



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

From The New York Times to The Blonde Salad:

How traditional online media and fashion bloggers frame fashion and luxury companies' social and environmental-based firestorms.

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Abstract

The current consumer trends and media landscape that allows for more gatekeepers and opinion leaders has transformed the fashion and luxury industry. Companies are under scrutiny and their actions are under magnifying glasses, especially given the history of corporate social irresponsible behaviour that many fashion firms exhibited in the past. When companies showcase amoral and unethical behaviour, different media outlets and online platforms react creating media firestorms. A manual quantitative content analyses of two hundred and fifteen items ($n = 215$) investigated how western blogs and online newspapers influence agenda-setting and media framing of both social-based and environmental-based scandals of eleven fashion firms. The findings imply that online newspapers present more neutral tonality when discussing corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) when compared to blogs that normally put the company in a negative light. Moreover, no significant differences were found when comparing newspapers and blogs and their use of frames, as most used frames were Attribution of Responsibility, Morality and Conflict. The biggest difference in framing was shown while comparing social and environmental scandals, whereas both environmental and social scandals use attribution of responsibility and conflict frames similarly, they differ in the usage of Morality frame and Human-Interest frame. These results present several managerial implications in relation to reputational crisis management and urge scholars to investigate further the impact of alternative gatekeepers, such as bloggers, as active opinion leaders shaping the public's understanding of CSI.

Keywords: Agenda-Setting, Media Framing, Corporate Social Irresponsibility, Firestorms, Fashion Industry

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.1. SOCIAL MEDIA FIRESTORMS	7
2.2. AGENDA-SETTING THEORY	9
2.3. MEDIA FRAMING	9
2.3.1 CROSS-MEDIA FRAMING: ONLINE NEWSPAPERS VS. FASHION BLOGGERS	11
2.4. CORPORATE SOCIAL (IR)RESPONSIBILITY	12
2.4.1. SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IRRESPONSIBILITY IN THE FASHION & LUXURY INDUSTRY.	13
3. METHODOLOGY	14
3.1. <i>Sampling</i>	14
3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN	17
3.2.1. <i>Variables</i>	17
3.2.2. <i>Intercoder reliability</i>	18
3.3 DATA ANALYSIS	19
4. RESULTS	19
4.1. SECOND-LEVEL AGENDA-SETTING TONALITY	19
4.2. MEDIA FRAMES USED	20
4.3. MEDIA FRAMING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOURCES	21
4.4 MEDIA FRAMING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCANDAL TYPE	21
5. DISCUSSION	23
5.1. CONCLUSIONS	23
5.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	24
5.3. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH	24
REFERENCES	26
APPENDIX 1: CODEBOOK	34

Introduction

During January 2018, the fashion brand H&M was in the mid of an online firestorm, causing global outrage due to an online advertisement. The brand had recently launched a new children's clothing line, and one ad featured a black child wearing a shirt with the text "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle." This was swiftly picked up by several Internet users and by different news media outlets worldwide, who reacted against the company, calling the ad racist and inappropriate. Unfortunately, the example of H&M is only one of several incidents that place the fashion industry in the middle of racism-fuelled crises (Elan, 2020; Ferrier, 2019; Haas, 2018). These crises generate *social media firestorms*, defined as abrupt discharges of negative Word-of-Mouth (WoM) and complaints against individuals, companies, or groups in social media networks (Pfeffer et al., 2014).

Social media firestorms breed risks of reputational crisis, as scandals are shared as newsworthy material in brand communities, online outlets, and social media (Herhausen et al., 2019; Hollenbeck, 2018; Scholz & Smith, 2019; Pfeffer et al., 2014). According to Berger et al. (2012), pieces of online content that evoke high-arousal emotions such as anger are more likely to become viral. Naturally, news outlets and bloggers write regarding these events and consequently shape the public's information (Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018). Besides online news outlets, consumers and fashion enthusiasts tend to follow fashion blogs for information-seeking and entertainment (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). As fashion blogs established themselves as central platforms for fashion-related news circulation (Rocamora, 2011), they might have a pivotal role in agenda-setting and the shaping of people's opinions. Agenda-setting refers to how media coverage is essential to

determining the salience of an issue to the public (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006).

Moreover, the shaping of the information can be defined by the concept of *framing*.

Framing is defined as communicating a particular selection of aspects and characteristics of perceived reality in a more salient manner to promote a particular moral evaluation or interpretation (Entman, 1993). Journalists then present and define issues, and these frames have consequences in societal decision-making and even drive collective action (de Vreese, 2005).

The fashion and luxury industry has not been traditionally associated with responsible social behavior or concerns about welfare, social justice, or human rights. Nevertheless, their constant development and their introduction in the mass-market arena have made the industry more permeable and susceptible to new expectations and challenges (Winston, 2016). From a consumer perspective, companies in the industry are often met with skepticism due to the fashion and luxury industry's perceived negative social and environmental footprint (Pedersen et al., 2018). Crises give the general public reasons to think badly of the organizations, and social media firestorms aggravate this problem, as people read about these events through news media or the Internet (Coombs, 2007). In western countries, this is exacerbated due to the rise of environmental awareness and brand activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020) and societal movements like Black Lives Matter and MeToo highlighting issues of inequality and the need for diversity (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

