



**LUND UNIVERSITY**  
School of Economics and Management

## **MASTER THESIS**

**Negative electronic Word of Mouth & Customer Based Brand Equity:  
A Qualitative View of the Apple iPhone Aversion on Facebook**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Abstract**

The emergent Social Media presents risks and opportunities for the brand that academic research still needs to reach further understanding (MSI, 2010). From both theoretical and managerial points of view, research is needed in regards to consumer created negative brand meanings in social media settings. Further, consumers have now the ability to share negative brand product evaluations at a massive scale through the practice of electronic word-of mouth, eWOM (Jansen et al., 2009) which is especially threatening to the corporate brand value because its perceived value lays in the minds of its consumers. Moreover, negative eWOM is a form of media content and to consumers; it has a higher degree of credibility than corporate communications.

Hence, it is of pivotal importance for corporations to have knowledge of the contents of consumer created negative brand meanings in Social Networks, in order to be aware of the negative brand image created by consumers in the online environment. Ultimately, knowledge of the contents of consumer created negative eWOM will enable corporations to identify weaknesses in the corporate brand image, while learning the motives of consumer rejection or dissatisfaction with the brand.

Accordingly, the following study aim is to describe brand and product related consumer created negative content in social media settings, specifically negative e-WOM, in order to monitor customer based brand equity by identifying motives of dissatisfaction or rejection articulated by consumers through media content in Social Networks.

Further, the purpose of the study is to describe the relationship between negative e-WOM related to a product and the parent brand Corporate Brand Equity in order to monitor and identify areas of weakness in the corporate image, which in turn, will aid marketers in the design of new strategies directed to sustain brand equity in the virtual environment.

The theoretical perspective of this study considers Strategic Brand Management and consumer Behaviour theories points of view.

The study will follow a case study research design and Grounded Theory analysis methods. The choice of research design was made taking into consideration the dimensions of the research process including the understanding of the particular behaviour in its specific social context, its

sequential nature as social phenomena and interconnections amongst theory and data. Moreover, the case study will analyse instances of consumer created negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone on the page ‘We hate Iphone!!’ of social network Facebook.

#### **A. Conclusion:**

The analysis shows Anti-branding sentiment triggered by consumer disapproval of corporate irresponsible business practices as a latent threat to corporate image. Consequently, it is recommended that Apple marketing communications send a clear message in regards to Corporate Responsibility (CSR) issues. In addition, corporate management needs to continue working towards a solution to the irresponsible business practices in its supply chain as a prerequisite to include CSR as part of their corporate image. Hence, Apple, as a corporation must ensure that its supply chain is aligned to CSR values. Otherwise, the company risks to be perceived as inauthentic, and it can backfire and cause an increase of consumer anti-branding activity (Smith et. al, 2010). Moreover, market speech anti-branding content is particularly damaging to the Corporate Brand since it has a direct impact on the corporate brand value (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Therefore, it is recommended that Apple implements further measures to correct the negative issues in its supply chain in order to be show social responsibility and to avoid serious financial devaluation of the brand.

#### **B. Keywords:**

*Customer based brand equity, brand extension, social network, negative e-WOM.*

## 1.2. Background

Nowadays, the achievement of a positive brand image relevant to consumers (Keller, 2008; Solomon et al. 2006) is considered crucial, especially, due to the fact that consumers seek their different forms of personal identity to be recognized by others through their consumption choices. Consequently, due to the fast changing trends in consumers' preferences, it is increasingly difficult for companies to develop distinctive competitive positions through their product offering alone (Firat & Venkatesh 1993 in Kacen, 2000).

Further, the financial value of the brand lays on the basis of creating assets of subjective nature such as brand awareness, emotional attachments, and beliefs of exclusivity and superiority in the consumer's mind. Hence, when brand awareness is reached and positive brand image is created successfully, companies implement Brand Extension as a strategic brand management tool with the aim of capitalising on the brand's intangible assets.

Thus it follows, companies choose to launch new products under the Extension strategy with the objective of building the future brand with respect to growth, image and profitability originated by the transfer of the aforementioned 'assets' between the parent category and the extension category and thus, herein lays the inherent importance of this strategy (Kapferer, 2008).

Moreover, product brand extensions can offer a number of advantages in comparison with launching a new product under a new brand name due to the leverage effect on existing promotional activities, and distribution channels. Not to mention, consumer's potential perceived risk reduction by purchasing a new product from a well-known brand (Keller, 2002).

Further, the success of a brand extension product lays in the assumption of the existence of positive customer based brand equity, which, by definition involves a strong, favourable, and unique memory association towards the particular brand (Keller, 1993).

