity for another. Koschate-Fisher & Schandelmeir (2014) agree with this contention where they state that "we can maintain that laboratory experiments are generally better suited to achieving high internal validity while field experiments are generally suited to drawing conclusions about the transferability of findings to real situations" (p. 799). As the researcher seeks to understand any impacts that MeWOM brand image disruptions have on a corporate reputation and seeks to apply knowledge to the wider subject area of corporate reputation management in the microblog context, achieving external validity was the primary concern for the research.

It has been acknowledged that online experiments constitute a form of field experiment as participants remain in their natural environment (Reips, 2002). In addition, online surveys have some specific benefits available due to the online environment being a visual medium – e.g. allowing images, messages and videos to be incorporated into the questionnaire (Brace, 2004). It was thus a logical choice to select the online environment to conduct the experiment for stage one of Phase II of the study due to the nature of MeWOM brand image disruptions and the setting in which they take place. In addition, conducting research online enables one to recruit large, heterogeneous or specialised samples quickly "making statistical tests very powerful and model fitting very clean" (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 813). There are some limitations that must be planned for and addressed by the researcher however, including the possibility of higher dropout rates and repeated participation. (Birnbaum, 2004). Subsequent sections of this chapter provide detail of how the researcher dealt with these limitations.

4.7.2.2 Type of Online Experiment

Having decided upon an online experiment, the researcher also had to consider the *type* of online experiment to conduct. Although there are a number of types of experiments that could be considered, a review of the literature within the marketing discipline demonstrates that there are two main types of experiments– true or quasi (Aaker et. al, 2011).

Although there has been some discourse on the ambiguity of the use of the term 'true' (Shadish et al., 2002), true experiments involve a random assignment procedure where all participants have an equal likelihood of being assigned to the experiment. True experiments are useful in terms of the ability to control experiments over any outside influences. They involve a control group, that does not undertake the manipulated experiment, and a randomised group of participants who could be assigned to the control group or to take part in the experiment (Aacker et al., 2011). True experiments are more closely associated with traditional types of experiments conducted in the medical field – e.g. the control group who does not receive any treatment and other groups that do. These types of experiments are conducted under strict conditions such as laboratories and enable tighter control of external factors which could influence outcomes (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) and therefore offer a higher degree of internal validity (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Quasi-experiments, on the other hand, enable the researcher to control when measurements are taken and on whom they are taken – i.e. participant assignment is not randomised. The researcher also has no control over the scheduling of treatments and is unable to expose test units to the treatments randomly (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Given the nature and environments where management research takes place, and on whom it takes place, quasi-experiments have been acknowledged as a way of addressing issues with management research such as lack of control of all variables within an experiment (Campbell and Stanley, 1966). Quasi-experiments offer many of the benefits that true experiments offer, but with high external validity and the opportunity for the researcher to conduct experiments whilst relaxing the need to control the random assignment of respondents and the need to manipulate independent variables (Grant and Wall, 2008).

Clearly, for this study, a quasi-experiment would be most appropriate due to the setting of the experiment (online/natural), the lack of need of randomisation of participants, and the need for flexibility with regard to controlling independent variables.

4.7.2.3 Platform Selection

Having determined that the experiment would take place online and that it would be a quasi in nature, it was also important for the researcher to consider which platforms would be utilised to build the experiment and questionnaire. To capture data for the study, two platforms were utilised. The Qualtrics survey platform was utilised to build the experiment and survey as this was the preferred survey platform for Strathclyde Business School students. Dissemination of the survey was accomplished via one main channel and that was the Prolific Academic research platform, which is detailed further in the chapter when discussing the sampling frame.

4.7.2.4 Microblog Selection

In addition to the decision to conduct the experiment online, it was also important to determine which microblog would be included in the experiment. The microblog selected for this this experiment was the microblogging application Twitter. At the time that the survey portion of this research was conducted in October 2015, Twitter was one of the most popular microblog sites in the world with 305 million monthly active users. North America was considered one of the most prominent locations of Twitter use - comprising 25 percent of Twitter users (Statista.com, 2016).

4.7.2.5 Country Selection

With regard to the native language of the researcher and the high percentage of Twitter users located in North America, the country chosen for this research was the United States.

4.7.2.6 Industry Selection

As the main overarching objective of this thesis is to explore the microblog environment and any implications for a reputation due to receivers being exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions, it was determined that a focus on the airline industry in the survey portion of the study would be pertinent.

It has become standard industry practice for the airline industry to engage with customers via social media, and specifically through Twitter in the United States. According to an article in the Washington Post, "the enlightened age of social media has dawned over the airline industry, casting shadows over telephone call centers and on-site agents. Facebook and Twitter are racking up friends and followers while the hold music plays on" (Sachs, 2014). According to another article, "customers displeased with unhelpful airline representatives behind desks in airports, or long waits on customer service phone lines are finding Twitter a far more effective forum in which to air grievances, an accessible panic button in times of trouble, or at least serious frustration (Hobica, 2013). For example, with approximately 2,500 – 2,600 Twitter mentions every day to the airline, JetBlue, a U.S. based airline, has a specialised Twitter social media team comprised of customer service agents, corporate communications and marketing to not only engage with customers in the environment in which they are choosing to contact them, but also to manage the volume of Tweets they receive each day (Kolowich, 2014).

Based on the popularity of Twitter with airline customers, and the availability of MeWOM brand images disruptions as a result, it was determined that the airline industry was a pertinent one to include in the experiment.

4.7.2.7 MeWOM Brand Image Sourcing

Once the industry and microblog social network site had been chosen (Twitter), examples of actual MeWOM image disruptions would need to be sourced to be included in the experiment and survey. The Twitter ‘Advanced Search’ feature enables one to search and filter on many factors including Tweets by location, language, from or to a Twitter account, key words and phrases, hashtags, date ranges and valence of Tweets. As depicted in Figure 4.7, the researcher used the Twitter ‘Advanced Search’ feature to find Tweets that were about airlines, positive or negative in valence and in the United States. To confirm whether the MeWOM brand image disruptions were considered positive or negative in valence, guidance was used from the research undertaken by Kim & Gupta (2012) to search for disruptions which had an emoticon of ☺ or ☹ and emotional words which could be considered positive or negative in valence.

Figure 4.7 - Twitter Advanced Search Feature

Six positive and negative valence Tweets were sourced and represented the types of Tweets available on Twitter at the time the experiment was designed in September 2015 – e.g. a Tweet with text only, a Tweet with a photograph and a Tweet with a video.

4.7.3 Phase II Experiment Design

Having considered the preliminary aspects to the design of the study for stage one of Phase II, it was next important to design the data collection component of the study. This section details the sequencing and planning of the experiment and questions to achieve the objectives of stage one of Phase II of the research.

4.7.3.1 Experiment Overarching Design

The overarching objective of stage one of Phase II is concerned with the occurrence of MeWOM brand image disruptions and assessing any impact to corporate reputation when receivers are exposed to them. Thus, the overarching design of the experiment and questionnaire sought to replicate, as much as possible, the sequence of events that MeWOM brand image disruption receivers go through upon exposure. Figure 4.8 provides a graphical representation of the experiment procedure.

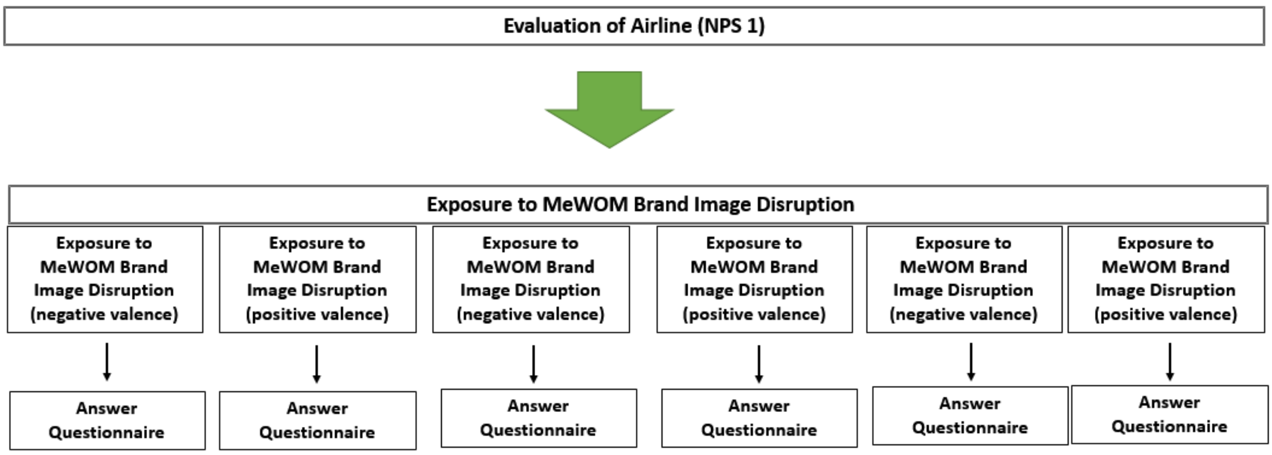

Figure 4.8 – Phase II Experiment Procedure

As demonstrated in Figure 4.8, the experiment was designed to incorporate four steps as follows:

1) Assess the evaluation of a range of airlines through the use of the NPS score question (a detailed explanation for the use of this question as a proxy for reputation is provided in section 4.7.3.2.1).
2) Expose respondents to a range of MeWOM brand image disruptions about airlines that were both positive and negative in valence and inclusive of different types of Tweets - i.e. Tweets with videos, Tweets with photographs and Tweets with text only
3) Ask questions about the MeWOM brand image disruptions, including another NPS question (NPS 2).
4) Provide a maximum of 25 minutes to complete the experiment in order to capture respondents' very first thoughts and impressions in a limited amount of time.

Inspired by the success of Daugherty & Hoffman's (2013) use of actual Pinterest content in their study on consumer attention in social media, the researcher selected six actual MeWOM brand image disruptions from Twitter regarding six different airlines to use in the experiment. As denoted above, there were three positive valence and three negative valence disruptions included in the experiment. There were some precautions taken to minimise carry-over effects when designing the experiment and these are discussed next.

4.7.3.1.1 Carry-Over Effects

In order to minimise the influence of carryover effects, or order effects (Brace, 2004; Wilson, 2012), a few steps were taken. Carry-over effects refer to instances where participants' experiences in one experimental condition are likely to influence responses on subsequent experimental conditions (Koschate-Fischer & Schandelmeier, 2014). Participants may become fatigued, bored and better practised at completing tasks as the experiment goes on (Field & Hole, 2002). To minimise these effects, a series of steps were taken. First, a distraction task was included in the initial part of the experiment to assess participants' perception of the airline. They were asked to rate how likely they would be to recommend an airline to a friend or colleague and were presented with a range of airlines for which to provide their evaluation (more detail about this step is included in the next section). The objective of this was to not only capture their evaluation of the airlines included in the experiment, but to include other airlines not included in the experiment – the rationale being that participants would not recall their answers later as they were exposed to various types of content with the Tweets included in the experiment before being asked the NPS question again. Secondly, the sequence of positive and negative valence brand image disruptions was displayed to participants on an alternating basis – e.g. negative/positive/negative/positive. Following guidance by Field & Hole (2002) carry-over effects were further reduced by randomizing the order of presentation of the types of Tweets. So for example, a negative Tweet in the form of a Tweet with photograph comprised the first exposure, whilst a positive Tweet with text only comprised the second exposure, whilst the third exposure was comprised of a negative Tweet with video and so on. Respondents were therefore presented with various types of content with no anticipation of what they would be exposed to next.

4.7.3.2 Step-by-Step Overview of the Experiment

The following steps and visuals demonstrate how the experiment was designed and operationalised.

4.7.3.2.1 Step 1 – Determine Respondent's Evaluation of Airlines

Objective two of the study was to explore *whether and to what extent* MeWOM brand image disruptions impact receivers' perceptions of corporate reputations. In order to assess any change in reputation, it was first important to obtain a baseline perception of the airline's reputation. As discussed in Chapter 2, before a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption, they will have a perception of a reputation of a firm in their mind. Their perception of the firm's reputation could be based on a number of factors including their own experiences,

experiences within or outside of their social network, advertisements, information from reviews and ratings sites, etc. Thus, in order for a corporate reputation to change after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption would have a perception of a corporate reputation in their mind before exposure. A variable that represents this perception was therefore been included in the model and respondents were asked to rate eight airlines using the Net Promoter Score Scale as depicted in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9 – Experiment Design - Assessing Initial Corporate Reputation

<u>Use of the NPS Score in the Experiment</u>

Although there has been a degree of discourse within the literature questioning the validity of the use of the Net Promoter Score to measure company profitability and brand loyalty (Keiningham et al., 2007; Grisaffe, 2007), the Net Promoter Score question was chosen as proxy to represent corporate reputation in this study for a few reasons. First, the researcher sought to quickly assess participants' evaluation of the airline. Having one question enabled the researcher to obtain an instantaneous evaluative inference of how the respondent perceived the airline. As noted in Chapter 2, the following definition of reputation offered by Dowling (2016) was adopted by this thesis -"*a corporate reputation is the admiration and respect that* *a person holds of an organization at a point in time*." To capture the essence of this, the researcher believed it was important to utilise one question that asked the respondent their opinion of the airline and would represent their overall evaluation of the airline ***at that moment in time***. The NPS question was considered the best option to achieve this objective as it would require the participant to instantaneously evaluate the airline. As detailed in Chapter 2, Dowling's definition is suitable for the digital environment as it as it indirectly reflects an environment that changes through the use of the phrase 'at a point in time'. It also acknowledges that there is a degree of cognitive effort involved as determining one's admiration and respect for a firm requires some cognitive processing – whether it is reflecting on experiences with a firm over time, reading about the experiences of others, or consulting reports about firms to come to a determination. The use of the NPS score question as a proxy for participants' evaluation of the airlines was deemed most suitable as the question asks how likely they would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague. Any increase or decrease in NPS score after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption could be considered an increase or decrease in admiration and respect for the firm. In essence, participants were asked to make an evaluative judgement about the airlines included in the experiment both before and after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruptions. Use of the NPS score was considered optimal for these purposes. The NPS score question was also chosen as it is comprised of a 10-point scale (0-6, detractors, 7-8, neutral and 9-10 promoters) that could easily be utilised to understand any movement within the scale after respondents were exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption. Finally, as the objective of the study did not include using the Net Promoter Score to actually predict sales and only to provide an evaluative inference of the perception of corporate reputation, it was believed that this use of the NPS score was acceptable, regardless of the literature questioning its validity (Keiningham et al., 2007; Grisaffe, 2007).

<u>Utilisation of Average Airline Brands in the Study</u>

To curtail the variable effects of prior knowledge, familiarity and involvement with the airlines included in the experiment, the researcher chose to use a ratings firm, Skytrax, to determine which airlines were included in the preliminary question. Skytrax defines itself as "the world's most comprehensive Air Travel Review and Airline Rating website." Their World Airline Star Rating "is the recognised global airline rating system that classifies airlines by the quality of their front-line product and service standards" (Skytrax, 2016). As the researcher sought to obtain a composite representation of survey respondents' overall evaluation of the airline, that is, its reputation before and after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruptions, it was determined that choosing airlines rated as 3-star, or *average*, would be optimal for the study. Skytrax (2016) describes 3-star airlines in the following way – "airlines delivering a fair quality performance equating to an industry 'average' of acceptable product and service standards."

4.7.3.2.2 Step 2– Exposure to MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

The next step in the experiment was to expose participants to a positive or negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption. As noted in the previous section, the experiment was designed to have six MeWOM brand image disruptions for inclusion in the experiment comprising three positive and three negative brand image disruptions. Figure 4.10 provides an example of the Hawaiian Airlines positive valence disruption (examples of all other MeWOM brand image disruptions utilised in the experiment can be found in Appendix 3).

Figure 4.10 - Hawaiian Airlines Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

As above, the emotive words used in the MeWOM brand image disruption are of a positive valence and include a happy face emoticon. In addition, clear instructions are provided at the top of the MeWOM brand image disruption for the experiment participants. The questions asked after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption to determine the factors that influence any change to a reputation after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption are explained later in the questionnaire design portion of this chapter.

4.7.3.2.3 Step 3 – Impact to Corporate Reputation

To assess any change in overall reputation of the airline in the mind of the receiver after MeWOM brand image disruption exposure, respondents were again asked the same NPS score question as they were at the beginning of the survey (only this time it was one question instead of eight and it was with regard to the specific airline called out in the MeWOM brand image disruption). It is important to note the following:

- At the beginning of the experiment, participants were asked the NPS score question regarding a range of airlines. This was done to in order to capture the initial data for the six airlines utilised in the experiment, but also included others to minimise the likelihood of respondents recalling their answer.
- Experiment participants were asked the second NPS score question after a series of questions about the MeWOM brand image disruption and it was the last question asked. Again, the experiment was designed this way in order to minimise the likelihood that respondents would remember their answer to the NPS questions asked at the beginning of the experiment and the one NPS question asked after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. Figure 4.11 below provides a visual representation of the reputation questions and the sequence of events.

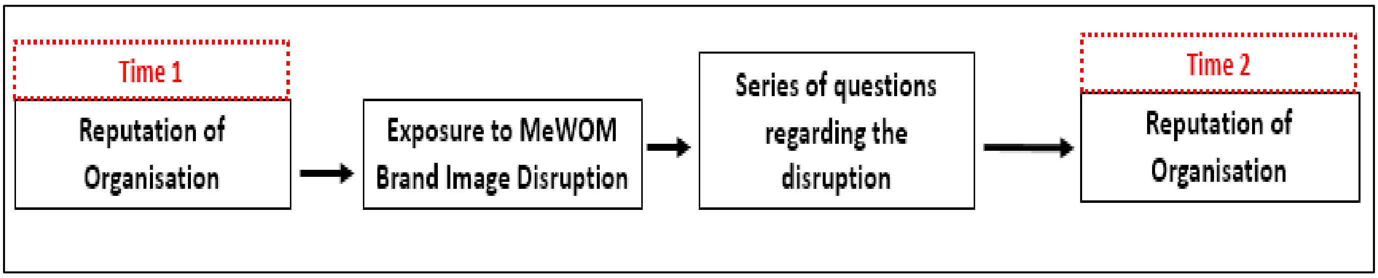

Figure 4.11 - Reputation Disruption Measurement

4.7.4 Phase II Questionnaire Design

Having conceptualised the overall experiment, the next step was to design the online questionnaire. This section outlines the steps taken to design the questionnaire, including a review of the literature to include best practice when designing questionnaires, followed by a detailed description of the experiment and questionnaire layout.

4.7.4.1 Questionnaire Design - Best Practice Guidelines

It has been stated within the literature that there is a lack of theory on the topic of questionnaire design and "because there are no scientific principles that guarantee an optimal or ideal questionnaire, questionnaire design is a skill acquired through experience" (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 372). Although there is an acknowledged dearth of theory, there is an abundance of practical guidance on designing questionnaires and the researcher consulted the literature in order to ensure that the questionnaire in this research provided accurate and useful data. Table 4.6 highlights the guidelines conveyed in the literature followed by a brief explanation.

Table 4.6 - Basic Principles of Questionnaire Design

Principle	**Reference**
1) Careful Planning	Brace, 2004; Wilson, 2012; Babin & Zikmund, 2015
2) Topic Selection Based on Research Objectives	Dillon et. al, 1994; Brace, 2004; Malhotra, 2010; Wilson, 2012; Babin & Zikmund, 2015
3) Relevancy	Webb, 2000; Brace, 2004; Aacker et al.; 2011; Wilson, 2012; Babin & Zikmund, 2015
4) Question Comprehension	Webb, 2000; Dillon et. al, 1994; Malhotra & Birk, 2007; Wilson, 2012
5) Question Format	McDaniel & Gates, 2010; Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012
6) Question Sequence	Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012

7) Questionnaire Layout	Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Malhotra, 2010; Wilson, 2012

4.7.4.1.1 Careful Planning

According to Brace (2004), "a questionnaire that is going to provide accurate, good-quality information needs to be thought about and planned, before a single question is written" (p. 35). A consequence of not taking the time to plan could result in questions that are not relevant to participants, or questions that respondents have a difficult time understanding (Wilson, 2012).

4.7.4.1.2 Topic Selection Based on Research Objectives

In order to formulate a questionnaire that will provide accurate and high-quality information, careful consideration of topics to be covered in the questionnaire must take place in the questionnaire design phase. Topics included in the questionnaire must be clearly based on the study's research objectives, and only questions that can provide the information necessary to satisfy the objectives should be included in the questionnaire (Brace, 2004; Malhotra, 2010; Wilson, 2012). Not carefully considering the topics to be included in the questionnaire and basing them on the study's objectives can have some unwanted consequences – e.g. wasting the time of everyone and to spend money unnecessarily (Brace, 2004). In addition to basing questions on the objectives of the study, if one has carried out exploratory research prior to the quantitative stage, then the findings from the exploratory stage can be used to help clarify what should be asked in the quantitative stage (Wilson, 2012).

4.7.4.1.3 Relevancy

Relevancy is discussed as a guideline from both the perspective of the questionnaire and the perspective of the respondent. From the perspective of the questionnaire, it has been highlighted as best practice to only include questions that are *relevant to the research* *objectives.* Specificity is of utmost importance and each question included should have a clear rationale for inclusion in the questionnaire (Babin & Zikmund, 2015). From the perspective of *relevancy to the respondent*, questionnaires should provide questions that participants are willing and able to answer (Webb, 2000; Brace, 2004; Aacker et al.; 2011; Wilson, 2012) and respondents should have knowledge of the subject being explored (Wilson, 2012). It has been suggested that the respondent's ability and level should be considered when designing each question (Webb, 2000), and that a potential way to do this would be for the interviewer to place themselves in the shoes of the respondent in order to determine whether respondents will be able to answer the questions they are being asked (Aacker et al.; 2011; Wilson, 2012).

4.7.4.1.4 Question Comprehension

Deciding on question wording has been acknowledged "as the most difficult task in developing a questionnaire" (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 384). It is important not only that respondents are willing and able to answer questions, but also that they are able to comprehend them. Thus, questions must be worded simply and be easy to understand by respondents. Guidance regarding the construction of questions to ensure comprehension by respondents includes the following (Dillon et. al, 1994; Webb, 2000; Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012):

1) Use ordinary words
2) Use clear and simple phrases in order to avoid ambiguity
3) Match respondents level of vocabulary and ways of using words
4) Ask one question at a time – i.e. don't ask two questions wrapped into one
5) Avoid leading or biasing questions
6) Test questions to ensure they achieve the intended objective

Using ordinary words and simple phrasing can help to ensure that respondents understand what is being asked and avoids ambiguity, or misunderstanding the question (Dillon et al. 1994; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Further, it has been recommended that the words used in a question should *match the vocabulary level of respondents* (Malhotra & Birks, 2007) and their particular colloquialisms and ways of using words should be considered. In addition, questions should not be complex – e.g. only one question should be asked at a time. Doing so will reduce the risk of confusing the respondent (Webb, 2000).

Leading questions, or questions that clue the respondent to what the answer should be, are not to be used. Further, questions which lead to bias, such as providing clues to the sponsor of a questionnaire, are also to be avoided (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Finally, testing questions before disseminating a questionnaire has been recommended as a way of ensuring that respondents can understand them and that other meanings are not applied to them (Wilson, 2012).

4.7.4.1.5 Question Format

There are three main types of questions noted within the literature and each one has a different quality with regard to the types of responses obtained as follows:

1) **Open-ended questions** (also referred to as unstructured, free-response and free-answer) – these questions enable respondents to answer questions in their own words. They are excellent for enabling respondents to express general attitudes and opinions and for providing the opportunity for respondents to provide useful information at the end of questionnaires (in case something was not covered and they have additional insights to share). In addition, open-ended questions provide opportunities to explain the answers to other questions in the questionnaire (McDaniel & Gates, 2010; Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012).
2) **Closed/structured questions** – closed, or structured, questions require respondents to choose from a pre-defined list of answers. Closed questions are a way of overcoming some of the disadvantages of open-ended questions as the risk of bias is reduced and

the results can be analysed quickly (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012). There are three forms of this type of question as follows:

- **Multiple -choice** – respondents are provided with a choice of answers and are asked to select one or more of the alternatives given.
- **Order bias or position bias** – is the respondents' tendency to select an alternative because it occupies a certain position or is listed in a certain order. An example of this would be a list of numbers in the form of quantities or prices.
- **Dichotomous questions** – these types of questions have only two response options – e.g. yes/no or agree/disagree

3) **Scaling questions** – these types of questions are commonly used in marketing research to assign numbers to subjective concepts such as feelings, attitudes, opinions and customer perceptions (Wilson, 2012). According to Wilson (2012), "the assignment of numbers enables the information from different groups of the population to be more easily compared and summarised" (p. 161). In marketing, two of the most common scaling formats are the Likert scale and the Semantic Differential Scale. The Likert scale, which is adopted in this study, asks respondents to note their level of agreement with a number of statements about a product, organisation or concept. Descriptors used to measure agreement are strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree (Wilson, 2012). Semantic Differential scales are similar to Likert scales, but are more complex. It is a question comprised of a set of bi-polar adjectives and phrases that are separated with a seven-category scale with no numerical or verbal descriptors in between. An example would a measure of how inexpensive/expensive a respondent thought something was by indicating a rating within the seven-point scale (Wilson, 2012).

4.7.4.1.6 Question Sequence

Question sequencing is just as important as the wording of questioning according to Malhotra & Birks (2007). Sequencing should be approached from the respondent's point of view in terms of what the respondent will find interesting and logical, and "if respondents feel they are jumping from subject to subject, the questioning can feel more like an interrogation than a relaxed marketing research survey" (p. 174) if not. Questions should therefore be grouped in terms of what would logically make sense to respondents. Malhotra & Birks (2007) note that when a researcher takes time to learn aspects about respondents, such as their vocabulary level, they should also, at the same time, think about the sequencing that would make the most sense to respondents. They further note that "all questions that deal with a particular topic should be asked before beginning a new topic" and "when switching topics, brief transitional phrases should be used to help respondents switch their train of thought" (p. 389).

According to Wilson (2012), the positioning of classification questions and whether they should be placed at the beginning or end of a survey is one of the more controversial issues with regard to sequencing. Classification questions are concerned with the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents. Wilson (2012) provides practical guidance in this regard – i.e. if the information is needed for screening purposes, place them at the beginning and if not, the end.

4.7.4.1.7 Questionnaire Layout

The layout of the questionnaire is particularly important for self-administered questionnaires such as online surveys. Researchers can increase the likelihood that their questionnaires will be completed by paying attention to certain aspects of the layout such as spacing, numbering and the quality of production (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012). Other aspects that should be considered when designing the layout are the inclusion of clear instructions at the beginning of a questionnaire (Malhotra, 2010).

4.7.5 Phase II Questionnaire Operationalisation

Having conceptualised the experiment and consulted best practice in questionnaire design, the next step taken by the researcher was to create the questionnaire that would support the experiment. The following sections provide details of the types of questions asked in the questionnaire and the scales utilised to support the creation of the questionnaire.

4.7.5.1 Questionnaire Introduction

Following the guidance provided by Malhotra (2010), a clear introduction with easy-to-understand phrasing was placed at the beginning of the survey as follows.

University of Strathclyde Business School

Welcome to this short survey.

If you are a current **Twitter** user, you live in the **United States**, and you are **over 18 years old**, you are invited to to share your perspectives by completing this survey.

Before answering the questions, please note the following:

- The survey should take approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete.
- Your participation is completely **anonymous.**
- You can only take the survey **once.**

Your participation in this survey is **greatly appreciated** and will not only help to advance our understanding of certain aspects of social media, but will help me to achieve a professional dream of completing a PhD.

Figure 4.12 - Introduction to Survey

Respondents were clearly advised of the inclusion criteria (Twitter users based in the United States who were at least 18 years old), the time it would take to complete the survey and that they could only complete the survey once.

4.7.5.2 Classification Questions

As mentioned previously, the placement of classification questions in questionnaires has been a topic of controversy highlighted within the literature and practical guidance has been provided (Wilson, 2012). As the researcher needed to include screening questions at the beginning of the survey, the classification questions were placed at the beginning. The classification questions included questions regarding gender and education level and can be found in Appendix 2. In addition, there were four screening questions as below:

1. **What is your age?** If respondents indicated an age less than 18, they were forced out of the experiment.
2. **Are you a current Twitter user?** This was a requirement of taking part in the experiment and therefore a crucial screening question. If respondents answered ‘no’, they were forced out of the experiment.
3. **Do you live in the United States?** As this experiment was designed to take place in one country, this was an important screening question to include. If respondents answered ‘no’, they were forced out of the survey.
4. **Which best describes your daily Twitter use?** To ensure that only users who used Twitter took the survey, two questions were asked in the survey, one which directly asked the participant if they were a Twitter user (as above), and one which asked this *indirectly by asking* how often they used Twitter each day. If the participant answered ‘none’ to the question regarding daily Twitter use, they were not allowed to continue on in the experiment and were excluded. Thus, the question was used as a disqualifier and a way to ensure that those who took the experiment were indeed Twitter users.

4.7.5.3 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Questions & Scales

As highlighted in the experiment design portion of this chapter, a series of questions followed the exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption for each participant. Following best practice guidance, the sequencing of questions followed a natural flow without transitioning back and forth between topics unexpectedly (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012). In addition, questions were clearly worded with the education and ability level of the respondent of primary consideration when creating the questions (Webb, 1992; Dillon et. al, 1994; Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012).

The objective of the questions in this phase of the experiment was to meet the criteria of assessing respondents' perceptions of the MeWOM brand image disruption in relation to its credibility, their involvement with the message and topic and any emotions they experienced after exposure. This section provides the details of the questions asked to help support the fulfilment of these criteria along with the use of any scales.

4.7.5.3.1 MeWOM Message Credibility

As discussed previously in this thesis, eWOM credibility has been found to influence eWOM outcomes, namely the effectiveness of eWOM. This study seeks to understand whether the credibility of the message of a MeWOM brand image disruption has any impact on a change in corporate reputation.

For the purpose of this study, MeWOM Message Credibility is defined as '*the extent to which the MeWOM Brand Image Disruption receiver finds the disruption believable and trustworthy*'. This definition is based on what the literature says about credibility with regard to eWOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

To measure receivers' beliefs regarding the credibility of the MeWOM brand image disruption, four, five-point Likert scale agree/disagree questions were asked regarding the extent to which respondents' believed the disruptions were believable, informative, trustworthy and reliable.

The beliefs questions were based on the literature and what it said about WOM and eWOM in terms of credibility (Arndt, 1967; Engel et al, 1969, Day, 1971; Tybout et al, 1981; Richins, 1983; Bolfing, 1989; Buttle, 1998; East et al, 2008) and a modified scale from research undertaken by Park et al. (2011) where they measured perceived eWOM credibility.

4.7.5.3.2 MeWOM Message Involvement

For the purpose of this study, MeWOM Message Involvement is defined as '*the extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption finds the information shared to be useful, interesting and likable.'* This definition was created based on the literature on eWOM and on personal involvement with messages (Zaichkowsky, 1994; Cheung et al., 2009).

To measure the MeWOM Message Involvement, survey respondents were asked four, five-point agree/disagree Likert scale questions regarding their perception of the MeWOM brand image disruption in terms of its usefulness, whether it was interesting and whether or not respondents liked it. This scale was based on research conducted by Zaichkowsky (1994) on personal involvement in relation to products, advertisements and purchase situations.

4.7.5.3.3 MeWOM Issue Involvement

As mentioned in Chapter 3, one of the objectives of this study is to determine whether involvement with a topic and the motivation to process information (central route processing) has an impact on a change in a corporate reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption. For the purpose of this study, 'MeWOM Issue Involvement' can be defined as '*the extent to which MeWOM brand image disruption receivers are motivated to process more information about an issue highlighted by the brand image disruption'*. This definition was created based on the literature on issue involvement and the cognitive processing of information (Mitchell, 1979; Petty & Cacioppo, 1980; Maheswaran & Levy, 1990).

As mentioned previously in this thesis, there are a few unique ways that receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions can display involvement with a topic and a motivation to process more information about it. They can:

- expand a Tweet to read comments from others
- expand a Tweet to read any response from an organisation included in a MeWOM brand image disruption
- retweet the MeWOM brand image disruption in an effort to receive comments, and thus more information, about the Tweet
- favourite the Tweet to refer to it later

To assess respondents' likelihood to undertake the information processing activities above, four five-point agree/disagree questions were asked to assess how likely respondents were to retweet the MeWOM brand image disruption, to read a response from the organisation, how likely they were to read a response from others and how likely they were to favourite it.