News coverage is of great importance for corporations as journalism focuses the public's attention on determined topics, having a role in agenda-setting. Therefore, news media influences the interpretations of corporate crises and corporate reputations, delineating what aspects of the crises are important, creating a frame of reference to evaluate information and understand situations (Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018). In

visual and symbolic industries, such as the fashion industry, blogs are key players in the field (Rocamora, 2011), alongside traditional news media and online magazines. Nowadays, fashion bloggers are considered legitimate stakeholders of the fashion industry due to the dynamism of web 2.0 and the creation of the concept of citizen journalism (Rocamora, 2013). Thus, an analysis of agenda-setting and media frames within this industry is important, as different outlets can highlight aspects of scandals given that they try to understand their readership's beliefs or stakeholder relations. Media biases in shaping public opinion about scandals can be discussed as media outlets and blogs are non-neutral actors with self-interests and salience needs that could profit from reinforcing their audience's beliefs (Cohen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the investigation of framing has been heavily related to political and mass communication (De Vreese et al., 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2008), and research on framing of corporate scandals can be considered scarce (Cohen et al., 2015; Comyns & Franklin-Johnson, 2018) leaving an interesting gap to research regarding social media firestorms and situational crises in the context of new media, namely online news media, and blogs. Therefore, this master's thesis aims to answer the overall research question: *"How do western news media and fashion bloggers frame luxury and fashion companies' scandals after social media firestorms?"*. Moreover, it will address differences in framing and agenda-setting regarding scandals, expecting differences in framing between types of scandals (social issues vs. environmental issues), and type of medium (online news media vs. fashion bloggers).

There are several managerial implications connected with the topic of this master thesis. Firstly, it reinforces the importance of stakeholder management and the inclusion of online media and opinion leaders (bloggers) as parties with loud voices in the communicative architecture of firms (Rocamora, 2013; Van den Heijkant & Vliegenthart, 2018). Besides, it showcases nuances of these new opinion leaders that shape the

understanding of companies and their work with the general public. Secondly, by understanding the trends on frame-building that journalists and bloggers use to depict crises, companies can preventively strategize their crisis communication and their own production of frames (Coombs, 2007). Thirdly, the results of this thesis can be of use for organisations to explore different communicative strategies from companies and their salience in the media, in order to adapt their strategic communication management accordingly. Moreover, the academic relevance of this thesis consists in enriching the field of corporate communications in the context of framing and situational crisis communication, establishing a clear link between crisis communication literature and media framing (Coombs, 2007; Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018). Finally, it adds new and interesting dimensions to the corpus of media framing, which has been focused on political and sports communication by adopting concepts of scandal framing used in political science and communication literature and applying them to corporate communication in luxury fashion in relation to sustainability and ethical (mal)practices (Cohen et al., 2015; Comyns & Franklin-Johnson, 2018; De Vreese et al., 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2008).

Theoretical framework

2.1. Social Media Firestorms

Online firestorm concept was developed by Pfeffer et al (2014) to explain the discharge of social network messages focusing on outrage against a person, company or group. Online firestorms are a way of weaponizing visibility that is afforded by web 2.0 to the public (Trottier, 2017), and is generally understood as a way to punish and control a third party that is at fault, including organisations. Social media firestorms are identified as corporations's risks that can be triggered by various events and need response strategies (Scholz & Smith, 2019). This perspective on online firestorms and their impact on

organisations is rooted in the school of thought “Communicative constitution of organisation” (CCO), which argues that communication defines and creates organisations and its understanding (Albu & Etter, 2016). CCO argues that nonorganizational members contribute to the co-constitution of organisations. In this light, firestorms are constitutive of the reputation of organisations and the communicative interactions in virtual sites play an active role in the identity of corporations, as online platforms afford visibility, persistence of information and the modification and relocation of interactions (Albu & Etter, 2016). As such, social media creates a new sphere of communication that poses reputational risks and possibility of crises for organisations.

In a deeply mediated industry as the Fashion Industry, social media has become central in shaping the impressions and workings of consumers and companies (Rocamora, 2017), and fostering the creation of online brand communities (Casalo et al., 2020). Users of social networks use call-out culture and weaponise visibility denouncing perceived injustices from fashion companies, including practices of bigotry, greenwashing, racism and sexism (Vigo, 2019) creating online firestorms. Furthermore, these are fuelled and shaped by online media outlets and bloggers as they disseminate the firestorm and set them as part of the media agenda, framing fashion companies in ways that pose threats to their reputation risking the development of reputational crises (Cohen et al., 2015; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018).

2.1.1. Reputational crisis

Corporate reputation is an intangible resource for organisations and helps reduce stakeholders' uncertainty about their performance, strengthens competitive advantage and contributes to the trust and value creation of a company (Pires & Trez, 2018). These collective judgements are based on assessments made over time in different spheres where a company is situated, including social, environmental and financial arenas. As evaluations,

they can be favourable or unfavourable and can change in light of a crisis (Coombs, 2007). Crises are unexpected events that pose a risk to disrupt an organisation, giving the public reasons to think about them negatively. Therefore, a reputational crisis can be defined as a major event that threatens perceptions by relevant stakeholders and makes them re-evaluate a firm (Coombs, 2007; Sohn & Lariscy, 2014).

2.2. Agenda-Setting theory

Agenda-setting theory has at its core highlighting and increasing salience and prominence of certain elements of a situation while obscuring others (Guo & McCombs, 2015). On a first-level, agenda-setting refers to what and who is showcased in the media and consequently seen as important by the public. On a second-level this theory focuses on which attributes (characteristics or properties) are showcased and gives the audience cues on how to interpret the information (Guo & McCombs, 2015). Whereas Agenda-setting research has mainly investigated political contexts and issues, the effects can be seen and studied in business contexts (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). The salience of a company in the media has an impact on the consumers' awareness of the company and can shift their perception of the firm and its activities.