However, occasionally consumers do not react with positive brand associations, and do not feel identified with the brand's image. The issue lays in the fact that nowadays consumers are able to post their negative opinions on the Internet, which in turn, are available for everyone to see at a massive scale. As a result, consumers have now the power of offering consumption-related advice through the practice of electronic word-of mouth, eWOM, which is defined as voluntary statements made via the internet by potential, actual, or former consumers in regards to a product or company (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

### 1.3. Practical Problem

Amongst the challenges marketers confront when entering a new market, an understanding of the target market is of the utmost importance and yet is the most difficult task to accomplish, especially, due to the subjective nature of consumer behaviour. Moreover, consumers react to marketing communications according to their values and beliefs (Zhang & Gelb, 1996 in De Pelsmacker et al., 2004).

In addition, nowadays, consumers have adopted crucial active roles in creating brand related media content at the same level as companies and their respective brands through eWOM in Social Media (Hanna et al., 2011). The importance of this phenomenon lays in the fact that word of mouth affects the majority of all purchase decisions, (Brooks 1957; Dichter 1966, in Kozinets et al., 2010a). Moreover, a major factor influencing positive brand equity and consumer choice is consumer sponsorship (Almquist & Roberts, 2000 in Kozinets, 2002). Hence, positive Word of Mouth becomes a source of Customer based brand equity.

Consequently, companies have the opportunity to leverage consumer information in regards to their preferences and behaviour through the analysis of eWOM in Social Media. This information can be used to challenge or improve conventional marketing activities such as: strategic planning, market segmentation, and targeting. Moreover, the need for a holistic understanding integrating factors influencing consumers' perception of a product and consequently consumers' preference or rejection towards a brand is evident (MSI, 2010).

As a result, it becomes of pivotal importance for companies and organizations to gain understanding of the nature of consumers' created negative eWOM in relation to a brand. Specifically, in order to understand, influence and leverage consumers' online life (Hanna et al., 2011) for marketing purposes.

From a marketing point of view, the knowledge of consumers' reasons for rejecting a brand or product is of foundational nature, specifically, in order to aid product development and to adapt new offering propositions to target markets. Further, knowledge of the nature of negative eWOM in relation to a brand can guide brand strategic management efforts (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010). Moreover, in practice, in order to develop effective marketing strategies, it is essential to have knowledge of the market's social environment to identify characteristics that could translate in

the adaptation of brand attributes. Further, the degree of knowledge of the sociological environment affects the logic of decisions in regards to optimal product positioning, and, as a result, the success or failure of marketing strategy (Sinkovics & Ghauri, 2009).

eWOM empowers consumers to influence brand image and perceptions at a massive scale. (Reynolds, 2006; Urban, 2005 in Jansen et al., 2009) due to the fact that consumers are able to adopt more and more active roles in co-creating brands and marketing content (Hanna et al., 2011). In fact, technology has empowered consumers to a degree that has resulted in the significant increase in the number of anti-brand content on the internet in the past 5 years; as a result brand related negative WOM is more visible than never before (Kucuk, 2010). The importance of this phenomenon lays in the negative effects of consumer evaluations related to a brand, which are negatively correlated with brand value (Kucuk, 2010) and ultimately, with the dilution of brand image (Keller & Aaker, 1992).

As a result, the importance of understanding the nature and content of consumers' negative e-WOM related to products launched under the modality of Brand Extensions cannot be understated. Specifically, the understanding of the nature of negative e-WOM related to a brand product is crucial due to its potential negative repercussions on the parent brand Customer based brand equity.



#### **1.4. Theoretical Problem**

Social media has provided consumers the power of co-creating brands today more than ever with the emergence of e-WOM, hence, it is necessary for academic research to focus on expanding current knowledge in the area of brand strategy and further understanding of the social media context in order to provide practitioners with necessary guidelines to interact with today's consumer and regain a certain degree of control of the brand assets (MSI, 2010).

Moreover, according to recent research, the field of brand strategy has some challenges to face in regards to the increasing consumer power in regards to brand evaluation online. (Fournier & Avery, 2011) while social media popularity and consumer involvement increases exponentially, the brand's role, as we know it, is changing as well. Brands have a broader meaning to consumers; they have evolved from providing solely functional or emotional benefits. Nowadays, brands serve as a medium through which consumers engage in conversations about social and personal matters. Further, Social Media has provided brands and consumers with multiple points of interaction. Thus, consumers' relationships with brands have become more diverse and multifaceted. As a result, it becomes pivotal for academic research to be able to answer questions raised by new developing issues such as how to approach brand related content within social media (MSI, 2010).