4.7.5.3.4 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Emotions

As noted previously, emotions experienced by receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions and whether they can potentially impact a change in a corporate reputation is an objective of this study. There has however been very little research empirically with regard to emotions and eWOM. The researcher thus consulted the literature on emotions. According to Machleit & Eroglu (2000) there have been three typologies of emotion that marketers borrow from psychology – Izard's (1977) 10 fundamental emotions from his Differential Emotions Theory, Mehrabain and Russell's (1974) Pleasure Arousal, and Dominance dimensions of response and Plutchik's (2001) eight basic emotion categories. Upon reviewing the options available, the researcher took the decision to employ Plutchik's (2001) eight basic emotion categories. Plutchik's (2001) basic emotion categories were selected for a couple of reasons. First, it has been acknowledged as having the widest usage in consumer research within the marketing discipline (Havlena and Holbrook, 1986; Machleit & Eroglu, 2000) and second, the descriptions of the emotions are easy to understand.

Plutchik first developed his model in 1958 when he suggested eight basic bi-polar emotions – joy versus sorrow (sadness), anger versus fear, acceptance versus disgust and surprise versus expectancy. He contends that since the time of Descartes, philosophers and psychologists have proposed anywhere from 3 to 11 emotions as primary or basic and that all of them include fear, anger and sadness, with most including joy, love and surprise (Plutchik, 2001). Figure 4.13 has been adapted to demonstrate the eight basic emotions and their polar opposites.

Figure 4.13 - Plutchik's Model of Eight Basic Emotions, Adapted from Plutchik (2001)

Two words in the model were slightly modified due to confusion identified in the pilot stage of the study (which is explained later in this chapter) – they were '**expectancy**' and '**acceptance**'. The researcher identified possible alternative words and selected 'not surprised' for 'expectancy' and 'approval' for 'acceptance'. These modified words were subsequently accepted in a brief follow up to the pilot stage.

Operationalising the questionnaire, eight, six-point scale questions were asked to assess the extent respondents felt joy, approval, fear, surprise, not surprised, sadness disgust and anger. The six points ranged from 'none' to 'very high'.

4.7.5.3.5 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Measurement Items

Table 4.7 provides a summary of the scale and non-scale items employed, associated authors and the construct measured in the study.

Table 4.7 - Scale and Non-Scale Items

Construct Measured	Scale Items	Author(s)
MeWOM Message Credibility	• The Tweet is believable • The Tweet is informative • The Tweet is trustworthy • The Tweet is reliable	Arndt, 1967; Engel et al, 1969, Day, 1971; Tybout et al, 1981; Richins, 1983; Bolfing, 1989; Buttle, 1998; East et al, 2008; Park et al., 2011
MeWOM Message Involvement	• The Tweet is useful • The Tweet is interesting • The Tweet is worth remembering • I liked the Tweet	Zaichkowsky, 1994; Cheung et al., 2009
Construct Measured	**Non-Scale Items**	**Authors(s)**
MeWOM Issue Involvement	After seeing this Tweet, how likely are you to do the following: • Retweet it • Expand to read (airline) response	Mitchell, 1979; Maheswaran; Petty & Cacioppo; 1980, Levy, 1990

	• Expand to read comments of others • Favourite it	
MeWOM Emotional Reactions	Reflecting on this Tweet, to what extent do you feel the following emotions? • Joy • Sadness • Surprise • Not surprised • Anger • Fear • Disgust • Approval	Plutchik, 1980; Havlena and Holbrook, 1986; Machleit & Eroglu, 2000; Plutchik, 2001

4.7.6 Pilot Test

Pilot testing, or pre-testing, is an important stage to undertake as it is a crucial step in identifying any design flaws (Wilson, 2012). It involves undertaking a limited number of experiments, questionnaires or interviews with respondents in order to clarify any problem areas of the study to be operationalised (Webb, 2000).

There are some key principles to adhere to when carrying out a pilot test as follows (Wilson, 2012):

- respondents should be drawn from the same population as the full survey
- the pilot test should be administered in the same way as the actual experiment

- it is recommended that a small test sample (between 10-40 participants) is utilised in order to test systematically with detailed probing
- if there are significant changes made as a result of the pilot test, one should repeat the pilot test

This study conducted a pilot test of the experiment with 10 participants from the sample population. Participants were sent a link to the online experiment and then asked to provide feedback to the researcher to determine any problem areas. Participants included 10 college-educated Twitter users in the United States under the age of 40. The researcher captured the feedback on Microsoft Excel and asked questions framed on the questionnaire quality criteria discussed earlier in this chapter. A pilot study log was developed and is depicted in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 - Pilot Study Log

Questionnaire Quality Criteria	Comments	Action Taken
Relevancy	All respondents felt the questionnaire was relevant to them.	None
Comprehension	Four respondents noted that the terms 'expectancy' and 'acceptance' in the emotion measurement portion of the experiment were confusing.	The terms were modified to similar alternatives – 'not surprised' for 'expectancy' and 'approval' for 'acceptance'.
Format	Three respondents indicated that they could not watch the videos included in the experiment.	In addition to an option to watch videos via a YouTube link, the researcher added an

		embedded video to the experiment and questionnaire.
Sequence	Five respondents gave feedback that there was too much information on one page and that the researcher should consider breaking up the survey.	The researcher broke up the experiment and questionnaire into clear blocks.
Layout	Due to the inclusion of videos and images within the experiment, three respondents noted that the images and videos loaded slowly.	The research added page breaks to the online experiment in order to have less elements loading on one page at a time.

As there were quite a few changes made to the questionnaire, the researcher followed Wilson's (2012) guidance and sent the revised experiment and questionnaire to an additional 10 respondents. All 10 completed the experiment and questionnaire without any additional comments for improvement.

In addition to the problem areas noted above, the researcher also determined an average amount of time that it took respondents to participate in the experiment and to take the questionnaire and utilised this information when the experiment and questionnaire were operationalised.

4.7.7 Sampling

Wilson's (2012) sampling process, as mentioned previously, was also used as a framework for the sampling procedure followed in stage one of Phase II of the study. The following sections provide details of the decisions taken with regard to the sampling procedure.

4.7.7.1 Population of Interest

Research conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, indicated that 23% of adult internet users in the United States above the age of 18 were reported to use Twitter. The research also indicated that the highest percentages of users, 37%, were between the ages of 18-29, followed by the ages of 30-49 at 25%. The microblog was especially popular with those under 50 and the college-educated - with at least 54% of Twitter users having at least some college education (Pew Social Media Update, 2014). Based on this data, college-educated, Twitter users between the ages of 18-49, who resided in the United States of America were identified as the population of interest.

4.7.7.2 Census or Sample

Capturing information in census form occurs when data is captured from every member of the population of interest. As Twitter had over 66 million active Twitter users in September 2015 when this experiment was designed (The Statistics Portal, 2015), the decision was taken to employ a sampling procedure in order to collect information.

4.7.7.3 Sampling Frame

The next stage in Wilson's (2012) sampling process is to select the sampling frame. The researcher chose to employ an access panel as the sampling frame. According to Wilson (2012), "an access panel is a database of individuals who have agreed to be available for surveys of varying types and topics. Rising rates of refusals and non-response make it more difficult to recruit for a single survey, therefore sampling from a pool of potentially willing marketing research respondents can be seen as an appropriate way of saving time and money" (p. 184).

The access panel utilised in stage one of Phase II of the study was Prolific Academic. Prolific Academic was founded by University of Oxford students as a way to bring academic researchers together with research participants. Research participants earn cash rewards or can donate earnings to charity. Prolific offered a high-quality participant pool, with participants from over 147 countries and the ability to select participants from the United States only (Prolific Academic, 2016). It also had some strong capabilities in terms of ensuring the quality of participants. Research participants must either use a university email address to join the platform or their Facebook login. It uses tracking mechanisms, including IP addresses, to ensure that no participant takes part in a study more than once and participants verify their accounts either by phone or Facebook and these mechanisms are used to run validation checks on accounts. The platform also uses the Smyte service which analyses user behaviour and trends across the internet to identify “bad actors” and “false positives” (Smyte, 2016).

The platform enabled the researcher to conduct flexible pre-screening and the opportunity to choose from a range of demographics to recruit participants. For example, as referenced in the previous section, 18-29 year olds with some college education comprised the majority of Twitter users in the United States according to Pew research undertaken in 2014 (Pew Social Media Update, 2014). In order to find a comparable demographic, the Prolific platform was an optimal channel from which to recruit participants. Participants who took part in the survey for this thesis were given a maximum of 25 minutes to complete the survey and were paid the equivalent of $9 an hour.

There are limitations associated with the use of crowdsourcing platforms and these are discussed at the end of the chapter.

4.7.7.4 Sampling Method

The next step was to determine the sampling method. The researcher again employed judgement sampling, or purposeful sampling, to select a sample that was deemed most appropriate for the study. As noted previously, college-educated, Twitter users between the ages of 18-49, who resided in the United States of America comprised the sample for stage one of Phase II of the study.

4.7.7.5 Sample Size

According to Wilson (2012), one of the most difficult challenges a researcher encounters is the determination of the sample size. Wilson further explains that determining sample size is comprised of a combination of financial, managerial and statistical issues. Although a large sample can help to reduce sampling error, researchers often need to achieve a balance with the increased costs and time involved in the data collection phase (Aacker et al., 2011). This study carried out 391 experiments (6 x repeated measures) with the aforementioned population of interest As each experiment took, on average, 15 minutes for completion (with approximately 98 hours having already taken place with 391 respondents), it was believed that an appropriate balance had been achieved between the sample size, the time and budget available to the researcher.

4.7.7.6 Sampling and Non-Sampling Errors

The occurrence of sampling and non-sampling errors is an important consideration for the researcher. These potential errors must be understood by the researcher and any necessary action must be taken in order to plan for them and/or address them.

According to Wilson (2012), "sampling error merely reflects the extent of random chance in selecting respondents with different views and behaviours" (p. 198). It is acknowledged that a certain amount of sampling error will occur in studies that involve collecting data from only a part of the population. They can be reduced by using a sampling procedure that has a high statistical efficiency and/or increasing the sample size (Wilson, 2012). The sampling procedure utilised by the researcher had a high statistical efficiency due to the way in which the respondents were selected via an access panel and the sample size was considered appropriate at 391 respondents.

Non-sampling errors can occur in many different forms (Aacker et al., 2011). These range from the scales used in the study, issues with the problem definition, the interviewing methods, data analysis, response errors and non-response errors.

As it has been acknowledged within the literature that non-sampling error can be more problematic than sampling errors (Churchill & Brown, 2007), the researcher sought to address these potential errors whilst designing the study – and many of them have been addressed in previous sections of this thesis (e.g. scales utilised, the problem definition, interviewing methods, and designing the study with the respondent in mind). One of the main non-sampling errors not explained earlier, and thus worth expanding upon here, is a type of respondent error. Respondent errors occur when participants either intentionally or inadvertently provide distorted or erroneous responses (Wilson, 2012; Babin & Zikmund, 2015). Potential respondent errors identified by the researcher included ensuring that respondents were actual Twitter users and that they lived in the United States.

As explained previously, two classification questions were asked in order to ascertain whether respondents were actual Twitter users – and one of them inadvertently assessed use by asking about daily Twitter use. If the respondent answered ‘none’, they were excluded from participating in the experiment.

A few quality criteria were operationalised to ensure that survey respondents did indeed live in the U.S.A. First, they were asked to confirm that they resided there, second, the Prolific platform enabled the targeting of those who not only reside in the United States, but also who were born there. Finally, the Qualtrics survey platform was utilised to confirm that IP addresses came from the United States. There were two instances out of 391 where Qualtrics flagged IP addresses outside the U.S.A. and these cases were excluded from the results.

4.7.8 Analysis of Data

Before providing detail of the statistical analysis methods employed in stage one of Phase II of the study, it is worth revisiting the objectives of the study. Stage one of Phase II of the study has two main objectives as follows:

- **Objective 2** - to explore *whether and to what extent* MeWOM brand image disruptions impact receivers' perception of a corporate reputation
- **Objective 3** - to establish which variables cause a change in a corporate reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption

When considering which statistical methods to use to achieve the objectives above, the researcher considered both first-generation and second-generation statistical methods. According to Hair et al. (2016), first-generation techniques are often used by social scientists and include regression-based approaches such as multiple regression, logistic regression, and analysis of variance. They also include exploratory factor analysis, cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling. These techniques have been widely applied by social scientists. Second-generation techniques however, have been increasingly used in the last 20 years to overcome many of the weaknesses associated with first-generation techniques. Table 4.9 provides details the first and second-generation techniques according to Hair et al. (2016).

Table 4.9 - Organisation of Multivariate Methods - Hair et al. (2016)

Organization of Multivariate Methods		
	Primarily Exploratory	**Primarily Confirmatory**
First-generation techniques	Cluster analysis	Analysis of variance
	Exploratory Factor Analysis	Logistic Regression
	Multidimensional scaling	Multiple Regression

Second-generation techniques	PLS-SEM	CB-SEM, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis

With regard to the methods highlighted in Table 4.9, Hair et al. (2016) note that when these first and second generation methods are applied to a research problem, “they are confirmatory when testing the hypotheses of existing theories and concepts and exploratory when they search for latent patterns in the data in case there is no or only little prior knowledge on how the variables are related” (p. 3). Based on the guidance provided above, the researcher considered the two forms of structural equation modelling for her research and a comparison of the two is provided later in this section.

4.7.9 Objective Two

Before utilising any of the advanced statistical methods mentioned above, the first step was to assess any change to a corporate reputation as detailed in the experiment design section of the this chapter. The statistical analysis employed for objective two involved utilising SPSS, version 22, to do a paired-samples t-test. The paired samples t-test was selected as the measurement instrument as the same respondents were asked the same NPS question on two occasions and the objective was to determine whether there was any change between the NPS scores provided at the beginning of the survey (NPS1) and after MeWOM brand image disruption exposure (NPS2). Employing a paired samples t-test not only enabled the researcher to determine if there was an actual change in reputation, it also enabled the researcher to understand the extent of the change. Additionally, it was also an applicable method to use as the data was normally distributed, independent and interval (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).

4.7.10 Objective Three

In contrast to objective two, the consideration of which statistical method to use for objective three was more involved as there were several methods to consider. Although some of the first-generation techniques noted in Table 4.9 seemed like a viable option (e.g. multiple regression), the researcher wanted to consider second generation statistical applications in order to take advantage of some of the benefits of using second generation GUI packages and the increasing use of SEM within the marketing discipline (Hair et al., 2011). She therefore considered the two types of Structural Equation Modelling– Covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM).

4.7.11 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

According to Hoyle (1995), "structural equation modelling (SEM) is a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses about relations among observed and latent variables" (p. 1). It has been noted as a method that has become "quasi-standard in marketing and management research when it comes to analysing the cause-effect relations between latent constructs" (Hair et. al, 2011). SEM uses factor analysis to operationalise latent variables and path analysis is then applied to measure the strength and direction of the relationships between the latent variables (Kline, 2015). Although path analysis models were first developed by Sewall Wright in the early 1920s, structural models as they are used in the social sciences began in the 1970s. PLS-SEM was developed more recently and is an evolving statistical modelling technique (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2016).

Before determining which SEM method to employ in stage one of Phase II of the study, there were a few key differences between the CB-SEM and PLS-SEM methods that were considered by the researcher. They are listed in Table 4.10 below (Hair et. al, 2011, Hair et. al, 2016):

Table 4.10 - CB-SEM and PLS-SEM Differences

CB-SEM	PLS-SEM
Attempts to reproduce the covariance matrix	Weights and partitions the variance between the variables

Underpinned by parametric statistical theory	Underpinned by non-parametric statistical theory
More restricted assumptions about the data	Less restricted assumptions about the data
More restricted sample size requirements	Less restricted sample size requirements
Best for theory testing and confirmation	Best for prediction and theory development

Covariance-based SEM determines how well a proposed theoretical model can estimate the covariance matrix for a sample data set. PLS path modelling, on the other hand, focuses on explaining the differences between the variables (Hair et al., 2016). Another key difference between CB-SEM and PLS-SEM are the statistical theories that underpin them. CB-SEM is underpinned by parametric statistical theory (Hair et. al, 2011, Hair et. al, 2016) which is more restrictive in nature than non-parametric statistical theory. A pertinent point highlighted in the literature with regard to the use of parametric statistical theories is that assumptions may be violated when the variables are operationalised using questionnaire item responses based on ordinal scales, including Likert scales (Carifio & Perla, 2008; Jamieson, 2004). Thus, there are more restrictions on the data used with CB-SEM and the sample size involved. In contrast, PLS-SEM is a non-parametric method, which has less restrictive sample size requirements, and is less sensitive to the measurement levels and distributional characteristics of the questionnaire data. These are important advantages, especially when the data violate the assumptions of parametric statistics (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004; Hair et. al, 2014; Wong, 2013).

When considering the philosophical differences between CB-SEM and PLS-SEM, Hair et. al (2011), stated, "if the research objective is theory testing and confirmation, then the appropriate method is CB-SEM. In contrast, if the research objective is prediction and theory development, then the appropriate method is PLS-SEM" (p. 140).

4.7.12 Selection of SEM Method

As discussed previously in this chapter, the researcher believes the pragmatist approach is best suited to her view of the world and the needs of the study. She therefore conducted an extensive review of the statistical tools and methods available in order to address the research objectives of the study. As noted previously, first and second generation techniques were considered. Weighing the options, the researcher decided to employ SEM as a second-generation technique in order to take advantage of the benefits of using second-generation GUI packages and the increasing use of SEM within the marketing discipline (Hair et al., 2011). She therefore considered the two types of Structural Equation Modelling – Covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM). Although both methods have the same objective (estimating the relationships among constructs and indicators), they differ in their statistical conceptions. For example, CB-SEM calculates the covariances of a set of variables (common variance), and only that variance is included in any solutions that are derived. PLS-SEM, on the other hand, does not divide the variance into common and unique variance – it accounts for the total variance in the observed indicators rather than explaining only the correlations between the indicators. CB-SEM therefore adheres to a common factor model approach in which the indicator covariances define the nature of the data, whereas PLS-SEM adheres to a composite model approach in which data are defined by means of linear combinations of indicators. The researcher chose PLS-SEM for the following reasons:

1. The model being tested in the study is exploratory in nature and is therefore predictive in nature. Researchers who have compared PLS-SEM and CB-SEM have specifically called out PLS-SEM as the preferred technique when the research is exploratory, rather than confirmatory (Rigdon, 2012; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014; Sarstedt et al., 2016; Hair et al.; 2017). It has been noted within the literature that “CB-SEM should be used to test only well-established theories that are empirically validated” and that “researchers can

help themselves avoid unsupportable conclusions by using PLS for exploratory analysis and for testing developmental theories" (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014, pgs. 131-132). As there was a dearth of research in the corporate reputation discipline on the factors which cause a change in reputation in a microblog environment, the researcher consulted the literature on eWOM and the variables which make it effective (effectiveness has been researched in relation to sales outcomes, the further proliferation of eWOM (virality) and awareness (e.g. the Twitter effect). The impact of these factors are not known with regard to reputation and therefore the study seeks to predict the variables that will influence a change in reputation. The study is thus exploratory in nature.

2. A limitation with CB-SEM is that it assumes that the researcher is using only reflective indicators in the model. As all reflective indicators of a latent construct are assumed to be caused by the construct, reflective indicators would have to co-vary. It has been highlighted in the literature that the assumption that all indicators are reflective can result in serious modelling errors that produce inappropriate results. Lowry & Gaskin (2014) note that "this is particularly salient to behaviorial research where mixed models – those comprising reflective and formative indicators – are common. Thus when a theoretical model includes formative indicators (or a mix of reflective and formative) it is important to use an appropriate statistical technique, such as PLS, that can account for both indicators in its statistical model." (p. 132). The models for this study are comprised of both reflective and formative indicators – e.g. reflective indicators comprise the latent variables for MeWOM Message Credibility, MeWOM Message Involvement and MeWOM Issue Involvement and formative indicators comprise all variables in the model as indicators of the formative construct 'NPS Change'.
3. PLS-SEM is suitable for small and large sample sizes, with larger sample sizes increasing its precision (Hair et al., 2014).

4. Works with various types of data – metric, quasi-metric, and (ordinal) scaled data (Hair et al., 2014).
5. Calls for further research on both types of CB-SEM and PLS-SEM have been made recently with researchers highlighting that both have their merits and that the researcher should decide which form of SEM is best suited to the research objectives. Although the research acknowledges that there have been several criticisms of PLS-SEM, more recent literature invalidates many of the criticisms and calls for further studies have subsequently been made (Sarstedt et al., 2016; Rigdon, 2016; Hair et al., 2017). As such, and in alignment with the researcher's philosophical stance, PLS-SEM was chosen due to the requirements of the research.
6. The PLS-SEM statistical method has become popular for the analysis of questionnaire data in marketing, business, and management research and has been hailed as "indeed a silver bullet" for this purpose (Hair et al., 2011, p.139). Over 100 studies have been published in the top marketing journals using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2011) and it thus was considered to be an optimal method by the researcher.

Having discussed the design considerations for stage one, Phase II of the study, the chapter now moves to the design of stage two of Phase II – the qualitative explanatory design.

4.8 Explanatory Design - Stage Two: Qualitative Phase

The second stage of Phase II of the study was comprised of the follow-up qualitative interviews. As noted previously, the follow-up qualitative interviews were the second stage following the quantitative element of phase II with the objective of providing further explanatory insights. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), there are two variants of the Explanatory Research Design – the follow-up explanations model and the participant selection model. The follow-up explanation model is used when researchers want to follow up quantitative results in order to explain or expand upon them. The participant selection model is used when research needs quantitative information in order to identify and select suitable participants for a follow-up qualitative study. The former model places emphasis on the quantitative results whilst the latter places more emphasis on the qualitative results. The follow-up explanation model was deemed most appropriate for the purpose of this study in order to obtain further insights from the receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions and their perceptions of any change in reputation that takes place.

Figure 4.14 provides a visual representation of the follow-up explanations model employed and the sequence of events. It was adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark (2007)

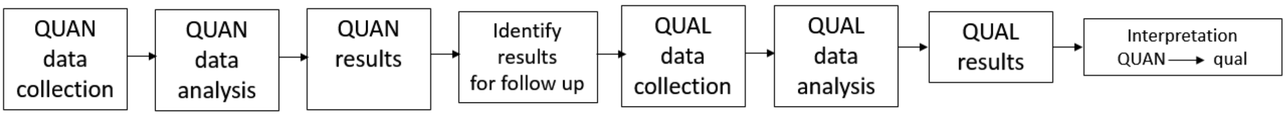

Figure 4.14 – Follow-Up Explanations Model (QUAN emphasised)

The design and steps employed for stage one of the Explanatory Model were covered in section 4.7. Additionally, there are a few decisions that must be made when designing the qualitative stage of an Explanatory Design study and these are provided in the next sections.

4.8.1 Sampling

This section provides details of the sample and sample size utilised for stage two of Phase II.

4.8.1.1 Sample

As the intent of an Explanatory Design is to use qualitative data to provide more detail about the quantitative results, it is recommended that the same sample be included in both data collections (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Similar to the Phase I sampling procedure, purposeful sampling was employed for the qualitative phase. A majority of participants in the quantitative portion of the study were between the ages of 18-24 and college educated. As such, college-educated, Twitter users between the ages of 18-24, who resided in the United States of

America comprised the sample for stage two of Phase II of the study. The participants for the study were recruited from a university in the United States and were given a gift card to a local coffee retailer for their participation. The demographic details of these participants are included in Chapter 7.

4.8.1.2 Sample Size

With regard to the sample size, the advice provided by Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) is to have a much smaller sample size for the qualitative phase. They note "the intent is not to merge or compare the data, as in the concurrent procedures, so unequal sizes are not as much an issue in the sequential designs" (p. 123). The emphasis in the Follow-Up Explanations Model sequential design is to use qualitative data to build on the initial stage one results, thus emphasising the quantitative results. In this study, 14 participants took part in stage two of Phase II of the study. Similar to the exploratory phase, the number of participants was determined using the point of saturation technique (Creswell, 2014) – i.e. it was believed that theoretical saturation had been reached within the sample as the level of new information provided had diminished. This was confirmed during analysis phase of the research when there were no additional emergent themes.

4.8.2 Selecting Results for the Follow-Up

Consideration of the criteria to be used in the follow up is another decision the researcher needs to make. It is recommended that researchers weigh the options and determine the approach that is best suited for their research purposes. Some options could be to follow up on significant or non-significant results, key significant predictors, outlier or extreme cases or distinguishing demographic characteristics (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For this study, the researcher decided to focus on the key significant predictors in the follow-up interviews as there were six individual MeWOM brand image disruptions included in the experiment. The rationale for doing so was to provide explanatory context to significant predictors of models which included different types of content included in both positive and negative valence Tweets – e.g. a Tweet with a video, Tweet with text only and Tweet with photograph.

4.8.3 Other Design Considerations

In addition to the decisions referenced previously, the researcher also had to again determine the type of interview questions to employ, the structure of the interviews and how to analyse the data.

4.8.3.1 Type of Interview Questions

Due to their flexibility and the emphasis on understanding the results of the quantitative phase, the researcher again chose semi-structured interviews for the qualitative portion of Phase II. In terms of creating the topic guide, topics to be covered were based on the stage one quantitative results. In addition to the topics to be covered, the topic guide also included prompts to enable the researcher to delve further into the information provided when additional clarification or explanation was needed (Wilson, 2012). The Phase II topic guide can be found in Appendix 4.

4.8.4 Operationalising the Interviews

As noted previously, participants for the qualitative portion of the Phase II study were recruited from a university in the United States. In advance of the qualitative interviews, participants were instructed to complete the Phase II online experiment 1 hour before their follow-up qualitative interview as indicated in Figure 4.15.

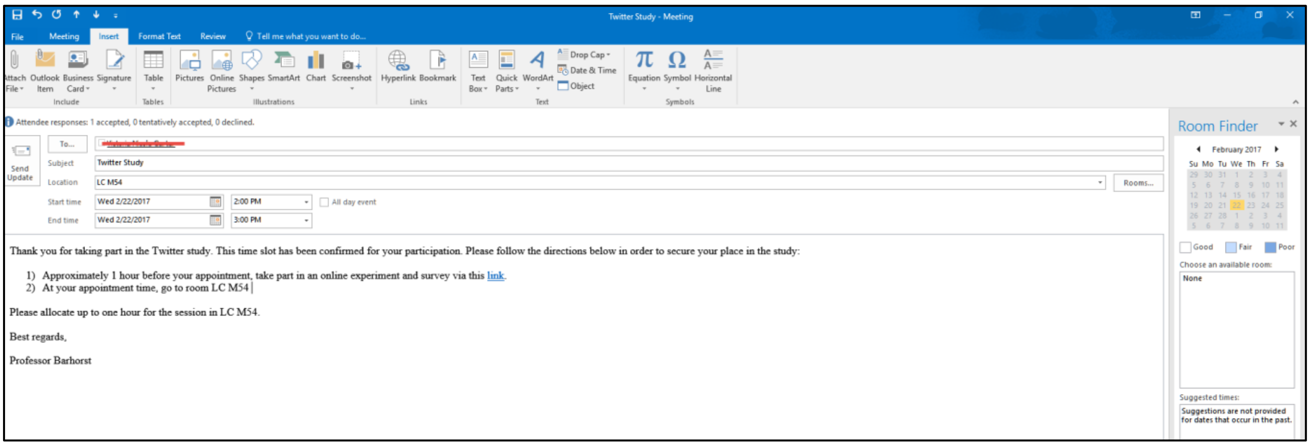

Figure 4.15 – Phase II Qualitative Invitation

The interviews were operationalised utilising the same guidance referenced in section 4.7 – i.e. the same approach was adopted in structuring the interviews and building rapport and trust with participants.

The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average with 14 participants taking part. They were recorded using the researcher's Apple iPhone and were subsequently transcribed into a Word document.

4.8.4.1.1 Analysing the Data

To analyse the transcriptions, the researcher again chose to use conventional content analysis which is comprised of coding categories directly from the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) in order to minimise the risk of missing crucial information and the essence of ideas and experiences (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

Following Mile and Huberman's (1984) framework, the researcher read the transcripts from the Phase II qualitative interviews several times in order to discern themes and statements related to the research objectives. These themes and statements were coded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to organise themes and statements and align them to the research objectives. Several themes emerged and provided explanatory context to quantitative results in stage one of Phase II of the study. The findings from the Phase II qualitative phase of the research can be found in Chapter 7.

4.9 Limitations

As with any research project, there are limitations which must be acknowledged and this study is no exception. The sections below outline these limitations.

4.9.1 Selection of Industry

A key limitation is that the research is focused on the airline industry. The airline industry was chosen as it was recognised as one that was at the epicentre of microblog members sharing their positive and negative eWOM and offered a wealth of data for the researcher to use. Although the use of the airline industry was a practical one in terms of the execution of the study, it would be interesting to undertake a similar study with another industry, or indeed a range of industries, to determine whether similar outcomes would occur.

4.9.2 Location

Another limitation is the location of the experiment and qualitative follow-up, the United States. With microblog users sharing their experiences of brands around the world, it would be interesting to undertake a similar analysis with receivers in other countries.

4.9.3 Social Media Platform

As the exploratory phase provided a strong rationale for undertaking a study focused on Twitter, there are opportunities to undertake similar studies utilising other social media platforms to determine if similar results occur.

4.9.4 Use of a Crowdsourcing Platform for Quantitative Participants

Although 43% of studies published in the Journal of Consumer Research between June 2015 and April 2016 utilised crowdsourcing platforms such as Amazon MTurk, and over 15,000 published papers have referenced using MTurk in the past 10 years (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017), there are limitations associated with utilising a crowdsourcing platform. The quantitative phase of this study utilised the crowdsourcing platform Prolific Academic to source participants. The main criticisms associated with the use of crowd-sourcing platforms to conduct research concerns the quality of participants (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). These concerns are discussed briefly along with actions taken by the researcher to minimise the risks associated with these concerns.

4.9.4.1 Representativeness

Representativeness concerns whether the sample on a crowdsourcing platform is representative of the target sample (Paolacci, 2010). To avoid any issues with representativeness, it is recommended that researchers build panels representative of their target populations (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). As discussed in section 4.7, Prolific Academic was chosen as it offered a high-quality participant pool, with participants from over 147 countries and the ability to select participants from the United States only whilst building a panel with several demographic options. In addition to the characteristics of Prolific, the experiment included screening questions to filter out those who were not considered part of the target group. Upon disqualification, the experiment ended and they were dropped from the study.

4.9.4.2 Self-selection

Self-selection concerns the attractiveness of some tasks over others due such characteristics as the time it takes to complete a task to higher pay rates of some studies over others. In this study, participants were paid a pro-rata rate of $9 per hour. To avoid the risks associated with self-selection, it is recommended that researchers to describe tasks generally to ensure that participants' expectations are aligned to the nature of the study without revealing details that would make the study more or less attractive to different participants (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). The researcher chose Prolific Academic over other crowdsourcing platforms such as MTurk for several reasons. One of the primary reasons was that Prolific requires a minimum wage payment to participants. The $9 amount was chosen as it was the minimum wage equivalent in GBP per hour at the time of the study – therefore minimising self-selection based on wage. With regard to the study details, Prolific only makes studies viewable to those who meet the researcher's pre-selected criteria. For this study, participants could only see the experiment one page at a time and only once they left Prolific and started the experiment in Qualtrics. As detailed previously in this chapter, a pilot phase was implemented to ensure that instructions were clear and questions understandable.

4.9.4.3 The Professional Participant

This criticism concerns the risk that participants may have been previously exposed to studies or stimuli. MTurk specifically has been called out as a platform that suffers from "professional survey takers" completing common experimental tasks and questionnaires, often utilised in behavioural research studies, on a daily basis, sometimes more than once (Peer et al., 2017). It has thus been recommended that researchers should ensure that they do not recruit participants who have participated in their related studies (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017) and that alternative crowdsourcing platforms be considered (Peer et al., 2017). In their research comparing MTurk, CrowdFlower (CF) and Prolific Academic (ProA), Peer et al. (2017) found that compared to MTurk, CF and ProA demonstrated lower degrees of dishonest behaviour compared to MTurk and that ProA participants demonstrated higher naiveté than MTurk participants. This was the first study conducted by the researcher and it was not available to participants prior to the study period. In addition, and as discussed previously in this chapter, the Prolific platform also had some strong capabilities in terms of ensuring the quality of participants. Research participants must either use a university email address to join the platform or their Facebook login. It uses tracking mechanisms, including IP addresses, to ensure that no participant takes part in a study more than once and participants verify their accounts either by phone or Facebook and these mechanisms are used to run validation checks on accounts. These attributes also helped to ensure that the experiment was only taken once by participants.