Whereas the first level of agenda-setting pertains to the discussion of the issue in the media or not in the case of this thesis only scandals showcased in the media will be evaluated. However, the characteristics of the communication of the issue are still utterly relevant. These characteristics belong to the second-level of agenda setting, which can be described in terms of two dimensions: A substantive or cognitive dimension which showcases the factual context of the issue (Which is linked to media framing theory), and an evaluative or affective dimension that discusses the tonality of the communication (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). When considering different outlets, different tonalities might

be used. Given the need to uphold journalistic ethical norms and values, traditional newspapers tend to be neutral while assessing news compared to alternative media outlets that do not need to abide by any standard of the journalistic community (Nygaard, 2020). Considering that the cognitive dimension is expanded by media framing, the affective dimension leads to the following research question:

RQ1: *Which type(s) of second-level agenda-setting tonalities can be found on western media and fashion bloggers' coverage of fashion companies' firestorms?*

2.3. Media Framing

Framing theory can be directly linked and converged to agenda-setting, especially to second-level agenda-setting theory's cognitive dimension. Framing refers to the selection of specific aspects of a perceived reality being used to promote a particular interpretation and moral evaluation of a situation or object (Maher, 2008). In media, frames are used as a tool to shape information in an organised idea and storyline providing meaning to events and gatekeeping the voices heard in crises (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van de Meer et al., 2017). Consequences of media framing are understood as *framing effects*, referring to the changes in evaluations and judgements of the general public as a result of exposure to a specific frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Thus, media framing influences public opinion, and is important in the case of corporate crises as it can set the public opinion in favour or against firms (An & Gower, 2009; Clement & Gabbioneta, 2017). Past research on media framing identified frames that are predominantly used in news coverage as (1) Attribution of responsibility, (2) conflict, (3) Economic, (4) human interest and (5) morality (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) (Table 1). Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the production and reception of frames are affected by social, cultural and individual contexts and are not a prescriptive interpretation of a situation (Vliegenthart &

van Zoonen, 2011). Therefore, a limitation of these identified frames is that this is only one application of a subjective and abstract understanding of frames (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). Utilising an inductive approach in this paper would help specify frames used particularly in fashion industry crises. However, it would compromise the generalizability and replicability of this research to crises outside of this specific industry. Thus, this thesis builds on the deductive approach to media framing by utilising previously developed and tested frames, leading to the following research question:

RQ2: *Which of the frames (attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic, human interest, and morality) are mostly used by western media and fashion bloggers in articles about luxury and fashion industry firestorms?*

Table 1. Frame typology

<i>Attribution of responsibility</i>	<i>Assigns responsibility to a specific involved party for a cause or a solution to a particular event or object (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).</i>
<i>Conflict</i>	<i>Presents information in a way it reflects disagreement and/or conflict stating different points of views (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).</i>
<i>Economic</i>	<i>Showcases the economic consequences and impact of the event or object on individuals, groups, organisations or countries (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).</i>
<i>Human interest</i>	<i>Stimulates psychological and emotional responses by creating a subjective and emotional presentation of an event or problem. This frame is often a predictor of blame on transgression crises (Cho & Gower, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).</i>
<i>Morality</i>	<i>Situates the event or object in light of ethical, moral or religious prescriptions, highlighting transgressions of morality and values. It is</i>

	<i>often used indirectly as it contrasts the journalistic norm of objectivity (Neuman et al., 1992).</i>
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2.3.1 Cross-Media framing: Online newspapers vs. fashion bloggers

Advances in technology allowed new stakeholders to have a determining voice on corporate crises, and whereas in the past organisations only had to manage the amount of negative attention in traditional media, now they also must oversee the negative blogs attention as well (Liu, 2010). Mass media helps the public make sense of information during crises, but blogs are challenging this by introducing new story angles and reporting styles (Liu, 2010). In the fashion industry, blogs are key players in the sensemaking of the audience and they represent an important stakeholder and opinion leader for fashion-interested audiences (Rocamora, 2011). The lack of journalistic training and imposed norms behind the use of blogs allows writers to be partisan and express opinions and subjective personal experiences while making sense of a situation or object (Xenos, 2008). Applied to this paper, this might result in structurally different approaches between online newspapers and fashion bloggers. Blogs can constitute a paradox for professional journalism. On one hand they can be resources for conventional journalists, and on the other hand, they can appear parasitic and competing against traditional media given the affordances of new technology (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Bloggers introduce new types of strategies such as conversation with audiences, transparency in sources and reporting and even co-participatory news production (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). To further investigate the dynamics between online newspapers and fashion bloggers within the context of fashion scandals, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: What differences in framing can be found between online newspapers and fashion bloggers' reporting on firms' firestorms?

2.4. Corporate social (ir)responsibility

Corporate social responsibility refers to the communicated practices, values and policies of organisations that indicate assumption of responsibility for societal good (Matten & Moon, 2008). These practices increase congruence between societal expectations and the actual behaviour of a company, and it is an intrinsic part of organisational reputation (Colleoni, 2013). Thus, CSR activities and its communication are a widely used resource to fulfil social obligations and commitments to a firms' context, while having the utilitarian role of improving the perception of the corporation or brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Whereas the fashion industry is not at the forefront of responsible social behaviour, their introduction to mass-market and the interest of the newer generations of consumers made companies engage in CSR and be more vigilant of their own operations (Winston, 2016) but their efforts are often met with scepticism due to irresponsible practices such as burning extra stock or farming exotic animals (Wong & Dhanesh, 2017).

If a company engages in corporate social irresponsible (CSI) behaviour, a reputational crisis can occur. These crises consist of firm-induced events posing threats to their reputation and CSR, and are associated with hurting norms and values upheld by society that have a deep symbolic and social meaning (Kang et al., 2016; Sohn & Lariscy, 2014). CSR activities and CSI incidents can be linked to one or more of the three dimensions of corporate accountability: People, Profits and Place (Fisk, 2010). These dimensions can be directly linked with the sustainability framework of the *Triple Bottom Line*, which examines a firms' social, environmental and economic impact (Elkington, 2018). The economic impact or "Profit" dimension refers to the financial position of a company (Fisk, 2010). The "People" dimension or the societal impact of a firm has to do with beneficial and fair business practices that take into consideration the human capital of a firm and the community (Alhaddi, 2015). Finally, the "Planet" dimension has to do with

the environmental impact of a firm and the need to engage in practices that do not compromise resources for future generations (Alhaddi, 2015; Fisk, 2010).

In western society, environmental and social activism are high on the public agenda and are part of the issues that media communicates and gives significance to (Pollach, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). As such, they are part of the emerging problems existing at the intersection of public and corporate spheres and a source of tension between firms and stakeholders (Pollach, 2018). Over the last decade, younger audiences are fostering a committed culture towards issues that affect the way that corporations are perceived (Loosemore & Lim, 2017). This cultural phenomenon sets the importance of CSR for companies and the risks that CSI can pose in terms of reputation.

2.4.1. Social and Environmental irresponsibility in the fashion & luxury industry.

The fashion and luxury industry often contradicts the ideals of CSR and sustainability. The mass-market, self-indulgent and hedonistic qualities of this industry are often presented as a direct opposite of CSR as its equality, universalism and moderation orientation (Wong & Dhanesh, 2017). Whereas there is an increase in firms' commitment to socially responsible behaviour, companies in the luxury and fashion industry are often observed acting against societal interest (CSI) whether this is accidental or purposeful (Cheng et al., 2020; de Angelis et al., 2017). An example of CSI in the social dimension is the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in 2013 (Jacobs & Singhal, 2017). This incident showcased the need for safe working conditions and the societal and ethical obligation from the fashion industry while becoming a catalyst for change and exposure of irresponsible behaviour in the fashion industry. Other examples of crises in the social line have to do with lack of diversity, discrimination and cultural appropriation (Loosemore & Lim, 2017; Murphy, 2021). These crises are likely to spur moral outrage and anger and be

set in the centre of the news media agenda (Murphy, 2021; Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018).

On the other hand, CSI within the environmental line has to do with firms' actions that damage the environment such as pollution or wildlife endangerment and mistreatment. Clear examples of these types of irresponsible behaviours can be related to slashing extra stock (Hills, 2021), or mistreating animals (Williams, 2021) among others. Unlike social line scandals and crises that trigger anger and outrage which encourages and motivates action, environmental CSI tends to provoke more passive emotions, such as sadness (Clayton et al., 2013). Based on this insight, this thesis presents the following research question:

RQ4: *What differences in framing can be found in social vs. environmental CSI firestorms?*

Methodology

The analysis of written communication was required in order to answer the research question proposed on this master thesis: *“How do western news media and fashion bloggers frame luxury companies' scandals after social media firestorms?”*. Thus, quantitative manual content analysis was the method used to conduct this research, as it allowed the analysis of a large number of articles. Quantitative content analysis supports the examination of symbols of communication within and between texts in order to uncover and describe relationships, and draw inferences (Riffe et al., 2019). Moreover, this replicable and systematic examination can be used to compare and contrast newspapers articles and blog posts on the same topic.

The units of analysis of this study are western and English-written articles in both newspapers and fashion blogs covering content about luxury fashion companies' scandals.

The articles gathered were from a combination of established, mainstream newspapers, tabloids and fashion blogs and online magazines. These were chosen in order to allow the analysis of different media over the same scandals, to compare and contrast the diverse coverage. The articles were gathered through NexisUni through diverse search phrases consisting of companies' names ("Gucci", "Prada", "Hermes", etc.), and "Scandal", "Greenwashing", or "Racism". Furthermore, Google Search engine was used to find fashion blogs and magazines discussing scandals. The data collection was done in the period between May 10th and May 29th, 2022.

3.1. Sampling

One hundred and nine online newspaper articles ($n=109$), and one hundred and six fashion blogs ($n=106$) articles were coded. The final sample consisted of two-hundred and fifteen articles ($n=215$), in which twenty ($n=20$) were added as part of the intercoder reliability test. Out of the total of the articles coded one hundred and forty six were from the United States (67.9%), fifty-three were from the U.K. (24.7%), twelve were from Canadian sources (5.6%), and the remaining four were from Australia (1.9%). Moreover, eleven companies were discussed in the articles, including: Alexander Wang, Balenciaga, Burberry, Canada Goose, Coach, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Prada. The selection of the articles was purposeful given that only companies that were engaged in a scandal based on either environmental or social irresponsibility were included. These companies were selected by browsing the latest fashion scandals of the last decade on Google Search. Table 2 showcases a short summary of the included companies and the scandals that were portrayed.