4.9.5 Limitations Summary

Although there are several limitations associated with this study, the researcher believes that the findings will help the overall understanding of corporate reputation within the microblog environment. The study will do so by helping to fill the gaps identified in the literature review and the needs expressed by senior managers the exploratory qualitative interviews. Acknowledging these limitations paves the way for more research in the future in this burgeoning domain.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter commenced by discussing the various research philosophies and methodological approaches in order to provide a strong foundation from which to take the research forward. Having reviewed the literature to understand the main philosophies utilised in the social sciences, along with consideration for the stated research objectives of this thesis, the pragmatist approach was regarded as the most suitable in designing the study.

The remainder of the chapter discussed the background and techniques used to design the two phases of research in the study with the final part of the chapter calling out the study's limitations.

The next chapter shares the results of Phase I of the study.

CHAPTER 5

PHASE I: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH FINDINGS AND TAKING THE RESEARCH FORWARD

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided a detailed review of the literature with regard to corporate image, reputation, microblogs and eWOM. Chapter 3 outlined the gaps within the literature, provided hypotheses and introduced an initial conceptual model based on the literature review. Next, Chapter 4 provided an overview of research philosophy, methodology and the research design employed for both phases of the study.

This chapter provides the findings of the Phase I exploratory research and aims to provide a strong rationale for taking Phase II of the research forward. As detailed in Chapter 4, the primary objective of the exploratory phase with organisations is to confirm what has been said within the literature with regard to any impact that eWOM has on firms' reputations. Additionally, the exploratory phase seeks to understand how microblogs such as Twitter are viewed specifically by firms in order to provide a rationale for undertaking a study on this social media application in particular. Finally, and with regard to the importance given valence and cognitive information processing in the persuasion context, this phase seeks to understand how firms manage both positive and negative eWOM brand image disruptions and their degree of interaction with them.

The chapter begins by providing the demographic data of the Phase I participants. Next, the chapter provides the findings from the study. The chapter ends with a rationale for taking Phase II of the research forward.

5.1 Demographics

As indicted in Table 5.1, 10 participants from various industries took part in the study with a majority working for multinational enterprises (MNEs). Six males and four females took part in the study.

All of the firms represented in the study utilised Twitter as a component of their firm's marketing and reputation management strategies. As participants were at the senior manager level, and were from MNEs, their remit comprised marketing and/or reputation management strategies globally. A majority however were physically based in the United States.

Table 5.1 – Phase I Demographics

Participant	Gender	Industry	Position Held	Company Size	Physical Location	Company Twitter Account
P1	Female	Energy	Social Media Director	MNE	United States	Yes
P2	Male	Travel Services	Senior Marketing Manager	MNE	United States	Yes
P3	Female	Technology Services (software)	Senior Marketing Manager	MNE	United Kingdom	Yes
P4	Male	Travel Events	Corporate Communications Director	SME	United States	Yes
P5	Male	Luxury Automotive	Communications Director	MNE	United States	Yes
P6	Male	Financial Services	Social Media Vice President	MNE	United States	Yes
P7	Female	Gaming	Senior Marketing Manager	MNE	United Kingdom	Yes
P8	Male	Aviation	Communications Director	MNE	United States	Yes
P9	Male	Chemical	Corporate Communications Director	MNE	United Kingdom	Yes
P10	Male	Marketing and PR Agency	PR & Communications Agency Director	MNE	United States	Yes

5.2 Preliminary Information – Objectives for Using Social Media

As noted in Chapter 3, one of the gaps identified within the literature review is with regard to the concept of corporate reputation in today's microblogging environment. Several assertions have been made within the literature with regard to corporate reputations and how they can be potentially impacted when experiences about brands are shared in microblogs such as Twitter. Little is known with regard to organisations and their uses for social media applications such as Twitter however. It was thus a good starting point in the interviews to understand what the primary objectives were for the use of social media applications such as Twitter. As expected, one of the primary reasons provided by all respondents was to protect their reputations with all respondents acknowledging that they manage their reputations within social media.

Participant 1 noted that her firm's main objectives were related to brand awareness and reputation management:

> *"Our main objectives are to increase brand awareness and to protect the reputation of the company."*

Participant 7 also acknowledged using social media to build their brand and for reputation management:

> *"I guess broadly speaking – a lot would be around branding and giving a voice to the business. We also use social in terms of DR or direct response."*

Participant 8 references marketing the firm and reputation management:

> *"The main objectives really are the marketing and brand preservation of the company."*

5.3 Impact of eWOM Brand Image Disruptions on Corporate Reputation

Critical to taking this thesis forward, it was important to understand any underlying concerns with regard to the impact that eWOM brand image disruptions could potentially have from the perspective of organisations. As highlighted in Chapter 2, a resounding theme throughout the literature on microblogs and eWOM was the potential impact that eWOM could have on corporate images and reputations (e.g. Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al, 2012; Trainor, 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016). In agreement with the literature, a key theme emerged from the data analysis and that was control. Participants felt a loss or lack of control over their reputations with the provision of eWOM about their firms in microblogs such as Twitter. Overall, there was however a lack of understanding of the key drivers which may cause a change in corporate reputations, with more general types of statements being provided.

Participant 1 describes the sense of loss of control when people start talking about their firm on social media applications such as Twitter:

> *"There's a lot of things we don't have control over, so when people start talking about our brands or our company and relationship to that and we're not tied to it, or we're indirectly tied to it, it all falls down on our reputation. It's really hard to manage."*

Participant 5, when discussing a loss of control of eWOM and the risk it poses to the reputation of his firm, acknowledged that it was becoming too much of a task to try and manage – that measures would be put in place to implement reputation specialists at each dealership:

> *"We have specified a person in each dealership that's responsible for social media content. We've left it up to the retailers for now, but it may get to the point where we say 'look you have to have an online reputation specialist that manages your online reputation as well as your offline reputation more proactively and I think we're starting to get to that point."*

Respondent 1 acknowledged the impact that negative eWOM could have and wanted to associate a dollar value to reputation loss. There was also an acknowledgement of a lack of action by the firm in their current reputation management strategy:

> *"I actually tried putting a model together with a dollar value to say that if someone heard that there was a stabbing at a station, then if a hundred people read that and those 100 people told*

5 people each what they'd heard, you'd run the risk of that many people not putting you in their consideration mix when they need to buy gas."

"And on the flip side I said that imagine all the times that we haven't said anything up to this point. So what if we actually started responding and doing something about it? Imagine then if those same 100 people who read it saw our response to it and told 5 people…'hey, did you know that they actually decided to do store clerk training to make sure they know how to handle…' you know like whatever it is. So it's just like if people could see what we're doing to improve and to try to make things better or to better their experience, you know we're hoping that it would swing the other way so it's not making a negative more negative – it's taking the negative and making it more positive."

The theme of a lack of control of corporate reputation and the risk that eWOM poses to reputations is in alignment to what the literature states and is of note for this study. It was clear from the interviews however that organisations were not clear on what exactly causes a change in reputation if one does occur, with many enduring an ongoing struggle in this domain with regard to reputation management. As discussed previously, if indeed a corporate reputation changes as a result of exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, the extent of change has not been empirically evaluated, and the factors that cause a change remain unknown. Understanding that organisations view this loss or lack of control as something they have a concern about and continue to struggle through, provides a strong rationale for undertaking further research in this area.

5.4 Crediblity of eWOM

In order to understand whether organisations perceived eWOM about their firms to be a threat to their reputations, a question was asked regarding their main concern with social media and microblogging sites such as Twitter. Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was that of the credibility of eWOM and the potential impact that misinformation could have on their reputations. Chapter 2 highlighted that eWOM credibility (Cheung et al., 2009), also referred to as message credibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and argument quality (Teng et al., 2014), has been found to play an important role in eWOM effectiveness. eWOM credibility concerns how believable or trustworthy a receiver believes the information to be. From the qualitative data analysis, it was clear that there was a clear concern that if the eWOM was considered credible, that there would be an impact on their reputations. There was a degree of uncertainty around this however with participants questioning the credibility of eWOM and how to react to it.

Participant 4 commented on the power of social media with regard to its scale and potential for misinformation as follows:

> *"Social media is a megaphone for anybody who wants to use it. I think social media promotes random comments without any true basis of fact and it's all about self-expression. It's becoming a megaphone for everyone to voice their opinion whether informed or not. And in a channel where perception is equal to dollars in a certain sense, that has great concern for us."*

Participant 8 referenced the difficulties in managing misinformation and control:

> *"There is a concern which is that the wrong type of information gets into the media. From the wrong type I am not saying that it is necessarily poor but that maybe it is misinterpreted, but I think that it can be very, very damaging and it is very difficult to have it under control. If you want to be present on social media the way that I perceive it from a company's point of view, it is a little bit of a gamble. It can go well, but it can go very wrong."*

Participant 7 referenced trolls on Twitter and the misinformation proliferated by them:

> *"There are a lot of trolls on Twitter who say things that aren't true and this is concerning to us. We are not clear what impact, if any, what they say has on our reputation."*

A concern for the credibility of eWOM and the impact that it could potentially have on a corporate reputation is an area of research that needs more exploration. As highlighted in Chapter 2, eWOM credibility, or argument strength and/or quality, is a predictor of eWOM effectiveness. The exploratory interviews confirm that organisations are concerned with this aspect of eWOM any impact it has on their reputations. This provides a strong rationale for obtaining clarification on the role eWOM credibility plays in relation to a change in reputation upon exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions.

5.5 Impact of Positive and Negative eWOM Brand Image Disruptions

As highlighted in Chapter 2, although there has been some impressive research on the valence of eWOM in a microblog previously (Riu et al., 2013, Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Marchand et al., 2016), there has been little with regard to the valence of a MeWOM brand image disruptions and any impact that valence has on a corporate reputation. Additionally, the eWOM literature was inconclusive on whether positive or negative eWOM was more impactful as there were mixed results (Marchand et al., 2016). Recent results have started to indicate that negative eWOM is more impactful on some eWOM outcomes however. It was therefore prudent to discuss with organisations how they perceive positive and negative disruptions in the context of any impact they have on their reputation. Exploring this topic with organisations demonstrates that participants were unclear about the impact of positive eWOM brand image disruptions – some perceived them to have an impact and some did not. With regard to negative eWOM brand image disruptions, there was a clear perceived risk to their reputations. With regard to negative eWOM brand image disruptions, they were somewhat expected and having a response strategy in place was more common as it was believed that an eWOM brand image disruption of this type would have an impact on their reputations.

5.5.1 Positive eWOM Brand Image Disruptions – Little Impact

As follows, some respondents noted that positive eWOM brand image disruptions were rare and they did not always understand how, or indeed whether, positive eWOM brand image disruptions could influence their corporate reputation.

Participant 7 seemed to have a relaxed perspective towards positive eWOM and its impact:

"If they deemed it appropriate for them to vouch for us, then it would be at their hands to do so. We of course appreciate it when they do, but it's not something we actively seek or promote through our activities. Their effect is just not that great."

Participant 2 also acknowledges that positive eWOM is rare whilst also relating a lack of impact on reputation:

"In terms of the impact of positive comments, I think, from what I've seen at least, they are quite rare and can have some impact and they get retweets or Facebook shares, but I just don't think the impact of them is big." "I think that the scale of it is just so small, I don't think it is something that has any kind of real impact on the brand."

5.5.2 Positive eWOM Brand Image Disruptions – Some Impact

Some organisations highlighted a belief in an enhancement to corporate reputation with regard to positive eWOM brand image disruptions with the acknowledgement that their presence and management helped to enhance their reputation.

Respondent 8 referenced positive comments and the positive impact they have on the corporate image of his firm:

"I have quite a lot of experience with positive comments where really the image of the company boosted up significantly because of the participation in the social networks and there you see the differences."

Participant 9 details how his firm works to encourage positive eWOM for use in marketing materials:

"We definitely work to encourage it. As we're assessing people's positive comments, my staff will occasionally pull those quotes and seed those into a Google doc which is our standard operating procedure for curating new content. We will copy those testimonies to then be used later in other marketing materials."

Commenting on the impact of positive eWOM, participant 10 references social media and WOM:

"Well social media is word-of-mouth if you think about it. It's just word of, you know, typed mouth. So yeah, it's highly impactful."

5.5.3 Negative eWOM Brand Image Disruptions in Social Media

Although participants had a mixed perspective on the impact of positive eWOM brand image disruptions on their reputation, there was more consensus on the risk to corporate reputation that negative eWOM brand image disruptions posed to firms. With regard to negative eWOM brand image disruptions, there was a degree of acknowledgement and acceptance of them – that they are indeed a normal part of business life.

Participant 3 notes that positive eWOM is rare and that negative eWOM must be managed quickly:

"People rarely write positive comments. I think we just want to be heard on social especially the negative things. I guess everyone knows that people are watching social media and don't want to be humiliated and I guess that's why brands should really want to take really quick action."

Participant 4 acknowledges the potential impact of negative eWOM and the management of negative eWOM:

"A lot of the queries that we tend to forward back to Facebook or Twitter is about how can we see a clear reporting of what users are saying about us in a negative way so we can react and kind of fix that."

Respondent 9 commented that negative eWOM brand image disruptions can potentially impact a brand's reputation and some commentary on the extent of the impact:

"It is definitely impacted in a couple of ways. So the first one that is probably quite limited if there is a sufficient number of complaints about a company and obviously other users can see that and either react to that and make a note – that is obviously damaging to the brand reputation."

The exploratory interviews confirmed that there was a mixed outcome in terms of the impact of positive valence eWOM brand image disruptions with some organisations perceiving them as impactful to their reputations and some believing them to have little impact. Negative eWOM brand image disruptions were viewed as something that could definitely damage their corporate reputation however with a majority of organisations in the study making this assertion. Throughout the interviews and data analysis, it became clear that although there was an acceptance that eWOM brand image disruptions could have an impact on their reputations, there was a lack of understanding in terms of how and to what extent. This is an interesting outcome with regard to this thesis as the potential to explore how and to what extent positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions affect a corporate reputation is an objective of the conceptual model that was proposed in Chapter 3.

5.6 Responding to eWOM Brand Image Disruptions from the Organisational Perspective

Having established that the organisations believe that eWOM brand image disruptions could have an impact on their reputation and that there was a perceived loss or lack of control of their reputations, it was also important to explore how organisations manage eWOM brand image disruptions in relation to information they provide from an organisational perspective. As noted in Chapter 2, the extent of cognitive information processing undertaken by a receiver of a message has been shown to be an enabler of attitude change. Exploring the extent to which organisations respond, and therefore provide information, would enable the researcher to understand whether and how organisations respond to eWOM brand image disruptions in microblogs such as Twitter and thus how much of a focus is put on the receiver of eWOM brand image disruptions. A surprising finding from the exploratory component of the research was a disparate approach across industries in the context of actively responding to eWOM brand image disruptions.

5.6.1 Disparate Approach to Actively Responding to eWOM Brand Image Disruptions

A surprising theme that emerged from the exploratory interviews was a disparate approach to responding to eWOM brand image disruptions with a majority noting that they did not always respond to eWOM brand image disruptions.

Participant 1 notes the use of a community manager and a relaxed approach to positive eWOM:

> *"I guess we see it and our community manager will acknowledge it if it's a really positive one, she'll 'favourite' or 'like" their post. It only seems like when they solicit some kind of response back for something positive would we re-engage."*

Participant 6 notes how his firm does not feel a sense of urgency when negative eWOM is shared:

> *"While there is concern that something negative is posted about us that people can read, it's not a really massive 'oh we have to answer this right away, oh my gosh' because it's online and it's negative."*

Participant 5 acknowledges having to use resources effectively when managing eWOM and not always responding to every issue raised:

> *"You can only control so much of a narrative. You have to be focused about how you are going to address each individual area of the business and where you are going to get the biggest bang for the buck and so that means we may not have the ability to address all issues at all times."*

Participant 10 noted that their firm looks at the content first. If the eWOM is considered to be "just complaining" then a wait and see approach is adopted:

> *"It depends on the content of the mention. So if someone is asking for help, of course we respond. But if someone is complaining without the context, you know, that is more like pointing to some issue, we will not respond because sometimes we just have to wait."*

Participant 3 notes that the community manager relies on intuition on whether to respond to something or not:

"It usually comes down to the community manager. They are usually quite experienced at what they do and they can intuitively recognise whether something is more threatening than something else, or if something is more important. So where some companies might have set procedures or even sort of red key words that would trigger certain tweets or responses to sort of escalate, I haven't seen that a lot. What I've seen mostly is sort of the community managers own judgement."

Some organisations were more consistent in their approach to responding to eWOM brand image disruptions as follows and a concern for how their corporate image was perceived by receivers. Respondent 2 noted that their social media team makes an effort to reply to most comments, but that it is difficult to do so with everyone due to volume:

"They try their best to reply to most comments. Although we don't get everyone, obviously because the volume is so great – but in that respect it's all about maintaining the brand image."

Participant 4 acknowledged receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions in relation to how their reputation is perceived through the actions they take by always replying to brand image disruptions:

"We'll often use our social media forums and not take down the negative comment, but always reply to them and show everybody that we're either trying to make it right or we've made an attempt to do so - so people can see that we are a caring company."

With regard to receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions in the microblog Twitter, participant 7 highlighted that acting as fast as possible and dealing with all genuine users and problems was important - i.e. there was an acknowledgement of the impact on receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions:

"So if we get a really negative comment and someone has 5K followers and the other one has 50K followers, I don't think you should prioritise because they are genuine users and both could have the same positive or negative impact based on how things progress. We would want to act as fast as we can for all genuine users with genuine problems or negative feedback."

In the context of this thesis, it was encouraging to see that some emphasis was placed on actively responding to eWOM brand image disruptions. It was evident however that responding to eWOM brand image disruptions was more disparate than concise across industries. The disparate approach to responding to eWOM brand image disruptions highlights a need to understand whether the processing of information by receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions has any impact on a change in perception of a corporate reputation. Understanding this component could help organisations to better plan and manage their response strategies.

5.7 Corporate Reputation Management within Microblogs

In addition to understanding organisations' objectives in the use of social media applications, it was also important to determine how they perceive managing their reputations within microblog environments in particular. Chapter 2 provided several examples from the practitioner and news media on the potential impact that MeWOM brand image disruptions can have on firms - with the use of microblogs such as Twitter utilised by consumers to engage with firms whether experiences with brands are positive or negative. A key theme that emerged from the analysis was the unique challenge that Twitter poses for firms and the subsequent prioritisation of the platform over other social networking sites when managing their reputations. In essence, due to its unique characteristics, Twitter is seen to be a platform that poses more of an immediate threat to organisations' reputation than other social networking sites such as Facebook.

Participant 9 discusses the fast reaction that must take place on Twitter:

> *"I would say Twitter has priority. We are fast to react on that because it is always going and it is important for us to respond as quickly as possible."*

Participant 2 explains how there is more of a delayed approach to responding on Facebook and a reliance on other Facebook users to help counter arguments made:

"So on Facebook for example when we have a complaint, we can wait for someone to say that's not true or that our company is doing a great job. That will happen more on Facebook than on LinkedIn and on Twitter. So yeah we have different times I would say."

Participant 4 references the importance of prioritising Twitter over other applications such as Facebook and LinkedIn:

"I think on Twitter it's very important to react very quickly because again everything is posted there and on Facebook is more like you have a private account and so is LinkedIn."

Participant 1 called out Twitter specifically as an application that is utilised in times of crisis:

"We also use Twitter for crisis. So in case there's a crisis, we turn on a certain Twitter handle and push everything out through that one."

Commenting on Twitter features specifically, Participant 7 also acknowledges the unique features of Twitter and the potential for MeWOM to go viral through the use of a hashtag:

"I guess it's the shareability of the content especially on Twitter where you can start something just with using a hashtag. Everything can go wrong for you."

Calling out microblogs such as Twitter as an environment that is fast moving and one where a response is needed quickly is aligned to assertions made within the literature. The acknowledgement that the platform is prioritised for reputation management is new information however and provides a strong rationale for researching this platform specifically in the study.

5.8 Rationale for Taking the Research Forward

The exploratory research conducted with ten organisations provided much needed data from an organisational perspective on eWOM brand image disruptions and confirmed many of the assertions made within the literature. As such, the following rationale is provided for taking Phase II forward.

5.8.1 Managing Reputations in the Social Media Environment

A key finding within the exploratory study was that all organisations interviewed utilised social media to protect their reputation as a primary objective of its use. Although this finding is fundamental in nature, it was important to assess this before determining whether the study should take place – i.e. if organisations are not particularly concerned with managing their reputations within social media environments specifically, it would have been questionable to undertake this study. Having established that organisations do actually consider reputation management within social media as a primary use of it, there is a rationale, at the most basic level, to continue to build a rationale to take this study forward.

5.8.2 Managing Reputations within a Microblog

A key theme that emerged from the data analysis is that the organisations described microblogs such as Twitter as a unique environment that must be managed differently from other social media platforms. Having a majority of respondents calling out microblogs such as Twitter as an environment where reputations must be managed differently provides a strong rationale for focusing on this environment in particular.

5.8.3 Impact of eWOM Brand Image Disruptions

A key theme that emerged from the analysis of the data is that respondents were concerned with the risk posed to their reputations with the proliferation of eWOM in social media applications such as Twitter. There was however a sense that organisations did not understand the factors that influence a change in reputation and what they could do to manage eWOM brand image disruptions. As said previously, and as noted by Gioia et al. (2014), it is the receiver of a brand's *intercepted* image that makes an inference about that image. Understanding receivers and the factors that influence a change in a corporate reputation could help organisations to have more of an acknowledgement of receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions in their reputation management strategies, as well as an understanding of the characteristics of MeWOM brand image disruptions that cause a change in corporate reputation.

5.8.4 Concerns with eWOM Credibility and its Impact on Corporate Reputation

eWOM credibility and the impact that it could have on firms' reputations was a theme that emerged from the analysis of data. Firms were concerned that misinformation, or untrue information, was shared about them through eWOM brand image disruptions and were unclear about any impact to their reputations that the credibility of eWOM brand image disruptions could have. As highlighted in Chapter 2, eWOM credibility, or argument strength and/or quality, is a predictor of eWOM effectiveness. The exploratory interviews confirm that organisations are concerned with this aspect of eWOM any impact it has on their reputations. This provides a strong rationale for obtaining clarification on the role eWOM credibility plays in relation to a change in reputation upon exposure to MeWOM brand image disruptions.

5.8.5 eWOM in the Positive and Negative Context

In addition to an acknowledgement that eWOM in social media applications such as Twitter poses a risk to reputations, there was a mixed perspective on the effect that positive eWOM brand image disruptions can have on reputations. Positive eWOM brand image disruptions were perceived as having little to no impact on corporate reputation by some, to having some impact by others. There was more consensus however in relation to the potential impact that negative eWOM brand image disruptions could have. This mixed perspective reflects the current research within the literature. It therefore provides a strong rationale to conduct a study that includes both positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions.

5.8.6 Responding to eWOM Brand Image Disruptions

With regard to responding to eWOM brand image disruptions, a surprising finding from the exploratory interviews was the disparate approach across industries. For some it was a matter of resource available, for others, it was left to a community manager to respond or not.

It is clear that the organisations interviewed accepted, and even feared, that their reputations were not entirely under their control, but not all of them seemed to have a concise approach to responding to eWOM brand image disruptions. This finding from the exploratory interviews provides another strong rationale to take Phase II of this study forward as helping organisations to understand the impact that information processing by receivers has on any change in reputation could help them to develop more concise response strategies with regard to eWOM brand image disruptions.

5.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the organisational perspective of eWOM brand image disruptions in relation to any impacts on a corporate reputation. The exploratory interviews with organisations confirmed several of the assertions made within the literature review in Chapter 2 and provided a strong rationale for taking this research forward with receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions in Phase II of the study.

The next chapter shares the results of stage one of Phase II of the study.

CHAPTER 6

PHASE II: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.0 Introduction

This section will outline the results from analysis of the survey data.

6.1 Cleaning the Data

Before undertaking the analysis, a data cleaning exercise was undertaken to ensure that the data was fit for purpose (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The steps taken can be found in Appendix 5.

6.2 Demographic Results

6.2.1 Gender

As noted in the table 6.1, 160, or 43% of the respondents were female. 212 or 57% were male.

Table 6.1 - Demographic Results - Gender

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	160	43.0	43.0	43.0
	Male	212	57.0	57.0	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

6.2.2 Age

The age distribution is skewed to mainly those who are 18-24 years old at 62.1%, followed by 30.6% who are 25 to 34 years old, bringing the cumulative percent for these age demographics to 92.7%. The remaining age groups were comprised of 35-44 years at around 5.6%, 45-54 years old at 1.6%.

Table 6.2 - Demographic Results - Age

Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 24 years	231	62.1	62.1	62.1
	25 to 34 years	114	30.6	30.6	92.7
	35 to 44 years	21	5.6	5.6	98.4
	45 to 54 years	6	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

6.2.3 Education

The majority of survey participants had some college at 41.4%, followed by those with a 4-year college degree at 31.5%. 9.7% had a Master's degree, around 2% had a doctoral degree, around 1% had a professional degree and around 6% had a 2-year college degree. Overall, the cumulative range for those who had some form of higher education was 92.2%. The remaining participants, those who had completed at least high school or a GED, was comprised of 7.8% of the total who completed the survey.

Table 6.3 - Demographic Results - Education

Highest Education					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High School / GED	29	7.8	7.8	7.8
	Some College	156	41.9	41.9	49.7
	2-year College Degree	23	6.2	6.2	55.9
	4-year College Degree	117	31.5	31.5	87.4
	Masters Degree	36	9.7	9.7	97.0

	Doctoral Degree	7	1.9	1.9	98.9
	Professional Degree (JD, MD)	4	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

6.2.4 Behavioural

A majority of respondents, 64.2%, indicated use of Twitter for less than 30 minutes per day, followed by 24.2% using the social network site for 30-60 minutes per day. Thus, a majority at 88.5%, noted use of Twitter less than 60 minutes a day. Around 8% of respondents indicated use of Twitter for 60-90 minutes a day and around 4% indicated use for more than 90 minutes. As noted previously, those who indicated using Twitter with an answer of 'none' on a daily basis, were disqualified and not allowed to proceed.

Table 6.4 - Daily Twitter Use

Daily Twitter Use					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30 minutes or less	239	64.2	64.2	64.2
	30-60 minutes	90	24.2	24.2	88.4
	60-90 minutes	29	7.8	7.8	96.2
	More than 90 minutes	14	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

6.3 MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions & Impact to Corporate Reputation

6.3.1 Background Information

In order to undertake analysis to understand which variables impact a change in a corporate reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, it was first necessary to understand whether a change to the perception of the airline had actually occurred and if so, to what extent. The paired samples t-test was selected as the measurement instrument of choice as the same respondents were asked the same questions on two occasions – that is, before being exposed to the MeWOM brand image disruption and after. In terms of suitability, it was also an appropriate test because the data is normally distributed, independent, interval and sampling was random (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).

6.3.2 Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

The negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions were comprised of three Tweets – a message with photograph (Delta Airlines Tweet), a message with a video (US Airways Tweet) and a message on its own (American Airlines Tweet). Examples of the MeWOM brand image disruptions can be found in Appendix 3.

6.3.2.1 Paired Sample T-Tests Results

As demonstrated in the correlations table below, the significance value of the t-tests was .000, indicating that $p<.05$ and that that there was a significant difference between the NPS score given by survey respondents before exposure to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and after.

Table 6.5 - Negative Valence T-Test Paired Sample Correlations

Paired Samples Correlations – Negative Valence Tweets				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	NPS1 Delta Air Lines & Delta NPS2	372	.581	.000
Pair 2	NPS1 US Airways & US Airways NPS2	372	.389	.000
Pair 3	NPS1 American Airlines & American NPS2	372	.418	.000

Having established that there was a significant change in NPS scores after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption, the Paired Samples Statistics table was produced. As demonstrated in Table 6.6, the mean NPS values for all three negative valence Tweets decreased after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption with the following results:

- **Delta Airlines** – decrease from an NPS1 mean of 5.30 to an NPS2 mean of 3.73
- **US Airways** – decrease from an NPS1 mean of 4.81 to an NPS2 of 3.39
- **American Airlines** – decrease from an NPS1 mean of 5.17 to an NPS2 of 3.69

Table 6.6 - Paired Samples Statistics - Negative Valence Tweets

Paired Samples Statistics - Negative Valence Tweets					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	NPS1 Delta Air Lines	5.30	372	2.424	.126
	Delta NPS2	3.73	372	2.182	.113
Pair 2	NPS1 US Airways	4.81	372	2.088	.108
	US Airways NPS2	3.39	372	2.138	.111
Pair 3	NPS1 American Airlines	5.17	372	2.262	.117
	American NPS2	3.69	372	1.896	.098

The Paired Samples Test table below demonstrates the extent of change for the NPS scores. In addition, the effect size was calculated to provide further insight. To determine the effect size, the following formula was used:

$$\textbf{Eta squared} = t^2/t^2 + (N-1)$$

The guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988), are as follows:

- 0.01 = small effect
- 0.06 = moderate effect
- 0.14 = large effect

All effects were large with the following results:

- **Delta Airlines** - the mean difference between the scores was 1.57 with a 95% confidence interval from a lower bound of 1.35 to an upper bound of 1.79. The effect size was 0.36 - $14.29^2/14.29^2 + (372\text{-}1)$
- **US Airways** - the mean difference between the scores was 1.42 with a 95% confidence interval from a lower bound of 1.18 to an upper bound of 1.66. The effect size was 0.27 - $11.719^2 /11.719^2 + (372 - 1)$
- **American Airlines** - The mean difference between the scores was 1.48 with a 95% confidence interval from a lower bound of 1.25 to an upper bound of 1.71. The effect size was 0.30 - $(12.62^2 /12.62^2 + (372\text{-}1)$.

Table 6.7 - Paired Samples Test - Negative Valence Results

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	NPS1 Delta Air Lines - Delta NPS2	1.570	2.119	.110	1.354	1.786	14.292	371	.000
Pair 2	NPS1 US Airways - US Airways NPS2	1.419	2.336	.121	1.181	1.658	11.719	371	.000
Pair 3	NPS1 American Airlines - American NPS2	1.481	2.264	.117	1.250	1.712	12.621	371	.000

6.3.2.2 Section Summary:

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate any change to the NPS score after receivers were exposed to a negative valance MeWOM brand image disruption. There was a statistically significant decrease in NPS mean scores for all three negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions with a large effect size based on Cohen's guidelines (1988).

For all three negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption cases, H11 was supported:

> **H11**: exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption will negatively affect corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective

6.3.3 Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

The positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions were comprised of three Tweets – a Tweet message with photograph (Hawaiian Airlines Tweet), a Tweet message with a video (Southwest Airlines Tweet) and a Tweet message on its own (United Airlines Tweet). Examples of the MeWOM brand image disruptions can be found in Appendix 3.

6.3.3.1 Paired Sample T-Tests Results

As demonstrated in the correlations table below, the significance value of the t-tests was .000, indicating that $p<.05$ and that that there was a significant difference between the NPS score given by survey respondents before exposure to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and after.

Table 6.8 - Positive Valence Paired Samples Correlations

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	NPS1 Southwest Airlines & Southwest NPS2	372	.384	.000
Pair 2	NPS1 United Airlines & United NPS2	372	.584	.000

Pair 3	NPS1 Hawaiian Airlines & Hawaiian NPS2	372	.353	.000

As demonstrated in table **6.9**, the mean NPS values for all three positive valence Tweets increased after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption with the following results:

- **Southwest Airlines** – increase from an NPS1 mean of 5.93 to an NPS2 mean of 6.98
- **United Airlines** – increase from an NPS1 mean of 5.12 to an NPS2 of 5.94
- **Hawaiian Airlines** – increase from an NPS1 mean of 4.58 to an NPS2 of 5.85

Table 6.9 - Positive Valence Paired Samples Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	NPS1 Southwest Airlines	5.93	372	2.375	.123
	Southwest NPS2	6.98	372	1.945	.101
Pair 2	NPS1 United Airlines	5.12	372	2.326	.121
	United NPS2	5.94	372	1.902	.099
Pair 3	NPS1 Hawaiian Airlines	4.58	372	1.984	.103
	Hawaiian NPS2	5.85	372	1.818	.094

Table 6.10 provides further details with regard to the extent of NPS score change for all three airlines that had positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions.