Table 2. *Companies, scandal descriptions, type of scandal and number of sources ($n=215$)*

Company	Scandal description	Year	Type of scandal	Source	N
Alexander Wang	<i>American fashion designer Alexander Wang faces allegations of sexual misconduct (Croxford, 2021)</i>	2021	Social Irresponsibility	Newspaper	2
				Blog	0
Balenciaga	<i>Spanish fashion brand Balenciaga was accused of cultural appropriation and racism because of 1,190 dollars sweatpants that resembled a gentrified version of a style made famous by hip hop culture in 1990s (Salathe, 2021)</i>	2021	Social Irresponsibility	Newspaper	6
				Blog	4
Burberry	<i>The British brand received backlash after burning £28 million of their own stock in order to preserve brand equity (Pinnock, 2018)</i>	2018	Environmental Irresponsibility	Newspaper	19
				Blog	9
Canada Goose	<i>Canadian luxury outdoor wear brand was criticised for using coyote fur in their parkas (Collins, 2015)</i>	2015 - 2018	Environmental Irresponsibility	Newspaper	10
				Blog	6
Coach	<i>After a TikTok of a woman discovering slashed bags in dumpsters behind Coach stores went viral, the company</i>	2021	Environmental Irresponsibility	Newspaper	13
				Blog	20

	<i>received backlash for destroying their own stock</i> (Hanbury, 2021)				
Dior	<i>French luxury house faces criticism after their designer John Galliano antisemitic rant goes viral</i> (Givhan, 2014)	2014	Social Irresponsibility	Newspaper	17
				Blog	12
Dolce & Gabbana	<i>The Italian fashion house caused worldwide outrage after leaked screenshots of founders making racist remarks against Chinese people</i> (Ferrier, 2018)	2018	Social Irresponsibility	Newspaper	21
				Blog	24
Gucci	<i>The luxury maison faces criticism due to a design deemed racist, as it resembles “Black Face”</i> (Young, 2019)	2019	Social Irresponsibility	Newspaper	8
				Blog	15
Hermes	<i>The luxury house faced outrage after videos of animal cruelty in their crocodile farm suppliers become viral</i> (Robinson, 2015)	2015	Environmental Irresponsibility	Newspaper	9
				Blog	13
Louis Vuitton	<i>The french luxury house was the target of a viral campaign started by an animal rights advocacy group to stop using fur in their designs</i> (Brady, 2021)	2021	Environmental Irresponsibility	Newspaper	2
				Blog	2

Prada	<i>Merchandise of Pradamalia collection was perceived to have racist imagery and created outrage</i> (Griffith, 2020)	2020	Social Irresponsibility	Newspaper	2
				Blog	1

3.2. Research design

In order to ensure a good quality of data, and valid conclusions while conducting quantitative manual content analysis, different protocols were applied (Riffe et al., 2019). A codebook was developed to guarantee reliable measure of variables for the manual coding of the data (Appendix A). Moreover, the codebook allowed for consistency among coders while categorising the content of the research, and to be able to further replicate this study.

3.2.1. Variables

To objectively measure and allow the further reproduction of the study (Riffe et al., 2019), the variables included in the research were operationalized. Firstly, formal variables of identification of the coder and context were presented in the codebook, including Coder ID, date of coding, article ID, publication date and length of the article. These variables allowed the proper organisation of the results and the analyses of intercoder reliability. Secondly, a set of questions in the codebook represented the operationalization of some of the general content information. The variable of source was operationalized in a dichotomous variable (Newspaper vs. Blog) and a string variable where the coder had to write down the name of the source. Moreover, this set also contained variables for the company the article focuses on, consisting in a pre-arranged list containing all the companies mentioned in the articles and two sets of dichotomous variables to understand the nature of the scandal (Environmental vs. Social). To help the coder understand the

papers' definition of an environmental and a social scandal, a concise explanation was added in the coding survey.

Lastly, the third and final section of the coding was aimed to investigate the agenda-setting and framing of the articles. To operationalize the concept of media-frames, this research based the proposed list of five answers on previous literature: Attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic, human interest, and morality (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The definitions of the frames and examples were presented in the codebook. Coders were asked to select which was the main frame used in the article. Moreover, the overall tone of voice of the article was measured to identify second-level agenda-setting. This was measured with three options: Positive, Neutral and Negative. According to Alamsyah et al. (2018), there are different words that are indicators of positive or negative frames, and texts that were not overly positive nor negative could be labelled "Neutral". The coders were presented with guiding information based on Alamsyah et al. (2018) research to assess the tonality of the articles.

3.2.2. Intercoder reliability

A 20-article sample was used as a test for intercoder reliability. Two coders of different backgrounds and studies analysed the data. Coder A, a MSc Business Administration student is a 25-year-old Venezuelan female with a background in marketing and media studies. Coder B is a 24-year-old Dutch male with a background in Psychology and Criminology. The articles were coded between May 20th and May 22nd, 2022, by both coders. The sample consisted of ten online news articles and ten fashion blog articles, gathered through Nexus-Uni and Google Search Engine. The coded articles were purposely selected due to their content based on the companies Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, Coach, Burberry, and Alexander Wang, presenting either environmental or social scandals. The articles ranged between 273 to 897 words and dated from July 2018 to October 2021.