<u>A summary of the changes and effects are:</u>

- **Southwest Airlines -** the mean difference between the scores was -1.05 with a 95% confidence interval from a lower bound of -1.30 to an upper bound of -0.81. The effect size was 0.16 with the following calculation: $- 8.38^2 / -8.38^2 + (372 - 1)$

- **United Airlines** - the mean difference between the scores was -.823 with a 95% confidence interval from a lower bound of -1.02 to an upper bound of -.622. The effect size was 0.15 with the following calculation: $-8.08^2 / -8.08^2 + (372 - 1)$

- **Hawaiian Airlines** - the mean difference between the scores was -.1.27 with a 95% confidence interval from a lower bound of -1.49 to an upper bound of -1.05. The effect size was 0.26 with the following calculation: $-11.27^2 / -11.27^2 + (372 - 1)$.

Table 6.10 - Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	NPS1 Southwest Airlines - Southwest NPS2	-1.054	2.425	.126	-1.301	-.807	-8.383	371	.000
Pair 2	NPS1 United Airlines - United NPS2	-.823	1.965	.102	-1.023	-.622	-8.075	371	.000
Pair 3	NPS1 Hawaiian Airlines - Hawaiian NPS2	-1.266	2.167	.112	-1.487	-1.045	-11.268	371	.000

6.3.3.2 Section Summary

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate any change to the NPS score after receivers were exposed to a positive valance MeWOM brand image disruption. There was a statistically significant increase in NPS mean scores for all three positive valence brand image disruptions with a large effect size based on Cohen's guidelines (1988).

For all three positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption cases, H10 was supported:

H10: exposure to a positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption will positively affect corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective

6.4 The Impact of Negative Versus Positive Disruptions on Corporate Reputation

Table 6.11 provides a visual representation of the effect size of change in reputation for each type of Tweet. As demonstrated in bold, all three negative valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions had a greater effect size than the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions.

Table 6.11 –Impact of Negative Versus Positive Disruptions

Valence	MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Type	Effect Size
Negative	**Photo**	**0.36**
Positive	Photo	0.26
Negative	**Text Only**	**0.30**
Positive	Text Only	0.15
Negative	**Video**	**0.27**
Positive	Video	0.16

For all six MeWOM brand image disruptions, H7 was supported:

H7: negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions will have a greater impact on corporate reputation than positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

6.5 Variables that Influence a Change in Corporate Reputation

6.5.1 Background Information

Having established that all six negative and positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions caused a statistically significant change to the NPS score after exposure, the researcher undertook additional analysis to understand which variables had a significant impact on the change in NPS score, or corporate reputation, after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. The researcher considered several statistical methods in order to address the objective and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was selected. A discussion on the methods considered and a justification for the selection of this approach can be found in Chapter 4.

SmartPLS software was used to conduct the PLS-SEM analysis. It was paid for and downloaded from the developer's website (www.smartpls.com).

The measurement model consists of the relationships between the reflective indicators, represented by rectangular symbols, and the latent variables, represented by the oval symbols. The reflective indicators are the multiple facets of each latent variable that were measured by the researcher. The indicators are combined by factor analysis to operationalise each latent variable. The factor loadings (i.e. the correlations between the indicators and their latent variables) are symbolized by λ next to the arrows pointing into each indicator.

The structural model consists of the relationships between the eleven predictors (Joy, Approval, Sadness, Disgust, Surprise, Not Surprise, Anger, Fear, MeWOM Message Credibility, MeWOM Message Involvement, and MeWOM Issue Involvement) and the single outcome variable (NPS Change) represented by unidirectional arrows, and measured by path coefficients, symbolized by β. Each β coefficient is analogous to a standardized partial regression coefficient in a multiple regression model, indicating the strength and direction of a relationship between an outcome and a predictor, using a standardized scale from -1 to +1. The structural model is demonstrated in Figure 6.1.

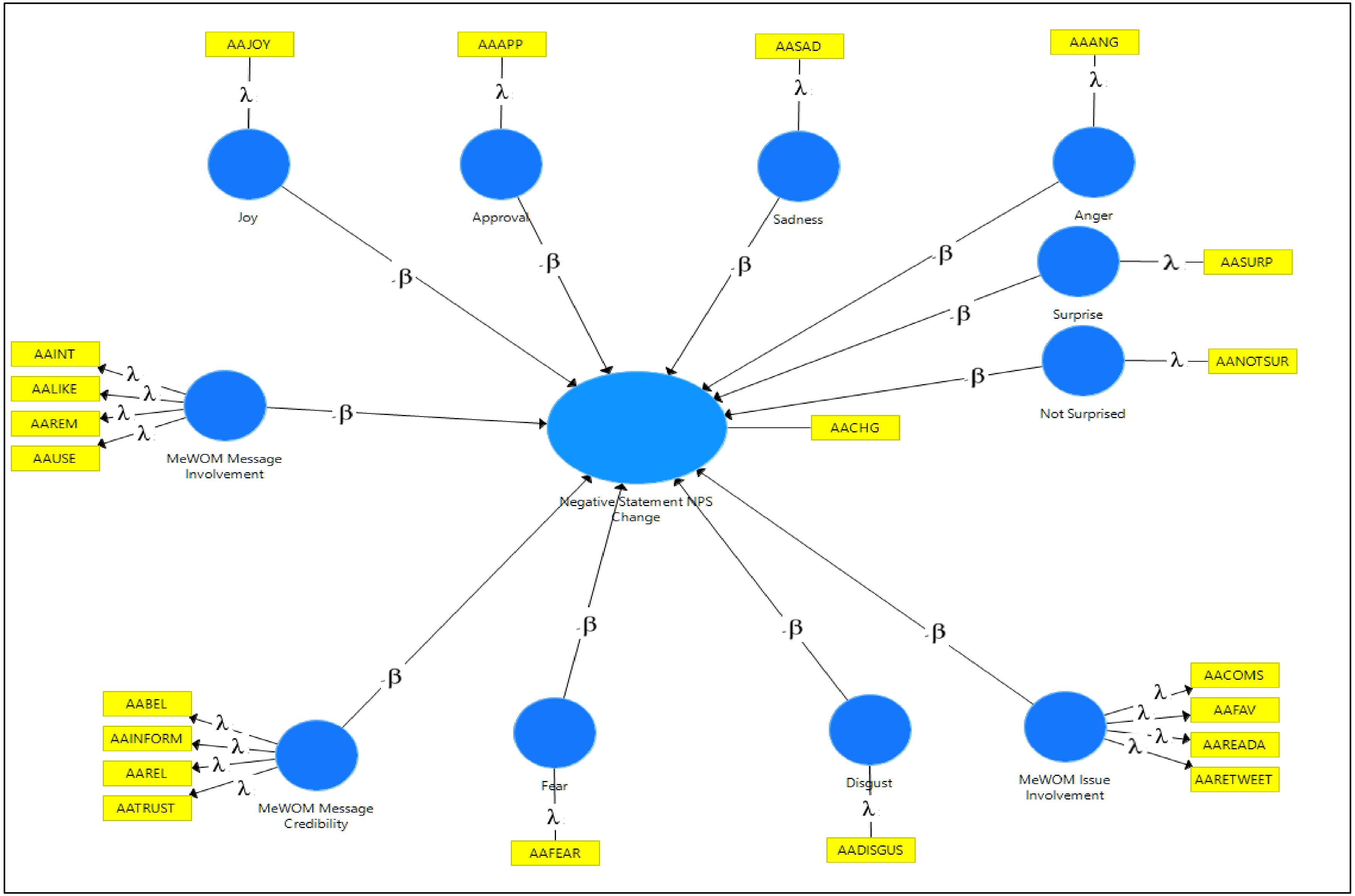

Figure 6.1 - MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Model

6.5.1.1 Computing the measurement and structural model

SPSS was utilised by the researcher in the early stages of data analysis in order to clean the data, obtain descriptive statistics and to conduct the t-tests shared earlier in this chapter. In order to prepare the data for PLS-SEM a few steps were taken which included:

- importing the SPSS data into SmartPLS in the form of a comma delimited (.csv) file
- standardising the data using z-scores
- running the PLS-SEM algorithm to compute the statistics

6.5.1.2 Validation of the measurement model

Once the measurement model was produced, the validity of the measurement model using the methods described by Henseler et al. (2009), Wong (2013) and Hair et al. (2014) were utilised. As there is not a global goodness-of-fit criterion for PLS path modelling, Chin (1998) recommends a two-stage process involving an assessment of the outer model and an assessment of the inner model (Henseler et al., 2009):

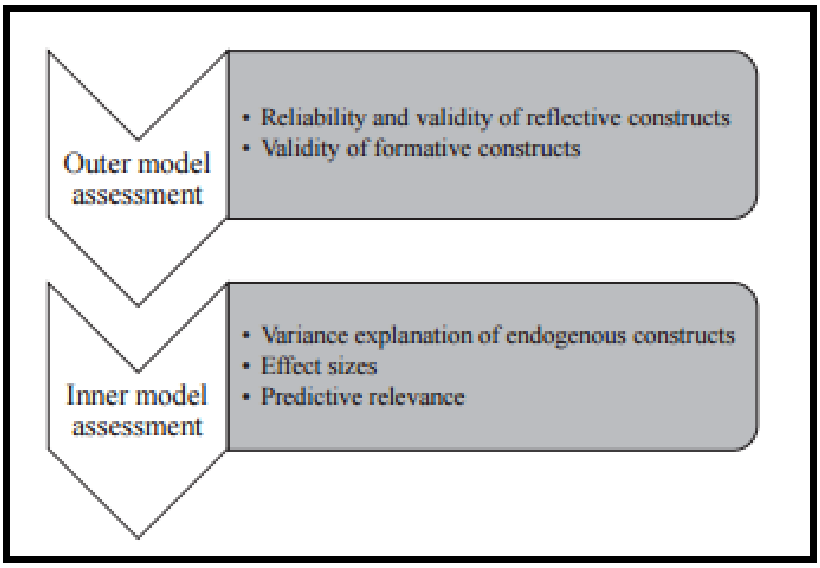

Figure 6.2 - A Two Step Process of PLS Path Model Assessment

The first step in checking the outer model is assessing the internal consistency reliability. Although Cronbach's Alpha is a reliable measure used in other forms of path modelling, it is not recommended for PLS path modelling as PLS prioritises indicators according to their reliability, resulting in a more reliable composite. It has therefore been acknowledged that the composite reliability is a more effective measure to use and the value should be at least 0.6 (Henseler et al., 2009). Henseler et al. (2009) highlight that the reliability of each indicator should be assessed and that "researchers postulate that a latent variable should explain a substantial part of each indicator's variance (usually at least 50%)". Accordingly, the absolute correlations between a construct and each of its manifest variables should be higher than 0.7. Moreover, some psychometrists (e.g. Churchill, 1979) recommend eliminating reflective indicators from measurement models if their outer standardized loadings are smaller than 0.4." Henseler et al. (2009) recommend caution with regard to eliminating reflective indicators however where they state, "taking into account PLS' characteristic of consistency at large, one should be careful when eliminating indicators. Only if an indicator's reliability is low *and* eliminating this indicator goes along with a substantial increase of composite reliability, it makes sense to discard this indicator" (p. 299). Hair et al. (2014, p. 103) agreed with this assertion where they state "rather than automatically eliminating indicators when their outer loading is below 0.70, researchers should carefully examine the effects of item removal on the composite reliability. Generally, indicators with outer loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be considered for removal from the scale only when deleting the indicator leans to an increase in the composite reliability or the average variance extracted." The diagram below from Hair et al. (2014, p. 104) highlights their guidance on the assessment criteria utilized for determining convergent validity:

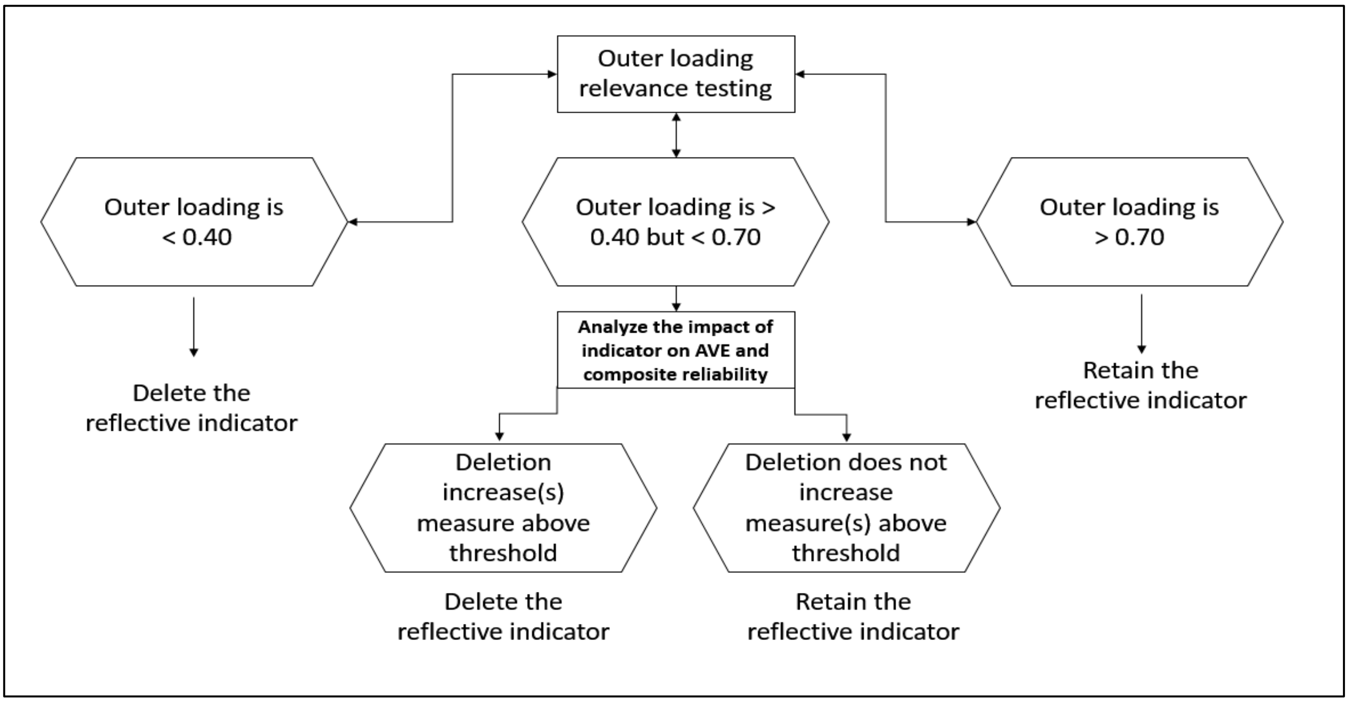

Figure 6.3 – Hair et al.'s Outer Loading Relevance Testing

Henseler et al. (2009) further explain that there are two subtypes to examine for the assessment of validity - the convergent validity and the discriminant validity. Convergent validity indicates that a set of indicators represents the same and one construct that can be demonstrated through their unidimensionality. They note that Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend using the average variance extracted, or AVE, as a criterion for convergent validity. An acceptable AVE is at least 0.5 indicating sufficient convergent validity and that the latent variable explains more than half of the variance of its indicators on average. Composite reliability, is a measure of internal consistency and must not be lower than 0.6. Establishing discriminant validity, according to Henseler et al. (2009) is "a bit more liberal" with the criterion being that the loading of each indicator is expected to be greater than all of its cross loadings (Chin, 1998; Gotz et al., 2009). They further note, "although the Fornell-Larcker criterion assesses discriminant validity, on the construct level, the cross-loadings allow this kind of evaluation on the indicator level" (p. 300).

Henseler et al. (2009) further state that discriminant validity is an analogous concept as it posits that two conceptually different concepts should exhibit sufficient difference. In other words, the joint set of indicators is expected not to be unidimensional.

In summary, the following validations were operationalized by the researcher to assess the outer and inner model:

- Internal consistency reliability was established if the composite reliability coefficient was > .60.
- Convergent validity was established if the average variance explained by the multiple indicators of each latent variable was > .50. Adhering to Henseler et al.'s (2009) and Hair et al.'s (2014) recommendations, if composite reliability was <.60 and the average variance explained was <.50, the indicator was removed from the model only if it significantly improved composite reliability.
- Discriminant validity was assessed and established if the factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables

6.5.1.3 Evaluation of the structural model – effect size and predictive relevance

The final stage was to evaluate the structural model. The effect size (R^2) indicated the proportion of the variance explained in the outcome variable by the predictor variables. Guidance from Chin (1989) and Hair et al. (2014) was utilised to interpret the R^2 with the following guidelines:

- 67% - substantial
- 33% - moderate
- 19% - weak

The statistical significance of each path coefficient (β) was estimated by bootstrapping. This involved randomly sampling the data 5,000 times with the mean of each β coefficient being computed. Two-tailed t-tests were subsequently conducted to determine if the mean of each β coefficient was significantly different from zero at $p < .05$.

Six models were constructed using PLS-SEM. The positive valence models were created using the data for the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions (Southwest Tweet with Video, and Hawaiian Tweet with photo and the United Airlines Tweet with text only). The negative valence models were created using the data for the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions (US Airways Tweet with video, American Tweet with text only and Delta Tweet with photo).

6.5.2 Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption – Tweet with Video

Table 6.12 demonstrates that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable was consistently > 0.50. Table 6.12 also shows that internal consistency reliability was established, as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 6.12 - Negative Valence Video Composite Reliability & AVE

	Composite Reliability	AVE
Anger	1	1
Approval	1	1
Disgust	1	1
Fear	1	1
Joy	1	1
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.856	0.601
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.927	0.762
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.912	0.722
Negative Video NPS Change	1	1
Not Surprised	1	1
Sadness	1	1
Surprise	1	1

Table 6.13 demonstrates that factorial and discriminant validity were established as the composite factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were consistently strong ($\lambda \geq 0.5$) and greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables.

Table 6.13 - Negative Valence Video Cross Loadings

	Anger	Approval	Disgust	Fear	Joy	ISSUE	CRED	MSG INV	USACHG	Not Surprised	Sadness	Surprise
USAANGER	**1**	0.045	0.681	0.36	0.104	0.366	0.361	0.384	-0.357	0.137	0.638	0.349
USAAPP	0.045	**1**	0.039	0.284	0.502	0.07	0.01	0.075	0.089	0.279	0.145	0.081
USADISGU	0.681	0.039	**1**	0.402	0.064	0.402	0.36	0.331	-0.359	0.159	0.531	0.282
USAFEAR	0.36	0.284	0.402	**1**	0.285	0.025	0.064	0.038	-0.07	0.214	0.369	0.177
USAJOY	0.104	0.502	0.064	0.285	**1**	0.137	0.091	0.197	0.015	0.261	0.205	0.16
USAFAV	0.317	0.123	0.36	0.069	0.234	**0.817**	0.524	0.627	-0.29	-0.005	0.272	0.269
USARCOMS	0.226	0.022	0.272	-0.032	0.059	**0.755**	0.356	0.449	-0.263	0.018	0.213	0.257
USARETWEET	0.377	0.075	0.39	0.073	0.12	**0.857**	0.509	0.612	-0.352	0.037	0.296	0.292
USAREADA	0.17	-0.036	0.184	-0.077	-0.03	**0.656**	0.338	0.404	-0.204	0.003	0.19	0.246
USABEL	0.291	0.006	0.282	0.022	0.048	0.428	**0.804**	0.55	-0.218	0.046	0.228	0.13
USAREL	0.29	0.008	0.303	0.039	0.07	0.498	**0.923**	0.618	-0.255	0.031	0.254	0.192
USATRUST	0.333	0.02	0.32	0.08	0.1	0.486	**0.922**	0.637	-0.26	0.072	0.293	0.225
USAINFORM	0.341	0.003	0.343	0.074	0.094	0.55	**0.835**	0.692	-0.287	-0.026	0.33	0.293
USAINT	0.282	0.023	0.228	-0.038	0.11	0.567	0.549	**0.858**	-0.292	-0.053	0.27	0.308

USALIKE	0.295	0.164	0.261	0.071	0.317	0.613	0.597	**0.826**	-0.286	0.007	0.239	0.288
USAUSEFUL	0.339	0.018	0.29	0.026	0.065	0.532	0.721	**0.836**	-0.285	0.021	0.302	0.25
USAREM	0.394	0.051	0.351	0.071	0.177	0.621	0.583	**0.879**	-0.272	0.018	0.358	0.339
USACHG	-0.357	0.089	-0.359	-0.07	0.015	-0.366	-0.295	-0.335	**1**	0.062	-0.312	-0.275
USANTSUR	0.137	0.279	0.159	0.214	0.261	0.019	0.033	-0.003	0.062	**1**	0.148	-0.283
USASAD	0.638	0.145	0.531	0.369	0.205	0.319	0.321	0.343	-0.312	0.148	**1**	0.422
USASURP	0.349	0.081	0.282	0.177	0.16	0.343	0.247	0.348	-0.275	-0.283	0.422	**1**

The next step taken to assess the quality of the model as recommended by Chin (1998) and Hair et al. (2014) was to assess the outer model estimations. The essential criterion according to Henseler et al. (2009) is the assessment of the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the endogenous latent variables.

A relatively moderate proportion of the change in NPS score (R^2 = 24%) was explained by eight predictors. The following variables were statistically significant predictors of the change in NPS score (after respondents were exposed to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with video):

- **MeWOM Issue Involvement** (β = - 0.16, t = 2.43, $p < .05$)
- **Disgust** (β = -0.15, t = 1.98, $p < .05$)

The following variables were not significant predictors of a change in NPS score after respondents were exposed to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with video:

- Approval (β = 0.10, t = 1.58, p = 0.113)
- Sadness (β = -0.09, t = 1.34, p = 0.18)
- Anger (β = -0.10, t = 1.29, p = 0.198)
- Surprise (β = -0.07, t = 1.19, p = 0.233)
- Not Surprise (β = -0.05, t = 0.85, p = 0.397)
- Fear (β = -0.03, t = 0.57, p = 0.571)
- MeWOM Message Involvement (β = -0.08, t = 0.95, p = 0. 945)
- MeWOM Message Credibility (β = - 0.01, t = 0.19, p = 0.848)

The model therefore predicted that a decrease in the emotion ***Disgust*** and a decrease in ***MeWOM Issue Involvement*** significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague after exposure to the negative MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with video.

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with video model, H6, H8 and H9 were supported:

> **H6**: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation
>
> **H8**: variables representing the central route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions
>
> **H9**: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with video model, H4 and H6 were not supported:

> H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation
>
> H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

6.5.3 Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption – Tweet with Video

Table 6.14 demonstrates that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable were all > 0.50. Table 6.14 also shows that internal consistency reliability was established as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 6.14 - Positive Valence Video Composite Reliability & AVE

	Composite Reliability	AVE
Anger	1	1
Approval	1	1
Disgust	1	1
Fear	1	1
Joy	1	1
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.925	0.754
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.905	0.705
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.927	0.762
Not Surprised	1	1
Positive Video NPS Change	1	1
Sadness	1	1
Surprise	1	1

Table 6.15 shows that factorial and discriminant validity were established as the composite factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were consistently strong ($\lambda \geq 0.5$) and greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables.

Table 6.15 - Positive Valence Video Cross Loadings

	Anger	Approval	Disgust	Fear	Joy	I.INVOLVE	CRED	M. INVOLVE	Not Surprised	SWACHANGE	Sadness	Surprise
SWAANGER	**1**	-0.155	0.868	0.824	-0.144	-0.24	-0.19	-0.237	0.398	-0.179	0.797	0.141
SWAPP	-0.155	**1**	-0.116	-0.057	0.638	0.447	0.427	0.549	0.065	0.231	-0.037	0.23
SWADISGU	0.868	-0.116	**1**	0.866	-0.117	-0.236	-0.206	-0.221	0.414	-0.212	0.786	0.166
SWAFEAR	0.824	-0.057	0.866	**1**	-0.045	-0.165	-0.155	-0.124	0.436	-0.161	0.878	0.189
SWAJOY	-0.144	0.638	-0.117	-0.045	**1**	0.575	0.449	0.641	-0.019	0.368	-0.014	0.345
SWAFAV	-0.224	0.44	-0.213	-0.161	0.54	**0.894**	0.41	0.598	-0.091	0.338	-0.172	0.175
SWAREADA	-0.211	0.341	-0.222	-0.149	0.469	**0.851**	0.366	0.598	-0.099	0.252	-0.152	0.244
SWAREADO	-0.228	0.376	-0.218	-0.146	0.489	**0.854**	0.392	0.62	-0.094	0.238	-0.151	0.253
SWARETWE	-0.178	0.385	-0.176	-0.121	0.491	**0.874**	0.424	0.595	-0.095	0.329	-0.127	0.217
SWABEL	-0.18	0.386	-0.149	-0.178	0.359	0.365	**0.835**	0.438	0.003	0.216	-0.187	0.087
SWAINFOR	-0.135	0.348	-0.168	-0.078	0.392	0.421	**0.786**	0.621	-0.046	0.264	-0.065	0.068
SWATRUST	-0.172	0.339	-0.186	-0.135	0.36	0.354	**0.866**	0.478	-0.013	0.142	-0.155	0.044
SWAREL	-0.153	0.33	-0.198	-0.141	0.367	0.362	**0.87**	0.488	-0.03	0.131	-0.167	0.038
SWAREM	-0.203	0.504	-0.18	-0.11	0.569	0.651	0.55	**0.907**	-0.074	0.311	-0.109	0.182

SWAINT	-0.218	0.49	-0.189	-0.102	0.563	0.596	0.528	**0.904**	-0.046	0.297	-0.125	0.184
SWAUSE	-0.094	0.416	-0.128	-0.031	0.476	0.547	0.568	**0.778**	-0.055	0.279	-0.051	0.147
SWALIKE	-0.295	0.501	-0.262	-0.176	0.618	0.616	0.54	**0.896**	-0.101	0.342	-0.171	0.187
SWNTSURP	0.398	0.065	0.414	0.436	-0.019	-0.109	-0.028	-0.081	**1**	-0.225	0.421	-0.014
SWACHANGE	-0.179	0.231	-0.212	-0.161	0.368	0.34	0.246	0.353	-0.225	**1**	-0.124	0.124
SWASAD	0.797	-0.037	0.786	0.878	-0.014	-0.173	-0.162	-0.134	0.421	-0.124	**1**	0.184
SWASURP	0.141	0.23	0.166	0.189	0.345	0.25	0.077	0.202	-0.014	0.124	0.184	**1**

A relatively moderate proportion of the change in NPS score (R^2 = 22%) was explained by eight predictors. The following variables were statistically significant predictors of the change in NPS score (after respondents were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with video):

- **Joy** (β = 0.23, t = 3.01, p < .05)
- **Not surprised** (β = -0.18, t = 2.96, p < .05)

The following variables were not significant predictors of a change in NPS score after respondents were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with video:

- Approval (β = -0.03 t = 0.31, p = 0.760)
- Sadness (β = -0.10, t = 0.76, p = 0.449)
- Anger (β = 0.09, t = 0.41, p = 0.681)
- Surprise (β = 0.01, t = 0.109, p = 0.762)
- Fear (β = -0.05, t = 0.30, p = 0.571)
- Disgust (β = -0.17, t = 0.76, p = 0.450)
- MeWOM Issue Involvement (β = 0.10, t = 1.53, p = 0. 127)
- MeWOM Message Involvement (β = 0.11, t = 1.21, p = 0. 228)
- MeWOM Message Credibility (β = 0.03, t = 0.43, p = 0.668)

The model therefore predicted that an increase in the emotion ***Joy*** and decrease in the emotion ***Not Surprised*** significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a positive valence weet with video.

For the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with video model, H6 and H9 were supported:

> **H6**: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H9: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with video model, H4, H5 and H8 were not supported:

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: variables representing the central route to persuasion will not influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

6.5.4 Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption – Tweet with Photo

Table 6.16 demonstrates that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable were all > 0.50. Table 6.16 also shows that internal consistency reliability was established as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 6.16 - Negative Valence Photo Composite Reliability & AVE

	Composite Reliability	**AVE**
Anger	1	1
Approval	1	1
Disgust	1	1
Fear	1	1
Joy	1	1
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.8	0.507
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.867	0.623

MeWOM Message Involvement	0.86	0.607
Negative Photo NPS Change	1	1
Not Surprised	1	1
Sadness	1	1
Surprise	1	1

Table 6.17 shows that factorial and discriminant validity were established as the composite factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were consistently strong ($\lambda \geq 0.5$) and greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables.

Table 6.17 - Negative Valence Photo Cross Loadings

	Anger	Approval	Disgust	Fear	Joy	Issue INV	CRED	Message INV	DeltaCHG	Not Surprised	Sadness	Surprise
DELANGER	**1**	0.136	0.647	0.485	0.174	0.307	0.14	0.329	-0.222	0.202	0.627	0.291
DELTAAPP	0.136	**1**	0.15	0.293	0.587	-0.006	0.119	0.107	0.023	0.09	0.182	0.184
DELDISGU	0.647	0.15	**1**	0.414	0.175	0.29	0.12	0.344	-0.175	0.211	0.53	0.259
DELFEAR	0.485	0.293	0.414	**1**	0.381	0.167	0.028	0.213	-0.232	0.073	0.423	0.3
DELTJOY	0.174	0.587	0.175	0.381	**1**	-0.029	0.112	0.184	-0.021	0.122	0.314	0.171
DELCOMM	0.273	-0.008	0.276	0.185	-0.049	**0.879**	0.111	0.393	-0.249	0.012	0.209	0.263
DELREADA	0.148	-0.124	0.11	0.095	-0.172	**0.741**	0.119	0.243	-0.177	-0.002	0.113	0.201
DELRETWEET	0.281	0.092	0.263	0.055	0.102	**0.606**	0.247	0.466	-0.101	0.083	0.198	0.041
DELTAFAV	0.213	0.111	0.209	0.1	0.173	**0.581**	0.247	0.441	-0.109	0.021	0.144	0.046
DELTABEL	0.131	0.057	0.112	0.053	0.057	0.159	**0.73**	0.312	-0.065	0.212	0.009	-0.082
DELTAREL	0.061	0.103	0.087	-0.026	0.084	0.119	**0.867**	0.399	-0.105	0.134	0.023	-0.063

DELTINFO	0.183	0.099	0.113	0.091	0.109	0.248	**0.684**	0.507	-0.081	0.079	0.106	0.088
DELTRUST	0.064	0.115	0.057	-0.029	0.104	0.143	**0.86**	0.399	-0.048	0.122	0.017	-0.034
DELTAINT	0.226	0.05	0.256	0.138	0.158	0.428	0.299	**0.779**	-0.104	0.033	0.217	0.159
DELTALIKE	0.182	0.183	0.227	0.141	0.309	0.328	0.418	**0.708**	-0.084	0.05	0.11	0.004
DELTAREM	0.326	0.061	0.365	0.194	0.109	0.506	0.385	**0.861**	-0.202	0.009	0.253	0.184
DELTAUSE	0.245	0.084	0.194	0.172	0.101	0.272	0.514	**0.761**	-0.168	-0.001	0.168	0.156
DeltaCHG	-0.222	0.023	-0.175	-0.232	-0.021	-0.243	-0.102	-0.197	**1**	0.109	-0.207	-0.26
DELNTSUR	0.202	0.09	0.211	0.073	0.122	0.028	0.171	0.021	0.109	**1**	0.102	-0.397
DELSAD	0.627	0.182	0.53	0.423	0.314	0.227	0.053	0.252	-0.207	0.102	**1**	0.377
DELSURP	0.291	0.184	0.259	0.3	0.171	0.232	-0.028	0.181	-0.26	-0.397	0.377	**1**

A relatively weak proportion of the change in NPS score (R^2 = 15%) was explained by eight predictors. The following variables were statistically significant predictors of the change in NPS score (after respondents were exposed to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with photo):

- **MeWOM Issue Involvement** (β = - 0.13, t = 2.30, p < 0. 05)
- **Fear** (β = -0.16, t = 2.14, p < 0. 05)
- **Surprise** (β = - 0.13, t = 1.98, p < 0. 05)

The following variables were not significant predictors of a change in NPS score after respondents were exposed to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with photo:

- Approval (β = 0.10 t = 1.47, p = 0.142)
- Joy (β = 0.03, t = 0.52, p = 0.601)
- Sadness (β = -0.06, t = 0.93, p = 0.353)
- Anger (β = -0.05, t = 0.59, p = 0.557)
- Not surprised (β = -0.09, t = 1.40, p = 0.161)
- Disgust (β = 0.01, t = 0.07, p = 0.942)
- MeWOM Message Involvement (β = -0.02, t = 0.25, p = 0. 806)
- MeWOM Message Credibility (β = - 0.01, t = 1.29, p = 0.196)

The model therefore predicted that a decrease in ***MeWOM Issue Involvement,*** and a decrease in the emotions ***Fear and Surprised*** significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a negative valence Tweet with photo.