Crosstab analyses and Krippendorff's alpha (Kalpha) were used as a measure of reliability for the variables of the study (Table 3). Kalpha measures the reliability of variables, and serves to analyse the description, instructions and background in the codebook (Riffe et al., 2019). The original number of variables indicated an overall satisfactory reliability, (*Mean Krippendorff's α : .79*). Nevertheless, due to the clear outlier being the variable "Secondary Frame" (*Mean Krippendorff's α : .003*) and it not being the main purpose of the study, the decision to delete the variable and question from the codebook was taken. Removing the variable, the results indicated a high reliability (*Mean Krippendorff's α : .92*). The calculus of Kalpha for Main frame (*Krippendorff's α : .78*) and Tone (*Krippendorff's α : .76*) returned a satisfactory reliability, which points out to disagreements within those variables which was expected due to the subjective nature of the interpretation.

Table 3. "Kappa value and Krippendorff's alpha per individual variable" (N=20)

Variables	Kappa value	Krippendorff's α
Source (Newspaper vs. Fashion blog)	1, <i>SD</i> = 0	1
Company discussed	1, <i>SD</i> = 0	1
Environmental scandal	1, <i>SD</i> = 0	1
Social scandal	1, <i>SD</i> = 0	1
Main frame	.78, <i>SD</i> = .15	.78
<i>Secondary Frame (Deleted variable)</i>	.01, <i>SD</i> = .08	.003
Tone	.75, <i>SD</i> = .13	.76

3.3 Data analysis

To answer the research questions proposed in the MSc Thesis, the coding of the data was performed through a survey hosted in Qualtrics XM, a software that allows the design and dissemination of online surveys. The final coding of this paper was conducted between May 23rd and June 17th, 2022, by three coders including the student author of this paper. After all articles were coded by using one survey per article on Qualtrics, the data was exported to data analyser and visualizer IBM SPSS Statistics 28 to perform statistical analyses. After cleaning the data from automatic variables created by Qualtrics and converting the string variables into numeric ones, frequency and descriptive analyses were performed to understand the scope of the data. Moreover, a mix of Chi-Square test for independence and crosstabulation analyses were used to answer the research questions.

Results

4.1. Second-Level Agenda-Setting Tonality

The first research question proposed on this thesis aimed for the investigation of what tonality do newspapers and blogs use while covering different scandals. A Chi-Square Test for independence was used to explore the relationship between sources (Newspapers vs. Blogs) and tonality (Positive, neutral, or negative). Previously, a frequency analysis was done over the dependent variable tonality. Given that only nine ($n=9$) of the articles were coded as positive and it did not reach the minimum expected cell frequency of five or more, only neutral ($n=94$) and negative ($n=112$) results were included in the Chi-Square test, and Fisher's exact test was used to determine significance ($FET p < .001$). The Chi-Square test for independence indicated a significant association between source and tonality, $X^2(1, N = 206) = 22.61, p < .001, Phi = .33$. Moreover, using Cohen's criteria, the effect of source on

tonality is of medium size (Pallant, 2013). In the Cross Tabulation table ($n=206$) it was showcased that newspapers were using a neutral tone (68.1%), compared to blogs (34.8%), and that blogs mostly used negative tone (65.2%), while newspapers were not using it as much (31.9%). Furthermore, a Cross Tabulation including positive tonality ($n=215$), showcased newspapers were referring to the companies in a positive tone (66.7%) more than blogs (33.3%), nevertheless these results were not statistically significant as there were not enough samples with positive tonality.

To answer RQ1, evidence from the Chi-Square Test for Independence shows that newspapers often use a neutral tonality to discuss fashion companies' scandals, which means that they both highlight negative and positive information about the firms. On the other hand, fashion blogs and online magazines used more the negative tonality to discuss scandals observed by the coders in the negative information shared about the firms. Finally, whereas it was not able to be proven statistically, newspapers published more articles praising companies and using a positive tone in comparison to fashion blogs.

4.2. Media Frames used

The second research question of this paper had to do with the frequency of use of frames by both newspapers and fashion articles. To highlight this, a Crosstabulation table was created. A frequency table showcased that out of all the items coded, 58.6% were using Attribution of Responsibility frame ($n=126$), 12.1% were using Conflict frame ($n=26$), 18.6% were using a Morality frame ($n=40$), 8.8% were using a Human-Interest frame ($n=19$) and only 1.9% were using Economic frame ($n=4$). As an answer for this research question, it is possible to describe that for both newspapers and fashion blogs the main frame most frequently employed was the Attribution of Responsibility frame. Additionally, this was followed by the Morality and the Conflict frame. Nevertheless, conflict was not as

used by fashion blogs as for newspapers. An overview with the frequencies of the frames used can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. *Frequencies and percentages of different Frames usage in newspapers, fashion blogs and in total (n=215).*

	Newspapers		Fashion Blogs		Total	
Main Frame	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Attribution of Responsibility</i>	61	56.0%	65	61.3%	126	58.6%
<i>Morality</i>	18	16.5%	22	20.8%	40	18.6%
<i>Conflict</i>	18	16.5%	8	7.5%	26	12.1%
<i>Human-Interest</i>	9	8.3%	10	9.4%	19	8.8%
<i>Economic</i>	3	2.8%	1	.9%	4	1.9%

4.3. Media Framing Differences between Sources

The third question of this thesis explored the differences between frames that are used by the two different sources (Newspapers vs. Blogs). In order to answer the question a Chi-Square Test for Independence was performed. Nevertheless, the Economic frame only had four units, for which it was excluded from the analyses as it did not reach the minimum expected cell frequency. The Chi-Square test for independence indicated a non-significant association between source and frame, $\chi^2 (3, N = 211) = 4.42, p = .219, \phi = .15$. Thus, the

answer to the RQ3 is that there are no statistically significant associations or differences between the different sources regarding which frames are used to cover the stories.