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with photo model, H6, H8 and H9 were supported:

> **H6**: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H8: variables representing the central route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

H9: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with photo model, H4 and H5 were not supported:

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

6.5.5 Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption – Tweet with Photo

Table 6.18 demonstrates that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable were all > 0.50. Table 6.18 also shows that internal consistency reliability was established as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 6.18 - Positive Valence Photo Composite Reliability & AVE

	Composite Reliability	**AVE**
Anger	1	1
Approval	1	1
Disgust	1	1
Fear	1	1
Joy	1	1
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.9	0.693
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.907	0.71
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.94	0.798
Not Surprised	1	1
Positive Photo NPS Change	1	1
Sadness	1	1
Surprise	1	1

Table 6.19 shows that factorial and discriminant validity were established as the composite factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were consistently strong ($\lambda \geq 0.5$) and greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables.

Table 6.19 - Positive Valence Photo Cross Loadings

	Anger	Approval	Disgust	Fear	Joy	I. INVOLV	CRED	M. INVOLV	Not Surprised	HAWCHANGE	Sadness	Surprise
HAWANG	**1**	0.048	0.911	0.946	0.151	0	-0.068	-0.017	0.431	-0.152	0.872	0.54
HAWAPP	0.048	**1**	0.047	0.081	0.69	0.483	0.458	0.59	0.183	0.342	0.054	0.166
HAWDISGU	0.911	0.047	**1**	0.917	0.15	-0.015	-0.107	-0.042	0.387	-0.2	0.881	0.486
HAWFEAR	0.946	0.081	0.917	**1**	0.19	0.014	-0.063	-0.001	0.421	-0.151	0.877	0.563
HAWJOY	0.151	0.69	0.15	0.19	**1**	0.497	0.446	0.62	0.195	0.345	0.184	0.271
HAWCOMMO	0.014	0.432	0.019	0.036	0.442	**0.804**	0.302	0.623	0.055	0.236	-0.005	0.185
HAWFAV	-0.014	0.404	-0.024	0.003	0.417	**0.874**	0.388	0.632	-0.013	0.345	0.008	0.159
HAWREADA	-0.018	0.457	-0.039	-0.027	0.439	**0.806**	0.399	0.641	0.032	0.26	-0.059	0.138
HAWRETWE	0.024	0.328	0.001	0.038	0.368	**0.844**	0.3	0.569	-0.046	0.275	0.039	0.243
HAWBEL	-0.028	0.358	-0.062	-0.029	0.336	0.237	**0.826**	0.377	0.05	0.302	-0.02	0.047
HAWREL	-0.09	0.376	-0.14	-0.094	0.35	0.318	**0.905**	0.445	0.027	0.294	-0.11	0.009
HAWINFO	0.008	0.414	-0.001	0.028	0.446	0.523	**0.721**	0.656	-0.014	0.305	0.015	0.115
HAWTRUST	-0.121	0.385	-0.162	-0.12	0.362	0.323	**0.906**	0.432	-0.004	0.287	-0.134	0.015
HAWINT	-0.017	0.545	-0.031	-0.001	0.568	0.655	0.513	**0.922**	0.013	0.369	-0.032	0.146

HAWLIKE	-0.064	0.603	-0.092	-0.042	0.604	0.634	0.545	**0.891**	0.005	0.382	-0.071	0.108
HAWREM	0.033	0.461	0	0.033	0.5	0.701	0.475	**0.887**	0.013	0.355	0.037	0.179
HAWUSE	-0.009	0.492	-0.026	0.011	0.538	0.647	0.508	**0.871**	0.027	0.354	-0.018	0.135
HAWNTSUR	0.431	0.183	0.387	0.421	0.195	0.004	0.018	0.016	**1**	-0.032	0.409	0.249
HAWCHANGE	-0.152	0.342	-0.2	-0.151	0.345	0.341	0.355	0.409	-0.032	**1**	-0.148	0.003
HAWSAD	0.872	0.054	0.881	0.877	0.184	-0.003	-0.073	-0.025	0.409	-0.148	**1**	0.54
HAWSURP	0.54	0.166	0.486	0.563	0.271	0.216	0.057	0.158	0.249	0.003	0.54	**1**

A relatively moderate proportion of the change in NPS score (R^2 = 25%) was explained by eight predictors. The following variables were statistically significant predictors of the change in NPS score (after respondents were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with photo):

- **Joy** (β = 0.14, t = 2.27, p < 0. 05)
- **MeWOM Message Credibility** (β = 0.12, t = 2.30, p < 0. 05)

The following variables were not significant predictors of a change in NPS score after respondents were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with photo:

- Approval (β = 0.08 t = 1.14, p = 0.255)
- Sadness (β = 0.04, t = 0.42, p = 0.675)
- Anger (β = 0.13, t = 1.00, p = 0.316)
- Not surprised (β = -0.01, t = 0.25, p = 0.802)
- Surprise (β = - 0.01, t = 0.17, p = 0.867)
- Disgust (β = - 0.02, t = 1.61, p = 0.107)
- Fear (β = - 0.04, t = 0.21, p = 0.834)
- MeWOM Message Involvement (β = 0.14, t = 1.74, p = 0. 083)
- MeWOM Issue Involvement (β = 0.08, t = 1.08, p = 0.279)

The model therefore predicted that an increase in the emotion ***Joy*** and an increase in ***MeWOM Message Credibility*** significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a positive valence Tweet with photo.

For the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with photo model, H5, H6 and H9 were supported:

> **H5**: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H6: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H9: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with photo model, H4 and H8 were not supported:

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: variables representing the central route to persuasion will not influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

6.5.6 Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption – Tweet with Text Only

Table 6.20 demonstrates that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable were all > 0.50. Table 6.20 also shows that internal consistency reliability was established as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 6.20 - Negative Valence Text Only Composite Reliability & AVE

	Composite Reliability	**AVE**
Anger	1	1
Approval	1	1
Disgust	1	1
Fear	1	1
Joy	1	1
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.866	0.618
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.919	0.74
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.918	0.736
Negative Text Only NPS Change (AACHG)	1	1
Not Surprised	1	1
Sadness	1	1
Surprise	1	1

Table 6.21 shows that factorial and discriminant validity were established as the composite factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were consistently strong ($\lambda \geq 0.5$) and greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables.

Table 6.21 - Negative Valence Text Only Cross Loadings

	Anger	**Approval**	**Disgust**	**Fear**	**Joy**	**I. INVOLV**	**CRED**	**M. INVOLV**	**AACHG**	**Not Surprised**	**Sadness**	**Surprise**
AAANG	**1**	0.37	0.681	0.526	0.397	0.152	0.218	0.278	-0.312	0.233	0.637	0.498
AAAPP	0.37	**1**	0.362	0.522	0.705	0.075	0.076	0.174	-0.024	0.243	0.302	0.341
AADISGUS	0.681	0.362	**1**	0.548	0.339	0.227	0.244	0.335	-0.31	0.285	0.523	0.377
AAFEAR	0.526	0.522	0.548	**1**	0.617	0.044	0.041	0.132	-0.148	0.263	0.416	0.344
AAJOY	0.397	0.705	0.339	0.617	**1**	0.036	0.01	0.069	-0.018	0.27	-0.314	0.343
AACOMS	0.104	0.037	0.197	-0.008	-0.022	**0.831**	0.28	0.536	-0.228	0.1	0.151	0.153
AAREADA	0.071	-0.018	0.134	-0.075	-0.065	**0.774**	0.282	0.495	-0.207	0.03	0.127	0.121
AARETWEET	0.15	0.107	0.171	0.104	0.119	**0.753**	0.342	0.506	-0.163	0.046	0.083	0.089
AAFAV	0.165	0.128	0.211	0.142	0.111	**0.785**	0.343	0.547	-0.194	0.028	0.126	0.121
AABEL	0.108	0.028	0.156	-0.046	-0.022	0.291	**0.8**	0.501	-0.132	0.172	0.08	0.026
AAINFORM	0.213	0.104	0.259	0.04	0.019	0.399	**0.781**	0.692	-0.184	0.071	0.19	0.124
AATRUST	0.208	0.06	0.221	0.063	0.022	0.32	**0.923**	0.533	-0.2	0.131	0.201	0.067
AAREL	0.198	0.06	0.188	0.06	0.006	0.329	**0.926**	0.555	-0.183	0.1	0.171	0.069
AAINT	0.239	0.13	0.269	0.103	0.055	0.572	0.525	**0.878**	-0.311	0.055	0.224	0.23

AALIKE	0.209	0.151	0.279	0.129	0.027	0.573	0.561	**0.831**	-0.281	-0.046	0.199	0.193
AAREM	0.268	0.192	0.319	0.162	0.131	0.609	0.547	**0.876**	-0.309	0.084	0.306	0.232
AAUSE	0.235	0.122	0.282	0.057	0.018	0.513	0.662	**0.847**	-0.282	0.057	0.255	0.21
AACHG	-0.312	-0.024	-0.31	-0.148	0.018	-0.254	-0.207	-0.345	**1**	-0.033	-0.329	-0.315
AANOTSUR	0.233	0.243	0.285	0.263	0.27	0.067	0.133	0.045	-0.033	**1**	0.175	-0.054
AASAD	0.637	0.302	0.523	0.416	0.314	0.158	0.194	0.288	-0.329	0.175	**1**	0.519
AASURP	0.498	0.341	0.377	0.344	0.343	0.157	0.087	0.253	-0.315	-0.054	0.519	**1**

A relatively moderate proportion of the change in NPS score (R^2 = 25%) was explained by eight predictors. The following variables were statistically significant predictors of the change in NPS score (after respondents were exposed to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with text only):

- **Surprise** (β = -0.18, t = 2.99, p < 0. 05)
- **MeWOM Message Involvement** (β = -0.22, t = 2.61, p < 0. 05)
- **Joy** (β = -0.18, t = 2.38, p < 0. 05)

The following variables were not significant predictors of a change in NPS score after respondents were exposed to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with text only:

- Approval (β = 0.09 t = 1.25, p = 0.211)
- Sadness (β = -0.12, t = 1.70, p = 0.090)
- Anger (β = -0.09, t = 1.01, p = 0.312)
- Not surprised (β = -0.01, t = 0.25, p = 0.802)
- Disgust (β = - 0.10, t = 1.25, p = 0.213)
- Fear (β = - 0.06, t = 0.55, p = 0.580)
- MeWOM Message Credibility (β = 0.64, t = 0.51, p = 0. 607)
- MeWOM Issue Involvement (β = -0.05, t = 0.91, p = 0.362)

The model therefore predicted that a decrease in the emotion ***Joy,*** a decrease in the emotion ***Surprise*** and a decrease in ***MeWOM Message Involvement*** significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a negative valence Tweet with text only.

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with text only model, H4, H6 and H9 are supported:

> **H4**: the extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H6: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H9: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

For the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with text only model, H5 and H8 are not supported:

H0: the extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible does not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: variables representing the central route to persuasion do not influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

6.5.7 Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption – Tweet with Text Only

Table 6.22 demonstrates that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable were all > 0.50. Table 6.22 also shows that internal consistency reliability was established as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 6.22 - Positive Valence Text Only Composite Reliability & AVE

	Composite Reliability	AVE
Anger	1	1
Approval	1	1
Disgust	1	1
Fear	1	1
Joy	1	1
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.866	0.618
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.884	0.657
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.9	0.691
Not Surprised	1	1
Positive Statement NPS Change	1	1
Sadness	1	1
Surprise	1	1

Table 6.23 shows that factorial and discriminant validity were established as the composite factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were consistently strong ($\lambda \geq 0.5$) and greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables.

Table 6.23 Positive Message Only Cross Loadings

	Anger	Approval	Disgust	Fear	Joy	I. INVOL	CRED	M. INVOL	Not Surprised	UNTCHANGE	Sadness	Surprise
UNTANGER	**1**	0.063	0.911	0.912	0.1	-0.011	-0.079	-0.037	0.368	-0.051	0.775	0.257
UNTAPP	0.063	**1**	0.026	0.097	0.61	0.315	0.443	0.415	0.258	0.053	0.136	0.243
UNTDISGU	0.911	0.026	**1**	0.899	0.104	-0.035	-0.082	-0.047	0.319	-0.039	0.693	0.252
UNTFEAR	0.912	0.097	0.899	**1**	**0.16**	-0.001	-0.013	0.008	0.342	-0.036	0.763	0.269
UNTJOY	0.1	0.61	0.104	0.156	**1**	0.332	0.469	0.476	0.191	0.209	0.16	0.268
UNTCOMMO	-0.011	0.199	-0.024	-0.011	0.239	**0.743**	0.371	0.464	0.012	0.085	-0.019	0.133
UNTFAV	0.02	0.267	-0.003	0.018	0.276	**0.811**	0.475	0.461	0.062	0.129	0.1	0.064
UNTREADR	-0.073	0.303	-0.091	-0.045	0.31	**0.822**	0.424	0.519	0.019	0.152	-0.04	0.091
UNTRETWE	0.051	0.19	0.033	0.048	0.199	**0.765**	0.436	0.421	0.03	0.105	0.098	0.022
UNTBEL	-0.14	0.367	-0.139	-0.06	0.369	0.4	**0.794**	0.532	0.055	0.165	-0.094	-0.07
UNTINFOR	-0.013	0.307	-0.027	0.023	0.308	0.364	**0.763**	0.613	0.117	0.136	0.019	0.104
UNTREL	-0.037	0.413	-0.047	0.007	0.472	0.589	**0.856**	0.999	0.043	0.217	-0.044	0.134
UNTTRUST	-0.068	0.334	-0.053	-0.01	0.342	0.367	**0.827**	0.543	-0.001	0.173	-0.007	0.038
UNTINT	-0.049	0.291	-0.061	-0.005	0.373	0.435	0.608	**0.815**	0.015	0.169	-0.054	0.164

UNTLIKE	-0.037	0.43	-0.039	0.029	0.478	0.541	0.773	**0.86**	0.063	0.209	-0.026	0.045
UNTUSEFU	-0.032	0.358	-0.039	0.016	0.375	0.422	0.748	**0.788**	0.043	0.146	0.002	0.085
UNTREM	-0.008	0.298	-0.021	-0.014	0.349	0.557	0.718	**0.861**	0.022	0.198	-0.067	0.151
UNTNOTSU	0.368	0.258	0.319	0.342	0.191	0.04	0.061	0.044	**1**	-0.099	0.392	0.031
UNTCHANGE	-0.051	0.053	-0.039	-0.036	0.209	0.155	0.218	0.22	-0.099	**1**	-0.023	0.083
UNTSAD	0.775	0.136	0.693	0.763	0.16	0.041	-0.042	-0.046	0.392	-0.023	**1**	0.307
UNTSURP	0.257	0.243	0.252	0.269	0.268	0.096	0.068	0.131	0.031	0.083	0.307	**1**

A relatively weak proportion of the change in NPS score (R^2 = 10%) was explained by eight predictors. The following variables were statistically significant predictors of the change in NPS score (after respondents were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with text only):

- **Joy** (β = 0.22, t = 3.28, p < 0. 05)
- **Approval** (β = -0.15, t = 2.04, p < 0. 05)

The following variables were not significant predictors of a change in NPS score after respondents were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a Tweet with text only:

- Surprise (β = 0.05 t = 0.84, p = 0.404)
- Sadness (β = 0.05, t = 0.51, p = 0.608)
- Anger (β = -0.03, t = 0.13, p = 0.893)
- Not surprised (β = -0.11, t = 1.86, p = 0.064)
- Disgust (β = 0.04, t = 0.32, p = 0.747)
- Fear (β = - 0.08, t = 0.40, p = 0.692)
- MeWOM Message Credibility (β = 0.12, t = 1.24, p = 0. 216)
- MeWOM Issue Involvement (β = 0.03, t = 0.50, p = 0.362)
- MeWOM Message Involvement (β = 0.07, t = 0.70, p = 0.483)

The model therefore predicted that an increase in the emotion ***Joy,*** a decrease in the emotion ***Approval*** significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to recommend the airline to a friend or colleague after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption in the form of a positive valence Tweet with text only.

For the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with text only model, H6 and H9 were supported:

> **H6**: the emotions felt by receivers after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption will influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H9: variables representing the peripheral route to persuasion will influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

For the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with text only model, H4, H5 and H8 were not supported:

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: The extent to which receivers find a MeWOM brand image disruption to be credible will not influence a change in their perception of a corporate reputation

H0: variables representing the central route to persuasion will not influence a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions

6.5.8 Source Characteristics Hypotheses

When comparing all six models, H1, H2 and H3 were supported:

H1: the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with a video will differ from those that influence a change with text only

H2: the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph will differ from those that influence a change with text only

H3: the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with text only will differ from those that influence a change with a photograph

6.6 Conclusion

The chapter commenced with the provision of demographic data of the respondents that were a part of the quantitative part of the study. Next, the chapter provided an analysis of the changes that took place to the Airlines' NPS scores before exposure to the six MeWOM brand image disruptions and afterward. Based on Cohen's criteria (1988), all six MeWOM brand image disruptions had statistically significant decreases (negative) and increases (positive) in NPS mean scores with a large effect size based on Cohen's guidelines (1988) as follows:

Table 6.24 – MeWOM Brand Image Disruption NPS Change Effect Sizes

Valence	**MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Type**	**Effect Size**
Negative	Photo	0.36
	Text Only	0.30
	Video	0.27
Positive	Photo	0.26
	Video	0.16
	Text Only	0.15

The chapter concluded with the provision of six PLS-SEM models to demonstrate the variables that predicted a change in NPS score for the various types of MeWOM brand image disruptions. As demonstrated in table 6.25, *MeWOM Message Involvement (-), MeWOM Issue Involvement (-),* and the emotions *Disgust (-), Fear (-), Surprise (-) and Joy (-)* were predictors in the negative valence models. *Joy (+), Approval (-), Not Surprised* (-) and *Message Credibility (+)* were significant predictors in the positive valence models.

Table 6.25 - MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Summary

Negative Valence Tweets	Video (R^2 = 24%)	• **MeWOM Issue Involvement** (β = - 0.16, t = 2.43, p <.05) • **Disgust** (β = -0.15, t = 1.98, p <.05)
	Photo (R^2 = 15%)	• **MeWOM Issue Involvement** (β = - 0.13, t = 2.30, p < 0. 05) • **Fear** (β = -0.16, t = 2.14, p < 0. 05) • **Surprise** (β = - 0.13, t = 1.98, p < 0. 05)
	Message Only (R^2 = 25%)	• **Surprise** (β = -0.18, t = 2.99, p < 0. 05) • **MeWOM Message Involvement** (β = -0.22, t = 2.61, p < 0. 05) • **Joy** (β = -0.18, t = 2.38, p < 0. 05)
Positive Valence Tweets	Video (R^2 = 22%)	• **Joy** (β = 0.23, t = 3.01, p < .05) • **Not surprised** (β = -0.18, t = 2.96, p < .05)
	Photo (R^2 = 25%)	• **Joy** (β = 0.14, t = 2.27, p < 0. 05) • **MeWOM Message Credibility** (β = 0.12, t = 2.30, p < 0. 05)
	Message Only (R^2 = 10%)	• **Joy** (β = 0.22, t = 3.28, p < 0. 05) • **Approval** (β = -0.15, t = 2.04, p < 0. 05)

The next chapter provides a follow up to this chapter by sharing the findings of stage two of the explanatory study.

CHAPTER 7

PHASE II: EXPLANATORY QUALITATIVE FOLLOW-UP RESULTS

7.0 Introduction

This section provides the results from stage two of Phase II of the study, the explanatory qualitative results. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the explanatory phase of this study has the objective of providing explanatory context to the results of stage two of Phase II of the study. Specifically, this chapter does the following:

1. provides further context and understanding of the significance of *MeWOM Issue Involvement* in relation to the negative valence photo and video MeWOM brand image disruptions
2. provides further context and understanding of the significance of *MeWOM Message Involvement* with regard to negative valence text only MeWOM brand image disruption
3. provides further context and understanding of the significance of *MeWOM Message Credibility* in relation to the positive photo MeWOM brand image disruption
4. provides further context and understanding of the significance of the emotions *surprise, joy, fear and disgust* in relation to negative MeWOM brand image disruptions
5. provides further context and understanding on the significance of the *emotions joy, not surprised and approval* in relation to positive MeWOM brand image disruptions

The chapter commences with the demographic data of the 14 qualitative interview participants. The chapter then provides a brief revisit to the Phase II findings in order to provide the necessary context. Next, the chapter provides a synopsis of themes from the data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with useful data to take forward in discussion.

7.1 Demographics

This section of the chapter provides the demographic characteristics of the participants that took part in stage two, Phase II of the study. All participants were from the United States of America.

7.1.1 Gender

As indicated in the table below, there were seven females and seven males that took part in the study.

Table 7.1 - Gender

What is your gender?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	7	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Male	7	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	14	100.0	100.0	

7.1.2 Age

All 14 participants were 18 to 24 years old.

Table 7.2 - Age

What is your age? (U.S. Census 7 Categories)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 24 years	14	100.0	100.0	100.0

7.1.3 Education

Eleven participants completed some college, two completed a 2-year college degree and one participant completed a 4-year college degree.

Table 7.3 – Highest Level of Education

What is the highest level of education you have completed?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Some College	11	78.6	78.6	78.6
	2-year College Degree	2	14.3	14.3	92.9
	4-year College Degree	1	7.1	7.1	100.0
	Total	14	100.0	100.0	

7.1.4 Behavioral

A majority of participants, six, indicated Twitter use of 30-60 minutes to per day, five at 30 minutes or less per day, two at 60-90 minutes per day and one indicated using Twitter more than 90 minutes a day.

Table 7.4 – Daily Twitter Use

Which best describes your daily Twitter use?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30 minutes or less	5	35.7	35.7	35.7
	30-60 minutes	6	42.9	42.9	78.6
	60-90 minutes	2	14.3	14.3	92.9
	More than 90 minutes	1	7.1	7.1	100.0
	Total	14	100.0	100.0	

7.2 A Revisit to Stage One, Phase II of the Study

Before providing the qualitative results, this section provides a brief overview of the stage one, Phase II findings in order to provide context to the stage two, Phase II findings.

7.2.1.1 Stage One, Phase II Background & Findings

There were six MeWOM brand image disruptions included in stage one of Phase II of the study. They were comprised of positive and negative valence Tweets with video, Tweets with a photograph and Tweets with text only. The common denominator for all six Tweets was concerned with customers' experiences with the service provided by the airlines. The negative valence Tweets detailed customers' experiences of poor service with three airlines, whereas the positive Tweets shared customers' positive experiences with service provided by three airlines. As indicated in Table 7.5, when comparing negative and positive MeWOM brand image disruptions, there were some unique similarities and differences. Similarities include a significance of emotions in all of the models, with joy playing a key role in all three positive valence models. *MeWOM Issue Involve*ment played a prominent role in two of the negative valence models (video and photograph), whilst *MeWOM Message Credibility* and *MeWOM Message Involvement* were significant in one model each.

Table 7.5 – A Revisit to Stage One, Phase II Findings

Negative Valence Tweets	Video ($R^{2\,=}$ 24%)	• **MeWOM Issue Involvement** (β = - 0.16, t = 2.43, p <.05) • **Disgust** (β = -0.15, t = 1.98, p <.05)
	Photo ($R^{2\,=}$ 15%)	• **MeWOM Issue Involvement** (β = - 0.13, t = 2.30, p < 0. 05) • **Fear** (β = -0.16, t = 2.14, p < 0. 05) • **Surprise** (β = - 0.13, t = 1.98, p < 0. 05)
	Message Only ($R^{2\,=}$ 25%)	• **Surprise** (β = -0.18, t = 2.99, p < 0. 05) • **MeWOM Message Involvement** (β = -0.22, t = 2.61, p < 0. 05) • **Joy** (β = -0.18, t = 2.38, p < 0. 05)

Positive Valence Tweets	Video (R^2 = 22%)	• **Joy** (β = 0.23, t = 3.01, p < .05) • **Not surprised** (β = -0.18, t = 2.96, p < .05)
	Photo (R^2 = 25%)	• **Joy** (β = 0.14, t = 2.27, p < 0. 05) • **MeWOM Message Credibility** (β = 0.12, t = 2.30, p < 0. 05)
	Message Only (R^2 = 10%)	• **Joy** (β = 0.22, t = 3.28, p < 0. 05) • **Approval** (β = -0.15, t = 2.04, p < 0. 05)

Having provided a brief revisit to stage one of Phase II qualitative findings, the next section outlines the key themes identified from the analysis of the qualitative data in stage two, Phase II of the study.

7.3 MeWOM Issue Involvement

'*MeWOM Issue Involvement'* was a significant negative predictor in two of the negative valence models – the Tweet with a video and the Tweet with a photo. As referenced in Chapter 2, a dual process theory of human information processing such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was the most commonly used theoretical foundation in the study of the impact of eWOM communication (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The Elaboration Likelihood Model was a model created by Petty and Cacioppo (1980) and posits that the attitude formation process is dependent upon the extent to which message receivers are motivated to elaborate, or think about, *issue-relevant* arguments within a persuasive communication. When receivers of a persuasive communication possess a relatively high motivation to process information, they employ the central route. The central route requires more elaboration, or thinking and consideration of issue-relevant arguments. When the motivation to process information is low, receivers of messages tend to rely on simple cues in the persuasion context such as the credibility or the expertise of the sender – using the peripheral route to persuasion. The variable *MeWOM Issue Involvement* was designed to demonstrate respondents' likelihood to elaborate on information available in the Twitter environment.

There were three key themes with regard to the likelihood to process more information about issue-relevant arguments contained within the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions with a video and photo. They were *culpability, legitimacy and following the story.*

7.3.1.1 Culpability

In terms of their motivation to process more information after being exposed to the negative MeWOM brand image disruptions with a video and photo, participants were motivated to process the issue relevant arguments about the Tweet and stated a likelihood to look to both airlines and other Twitter users for answers. One piece of information that a majority of participants in the study specifically sought from both airlines and other Twitter users was *culpability* - or who was at fault. They were motivated to process more information about the Tweet in order to understand the culpable party of the circumstance portrayed. Upon exposure to the US Airways negative valence video, participant 2 wanted more information about others' experiences as highlighted in the following quote:

> *"I'd be interested to see if other people had similar experiences with it. Maybe some people who went through the same situation, but maybe they could have their violins on the plane or different instruments. So I guess I'd be interested to see other peoples' experience and how they respond."*

Other participants such as participant 4 looked to the airline to provide more information:

> *"Just to see what they say to it. Like whether they accept the responsibility. You know, deny it or something."*

Participant 5 looked for accountability and an acknowledgement by the airline that they have areas for improvement:

> *"I would be interested to see if they would try to work with them, or if there was some misunderstanding, or to explain why you can't bring this on board."*

7.3.1.2 Legitimacy

Another key theme that emerged in relation to the motivation to process more information about the issue-relevant arguments in the negative valence Tweet with a video was *legitimacy*. Participants sought confirmation, or validation, of the experience shared within the MeWOM brand image disruption from both the airlines and other Twitter users.

In response to the MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph, participant 3 was motivated to seek a sense of legitimacy from other Twitter users as the following statement demonstrates:

> *"And I like to see what other people say because obviously if other people never had that problem, never had a delay with them, that kind of thing, that kind of negates everything they are saying."*

Participant 5 sought a sense of legitimacy from US Airways regarding the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a video as demonstrated in the following quote:

> *"Maybe it wasn't even real. Maybe it was a staged set up or something. Or if it was real, I am guessing they would have a policy for the violin cases or something or a reason they would not allow it on."*

Participant 12 commented specifically on seeking truth when reading responses from the airline:

> *"Just to see what they actually said and if they had more reasoning for it. I guess to see more of the truth of it."*

7.3.1.3 Following the Story

With regard to the negative valence Tweet with a video and Tweet with a photograph and the significant variable '*MeWOM Issue Involvement'*, another key theme identified within the analysis was that of following the story. Respondents were motivated to process more information about the disruption to find out what happened next.

Participant 8 indirectly referenced an entertainment factor when describing his perspective of following the story of what happened:

"Yeah, I like reading people's opinions to see what they say. Like how crazy can it be, how good it can be. Whether I agree or disagree. I don't really ever say anything, because I don't like getting into internet arguments. Nobody wins really."

Participant 11 looked for both sides of the story and an associated entertainment factor in her motivation to process more information:

"Well I just want to see what they say. Like if they say, that's messed up or something. It's interesting to see their comments, if it's funny or if it's just wrong, if somebody says I am praying for you, you know you'd probably use another airline."

Participant 10 indicated he always follows the comments of others to see what happens:

"Always, always. I like the responses and what people say, when people start fussing online, it's pretty funny."

7.4 MeWOM Message Involvement

Within Phase II of the quantitative study, the variable '*MeWOM Message Involvement'* was a significant predictor in one of the MeWOM brand image disruptions, the negative valence Tweet with text only about American Airlines. The negative valence Tweet about American airlines concerned a customer sharing their experience of poor customer service from American Airlines. As highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2, the usefulness and relevance of eWOM influences its effectiveness and this variable represents these attributes.

7.4.1 Future Purchase

One theme emerged from the analysis of the Phase II qualitative data with regard to '*MeWOM Message Involvement'* of the negative valence Tweet with message and that was '*future purchase*'. After being exposed to the MeWOM brand image disruption, respondents became involved with the message when thinking about their potential future purchase with American Airlines.

Participant 4 described how seeing this Tweet in his timeline would impact his future purchase:

“If I were considering American and I scrolled through and saw this, it would probably shift my decision on who I wanted to fly with”

Participant 10 referenced having a choice with regard to airlines and that exposure to the Tweet might influence choosing American Airlines in the future.

“If I have all these different choices in airlines, I probably wouldn't choose American Airlines after seeing this”

Respondent 4 also referenced choices with regard to future purchase and if price were of no concern, the choice might be different.

“If I am booking and it is the same price, I may choose another airline after I saw this. Maybe.”

7.5 MeWOM Message Credibility

The variable ‘*MeWOM Message Credibility’* was significant in one model – the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption model with a photograph. The positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph portrayed a smiling flight attendant serving a beverage.

The literature review in Chapter 2 highlighted that the credibility of eWOM is a determinant of eWOM effectiveness. Referred to as the message quality by some researchers, ‘*MeWOM Message Credibility*’ is a variable that captures how believable, trustworthy and reliable receivers found the MeWOM brand image disruption to be. Two key themes emerged from the analysis of data – legitimacy and service expectation affirmation.

7.5.1 Legitimacy

Legitimacy was a key theme that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative interviews regarding the significance of ‘*MeWOM Message Credibility’*. Unlike the negative valence photo however, legitimacy was not something participants sought from processing further information, but instead something they immediately saw. Participants gained a sense of legitimacy from artefacts within the photograph that led to an immediate belief in the MeWOM brand image disruption.

Participant 12 commented on the smiling employee in the photograph:

"I think because there is a person standing there. An employee with a smile on her face. The customer thinks she is enjoying her job and doesn't hate the world for being there. I think that in itself, her with the smile on her face, is why this is reliable"

Participant 7 noticed other cues in the photograph – a name tag and other passengers:

"I mean it's her and you can see the name tag on her. You can also see there are other passengers. She is also holding the beverages and all. So I feel like that makes it somewhat believable"

Participant 9 referenced the photograph itself as validation:

"Because you can actually see it. If you had the tweet without the picture, I am not sure I'd believe it"

7.5.2 Service Expectation Affirmation

In relation to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photo of a smiling flight attendant, respondents also found the Tweet to be credible as it met their expectations. There was a sense that the employee in the photo was just going about everyday business and doing her job.