4.4 Media Framing Differences between Scandal type

Lastly, the differences between social and environmental scandals' frames were discussed in RQ4 and were analysed by the means of Chi-Square Tests for main frame and tone. As with the prior research question, the Economic frame and positive tone were excluded from the analysis as they did not reach the minimum expected cell frequency. The Chi-Square test for Independence showcased a significant association with a medium size effect in the type of scandal and the used frames, $X^2 (3, N = 211) = 40.2, p < .001, phi = .44$. In addition, a crosstabulation table indicated that whereas both environmental and social scandals use attribution of responsibility and conflict frames similarly, they differ in the usage of Morality frame and Human-Interest frame (Table 5). Additionally, the analysis did not show a significant association between type of scandal and tonality, $X^2 (1, N = 206) = 1.14, p < .117$ (Using Fisher's exact test). As an answer to the research question, it is possible to say that there are differences in frame usage when covering environmental and social scandals of fashion companies. Whereas both articles and blogs use Attribution of Responsibility and Conflict frames regardless of the scandal, Morality frame was mainly used for scandals with a social nature, and Human-Interest frame was mainly used for scandals involving the environment.

Table 5. *Frequencies and percentages of different Frames usage and tonality depending on CSI (MF n=211; T n=206).*

	<i>Social</i>	<i>Environmental</i>
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	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percentage</i>
<i>Main frame</i>				
Attribution of responsibility	58	50.9%	68	70.1%
Conflict	12	10.5%	14	14.4%
Human Interest	5	4.4%	14	14.4%
Morality	39	34.2%	1	1%
<i>Tonality</i>				
Neutral	54	49.1%	40	41.7%
Negative	56	50.9%	56	58.3%

Lastly, to delve deeper into differences between the different cases, two companies were selected for a crosstab analysis: Dolce & Gabbana representing social scandals ($n = 45$), and Coach representing environmental scandals ($n = 33$). The differences of frames depending on scandal type were even more distinct when considering companies individually. Out of all items representing the Dolce & Gabbana social scandal, 84.4% used a morality frame, with the remaining 13.3% using attribution of responsibility and 2.2% using Human interest frames. On the other hand, the Coach environmental scandal main frame was attribution of responsibility with 84.8% of all items being in this frame, and only the remaining 15.2% being in a conflict frame.

Discussion

5.1. Conclusions

This MSc Thesis examined the differences between how news media and fashion bloggers discuss fashion companies' scandals that generated media firestorms. By gathering data from articles discussing eleven fashion companies' scandals, a quantitative manual content analysis was performed and statistically analysed to answer several research questions. RQ1 aimed to discover differences in tonality, one of the dimensions of second-level agenda setting (Guo & McCombs, 2015). Prior literature (Nygaard, 2020; Xenos, 2008) explains that alternative media do not need to follow journalistic ethical commitments, which allows them to explore topics that can cause outrage and state claims that are divisive. In line with this research, this thesis found a significant difference between how traditional media (newspapers) write about scandals compared to fashion bloggers. Online newspapers used a neutral tone more often, meaning that they highlighted both negative and positive characteristics and facts in their stories about fashion companies' firestorms. On the other hand, fashion blogs and online magazines used a negative tone most often, meaning that they were highlighting negative aspects of the company while discussing the controversies. This is aligned with Berger et al. (2012) that explains that pieces evoking high-arousal emotions such as anger are more likely to become viral, thus, more implemented to gain popularity online.

The results of RQ2 and RQ3 show that there are not significant differences in frames resulting from the source. This could be related with Berger et al. (2012) given that the frame selection for both newspapers and blogs were similar, showing similar interpretations of the situations (Maher, 2008). Additionally, the lack of differences in frames could be linked to the somewhat parasitic relationship between journalist and

bloggers as depicted by Domingo and Heinonen (2008), where professional journalists introduce the frame and bloggers reproduce them. Lastly, RQ4 showcased interesting results when considering the different dimensions of corporate accountability and corporate irresponsibility. The use of morality frame for situates the events as moral transgressions, and it was mostly used for social-based scandals. This finding was in line with prior research on how social corporate irresponsibility causes moral outrage and anger (Murphy, 2021; Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018). Moreover, when considering the items depicting CSI within the environmental line, the attribution of responsibility frame was mostly used. This was also aligned with prior research which showcased that these types of scandal tend to provoke passive emotions and not a call to action as social-based scandals do (Clayton et al., 2013). Within this frame, companies were just attributed the responsibility of the action, yet it did not spark moral outrage or showcased deep transgression of values as social scandals did.

5.2. Managerial implications

This paper's findings contribute to the knowledge of managers when dealing with corporate reputational crises. Given the growing relevance of non-traditional gatekeepers in the fashion industry, and the decline in trust of traditional media and corporations (Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018), this research allows companies to prepare and strategise their responses when confronted with a CSI crisis. In addition, the differences in framing depending on the type of crisis (environmental vs. social) that were uncovered in this paper can help managers understand trends in frame-building. They can also help prepare their responses considering morality frames implications for social-based scandals and attribution of responsibility and conflict frames for environmental-based scandals. Knowing

how opinion leaders tend to respond to crises allow companies to anticipate media coverage and tailor their responses to what is needed depending on the type of scandal.