Participant 6 commented on how he related to the Tweet based on previous experiences:

"Because from previous experiences, I feel like the stewardess has always greeted you with a genuine and happy greeting. So I can really relate to this Tweet. It's a picture about how she is greeting her customers and people she is flying with."

Participant 12 commented on the happy state of the employee in the photograph and expectations related to happiness and service:

"It says in the Tweet excellent service. The picture, I see a name tag now, it looks like she is very happy where she works, of course when someone is happy where they work, they show that in customer service as well"

Participant 1 commented on the normal business flow of activity happening:

"It's like a normal thing going on. It just looks like normal flow."

7.5.3 Explaining a Lack of Significance of MeWOM Message Credibility

As noted in the previous section, *MeWOM Message Credibility* was a significant predictor in only one instance – the positive valence Tweet with photograph. Considering this unique outcome, participants were asked about the message credibility of all six MeWOM brand image disruptions. A rationale for a lack of credibility as a significant predictor of reputation change could be explained by a "face value" credibility associated with the Tweets. In essence, the Tweets were believed at face value without much scrutiny by participants – and therefore not a key evaluation factor of reputation change in five of the six models. Analysis of the qualitative data indicates that the Tweets were taken at face value for three key reasons – *service expectation, effort of the sender and artefacts as proof*. These are detailed below.

7.5.3.1 Service Expectation Affirmation

A key theme that emerged from the analysis of qualitative data was that the experiences portrayed in the Tweets were plausible due to participants' own prior experiences with airlines. The experiences conveyed within the Tweets resonated with participants as they reflected on their own prior experiences.

Participant 5 provided details of being delayed at an airport previously:

> *"Because I have been stuck at the airport before so I know how that can go. My flight has been delayed. When I flew out to Virginia actually this summer, my flight was delayed. I don't know if it was 5 hours, but it was pretty close. It was like 4, or maybe 3 and a half, and I know how that can be. Just sitting at the airport when you have absolutely nothing to do. Time doesn't go by very fast."*

Participant 10 provided details of experiencing the situation before with other airlines:

> *"It looks like it is someone communicating with American Airlines about poor customer service and maybe the agents weren't apologetic about what they could do. I have seen that in airlines before. Not specifically American, but other ones."*

Participant 3 compared the experience shared in the Tweet with a recent trip to Detroit:

> *"The way the flight attendant went up and down the aisle to explain stuff. They did not do that on my plane when I went to Detroit. So they informed me because there were some things they said that*

I did not know about. They just spoke like they were talking through a teleprompt. He explained everything and had his own little funny comments. So I thought that was really believable."

7.5.3.2 Effort by Sender

Participants also noted a belief in the Tweets as there was a perception that the sender of the Tweet would not bother to share their experience if the event had not occurred.

Participant 4 discussed the effort it took to post a photograph and the believability of the Tweet with photograph about Delta Airlines:

> *"If somebody feels the need to like Tweet about it, and to post a picture, then usually they are like pretty aggravated, so I believe that."*

Participant 6 references taking the time to Tweet and the reliability of the Tweet:

> *"I guess I would rely on the fact that they took the time out of their day to Tweet it."*

Participant 8 states that people would not go out of their way to Tweet if it was not believable:

> *"I believe it because I feel as if people would not go out of their way to Tweet something unless it was somewhat believable."*

7.5.3.3 Artefacts as Proof

When asked why they found Tweets to be credible, a majority of respondents referenced the evidence of the experience taking place in relation to the artefacts included with the Tweet. Whether it was a positive Tweet with text only, or a negative Tweet with a video, participants assigned 'face value' credibility due to the evidence associated with Tweet artefacts.

Respondent 2 provides details of what he sees in relation to credibility of negative valence Tweet with a video:

> *"It's right there, it's a video. They're standing literally outside the aircraft and in the video you can see like a pilot walking back and forth and you can tell he is kind of trying to ignore the guys. Because they are right there playing the violin and you can tell he is annoyed. He doesn't want them to be right there. I think it's very trustworthy and believable."*

Respondent 10 references the smiley face emoticon contained within the positive valence Tweet with text only:

"They just were really excited about their customer service. They put a smiley face in there and everything so I do believe that something positive happened."

Respondent 3 also references an emoticon, but in a negative valence Tweet with text only as an artefact as proof:

> *"Yeah, because of the frowny face once again. Because it's not a mad face, it's a sad face. Apparently they were upset about it and they could not get an apology out of something that really happened."*

Respondent 9 references the photograph as evidence in the negative valence Tweet with a photo:

> *"I believe it because it's like picture evidence."*

7.6 Emotions

Emotions played a key role in all six positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Emotions were highlighted in Chapter 2 as a relatively new area of research in the eWOM domain with the potential to influence eWOM outcomes. As noted previously, *Joy (+)*, *Not Surprised (-)* and *Approval* (-) were significant predictors in the positive valence models whilst *Disgust (-)*, *Fear (-)*, *Surprise (-)* and *Joy (-)* as predictors in the negative valence models.

7.6.1 Disgust

Along with '*MeWOM Issue Involvement,'* '*Disgust*' was the other significant predictor for the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a video. Analysis of the data reveals that disgust was felt by respondents in relation to disconfirmation of their service expectations – that is the service delivered by the airline did not live up to their expectations.

7.6.1.1 Service Expectation Disconfirmation

Participant 8 experienced disgust as they expected airline employees to engage with the customers sharing their experience in the video:

> *"I guess I felt disgusted because the rest of their crew actually allowed this. Like you actually allowed them to just stand out there and wait like if they can't get on the plane, where are they going to go? Like you just let them just sit there. Like I would feel really stranded and upset. I would want my money back."*

Participant 3 expected communication from the airline to customers filming the video:

> *"I felt disgust probably because nobody was saying anything to them, like I am sorry for what's happening, can we help you out."*

Participant 5 also highlighted the workers in the video:

> *"I felt disgust probably because none of the workers were doing anything. It's like they were almost trying to avoid them and not say anything, so I just don't think anyone handled it well for what was happening."*

7.6.2 Joy

The emotion *joy* played a prominent role in the study. It was a significant predictor in four out of six models – a positive predictor in all three positive valence models and a negative predictor in one negative valence model.

7.6.2.1 Joy – Positive Valence Models

One key theme emerged from the analysis in relation to the emotion joy and the positive valence models and that was that participants identified with the joy conveyed with Tweets and also felt joy as a result. As such, a sense of contagion took place with joy emanating from the Tweets and bring joy to the participants.

7.6.2.1.1 Joyous Contagion

Participant 9 felt joy as a result of others feeling joy upon exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption with a video:

"It made me joyful because everyone seemed happy in the video. He seemed happy. They seemed like they were enjoying their job. Everyone seemed like they were enjoying the experience"

Participant 2 felt joy from reading the MeWOM brand image disruption with text only:

"It's a happy Tweet. Really, really, really three times with a smiley face. Somebody is excited about the customer service. I think there is some joy in that"

Participant 6 described the details of the environment and how the flight attendant appeared in the MeWOM brand image disruption and the joy felt as a result:

"I felt joy because she is happy. She has her Coca-Cola drink in her hand so, it's like you can do this on the plane. There are some things you can do and some you can't do on a plane, she seems like she is having a good time"

Participant 10 also mentions the joy felt from seeing the happiness of the flight attendant in the photograph:

"The smile says it all. I think the customer service says it all in this picture. She's smiling and she's got a Coke in her hand, the drinks to serve in her"

7.6.2.2 Joy – Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

The emotion joy was a negative predictor for the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with text only about American Airlines. When discussing this emotion with participants, joy in the negative sense was discussed when they revealed how the text only Tweet made them feel. One theme emerged from the analysis and that was empathy.

7.6.2.2.1 Empathy

Participants were empathetic with the consumer that shared their experience via the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption about American Airlines.

Participant 7 was in a state of remorse for the consumer:

"I just felt remorseful for the person who had to go through this because we have all experienced poor customer service in one place or another, whether it be on an airline or a restaurant. No matter where you travel, it can happen, so nobody wants to go through that."

Participant 3 put themselves in the consumer's shoes:

"I guess if I put myself in that situation and I would probably be upset and it makes me sad."

Participant 9 noted distress and feeling bad for the American Airlines customer:

"I guess I feel distressed for them - I mean I do feel bad for them. I don't know what's going on in their lives, but we've all had bad times and I feel sorry for them."

7.6.3 Surprise

In Phase II of the study, the emotion surprise was a negative significant predictor in the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions with a photo and text only. Again, a key theme that emerged from the analysis of the emotion surprise with regard to these two disruptions was '*service expectation disconfirmation'*. Participants identified with the surprise felt by the sender of the Tweets and also felt a sense of surprise when the service provided was below what they expected of the airline.

7.6.3.1 Service Expectation Disconfirmation

Whether it was commenting about the length of time the customer had to wait for their luggage, or the lack of service depicted in the American Airlines Tweet, a lack of expected service provision contributed to the emotional reaction surprise. In essence, surprise was evoked as a result of an experience that conflicted with participants' expectations of what should happen.

Participant 2 noted her surprise at Delta Airlines and not living up to her expectations of the airline:

"You know, and I read they waited an hour and a half I was like, really, like, you're the top like airline, you should be on your mark. I am really, like they are kind of slacking. I mean I figure something like that you want to stand to your word and make that good impression. I was surprised like I did not really get the impression of that."

Upon reflecting on the American Airlines MeWOM brand image disruption with text only, respondent 6 highlighted his surprise at the lack of apology offered by the airline:

> *"I was surprised that the agents that were mentioned in the Tweet weren't apologetic. That's one of the first things you want your company to do. If you're a CEO, it's one of the first things you teach your employees that if there is a dispute or disagreement, or you know if a customer, if something doesn't go his or her way, then you want to be as an employee of a company very apologetic"*

Participant 3 was also surprised at a lack of apology from American Airlines:

> *"I mean, you paid a lot of money and at least an apology would have helped a little bit, I mean it would not have fixed everything. Customers are what brings the money in, you've got to keep them coming back and you don't want to make somebody mad and they ain't coming back"*

7.6.4 Not Surprised

The emotion *not surprised* was a negative significant predictor for the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a video – meaning that an increase in not being surprised would be associated with a decrease in perception of the airline's reputation. Analysing the data in relation to a feeling of surprise in relation to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a video brought forward one key theme – a conflicting perspective of ***service expectation***.

7.6.4.1 Service Expectation Transcendence

Participants felt a sense of surprise when the experience shared in the positive Tweet with video did not align with their expectations of what happens with airlines. As detailed in the previous section, in the negative valence Tweets, the emotion surprise was evoked as a result of a provision of service below what was expected of the airline. In the positive context however, surprise was evoked as a result of the provision of service that transcended their expectations.

Respondent 12 voices an expectation of poor service:

> *"I guess it is surprising because you are not used to seeing a lot of positives, especially when it comes to airlines."*

Respondent 2 references the flight attendants enjoying their jobs and being surprised:

"I guess because flight attendants aren't known to like enjoy their jobs a lot. The fact that they look like they are having fun and getting involved, that surprised me."

Respondent 9 references the provision of safety information and the extra service provided by the crew:

"Normally you don't see this kind of representation of safety information on a flight. Most of the time it's just boring, they're just going through the motions and they actually made it interesting in this video."

7.6.5 Fear

The emotion fear was a negative significant predictor in the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photo. One theme emerged from the analysis and that was future risk. Respondents voiced concerns that the same thing could happen to them if they flew with the airline.

7.6.5.1 Future Risk

Respondent 14 noted that she takes two bags when flying home and that this would be an unwelcome event:

"Whenever I fly home, I take two large bags - and I don't want this to happen to me."

Respondent 9 highlighted the timeline involved:

"I am fearful because who would want to wait an hour and a half for their luggage. I wouldn't want that to happen to me."

Respondent 3 references the airline and wasting the customer's time:

"I think that Delta Airlines is wasting the customer's time. It is not good. I don't want the same problem with my baggage."

7.6.6 Approval – Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Text Only

The positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption about United Airlines included text only and had two predictors for a change in corporate reputation – *joy* and *approval*. As detailed in the previous section, the emotion *joy* was a positive predictor of reputation change. *Approval* however was a negative predictor, meaning that a decrease in approval of the MeWOM brand image disruption would predict an increase in perception of the airline. This is a seemingly puzzling outcome as one would expect an increase in approval of the Tweet to be associated with an increase in perception of the airline. Consulting Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions as depicted in Figure 7.1 helps to provide some clarity to this outcome. As detailed in Chapter 3, the emotion '*Acceptance*' was modified to '*Approval*' in the pilot stage of the study as pilot participants found the word '*Acceptance*' confusing. The opposite of '*Acceptance*' or '*Approval*' on the wheel is the feeling of '*Disgust*'.

Figure 7.1 - Plutchik's Eight Basic Emotions (adapted from Plutchik, 2001)

Analysis of the qualitative data demonstrates that a majority of participants felt there was an overall sense of exaggeration associated with the Tweet and thus a lack of approval and some level of disgust with it.

7.6.6.1 Exaggeration

The theme of exaggeration was associated with a lack of approval of the Tweet. A lack of other visible cues such as a photograph or video left participants with questions regarding the events described in the Tweet.

Participant 2 discussed a need for more information and a feeling that the sender of the Tweet was exaggerating:

> *"I don't know how to explain it. Because she is crying like - and I don't think she really was crying. She is probably just over exaggerating. She says 'you restored my faith in customer service' and we don't know what that is. I don't know if she was getting extra or just I don't know."*

Participant 6 also questioned whether the sender of the Tweet was actually crying:

> *"And even though crying is kind of a cliche, they might not have really been crying, but they said it made their day so it was impactful to them."*

Participant 7 found the statement to be bland:

> *"It's kind of a bland statement. you restored my faith you know, made my day. Y'all made my day, okay, but without more information, I would just go to the next Tweet. It's not really interesting."*

7.7 Summary of Phase II Follow-Up Qualitative Findings

The content analysis of the 14 qualitative interviews brought forward several themes to explain the outcomes in Phase II of the study. Table 7.6 provides a summary of the themes and the number of participants' answers that aligned to the themes.

Table 7.6 – Summary of Qualitative Themes

Type of Tweet	Phase II Predictors	Phase II Follow-Up Theme(s)	Number
Positive Video	Joy (+)	Joyous Contagion	12
	Not Surprised (-)	Service Expectation Transcendence	10
Negative Video	M. Issue Involvement (-)	Culpability	11
		Legitimacy	10
		Following the Story	13
	Disgust (-)	Service Expectation Disconfirmation	12
Positive Photo	M. Message Credibility (+)	Legitimacy	13
		Service Expectation Affirmation	12
	Joy (+)	Joyous Contagion	12
Negative Photo	M. Issue Involvement (-)	Culpability	11
		Legitimacy	13
		Following the Story	10
	Fear (-)	Future Risk	12

	Surprise (-)	Service Expectation Disconfirmation	12
Positive Text Only	Joy (+)	Joyous Contagion	11
	Approval (-)	Exaggeration	9
Negative Text Only	Surprise (-)	Service Expectation Disconfirmation	10
	M. Message Involvement (-)	Future Purchase	11
	Joy (-)	Empathy	12

7.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide explanatory context to the Phase II quantitative findings. The chapter began with an overview of the demographic information about the respondents who took part in the Phase II qualitative interviews. Next, the chapter provided a brief review of the Phase II quantitative findings in order to provide a background to the qualitative interviews. The chapter then was concerned with the provision of the qualitative findings and ended with a summary of key themes.

The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of the study.

CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION

8.0 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the advent of customers sharing their positive and negative experiences of brands on social media sites such as Twitter, and the viral nature of these shared experiences, has received a tremendous amount of media coverage over the last few years. Recent examples include a United Airlines customer being forcibly dragged from his seat due to overbooking (Griffiths & Wang, 2017) and a tech influencer, Casey Neistat, sharing his positive experience of being upgraded on Emirates (Sharman, 2016). Although these extreme examples garner the media attention they deserve, ordinary consumers share their positive and negative experiences of brands on microblogs such as Twitter as they carry out their routine transactions. In the past, they may have told a neighbour or colleague about these experiences, whereas today they can tell the whole world about them through microblogs such as Twitter. Little is known about these shared brand experiences however (referred to as MeWOM brand image disruptions in this study) and the impact they have on corporate reputation. A review of the literature and discussions with organisations identified a clear need to not only understand whether MeWOM brand image disruptions actually cause a change to corporate reputation from the receiver's perspective, but to also understand the variables that influence a change in a corporate reputation after exposure to them. This study aims to fill these gaps in knowledge by providing a much needed understanding and clarification for this burgeoning area of research.

This chapter discusses the findings from this study and commences by discussing the findings with regard to any change to corporate reputation that occurred as a result of exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption and the extent of the change. Next, the chapter revisits the variables tested in the conceptual model before moving to a discussion of the findings from the experiment and qualitative follow-up. The chapter ends with the introduction of six new MeWOM brand image disruption models.

As the experiment included both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions, the discussion of findings in this chapter is structured in order to delineate between the negative valence findings and the positive valence findings.

8.1 Negative MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions Negatively Impact Corporate Reputations

The results from this study demonstrate that all three negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions had a statistically significant impact on a change in corporate reputation with a large effect based on Cohen's criteria (1988). This result suggests that exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption negatively influences a firm's reputation in the mind of a receiver and confirms assertions made within the literature.

Specifically, the literature called out the power that social network site users have to influence corporate reputations as a range of stakeholders are exposed to the thoughts, feelings, experiences and perceptions of brands on a daily basis through social networking sites and microblogs such as Twitter (Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016). Although several noteworthy assertions were made within the literature, when conducting the literature review, it was surprising to find that there was a dearth of empirical data to confirm whether negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions could have an impact on corporate reputation – and if they did, to what extent. At its most basic sense, this is a fundamental concern that needed to be addressed empirically. In addition, the qualitative findings from Phase I of the study were aligned with the literature in that a majority of participants believed that MeWOM brand image disruptions could have an impact on their corporate reputations – yet there was a lack of understanding of how much or to what extent.

The results from this study provide a noteworthy contribution with some worthwhile confirmatory data to the body of literature on negative MeWOM brand image disruptions and the influence they have on corporate reputations from the receiver's perspective. Further, this finding confirms that the fear expressed within the literature, and by the organisations that took part in Phase I of the study, is a rational one in relation to the potential impact that negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions can have on a corporate reputation.

8.2 Negative MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions Are More Impactful than Positive Ones

All three negative MeWOM brand image disruptions had a statistically larger effect on a change in reputation than the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. This finding suggests that negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions have a greater impact on a change in reputation in the mind of the receiver than positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Hence, the previous literature that purports negative valence eWOM as having a greater impact than positive eWOM is supported.

Explicitly, the literature revealed a number of authors who made assertions that negative information is more attention grabbing in general (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013; Wang et al., 2015) and is therefore more impactful on receivers. For example, Daugherty & Hoffman (2013) noted that negative valence information "captures attention more readily than other types of information" and that negative reviews have been shown to weigh more heavily on consumer minds than positive reviews (p. 87). Literature in the psychology domain supports their assertions by explaining a negativity bias could occur if negative stimuli are more likely to prime or activate a flight or fight response, thereby producing more extreme reactions (including more extreme ratings of) negative stimuli than positive stimuli (Ito et al., 1998). In this study, exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions activated a range of responses – from the motivation to process more information (central processing), to a reduction in perception of the airlines' reputations (flight response).

In relation to the impact of negative valence MeWOM disruptions versus positive MeWOM brand image disruptions, the results are consistent with the initial prediction. This study thus makes a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on the powerful effects of negative microblog eWOM and its impact on corporate reputation.

8.3 Positive MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions Positively Impact Corporate Reputations

The results in Chapter 6 also demonstrate that all three positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions had a statistically significant impact on a change in corporate reputation with a large effect based on Cohen's criteria (1988). This result suggests that exposure to a positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption positively influences a firm's reputation in the mind of a receiver and adds to the extant literature.

The literature provided a strong rationale for firms to maintain a positive reputation due to the associated benefits of providing an optimal marketplace position (Raj, 1985; Balmer, 1998; Greyser; 1998, Roper & Davies, 2007, Ali et al., 2015), the mitigation of threats (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004), higher customer loyalty (Bartikowski et al., 2011; Ali et al., 2015), and customer commitment and trust (Ali et al., 2015). Given the importance stressed within the literature with regard to the importance of maintaining a positive reputation, there was a surprising dearth of empirical data on receivers and their perception of a corporate reputation when exposed to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Adding to some promising recent studies (e.g. Riu et al., 2013) on positive eWOM, the findings from this study are an important contribution to the literature as results demonstrate that positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions are just as impactful on a corporate reputation as the negative disruptions – i.e. the results in Chapter 6 demonstrate that positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions do have a statistically significant, positive impact on corporate reputation with a large effect based on Cohen's criteria (1988).

8.4 Source Style Influences the Variables that Predict a Change in Corporate Reputation

All six positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions had different significant predictors, with source style playing a key role in determining the variables that were significant in predicting a change in reputation. This finding suggests that source style has an important role to play in determining the factors that influence a change in reputation when receivers are exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions.

As referenced in Chapter 2, source style is a relatively new feature of eWOM that has been highlighted as affecting eWOM effectiveness that has very little research to date (Lin et al., 2012). Source style is concerned with the assertion that visual information exerts a significant impact on user's online information acceptance (Stuart et al., 2014). For example, recent studies demonstrate that characteristics of online reviews such as the type of review (benefit centric versus attribute centric), or the addition of images to a review, have an impact on eWOM effectiveness (Lin et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2015). The findings in this study support the literature with source style influencing the significant predictors of a change in reputation – i.e. all six models had different predictors of a change in reputation with source style playing a key role. The primary role that source style played was with regard to the provision of complex versus simple visual cues to the receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions. In negative valence models with complex visual cues (e.g. a photo and video), significant predictors included high arousal emotions (*fear, disgust and surprise*) and a central route to persuasion variable (*MeWOM Issue Involvement*). In the negative valence model with text only, and thus simple cues, *empathy* with the sender occurred and subsequent personal relevance. In the positive valence models, aspects of *source style* in relation to both complex and simple cues brought about *joyous contagion* and is aligned with recent studies demonstrating the impact that attributes of content can have in promoting emotional contagion (e.g. Berg et al., 2015). Additionally, *source style* had a role to play with the significance of *MeWOM Message Credibility* in a positive valence model as receivers focused on artefacts signaling *legitimacy* in the photograph with a subsequent change in reputation taking place.

These results are aligned with the prediction as a range of variables were predictors of a change in reputation when comparing source style types with complex and simple visual cues. This finding therefore demonstrates the influence that *source style* can have on the factors that influence a change in reputation in the mind of the receiver and supports what has been said in the literature.

8.5 Variables Influencing a Change in Corporate Reputation

Interviews with organisations in Phase I of the study brought to the fore an uncertainty with regard to the factors that influence a change in reputation after receivers are exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions – with some indicating a reliance on community managers to assess Tweets and then make a determination of their potential impact on receivers. This provided a strong rationale to take Phase II of the research forward - to not only understand the impact that MeWOM brand image disruptions have on receivers, but to understand the factors that influence a change in reputation upon exposure. The literature in the corporate image and reputation domain did not provide sufficient research in this area and a wider review of the marketing literature took place. In the context of eWOM effectiveness, the literature called out five different variables that could potentially have an impact on its effectiveness from a receiver's perspective including *eWOM credibility, message involvement, issue involvement, prior knowledge about the product or service* and *emotions* (see Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Lin et al., 2012; Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Stuart et al., 2014; Wang et al. 2015; Teng et al., 2015; Luo and Zhong, 2015; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016).

In the context of MeWOM brand image disruptions, and any impact they have on a change in corporate reputation, 11 different variables were created for the model. As the eWOM literature did not specifically call out any emotions in particular, a lightly modified version of Plutchik's (2001) eight basic emotions were used – i.e. *joy, sadness, anger, approval, disgust, fear, surprise, not surprised*.

Table 8.1 provides a clarification of the definition of each of the variables explored within the study based on the literature reviewed.

Table 8.1 – MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Variable Definitions

Variable	Definition
MeWOM Message Credibility	The extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption finds the disruption to be believable and trustworthy.
MeWOM Message Involvement	The extent to which MeWOM receivers find the disruption to be useful and relevant.
MeWOM Issue Involvement	The extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption is motivated to process more information about the disruption.
MeWOM Emotions	The extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption experiences the emotions joy, sadness, anger, approval, disgust, fear, surprise and not surprised
Change in Corporate reputation	Any change in reputation, from the receiver's perspective that has occurred after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

Stage one of the explanatory study provided some much needed empirical confirmation of the variables that were most influential in predicting a change in reputation, whilst stage two provided additional explanatory context. These results are discussed next.

8.5.1 Variables Influencing a Change in Reputation – Negative Valence Models

This section provides a discussion of the significant predictors of a change in reputation for the three negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Table 8.2 provides a review of the significant predictors for the negative valence models as well as the emergent themes from the data analysis of the follow-up qualitative study.

Table 8.2 – Negative Predictors and Follow-Up Themes

Type of Tweet	Phase II Predictors	Phase II Follow-Up Theme(s)
Negative Video	M. Issue Involvement (-)	Culpability
		Legitimacy
		Following the Story
	Disgust (-)	Service Expectation Disconfirmation
Negative Photo	M. Issue Involvement (-)	Culpability
		Legitimacy
		Following the Story
	Fear (-)	Future Risk
	Surprise (-)	Service Expectation Disconfirmation
Negative Text Only	Surprise (-)	Service Expectation Disconfirmation
	M. Message Involvement (-)	Future Purchase
	Joy (-)	Empathy

The discussion begins with the significance of *MeWOM Issue Involvement* before moving to a discussion of the significant emotions in the negative valence models.

8.5.1.1 MeWOM Issue Involvement Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The variable MeWOM Issue Involvement was a significant predictor in two of the negative valence models. This result suggests that the central route to persuasion influences a change in perception of reputation upon exposure to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions with complex visual cues. Hence, this finding supports the previous literature on information processing and the route to persuasion.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the attitude formation process is dependent upon the extent to which message receivers elaborate, or think about, issue-relevant arguments within a communication (Petty and Cacioppo, 1980). Additionally, it is said that in some situations, people will be highly motivated and able to evaluate the true merits of an issue position. Petty et al. (1987) noted that "when the elaboration likelihood is high, people will process all subjectively relevant information in order to determine the central merits of the advocated position" (p. 238). In this study, results from the qualitative follow-up demonstrated that the central route to persuasion was taken with participants motivated to understand who the culpable party was (*culpability)*, to understand further information about the experiences portrayed (*legitimacy)* and to see what happened next (*following the story)*. This study makes a noteworthy contribution by supporting the literature in the context of the central route processing that takes place when receivers are exposed to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and their evaluation of a corporate reputation.

Explaining why the motivation to process information was high in two of the negative valence models can again be found in the extant literature with regard to the influence that emotions have in processing information. These are discussed next.

8.5.1.2 The Emotions Fear, Surprise and Disgust in the Negative Valence Models

Morris et al. (2005) emphasised the important role that emotions play in cognitive information processing and explained that even as an individual processes a message cognitively, the cognition has an emotional core. Significantly, at the core of the two negative valence models where central information processing was significant, the emotions *fear*, *surprise,* and *disgust* were significant predictors of a change in reputation. A discussion of these significant emotions follows.

8.5.1.2.1 The Emotion Fear Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The emotion *fear* (-) was a significant predictor of reputation change in one negative valence model. This result suggests that upon exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *fear* influences a change in reputation in the mind of the receiver. The significance of this emotion adds to the growing body of literature in relation to emotions and eWOM effectiveness.

Although the emotional reaction *fear* was not mentioned in the eWOM literature specifically, literature in the advertising domain demonstrated that the emotion *fear* is a primitive instinct that has the ability to guide and activate human behaviour and is an emotion that marketers use to seize attention and persuade consumers (La Tour & Zahra, 1988). It has also been acknowledged in the literature that the emotion fear elicits an avoidance reaction (Morales et al., 2012) with persuasive messages frightening people by depicting unwanted consequences of non-compliance (Wright, 1992). The explanatory follow-up interviews brought to the fore the theme of *future risk*. In essence, a negative Tweet with a photograph evoked the emotion fear as it depicted an unwanted consequence of flying with Delta Airlines. Participants in the study voiced concerns about the same thing happening to them and were motivated to process more information to avoid it– whether through assigning *culpability* or determining *legitimacy*. This mirrors the literature with regard to fear and its impact and demonstrates the power this emotion has in relation to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and a change in reputation. This finding makes a noteworthy contribution to the literature in relation to the significant role this emotion plays upon exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption.

8.5.1.2.2 The Emotion Disgust Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

Disgust was also a negative predictor of reputation change in a negative valence model. This result suggests that upon exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *disgust* influences a change in reputation in the mind of the receiver. The significance of this emotion again adds to the growing body of literature in relation to emotions and eWOM effectiveness.

For example, it is known that emotion disgust is associated with a feeling of visceral repulsion (Shimp & Stuart, 2004), and thus elicits avoidance tendencies more immediately than *fear* (Morales et al., 2012). Analysis of the follow-up interviews again brought to the fore that similar to the evocation of the emotion *surprise*, the emotion *disgust* was evoked as result of divergence of perceptions and expectations of the airline. In turn, it elicited a motivation to process more information about the MeWOM brand image disruption. This is a powerful new insight into the importance of this emotion and contributes to the body of literature on emotions in relation to corporate reputation and eWOM effectiveness.

8.5.1.2.3 The Emotion Surprise Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The emotion *surpise* (-) was a significant predictor of reputation change in two negative valence models. This result suggests that upon exposure to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *surprise* influences a change in reputation in the mind of the receiver. The significance of this emotion also adds to the growing body of literature in relation to emotions and eWOM effectiveness.

Specifically, the literature highlights that the emotion surprise is evoked as result of divergence of perceptions and expectations. Based on previous experiences, it is said that individuals develop schemas and expectancies about certain events. If expectancies are disconfirmed, then the emotion surprise is evoked (Hutter & Hoffman, 2011). Follow-up interviews with participants in Phase II of the study confirmed that *surprise* was evoked as a result of being exposed to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and *service disconfirmation* – i.e. the experiences portrayed in the negative valence Tweet were not aligned to participants' service expectations.

The significance of surprise and the data from the follow-up interviews provides a noteworthy contribution to the literature on emotions and their role in predicting a change in corporate reputation. The reactions of participants is aligned to what advertisers have known for quite some time about the emotion and demonstrates the importance of this emotion in the eWOM domain and its impact on a change in reputation.

8.5.1.3 Joy in the Negative Context Elicits Empathy and Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The emotion *joy* was a negative predictor in one of the negative valence models. This result suggests that upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *joy* in a negative context influences a change in reputation. The significance of this emotion also adds to the growing body of literature in relation to emotions and eWOM effectiveness.

As referenced in Chapter 2, Berger & Milkman (2012) noted that emotions generate various levels of psychological arousal or activation. Anger and anxiety are associated with states of heightened arousal or activation whilst contentment and sadness are associated with low arousal or deactivation. They further noted that low arousal is characterized by relaxation and high arousal with activity. In the two negative valence models with a Tweet with photo and a Tweet with video, the high arousal emotions of *fear (-)*, *surprise (-)* and *disgust (-)* were significant whilst a high arousal and a low arousal emotion were significant predictors in the text only model – *surprise* (-) and *joy* (-) respectively. Significance of only high arousal emotions generated action to process more information whereas the addition of a low arousal emotion, *joy* (-), evoked by the text only Tweet evoked *empathy* and therefore involvement with the message. Upon the evocation of empathy, the message became relevant and useful as participants reflected on the plight of the Twitter sender whilst imagining their own flight purchasing process in the future. This is discussed next.

8.5.1.4 MeWOM Message Involvement Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

MeWOM Message Involvement was a negative predictor of corporate reputation change in one model. This suggests that the extent to which receivers find a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption to be relevant and useful influences a change in reputation in the mind of the receiver. Thus, the significance of this variable supports the extant literature.

As noted in Chapter 2, when discussing what makes eWOM effective, researchers highlighted that the degree of involvement and the usefulness of the information in messages influenced eWOM outcomes

(Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et al., 2014). As noted previously, analysis of the follow-up qualitative data confirmed the evocation of *empathy* with the sender of the Tweet. Hence, the message became relevant and useful as participants reflected on the plight of the Tweet sender whilst imagining their own flight purchasing process in the future. A situational interest (Richens, 1984) was thus generated and a change in reputation took place. This is an interesting and useful insight that makes another significant contribution to the corporate reputation and eWOM bodies of literature.

8.5.2 Variables Influencing a Change in Reputation – Positive Valence Models

This section provides a discussion of the significant predictors of a change in reputation for the three positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Table 8.3 provides a review of the significant predictors for the positive valence models as well as the emergent themes from the data analysis of the follow-up qualitative study.

Table 8.3 – Positive Predictors and Follow-Up Themes

Type of Tweet	Phase II Predictors	Phase II Follow-Up Theme(s)
Positive Video	Joy (+)	Joyous Contagion
	Not Surprised (-)	Service Expectation Transcendence
Positive Photo	M. Message Credibility (+)	Legitimacy
		Service Expectation Affirmation
	Joy (+)	Joyous Contagion
Positive Text Only	Joy (+)	Joyous Contagion
	Approval (-)	Exaggeration

As evidenced in Table 8.3, with the exception of *MeWOM Message Credibility*, all of the predictors in the positive valence models were emotions. The discussion begins with the significance of the emotion *joy* as it was significant in all of the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions.

8.5.2.1 The Emotion Joy Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The emotion *joy* was a positive predictor in all three of the positive valence models. This result suggests that upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *joy* influences a change in reputation. This finding contributes to the burgeoning body of literature on the emotion *joy* and its contagious effects and eWOM effectiveness.

The outcome in this study aligns with recent studies into the emotion *joy* and its contagious effect. Upon exposure to advertisements with emotion-evoking stimuli, consumers are said to form attitudes that are aligned with the nature of emotion linked to the brand in the advertisement (Hasford et al., 2015). For example, a recent study found that advertisements with a smiling model produced better attitudes toward the ad versus ones with a non-smiling model through the emotional contagion that took place in relation to the emotion *joy* (Berg et al., 2015). Results from this study demonstrate similar results. The evocation of the emotion *joy* was brought about by the joy expressed by the Tweet sender or the joy being depicted in the Tweets. The evocation of the emotion *joy* resulted in a change in reputation after an emotional contagion took place, thereby resulting in a better evaluation of the firm.

The significance of *joy* in all of the positive models demonstrates the importance of this emotion in relation to a change in reputation and makes an important contribution to the literature.

8.5.2.2 The Emotion Approval Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The emotion *approval* was a negative predictor in one of the positive valence models. This result suggests that upon exposure to a positive MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *approval* in a negative context influences a change in reputation. This finding adds to the growing body of literature on emotions and the impact that different emotions can have on eWOM effectiveness.

Analysis of the qualitative data from the follow-up phase helped to provide an understanding of this outcome with the theme of *exaggeration* being associated with a feeling of a lack of approval of the Tweet. This can potentially be explained by assertions by Morris et al. (2005) who noted that positive emotions influence peripheral information processing whilst negative emotions influence central processing. As discussed previously, *joy* was a significant predictor in all three models and thus played a key role in the study. In this case, the positive Tweet with text only, *approval* was a negative predictor that took second place to *joy*, indicating that a feeling of *joy* was the overriding force in reputation change. Therefore, although participants questioned the sender of the Tweet and the emotions they felt, they also felt a sense of *joy* after exposure with a change of reputation taking place.

This finding adds yet another contribution to the literature with regard to the important role that emotions play after receivers are exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption and their influence on a change in reputation.

8.5.2.3 The Emotion Not Surprised Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

The emotion *not surprised* was a negative predictor of reputation change in the positive valence model. This result suggests that upon exposure to a positive MeWOM brand image disruption, the emotional reaction *not surprised* in a negative context influences a change in reputation. This finding supports the literature in relation to the emotion surprise and eWOM effectiveness.

Again, this outcome in the study confirms what the literature says in relation to the emotion *surprise* – i.e. that the emotion is evoked as result of divergence of perceptions and expectations (Hutter & Hoffman, 2011). In the case of the positive valence model and *not surprised* the emergent theme from the qualitative data was that of *service expectation transcendence*. Participants felt a sense of surprise when the experience shared in the positive Tweet did not align with their expectations of what *usually* happens with airlines. In the positive context, surprise was evoked as a result of the provision of service that transcended their expectations.

The significance of this emotion in the positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions provides some useful insight into the power of this emotion in relation to reputation change and makes a significant contribution. The discussion moves next to the only predictive variable that was not an emotion in the positive valence models – *MeWOM Message Credibility*.

8.5.2.4 MeWOM Message Credibility Positively Predicts a Change in Corporate Reputation

MeWOM Message Credibility was a positive predictor in one of the positive valence models, indicating that an increase in the credibility of the message predicts a change in corporate reputation in the mind of the receiver. This finding is aligned to the previous literature on the role of eWOM message credibility in relation to eWOM effectiveness.

The literature review in Chapter 2 highlighted that eWOM credibility (Cheung et al., 2009), also referred to as message credibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and argument quality (Teng et al., 2014), has been found to play an important role in eWOM effectiveness. This outcome could be explained by the route to persuasion that the Tweet with photograph elicited. As discussed previously, the Elaboration Likelihood Model posits that receivers of persuasive messages take a central or peripheral route to persuasion. When the peripheral route is taken, the motivation to process issue-relevant arguments is low with heuristic cues such as the expertise/credibility of the sender or aesthetic aspects of a communication leading to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Poiesz (1989) noted that images may serve as heuristic, and simplifying choice rules in low involvement decision making. They asserted that if the motivation to process information or actual information processing are low, images might function as persuasion cues to generate a small and temporary attitude change without its arguments being read. This assertion is particularly salient in the context of this study. Participants in the follow-up study verbalised a sense of the event portrayed in the positive MeWOM brand image disruption with a photo as being real due to artefacts contained within the photograph – such as the nametag on the flight attendant, her smile, the other passengers on the plane and her uniform. The other theme that emerged from the analysis of the follow-up qualitative data was *service expectation affirmation*. Participants felt that the photograph portrayed business as usual operations and thus this supported the believability of the Tweet.

Combined with the other positive predictor of the disruption, the emotion *joy*, a change in reputation took place after participants were exposed to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph. As stated by Morris et al. (2005), the elicitation of positive emotions leads to the peripheral route to persuasion with heuristic cues playing a key role in the route to persuasion. In this case, the existence of complex visual cues in the photograph proved to be a compelling factor in a change of reputation. This indeed helps to explain the significance of *MeWOM Message Credibility* in the positive valence model with a photograph. An unexpected outcome of the study however was a lack of significance of *MeWOM Message Credibility* in other models. The next section discusses this outcome.

8.5.2.4.1 A Lack of Significance of MeWOM Message Credibility in Other Models

As noted previously, *MeWOM Message Credibility* was a significant predictor in only one instance – the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with photograph. Considering this unique outcome, participants in the follow-up study were asked about the message credibility of all six MeWOM brand image disruptions. A rationale for a lack of credibility as a significant predictor of reputation change could be explained by a "face value" credibility associated with the Tweets. In essence, the Tweets were believed at face value without much scrutiny by participants – and therefore not a key evaluation factor of reputation change in five of the six models. This finding is hardly surprising as recent study found that of the 7,804 students studied, a majority of college students from a top-ranking university could not discern a reputable website from a fringe one when asked to examine the content on both for 10 minutes. The students found them both to be equivalent by focusing on the surface features of the websites rather than taking further actions to evaluate the firms to assess their legitimacy. Hence, the study demonstrated that the students in the study assessed the legitimacy of firms based on superficial cues on the websites – taking them at face value (Wineberg & McGrew, 2016).

Analysis of the qualitative data indicates this study mirrored this outcome with credibility assigned to Tweets through heuristics such as *service expectation, effort of the sender and artefacts as proof*. This is an important finding with regard to the Twittersphere and the information that is shared about firms. One of the themes that emerged from the exploratory interviews was a fear or risk of misinformation being proliferated. Findings from this study demonstrate that MeWOM brand image disruptions are believed at face value for the reasons provided here.

8.6 Six New MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Models

This research has six new models to add to the burgeoning area of research on MeWOM brand image disruptions and the impact they have on a corporate reputation. Chapter 3 provided a temporal order of variables that research has demonstrated to have an impact on eWOM outcomes. Parsimony and comprehensiveness were employed to include the variables that would be applicable for a microblog environment and use in this study. As a result, two variables were not utilised in this study (source characteristics and volume of eWOM).

The literature review and the interviews with organisations highlighted a delineation that takes place with regard to positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. The findings from the quantitative portion of the study confirmed that the variables that influenced a change in perception of a corporate reputation were different in the context of MeWOM brand image disruptions that were negative in valence versus MeWOM brand image disruptions that were positive in valence.

The results from the online experiment, the literature review and explanatory qualitative interviews bring six models to the research on MeWOM brand image disruptions and corporate reputation. The next sections provide a visual representation of these models followed by a brief review of the variables contained within the models.

8.6.1 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Negative Valence Model with a Video

As discussed in previous sections, starting from the left, the negative valence model in Figure 8.1 begins with a composite representation of the receiver's perception of the corporate reputation. This variable represents the corporate reputation in the mind of the receiver before exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. Next, the model includes a variable that represents the MeWOM brand image disruption. This variable represents the phenomenon of a receiver being exposed to a negative valence

MeWOM brand image disruption. The next two variables, *MeWOM Issue Involvement* and *Disgust*, are both variables that influence a change in reputation after exposure to the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a video. As discussed previously, M*eWOM Issue Involvement* is a variable that represents the extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption is motivated to process more information about the disruption. Next, *Disgust* is included to represent is the extent that the receiver of the message experienced the emotion as a result of exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. Both variables, *MeWOM Issue Involvement* and *Disgust* are negative predictors of a change in corporate reputation – indicating that a decrease (increase) in these two variables from the receivers' perspective would indicate an increase (decrease) in a change in corporate reputation.

The final variable in the model represents any change in perception of the corporate reputation after a receiver has been exposed to a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption.

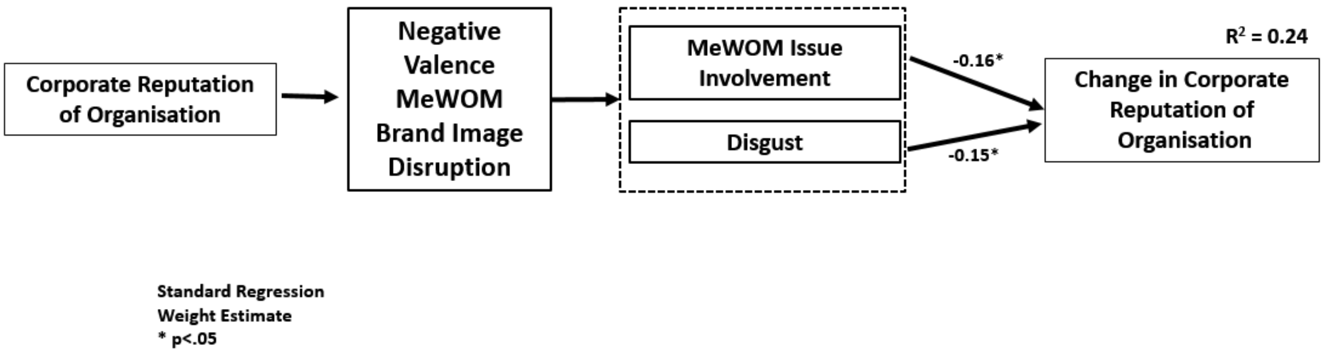

Figure 8.1 - Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Video Model

8.6.2 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Positive Valence Model with Video

With regard to the positive valence model with video, the left portion of the model again starts with a variable representing the composite corporate reputation in the mind of the receiver before exposure to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption.

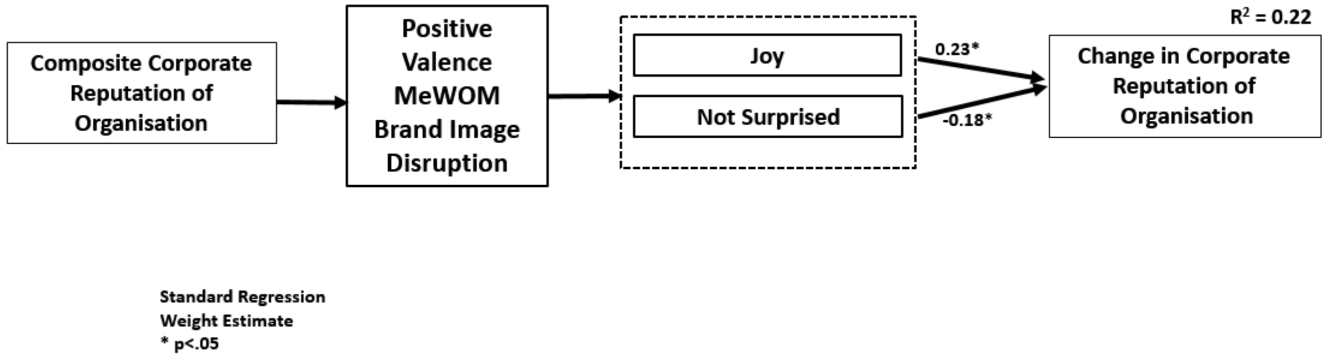

Figure 8.2 - Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Video Model

Next, the model includes a variable that represents the *positive valence* MeWOM brand image disruption. Similar to the negative valence model with video, this variable represents the phenomenon of a receiver being exposed to a positive valence eWOM brand image disruption within in a microblog environment. The next two variables are specific to the positive valence model comprised of a MeWOM brand image disruption with a video and represent the predictors for a change in corporate reputation. As noted previously, *joy* and *not surprised*, represent the extent to which receivers experienced these emotions after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. The emotion *joy* is a positive predictor of a change in corporate reputation and indicates that an increase (decrease) in the amount of joy experienced by receivers of positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions would indicate an increase (decrease) in a change in corporate reputation. The emotion *not surprised* is negatively associated with a change in corporate reputation – indicating that a decrease (increase) in this emotion would indicate an increase (decrease) in a change in corporate reputation. Finally, and similar to the negative valence model, the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption model includes a final variable which represents any change in corporate reputation of the organisation.

8.6.3 MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Negative Valence Model with Photograph

Similar to the previous two models the model for the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph model starts with corporate reputation, ends with a change in corporate reputation and includes a variable that represents exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

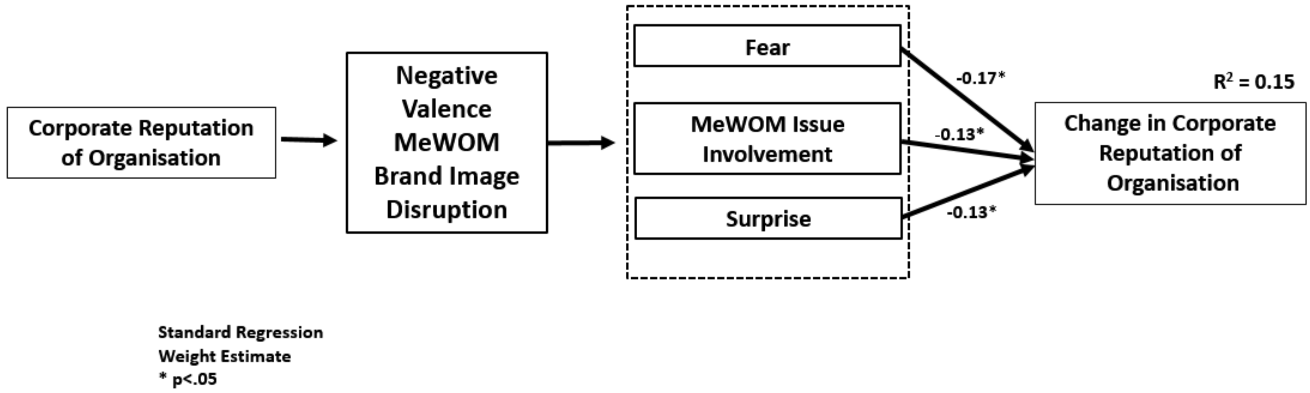

Figure 8.3 - Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Photograph Model

As noted previously, *MeWOM Issue Involvement* is the extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption is motivated to process more information about the disruption. *Fear* and *Surprise* represent the extent the receiver felt these emotions after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. All three variables, *Fear, MeWOM Issue Involvement* and *Surprise* are negative predictors of a change in corporate reputation – indicating that a decrease (increase) in these three variables from the receivers' perspective would indicate an increase (decrease) in a change in corporate reputation.

8.6.4 Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Photograph

Again, the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photograph model starts with corporate reputation, ends with a change in corporate reputation and includes a variable that represents exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

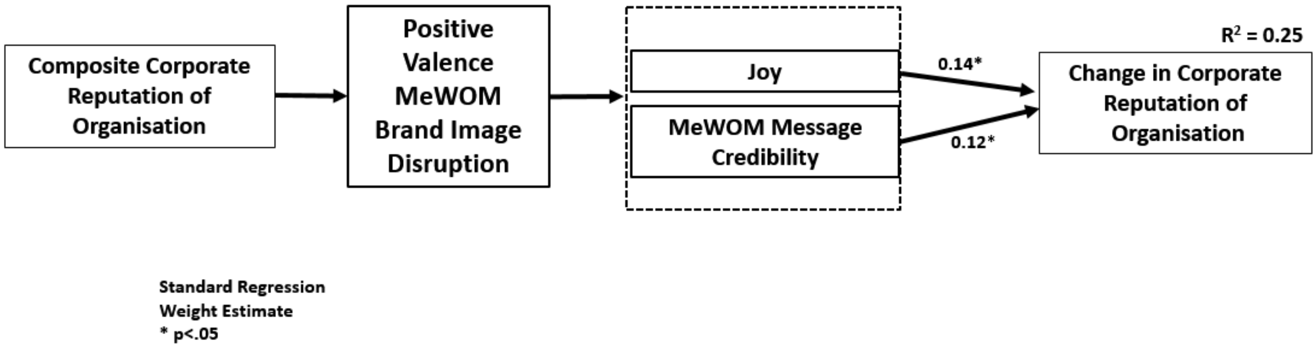

Figure 8.4 – Positive MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Photograph Model

As explained previously, *MeWOM Message Credibility* is the extent to which the receiver of the disruption finds the disruption to be believable and trustworthy. The emotion *Joy* represents the extent to which the receiver of the MeWOM brand image disruption feels this emotion after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. The two variables, *Joy* and *MeWOM Message Credibility* are positive predictors of a change in corporate reputation – indicating that an increase (decrease) in these two variables from the receivers' perspective would indicate an increase (decrease) in a change in corporate reputation.

8.6.5 Negative MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Text Only

As indicated in the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption model with text only depicted in Figure 8.5, three variables are significant negative predictors of reputation change – *MeWOM Message Involvement, Surprise* and *Joy.*

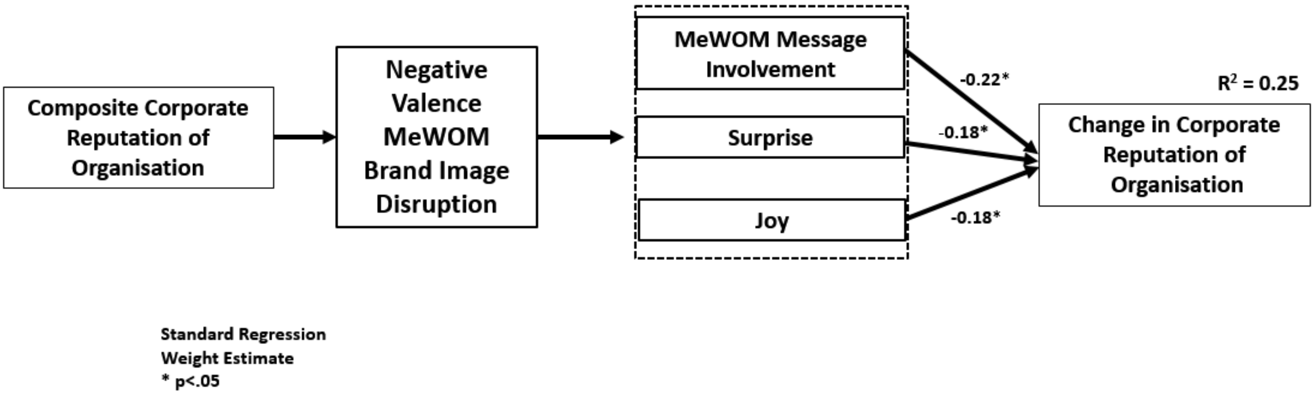

Figure 8.5 – Negative MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Text Only Model

MeWOM Message Involvement is a variable that represents the extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption finds the disruption to be useful and relevant. *Surprise* and *Joy* are variables that represent the extent the receivers of the MeWOM brand image disruptions felt these emotions after exposure. A decrease (increase) in these three variables from the receiver's perspective would indicate an increase (decrease) in a change in corporate reputation.

8.6.6 Positive MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Text Only

As with all previous models, the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with text only model starts with corporate reputation, ends with a change in corporate reputation and includes a variable that represents exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

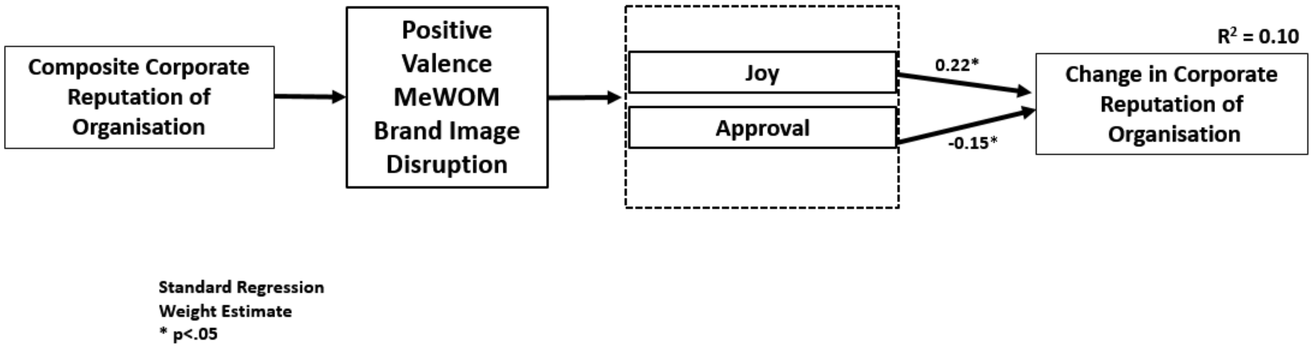

Figure 8.6 – Positive MeWOM Brand Image Disruption with Text Only Model

Two emotions are positive predictors of a change in reputation – *Joy and Approval*. *Joy* is a positive predictor of a change in reputation, indicating that an increase (decrease) in this emotion would result in an increase (decrease) in a change in reputation. *Approval* however is a negative predictor of a change in reputation, indicating that an increase (decrease) in this emotion would result in a decrease (increase) in a change of reputation.

8.7 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter included an examination of the results of the models in the positive and negative context and the significant predictors of a change in reputation for all six MeWOM brand image disruptions included in Phase II of the study. It also included a discussion of the additional context to the significant predictors provided by the follow-up qualitative data. Where applicable, insights from senior managers of Phase I of the study were also offered to stress the importance of the findings in the study.

The chapter ended by providing a visual representation and explanation of six new MeWOM Brand Image Disruption models to add to the burgeoning research on the topic of the factors that predict a change in corporate reputation in the microblog environment.

The next chapter will discuss the conclusions of the study in relation to each of the research objectives. In addition, the methodological and theoretical contributions will be outlined as well as the practical managerial implications for managers who are concerned with corporate reputation management within the microblog environment. Finally, the study's limitations and directions for future research will be outlined.

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

9.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to close the thesis in a clear and structured format. In order to explain how the research objectives were met, the chapter begins by concluding the research objectives in relation to the findings of the research. Next, the chapter discusses the methodological, theoretical and managerial implications of the study. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the study's limitations along with recommendations for future research.

9.1 Conclusion of Objective One

The first objective in the study was *to explore whether organisations consider individual MeWOM brand image disruptions to have any influence over their corporate reputation and how they manage them.*

The research concludes that organisations do consider individual MeWOM brand image disruptions to be a risk to their corporate reputations and that the microblog Twitter is prioritised over other social media applications in relation to reputation management.

This objective was influenced by the literature review and the researchers that repeatedly highlighted the potential impact that eWOM brand image disruptions within social media could potentially have on a corporate reputation. Although several assertions were made within the literature regarding the risk to corporate reputations due to eWOM brand image disruptions (Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016), there was nothing empirically to confirm whether organisations, in reality, perceived this risk as well. Phase I of the study was exploratory in nature and sought to address Objective 1 through the operationalisation of exploratory qualitative interviews. As a majority of organisations expressed their concern with eWOM brand image disruptions, and a loss or lack of control of their reputations within the social media environment, the assertions made within the literature were validated. Additionally, the exploratory interviews provided an extra level of enlightenment in the context of a specific social media environment to explore – namely the microblog environment. To date, this had not been achieved by researchers and thus prevented the researcher from undertaking a study that would have little value to firms – something the literature highlights as a concern in academic research (Reibstein et al., 2009; Jaworkski, 2011).

9.2 Conclusion of Objective Two

The second objective of the study was *to explore whether and to what extent MeWOM brand image disruptions impact receivers' perception of a corporate reputation*.

This study concludes that in relation to objective two, the results from this study indicate that both positive valence and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions do have an impact on corporate reputation - and they do so with a statistically large effect based on Cohen's criteria (1988). The findings demonstrated that positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions caused an increase in perception of corporate reputation (with a statistically large effect) and that negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions caused a decrease in perception of corporate reputation (with a statistically large effect) after receivers were exposed to positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions in an online experiment. In addition, this study added to the more recent literature in that negative MeWOM brand image disruptions were more impactful on a reputation that positive MeWOM brand image disruptions (e.g. Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013; Hennig-Thurau, 2015).

As noted in Chapter 2, researchers called out Twitter specifically as a unique environment with eWOM in microblogs such as Twitter being especially unique due to the 'push' of information rather than 'pull' scenario as seen with product/service reviews such as those found on ratings and review sites (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015). Further, and as highlighted within Chapter 2, some impressive research has been published in the recent literature on microblogs and the impact that eWOM can have (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015, Kumar et al., 2017), with assertions concerning the risk that eWOM in poses to reputations being prevalent for the past several years (e.g. Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014, Rutter et al., 2016). The results in this study were aligned with previous assertions and studies within the literature with both positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions having an impact on corporate reputation.

9.3 Conclusion of Objectives Three & Four

The third objective of the study was *to establish the variables that predict a change in a corporate reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption*; the fourth objective was to *provide further context from the receivers' perspective of the variables that did cause a change in reputation after a receiver is exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption*.

This study concludes that in relation to Objective Three, *Joy* (+), *Approval* (-), *Not Surprised* (-) and *MeWOM Message Credibility* were significant predictors in the positive valence models and *MeWOM Message Involvement* (-), *MeWOM Issue Involvement* (-), *Joy (-), Surprise* (-), *Disgust (-)* and *Fear (-)* were significant predictors in the negative valence models. Supporting the significance of these predictors, the study concludes that in relation to Objective Four, the key themes of *culpability, legitimacy, following the story, service expectation disconfirmation, future purchase*, *future risk* and *empathy* emerged in relation to the negative valence models; *joyous contagion, service expectation transcendence, service expectation affirmation, legitimacy* and *exaggeration* emerged in relation to the positive valence models.

Although the literature review brought to the fore the evolving constructs of corporate image and reputations in today's technological environment (Price et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 2014; Dowling, 2016), and the risks to corporate reputations that social network site users pose (Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016), there was a dearth of research in terms of variables that could have an impact on a corporate reputation within microblogs. This study concludes with the confirmation of these significant predictors and the associated themes supporting them.

Several further conclusions can be drawn in relation to the significant predictors. These are discussed next.

9.3.1 Source Style Plays an Important Role in Relation to Significant Predictors

It can be concluded that *source style* plays an important role in the determination of the predictors of a change in reputation when receivers are exposed to both negative and positive MeWOM brand image disruptions. The literature in Chapter 2 called out that online reviews within social media can be the combination of text and visual cues and that visual information exerts a significant impact on users' online information acceptance (Stuart et al., 2014), with recent studies demonstrating that the type of content in text reviews and the addition of photographs having an ability to impact eWOM outcomes (Lin et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2015). As this is a relatively new area of research however, there were not any studies within the microblog context in relation to the impact that source style could have. In this study, source style had a clear impact as the predictors for a change in reputation were dependent upon complex and simple cues in the negative and positive valence models.

It is thus concluded that *source style* plays an important role in determining the factors that predict a change in reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

9.3.2 Emotions Matter and they Matter a Lot

It can be concluded from the significant variables listed above that emotions matter, and they matter a lot with regard to a change in corporate reputation after receivers have been exposed to a positive or negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption. As discussed in the previous chapter, although emotions were mentioned within the eWOM literature as having an impact on eWOM outcomes (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016), there was limited research within this area and was thus highlighted as a burgeoning domain with some promising recent studies taking place. The finding in this study that emotions play a crucial role in predicting a change in corporate reputation after receivers are exposed to both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions adds to this burgeoning area of research. In the context of this study, they are of paramount importance with regard to a change in corporate reputation as they were significant predictors in all six models.

9.3.2.1 The Emotion Joy is a Key Influence in the Positive and Negative Context

It can be concluded that the significance of the emotion *joy* in four of the six models signifies its importance in the change in reputation that takes place in the mind of the receiver after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

A notable finding from the research was that the emotion *joy* was significant in all three positive valence models and one of the negative valence models. Although not mentioned in the literature with regard to eWOM effectiveness specifically (e.g. Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016), the literature review brought to the fore the activity of *emotional contagion* (Hatfield et al., 1993) and a recent study demonstrating *joy* as having contagion effects in advertising (e.g. Berg et al., 2015).

This study demonstrates the importance of the emotion in both the positive and negative context with its ability to elicit emotional contagion in positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and empathy in negative ones.

9.3.2.2 The Emotion Surprise is a Key Influence in the Positive and Negative Context

It can be concluded that the significance of the emotion surprise in three of the six models, and the evocation of the emotion in relation to *service divergence*, is a notable predictor of reputation change after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

Another key finding from the research was the significance of the emotion *not surprised* (-) in a positive valence model and its polar opposite on Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions (2001) *surprise* (-) in the negative valence models. These results were aligned to what the literature said with regard to the elicitation of the emotion as a result of divergence of perceptions and expectations (Hutter & Hoffman, 2011). Analysis of the qualitative data further confirmed this support of the literature and brought to the fore the emergent themes of *service disconfirmation* only and *service transcendence*.

The results in this study in relation to the emotion surprise bring to the fore its importance with regard to a change in reputation after receivers are exposed to both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions.

9.3.2.3 Emotions Eliciting Avoidance Activities Play a Role in Negative Valence Tweets

It can be concluded that MeWOM brand image disruptions that elicit avoidance emotions are powerful in relation to a change in corporate reputation.

The significance of the emotions *fear* and *disgust* supported the burgeoning body of research on emotions in relation to eWOM effectiveness (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016) and their evocation of avoidance tendencies (Morales et al., 2012) – namely cognitive information processing in the negative models with complex visual cues.

The significance of these two emotions demonstrates their importance in relation to a change in reputation after receivers are exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions and the route to persuasion taken.

9.3.2.4 High and Low Arousal Emotions Play a Key Role in the Positive and Negative Context

It can be concluded that high and low arousal emotions play a key role in a change in reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

In the three negative valence models, the high arousal emotions of *fear (-), surprise (-)* and *disgust* (-) were significant predictors of reputation change. The positive valence models however evoked the relatively low arousal emotions of *joy (+), not surprised (-) and approval (-).* In alignment with assertions in the literature (Morales et al., 2012) the emotions *fear* and *disgust* elicited avoidance reactions (and thus activation) with receivers of the MeWOM brand image disruptions compelled to process more information about the Tweet. The emotion *surprise* in the negative valence text only Tweet aroused interest in the Tweet and brought about relevance. The low arousal emotions *joy, not surprised* and *approval* were strong predictors in the positive valence models where a peripheral route to persuasion took place and emotional contagion (a more relaxed activity) with the emotion *joy*.