5.3. Limitations and further research

One of the limitations of this study is the difficulty to make generalisations considering other industries or populations due to the sampling process. The sample taken into consideration for this paper was purposely selected and non-randomised, which makes it difficult to extend the results to other scandals and industries. Moreover, the particularities of the industry and its history with corporate social responsibility need to be taken into consideration (Cheng et al., 2020; de Angelis et al., 2017), as the constraints of the fashion industry cannot be translated to other industries. Nonetheless, this could aid other industries such as tobacco and pharmaceutical industries which have had similar CSR issues (de Angelis et al., 2017). Moreover, the selection of sources was not exhaustive due to the time constraints of this thesis.

Nevertheless, these research results shed light on how previous literature on media framing and CSI apply to the fashion and luxury industry. Additionally, this research sets a precedent on the importance of stakeholder management in highly mediatized industries. Future research could investigate the implications of bloggers and other opinion leaders that deviate from traditional media when discussing CSI in other industries that have a high media usage and relevance such as the beauty industry. Moreover, given the decline in trust in mainstream media and companies (Van den Heijkant & Vliegenhart, 2018), bloggers, online influencers and other alternative opinion leaders should be researched to further understand their communication. Additionally, their influence in agenda-setting and framing interpretation represent an interesting research avenue to further understand consumer behaviour and societal decision-making.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Codebook

Codebook

Purpose of the research

In order to understand the differences between how western online news media and bloggers discuss scandals of fashion companies, a content analysis was planned. In turn, this codebook intends to give coders a thorough guideline and description on how to analyse the provided articles. The coding will be performed through a survey hosted in Qualtrics and consists of a series of questions addressing: Contextual information (Coder ID, date, article ID, publication date, and length of article), Content information (Focusing on content of article, such as name of the company involved, name of the news-site or blog, and if an environmental or social scandal is discussed) and Framing information (Measuring the frame/s used and tonality of the article).

Instructions

To ensure a reliable coding, the coder should access the provided OneDrive folder, and follow the delineated steps:

1. Read the full codebook, if you have any questions (especially surrounding the definitions of frames, tonality, etc.) please let the student researcher know (cecilia.arroyo@student.uva.nl)
2. Read the (to-be-coded) article before completing the survey.
3. Open the Survey link (https://uva.fra1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_doL1p1jDdQtht8W) and the article in a split-view window
4. Re-read the article while going, in order, through the questions.

5. After finishing the survey and sending the response, place the coded article on the provided subfolder on OneDrive.

Contextual information

1. Coder ID

Please fill in your initials and last name.

Example: C. Arroyo
 R. de Jong

2. Date of coding

Answer scale: day/month/year

3. Article ID

Copy the provided number (File name) of the article.

Example: 001

4. Publication date

Date of the publication of the article.

Answer scale: day/month/year

5. Length of article

Number of words in the article. Provided underneath the title and author.

Example: 436

Content information

6. Is this a news article or a blog article? (Select one)

- a. Newspaper
- b. Blog

7. Name of news-site or blog

Example: The Guardian

8. Which company is discussed in the article?

Example: Gucci

9. Is the scandal discussed of an environmental nature?

An environmental scandal involves a company causing damage to nature, natural resources or animals due to irresponsible behaviour.

- a. Yes
- b. No

10. Is the scandal discussed of a social nature?

A social scandal involves company causing damage to society, minorities or individuals based on discrimination, unlawful or unethical behaviour, harassment or abuse of power in any way.

- a. Yes
- b. No

Framing information

Framing refers to the way the article discusses the scandal, highlighting some attributes or characteristics of the situation while obscuring others. While many authors can write about the same issue, most often than not, the pieces written by different people have different focus. While one piece might focus on the economic consequences of a scandal, the other might highlight the conflict between different parties. Please read carefully the definitions and examples of each of the different frames before answering the question:

- A. **Attribution of responsibility:** This frame focuses on who is the main responsible party for an event, solution or object (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In the case of the articles coded, this frame would focus on assigning responsibility to X company over the scandal.
- B. **Conflict:** This frame focuses on disagreement and states different points of view (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In the coded articles, while the author might present the scandal, it would focus on the conflicting opinions stating very diverse points of view (Example: *point of view of company vs. point of view of an NGO*).
- C. **Economic:** Showcases the economic consequences and impact of the event or object on individuals, groups, organisations or countries (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). (Example: *Company X caused 30 million loss due to scandal*)
- D. **Human Interest:** This frame aims to create an emotional response by focusing on the event in a way that assigns blame or inspires strong emotions in the readers (Cho & Gower, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). (Example: *Company X guilty for leaving 4,000 workers on the street*)
- E. **Morality:** Situates the event or object in light of ethical, moral or religious prescriptions, highlighting transgressions of morality and values (Neuman et al.,

1992). This frame is often subjective, which makes it less obvious in newspapers where journalists need to be objective.

11. What is the main frame used?

- a. Attribution of responsibility
- b. Conflict
- c. Economic
- d. Human interest
- e. Morality

12. Would you attribute any other frame:

Open-ended question, not mandatory.

13. What is the overall tone of the article while discussing the company?

- a. Positive (The article praises company, puts company in a favourable light)
- b. Neutral (The article does not have a clear tone or discusses both positive and negative things)
- c. Negative (The article puts company in a negative light)