9.3.3 MeWOM Message Involvement is Significant with Other Compelling Factors

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that in the context of a change in corporate reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, the relevance and usefulness of the message is a predictor of a change in reputation when supported by a sense of *empathy* with Tweet senders and a high arousal emotion *surprise*. As noted in the Chapter 2, researchers highlighted that the relevance and usefulness of the information in messages influenced eWOM outcomes (Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. al, 2014; Cheng & Loi, 2014). Analysis of the qualitative follow-up data confirmed that participants were involved with the message as the experience depicted in the Tweet did not meet their service expectations and thus evoked surprise. In the absence of more complex visual cues, receivers of the negative valence Tweet placed more scrutiny on the message and connected with the sender of the Tweet through a sense of *empathy*.

9.3.4 MeWOM Issue Involvement Plays a Key Role in Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that in the context of a change in corporate reputation, issue involvement is an important predictor when receivers are exposed to negative MeWOM brand image disruptions with complex visual cues. The finding that MeWOM Issue Involvement was a predictor of a change in corporate reputation in two the negative models confirms the assertions made by Petty & Cacioppo (1980) with regard to receivers' motivation to process information and attitude change. A change in corporate reputation occurred after receivers were exposed to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and their motivation to process more information about the disruption was a key enabler of the change. Their motivation to process more information was influenced by a need to assign *culpability*, to assess *legitimacy* and to *follow the story* to see what happened next.

MeWOM Issue Involvement was not a key enabler in the positive valence models however, which were more concerned with the peripheral route to persuasion taken by receivers and is explained in the next section.

9.3.5 Receivers' Employ Different Routes to Persuasion When Exposed to Positive and Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions employ different routes to persuasion when exposed to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. This finding supports the literature in relation to the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty and Cacioppo (1980) which posits that persuasive information is cognitively processed via two routes. These two routes are called the 'central route' and the 'peripheral route' to persuasion. Four peripheral variables were significant predictors of a change in corporate reputation in all three positive models – the emotions *joy* (+), *not surprised* (-) *approval* (-) and *MeWOM Message Credibility* (+). A mixture of central and peripheral route variables were significant in the negative valence models – i.e. *MeWOM Message Involvement* (-), *MeWOM Issue Involvement* (-) and the emotions *Surprise* (-), *Disgust* (-), *Fear* (-) and *Joy* (-).

With regard to cognitive information processing, it can be concluded that negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions cause the receiver to engage both peripheral and central routes to persuasion and that positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions cause the receiver to employ the peripheral route to persuasion.

9.3.6 Tweets Are Believed at Face Value, Yet Not Always a Predictor of Reputation Change

It can be concluded that *MeWOM Message Credibility* does have a limited role to play in relation to a change in reputation after receivers are exposed to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

eWOM credibility was mentioned within the eWOM literature as a variable that influences eWOM effectiveness (Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Lin et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2015), yet had not been examined in relation to its effectiveness and a change in reputation from a MeWOM brand image disruption receiver perspective. A surprising finding of the study was that *MeWOM Message Credibility* was a significant predictor in one model only – the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption with a photo. This indicates that that the credibility of the message can play a significant role, but only occasionally. Analysis of follow-up qualitative data demonstrated that its significance in this one model was attributed to the overwhelming artefacts in the Tweet that conveyed legitimacy and the normal business as usual depiction – i.e. the smile on the flight attendant's face, her nametag, other passengers on the plane, the activity of serving a Coca-Cola, etc. A lack of *MeWOM Message Credibility* in all of the other Tweets was also explained with the follow-up qualitative data. It was found that Tweets were believed and taken at *face value* due to *service expectation, effort of the sender and artefacts as proof*. In essence, the credibility of the Tweets was not a significant factor in reputation change as the Tweets were believed at face value. Thus, the credibility of a MeWOM brand image disruption plays a very limited and specific role with regard to a change in reputation upon exposure.

9.4 Key Theoretical Contributions

The study makes a number of theoretical contributions to enhance our understanding of the phenomena of MeWOM brand image disruptions and they are discussed in the following sections.

9.4.1 Knowledge in Relation to Corporate Image and Reputation in the Microblog Context

Firstly, the theoretical point of view that postulates that corporate images are a series of 'scattered images' that are comprised of a multitude of varying images which are sent and then interpreted by receivers in social and virtual environments, and that receivers of these 'scattered images' can do whatever they want with them (Price et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 2014) has been empirically validated. In the context of this study, the experiment provided receivers with a series of 'scattered images' (or MeWOM brand image disruptions in this study) and the receivers did indeed decide what to do with them – i.e. a change in their perception of the corporate reputation occurred when exposed to MeWOM brand image disruptions.

Secondly, the knowledge on corporate reputation has been enhanced by providing empirical data that confirms that a change in reputation takes place after receivers are exposed to both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Although several assertions were made within the literature regarding the risk to corporate reputations due to eWOM brand image disruptions (Breazeale, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Siano et al, 2011; Berthon et al., 2012; De Maeyer, 2012; Cheng & Loi, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2016), there was nothing empirically from the receiver perspective in relation to MeWOM brand image disruptions. This study therefore adds a much-needed contribution to the literature with provision of empirical data to confirm that MeWOM brand image disruptions about firms do result in a change in reputation.

9.4.1 Confirmation of the Role of Source Style

Thirdly, this study makes a contribution to knowledge in relation to source style and its influence on the significant predictors of a change in reputation. As referenced previously, source style is a relatively new feature of eWOM that has been highlighted as affecting eWOM effectiveness that has very little research to date (Lin et al., 2012). With the exception of a couple of recent noteworthy studies (e.g. Lin et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2015), there was a dearth of empirical data on the influence that source style has within the microblog environment. This study confirms that source style has a key role to play in relation to both complex and simple cues included in MeWOM brand image disruptions and the predictors that result in a change in reputation.

Hence, the importance of source style has been confirmed in the microblog context and adds to the growing body of research on source style in relation to eWOM effectiveness and the facets of MeWOM brand image disruptions that predict a change in reputation.

9.4.2 Confirmation of the Role that Emotions Play and Why

The fourth contribution to knowledge concerns the confirmation of the important role that emotions play in relation to a change in corporate reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption and why they do. All six models in the study had at least one emotion as a significant predictor of a change in reputation after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption with several explanations provided. Although some initial and noteworthy work had taken place with regard to the impact that emotions can have in relation to eWOM outcomes (e.g. Kim and Gupta, 2012; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Standing et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2016), there was a dearth of information on specific emotions and their impact on receivers in the microblog eWOM context. This study contributes to knowledge with the finding that emotional reactions to MeWOM brand image disruptions are a fundamental predictor of a change in reputation from the receiver's perspective - with high arousal emotions dominating negative valence models (*surprise (-), fear (-) and disgust (-)*) and low arousal emotions dominating positive valence models (*joy (+), approval (-), not surprised (-)*). Further, the emotions were supported by the themes *joyous contagion, exaggeration*, and *service expectation transcendence* in the positive valence models and *culpability, legitimacy, following the story, future risk, future purchase and service expectation disconfirmation* in the negative valence models.

9.4.3 Confirmation of the Role of MeWOM Message Involvement

The fifth contribution to knowledge that this study makes is confirmation of the role of *MeWOM Message Involvement.* Although there was research demonstrating the impact that the usefulness and relevancy of a message has on eWOM outcomes (Cheung et al., 2012; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Stuart et. Al, 2014), there was a dearth of empirical data within the microblog context and its effect on a change in corporate reputation. This study contributes to knowledge with the confirmation that the usefulness and the relevancy of a negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption can predict whether a change in reputation takes place with *empathy* playing a supporting role.

9.4.4 Confirmation of the Role of Cognitive Processing

The sixth contribution to knowledge is the role that cognitive processing has in relation to a change in corporate reputation after receivers are exposed to positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. The study adds to the body of literature on the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty and Cacioppo (1980) which posits that persuasive information is cognitively processed via two routes – the central route and the peripheral route. This study indicates that the peripheral route to persuasion is employed when receivers are exposed to positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and a change of reputation occurs with *joyous contagion, service expectation affirmation/transcendence,* and *legitimacy* playing supporting roles. On the other hand, with regard to negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions, a combination of central and peripheral routes to persuasion are employed by receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions with *culpability, legitimacy, following the story, service expectation disconfirmation, future purchase, future risk* and *empathy* playing supporting roles.

Findings from this study add to the literature on cognitive information processing and its role in a change of reputation that takes place after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

9.4.5 Confirmation of the Role of Message Credibility

The seventh and final contribution to knowledge that the study makes is that the credibility of the message can play a significant role in predicting a change in reputation upon exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption, but it does so only in certain circumstances. The literature brought to the fore that eWOM credibility (Cheung et al., 2009), also referred to as message credibility (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and argument quality (Teng et al., 2014), had been found to play an important role in eWOM effectiveness. There was however a dearth of empirical data on the role that eWOM credibility played in the microblog environment and its influence on a change in corporate reputation. This study makes a contribution to the literature by demonstrating that in certain instances, *MeWOM Message Credibility* can influence a change in reputation when source style includes cues that elicit thoughts of *legitimacy and service expectation affirmation* with receivers. The study also confirms that *MeWOM Message Credibility* does not play a significant role however in a majority of instances as a *face value* credibility is assigned to MeWOM brand image disruptions due to associated *artefacts as proof, effort of the sender* and *service expectation affirmation*.

Findings from this study add to the literature on *MeWOM Message Credibility* and its role in a change of reputation that takes place after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption in certain instances.

9.5 Managerial Implications

The research offers corporate reputation and marketing managers a few implications and these are discussed in the paragraphs below.

9.5.1 Managers Must Be Diligent

First, it has been confirmed through this study that a change in corporate reputation does indeed occur when receivers are exposed to both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. This finding highlights the need for managers to diligently work to preserve their corporate reputations in the microblog environment when MeWOM brand image disruptors share their thoughts and experiences of brands in microblogs such as Twitter. There is thus no question for managers, they must be operating in this environment and working to preserve their corporate reputations within it.

9.5.2 Managers Must be Vigilant

Second, there are a couple of implications with regard to the significant predictors in the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption models. The predictors of a change in reputation for the negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions were more complex from the receivers' perspective. Complex visual cues in photographs and videos brought about action-eliciting emotions and stimulated the motivation to process more information about the Tweets; the text only Tweet stimulated empathy, a focus on the sender and relevance with regard to future purchase followed. These findings emphasise the importance of managers taking all negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions about their brand seriously and being vigilant by responding to all negative MeWOM brand image disruptions as quickly as possible. In their motivation to process more information about the MeWOM brand image disruptions, receivers are not only looking for the culpable party, but they are also interested in the organisation's view and the organisation's side of the story. Thus, managers have the opportunity to influence the outcome with regard to any change in perception of their corporate reputations. By employing a reputation management strategy of responding to MeWOM brand image disruptions, information can be provided which supports the organisation and overcomes the service disconfirmation depicted in negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Doing so can help managers to preserve their corporate reputations when negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions occur.

9.5.3 Managers Should Place Greater Emphasis on Positive MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

There are also a couple of implications for managers from the findings in relation to the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. First of all – they matter. The exploratory interviews with organisations highlighted a lack of understanding of the impact that positive valence eWOM brand image disruptions can have in microblogs such as Twitter. This study finds that positive MeWOM brand image disruptions are just as impactful as negative MeWOM brand image disruptions when receivers are exposed to a positive valence MeWOM brand image disruption and a change in corporate reputation occurs. Second, positive MeWOM brand image disruption receivers employ a less complex process to decision making about a corporate reputation upon exposure. They are influenced by heuristics like how the MeWOM brand image disruption makes them feel, or credibility associated with the message, and any change in corporate reputation is based on that. This is a tremendous opportunity for managers to take positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions and promote them by retweeting and sharing in other channels. Doing so could help to enhance positive feelings toward their organisations and increase their brands' reputations.

9.5.4 Ensure Their Brand's Voice is the Conversation

Finally, it is important for managers to understand that MeWOM brand image disruptions have the propensity to be believed at face value – that is receivers will believe the experience depicted in a MeWOM brand image disruption upon exposure. This further establishes the need for the firm's voice in relation to every negative valence MeWOM brand image disruption shared about their organisation. For positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions, again face value credibility given to MeWOM brand image disruptions by receivers brings forth opportunities to proliferate these positive affirmations about the brand further.

9.6 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are limitations associated with this study that pave the way for future research to take place. First of all, and as mentioned within Chapter 4, the research was focused on the airline industry. The airline industry was chosen as it was recognised as one that was at the epicentre of microblog members sharing their positive and negative eWOM and offered a wealth of data for the researcher to use. Although the use of the airline industry was a practical one in terms of the execution of the study, it would be interesting to undertake a similar study with another industry, or indeed a range of industries, to determine whether similar outcomes would occur.

Other limitations of the study concern the location of the study, the United States, and the crowdsourcing platform used to source participants. With microblog users sharing their experiences of brands around the world, it would be interesting to undertake a similar analysis with receivers in other countries and to source participants through a range of methods.

It would also be of interest to undertake a similar study in another social media platform. There are several to choose from and Twitter is just one of many. Although a strong rationale for focusing on Twitter was provided by Phase I of the study, consumers share their experiences of brands on numerous types of social media applications and therefore further research is warranted.

Finally, although the study helped to move forward our collective understanding of receivers and the factors that influence a change in corporate reputation when they are exposed to both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions, it would be interesting to conduct additional studies with receivers further. As indicated within the literature review in Chapter 2, very little emphasis has been placed on the receivers of eWOM and there is a tremendous opportunity for researchers to focus on this group of people in particular with regard to eWOM outcomes. For example, one of the key contributions the study made was with regard to emotions felt by receivers and their impact on a change in corporate reputation. It would be of interest to undertake further studies to understand receivers' emotions within a range of social media environments to understand any other roles that emotions play in relation to their evaluation of firms.

9.7 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the phenomena of MeWOM brand image disruptions from two key perspectives – the organisational perspective and the receiver perspective. The research addressed four objectives to explore these perspectives as outlined in this chapter. Firstly, it was established that organisations do perceive MeWOM brand image disruptions to put their corporate reputations at risk. Secondly, it was confirmed that MeWOM brand image disruptions do cause a change in the perception of corporate reputation, from the receiver's perspective, upon exposure to positive or negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Thirdly, the research explored and confirmed the variables that predict a change in corporate reputation when receivers are exposed to both positive valence and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Fourthly, the research added additional context to the significant predictors of a change in corporate reputation through a follow-up study with receivers.

This chapter also outlined the theoretical contributions of the study along with the managerial implications for corporate reputation and marketing managers. Finally, the limitations of the research along with recommendations for future research were discussed.

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APPENDIX 1

PHASE I QUALITATIVE TOPIC GUIDE

Opening script:

Hello [name], thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. As previously discussed, I am conducting this session in order to better understand organisational perspectives on the topic of social media. Your participation in this conversation will therefore be very helpful to me as I explore this most interesting area and I look forward to hearing your thoughts today.

Before I get started, there are a few things I would like to highlight:

- Please feel free to share any thoughts you have today that you think are relevant and/or important – rather than a very structured interview, I'd like you to think of this more of an informal chat. This is an exploratory phase of research – which means that I may learn about new ideas or events that I had not considered in my original research project – which will ultimately help me to refine my project further and really add something of value to my field. So please, chat freely on today's subject.

- Most of the organisations I have approached have requested that their companies are kept anonymous - I will therefore only note the type of industry your company represents and the size of the company based on the European Commission's definition of size. According to the European commission companies with ….. [explain parameters below]

Company category	Employees	Turnover	or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

Companies with more than 250 employees and a turnover over 50 million euro would be considered a large enterprise. What size organisation would you categorise your company to be as based on these parameters? I consider your industry to be XXXX. Would you agree?

You will also be kept anonymous and I will only reference your participation by a rather generic type of job position – e.g. Director, Marketing Manager

- For transcription purposes later, I will be recording today's call. As noted, your company will remain completely anonymous and once transcribed, I will delete the recordings.
- Before we get started and I start recording, do you have any questions for me?

Okay, great – I think we're all set. I'll start recording and once I do, I'll just start conversing with you on various topics and look forward to hearing your thoughts. [START RECORDING]

Objective 1 – to understand to what extent organisations use social media to manage their images and reputations

Rationale: the literature needs to be updated in terms of our understanding of image and reputation in today's technological environment. Obtaining the organisational perspective of their use of social network sites to manage their image and reputations will provide empirical evidence to support this.

Topics:

1. Types and number of social network sites the company uses

2. Length of time using social

3. Early adopter or late adopter in terms of social/comfort levels using social

4. Purpose social network sites are used – sales, share information, brand awareness, image management, protect reputation?

   [Discuss image and reputation further if noted by the participant – prompt if not]

5. Specific social network sites that the company uses often or for certain purposes – any that are more suited to the company or for strategic purposes

   [Prompt for more information on microblogging applications and how they may use this form of social media differently than other social media sites]

6. Degree to which employees use social media to enhance the image of the company – how do they do this? Does the company advocate the use of social to help enhance the image of the company? Are there any concerns if not?

Objective 2 – to understand the perceived impact eWOM image disruptions have on their reputations

- ***Rationale: to provide empirical data to support the assertions within the literature that eWOM image disruptions have an impact on reputation***

1. Social network site members discussing the company's products or services – do they do this?

2. Negative mentions about the quality of a product or service – management and perception of what it does to the company's image

3. Positive mentions about the quality of a product or service – management and perception of what it does to the company's image

4. Facilitation of eWOM on social networking sites – does this take place? How?

5. Users who propogate or influence via social media- do they exist? Are they utilised? If so, how?

Objective 3 – to understand to what extent organisations consider image interruptions a threat to their image and reputation

Rationale: A resounding theme throughout the literature was a lack and loss of control of brand image and the ever-increasing power of consumers facilitated by the capabilities that technological advances give them to band together – this section will help to provide empirical data on these assertions from an organisational perspective

1. If you were to name one concern about the use of social media by the general public that your company might have, what would it be?

   [prompt with examples if needed]

2. Use of social media monitoring services - Self-monitor – use of agency to monitor

3. Concerns over the power social network site users have on your image and reputation – are there any? How are threats mitigated?

4. How interactions from social network site users are managed e.g. always responds, listens and may respond, incident management process

[Prompt: if an enquiry comes through via a microblog, how does your company respond]

[Prompt: do you have any SLAs in place that determine how long before social network site users are responded to]

[How are negative mentions or interactions managed on your social media sites? Are they handled more quickly? What about positive and neutral mentions?]

[Are certain types of mentions or queries escalated? How does your company determine this?]

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

This section provides screen grabs of the questionnaire that was utilised to conduct stage one of Phase II of the research.

1.0 Survey Introduction

University of Strathclyde Business School

Welcome to this short survey.

If you are a current **Twitter** user, you live in the **United States**, and you are **over 18 years old**, you are invited to to share your perspectives by completing this survey.

Before answering the questions, please note the following:

- The survey should take approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete.
- Your participation is completely **anonymous**.
- You can only take the survey **once**.

Your participation in this survey is **greatly appreciated** and will not only help to advance our understanding of certain aspects of social media, but will help me to achieve a professional dream of completing a PhD.

2.0 Classification Questions

University of Strathclyde Business School

What is your age?

- Under 18 years
- 18 to 24 years
- 25 to 34 years
- 35 to 44 years
- 45 to 54 years
- 55 to 64 years
- 65 years and over

University of Strathclyde Business School

Are you a current Twitter user?

- Yes
- No

0% 100%

>>

University of Strathclyde Business School

Do you live in the United States?

- Yes
- No

0% 100%

>>

University of Strathclyde Business School

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School
- High School / GED
- Some College
- 2-year College Degree
- 4-year College Degree
- Masters Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree (JD, MD)

Which best describes your daily Twitter use?

- None
- 30 minutes or less
- 30-60 minutes
- 60-90 minutes
- More than 90 minutes

3.0 NPS Question Before Exposure to MeWOM Brand Image Disruptions

University of Strathclyde Business School

On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend the following airlines to a friend or colleague?

US Airways

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Southwest Airlines

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Delta Air Lines

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Virgin America

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

United Airlines

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

JetBlue Airways

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

American Airlines

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Hawaiian Airlines

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4.0 Instructions before exposure to Twitter MeWOM brand image disruptions.

University of Strathclyde Business School

You will now be presented with a series of Tweets

Imagine these Tweets have appeared in your Twitter timeline when you log into your Twitter account.

Please answer the questions on the next few pages based on your very first thoughts and impressions of seeing the Tweets.

5.0 MeWOM Message Credibility Questions

Thinking about this Tweet, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Tweet is believable	○	○	○	○	○
The Tweet is informative	○	○	○	○	○
The Tweet is trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○
The Tweet is reliable	○	○	○	○	○

6.0 MeWOM Message Involvement Questions

Thinking about this Tweet, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Tweet is useful					
The Tweet is interesting					
The Tweet is worth remembering					
I liked the Tweet					

7.0 MeWOM Emotions

Reflecting on this Tweet, to what extent do you feel each of these emotions?

	Very Low	Low	Some	High	Very High	None
Joy						
Sadness						
Surprise						
Not surprised						
Anger						
Fear						
Disgust						
Approval						

8.0 MeWOM Issue Involvement Questions

After seeing this Tweet, how likely are you to do the following?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neither Unlikely or Likely	Likely	Very Likely
Retweet it	○	○	○	○	○
Favorite it	○	○	○	○	○
Expand to read Delta's response	○	○	○	○	○
Expand to read comments from others	○	○	○	○	○

9.0 Corporate reputation After Exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption

After reading this Tweet, how likely are you to recommend Delta Airlines to a friend or colleague?

Not at all likely					Neutral					Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

APPENDIX 3

MeWOM BRAND IMAGE DISRUPTIONS

This section includes the actual MeWOM brand image disruptions that were used in the experiment.

1.0 Delta Airlines Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

2.0 United Airlines Positive MeWOM Brand Image Disruption

3.0 US Airways Negative Valence Brand Image Disruption

YouTube URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AK9FRhOWlc

4.0 Hawaiian Airlines Positive Valence MeWOM brand image disruption

Please read the Tweet about Hawaiian Airlines below and share your very first thoughts and impressions by answering the questions that follow:

"@airchive: .**@HawaiianAir** excellent service with a smile Mahalo! #717 " - cc: @kuroDEE :)

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5.0 American Airlines Negative Valence MeWOM brand image disruption

Please read the Tweet about American Airlines below and share your very first thoughts and impressions by answering the questions that follow:

@AmericanAir poor customer service exper., unfortunately. Agents weren't apologetic at all. :(I thought the airline had made some changes.

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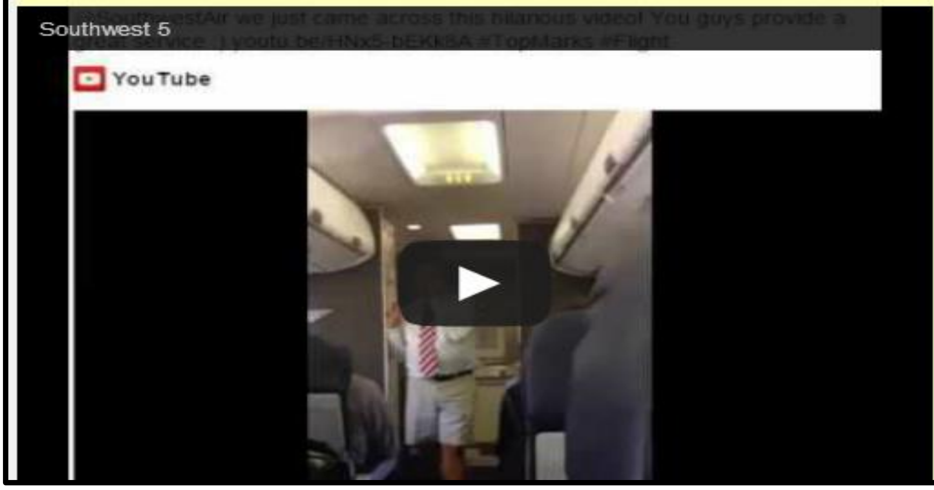
6.0 Southwest Airlines Positive Valence MeWOM brand image disruption

The following Tweet shares a video filmed by a Southwest Airlines customer. Please click the play icon (be sure to adjust your sound and put headphones on if needed) and then answer questions based on your very first thoughts and impressions.

The Tweet above the video reads:

@SouthwestAir we just came across this hilarious video! You guys provide a great service!



YouTube URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zo6B5iYKNw0

APPENDIX 4

PHASE II QUALITATIVE TOPIC GUIDE

<u>Opening script:</u>

Hello [name], thank you so much for agreeing to sit down with me today. As previously discussed, I am conducting this session in order to better understand the social media application Twitter. Your participation in this conversation will therefore be very helpful to me as I explore this most interesting area and I look forward to hearing your thoughts today.

<u>Before I get started, there are a few things I would like to highlight:</u>

- Please feel free to share any thoughts you have today. Today's session is all about you and your perceptions.
- Your participation in the study will be anonymous. I only need some general information about you to include in the study including your age, gender and year at university.
- For transcription purposes later, I will be recording today's session. As noted, you will remain completely anonymous and once transcribed, I will delete the recordings.
- Before we get started and I start recording, do you have any questions for me?

Okay, great – I think we're all set. I'll start recording and once I do, I'll just start conversing with you on various topics and look forward to hearing your thoughts. [START RECORDING]

Stage 1 – Preliminary Information

Perfect – we are now recording. So, can you please state your gender, age and year at university?

Stage 2 - Interview

Objective 1 – to open the session on a broad topic and understand social media and Twitter use in general

<u>Topics:</u>

7. Social media sites used
8. Thoughts on Twitter in general/reasons for using Twitter
9. Reasons for using Twitter versus other social media sites
10. Length of time using Twitter

Objective 2 – to understand current brand image of various airlines

Topic

NPS Question – Delta, American, United, Virgin, Hawaiian, US Airways, JetBlue, Southwest

Objective 3 – to understand reactions to MeWoM brand image disruptions

Topics – all Tweets

Repeat for all Tweets and draw out any variances between Tweets – e.g. if angrier or more interested in one Tweet versus another, ask respondent to explain why

1. Initial thoughts and reactions

[Prompt regarding any thoughts about the airline specifically if not shared]

2. Level of interest in the Tweet
3. Usefulness of the Tweet
4. Remembrance of the Tweet
5. Implications or actions as a result of seeing the Tweet
6. Following the story of what happens – reading the response of airline, reading responses of others
7. Retweeting
8. Believability of Tweet and credibility of sender
9. Emotions – ask respondent to rate each Plutchik emotion and explain any that they rate 'some', high' or 'very high'
10. NPS question again – compare to original answer given. If higher or lower, ask respondent to explain why they think a change occurred.

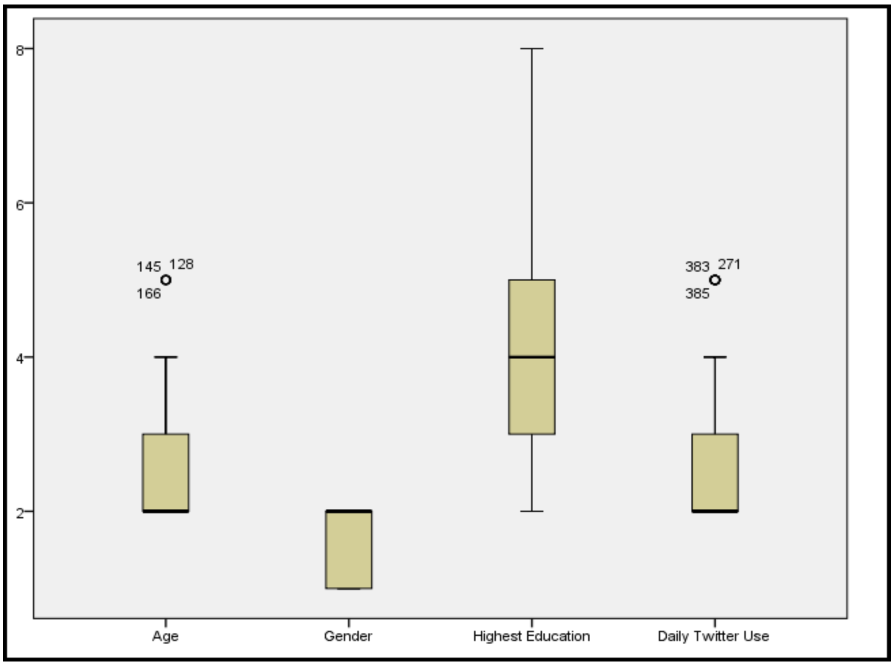
APPENDIX 5
DATA CLEANING

Cleaning the data

Before undertaking the analysis, a data cleaning exercise was undertaken to ensure that the data was fit for purpose (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The following steps were followed:

1) **Missing data check** – IBM SPSS was utilised for the purpose of analysing the data. To check for missing cases, the descriptive statistics function was used along with Microsoft Excel. It was found that out of the 391 respondents who took the survey, only 372 were only able to take the entire survey. This was due to videos being included in the survey. If respondents were unable to watch the video, they were progressed to the next section of the survey. As such, 378 respondents responded to the US Airways portion of the survey and 372 participated in the Southwest portion of the survey. The researcher decided to dismiss the data that had missing responses for the video component of the survey.
2) **Unengaged responses** – to check for variability of responses, the researcher used Microsoft Excel's standard deviation formula. It was found that all cases had a standard deviation >1 and therefore all cases had a degree of variability.
3) **Outliers** – the chance of finding outliers was very low as the survey was comprised of Likert scales for the majority of questions. A few questions at the beginning of the survey were not Likert scales, but they were multiple choice, forced response questions which included gender, age, education level, daily Twitter use and a yes/no question that asked respondents if they lived in the United States. The standard deviation variability exercise in step two above was used to check for outliers for the Likert scale questions. To check the gender, age, education and daily Twitter use questions for outliers, a boxplot was created (see figure below) using the graph feature in SPSS. The only outliers that were highlighted in the boxplot came under age (3 cases) and daily Twitter

use (3 cases). The researcher checked these cases and found no cause for concern as the three cases for age answered '5' which indicated these respondents were between the ages of 45-54 years. As the researcher *mainly* targeted those under the age of 49, these were called out as outliers as they are the only three in this age range. The researcher decided to keep them in the survey however as there was no apparent cause to remove them. The decision was taken to keep an eye on them in further analysis to determine whether their answers caused any issues later. The three cases highlighted under 'daily Twitter use' all answered '5 – more than 90 minutes'. These were called out as outliers by SPSS as these were the only three cases that gave this response and the majority indicated they used Twitter 60 minutes or less each day. Again, the researcher decided to keep these responses, as there was no cause to remove them.



4) **Kurtosis** – as the survey data was comprised mainly of Likert scales, it was decided that kurtosis would be used to assess the distribution of data. According to DeCarlo (1997), "kurtosis can be formally defined as the standardized forth population moment about the mean, where E is the expectation operator, μ is the mean, μ_4 is the forth moment about the mean, and σ is the standard deviation:"

$$ {}_2 = \frac{E\,(X-\mu)^4}{(E\,(X-\mu)^2)^2} = \frac{\mu_4}{{}^4}, $$

DeCarlo (1997), in his definition of kurtosis further explains that the normal distribution has a kurtosis of 3 and that “positive kurtosis indicates an excess in the tails, the centre, or both, whereas negative kurtosis indicates a lightness in the tails, or centre, or both (an excess in the shoulders).” The researcher used the SPSS descriptive statistics feature to highlight any variables that had a kurtosis score greater than 3 or less than -3.

All of the variables had a positive kurtosis. There were six variables that had a kurtosis greater than 3 and they were all emotions as indicated in the table below.

Statistics

		Hawaiian Sadness	Hawaiian Fear	Hawaiian Disgust	American fear	Southwest anger	Southwest disgust
N	Valid	390	390	390	390	376	376
Kurtosis		3.595	5.101	3.107	4.166	6.078	5.071

As these were all variables which assessed how a respondent felt about a Tweet, the decision was taken to leave these variables in and to keep a watch on them until further analysis was undertaken. The researcher took this decision as she felt that explanations could be given for all of them in terms of how a majority of respondents felt – e.g. in the case of Southwest Airlines, it would not be expected that many respondents would feel angry watching a comedic flight attendant, or sad or fearful of a Hawaiian flight attendant smiling and serving customers. As such, it was believed that these variables would not cause any issues.