For instance, the sociogenic nature of needs (Bocock, 1993, in Solomon et al., 2006) is being intensified by Social media such as Facebook. In fact, consumers' reference group information can be accessed at any time through direct and easily available consumer-to-consumer communication in social networking sites such as Facebook. Consequently, as consumers' connections amongst each other increase, their degree of control over the brand is amplified, despite corporate marketing pains to create a particular brand image (Hartzel et al., 2011). Social media is ruled by the social collective. Criticism, ridicule and exposure are common and can signify social suicide for a brand. Thus therein lays the online based power struggle between consumers as co-creators of the brand and marketers. This dichotomy presented under the new e-reality challenges traditional brand management principles. For instance, under this new e-reality, short-term brands taking advantage of buzz can defeat heritage brands. Brand protection becomes a priority over brand building due to the brand's vulnerable position in regards to Social Media (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

As a result, several aspects of traditional brand management appear disconnected with the emergence of Social Media. Social media is changing the meaning of branding in a dramatically. Before eWOM, marketers created the brand with a long term view, nowadays, there is a shift towards fuelling short-term cultural phenomenon (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

Consequently, the need for academia to design specific techniques tailored to the particular nature of consumer behaviour in social media is evident (Casteleyn, 2009). However, in order to adapt strategic brand management techniques to influence and leverage consumer behaviour in Social Media settings, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the nature of the consumer created content related to products and brands.

Moreover, Social Media presents risks and opportunities for the brand that academic research still needs to reach further understanding. Thus, from the theoretical point of view, research is needed in regards to brand related content analysis of social media in order to reach a theoretical understanding of negative evaluations in regards to a product or brand. Further, analysis of the content of consumers' voluntary negative opinions, made public through the social media will allow further understanding of consumer behaviour in the current context of consumer-increased power in regards to brand co-creation due to the imminent risk to corporate brand value.

### **1.5. Research Purpose/Aim**

Our aim is to describe brand and product related consumer created negative content in social media settings, specifically negative e-WOM, in order to monitor Customer based brand equity by identifying motives of dissatisfaction or rejection articulated by consumers through media content in Social Networks.

Further, our aim is to describe the relationship between negative e-WOM related to a product and the parent brand Corporate Brand Equity in order to monitor and identify areas of weakness in the corporate image, which in turn, will aid marketers in the design of new strategies directed to sustain brand equity in the virtual environment.

Specifically, the description of brand related eWOM, will provide further knowledge in relation to consumer-generated negative brand identity in social networks in order to set the basis for the design of a strategic brand management framework that will aid companies in managing their online presence.

Consumer created negative media content is of pivotal importance as consumers look for information online before making a purchase; hence negative eWOM has direct influence in consumer choice and brand value. Hence, further knowledge of brand related negative eWOM content description would provide guidelines in regards to the weaknesses of brand image in order to design marketing communications that will address and correct the deficiencies.

In addition, negative eWOM content can provide a baseline to re-evaluate current corporate values in order to reflect a strong and positive corporate image oriented to Corporate Social Responsibility, especially in social networks, as key influencers of today's consumer society.

Hence, this information will aid theorists and marketers in both the design and implementation of brand management strategies tailored to the new dynamics created by Social Networks; to create and sustain a strong positive online presence, and to guide further research oriented towards the management of consumer negative created media content.

## **1.6. Expected Practical and Theoretical Contribution**

Further understanding of the nature of negative eWOM in regards of a product and/ or brand will allow marketers and academics to work towards solutions towards the implementation of strategies that can lead to the control of consumer created negative media content, or use it for product improvement.

Further, companies have the opportunity to leverage negative eWOM in social media, due to the fact that social networks create virtual spaces where consumers express their opinion, companies can use this information to reach solutions for consumer dissatisfaction. Consumer created negative eWOM related to a product or brand content knowledge will aid us to gain deeper understanding of the changes in consumer attitudes and perceptions. In addition, further understanding in regards to consumer culture trends could be achieved by following eWOM contents. Consequently, companies can use strategic brand management techniques in marketing communications and product development in order to change negative consumer experiences and evaluations into positive perceptions and ultimately, positive Word of Mouth in today's fast developing digital market (Kucuk, 2010). Further, the information obtained in this study could be leveraged by companies to influence eWOM, tame negative eWOM and ultimately, to increase or reinforce Customer Based Brand Equity.

From the theoretical point of view, further understanding of the content of consumer created negative eWOM related to brands and products in Social networking sites could lead to the design of adequate techniques tailored to its particular nature (Casteleyn, 2009).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the following literature review, well-established theory and models have been used to gain in-depth understanding of the research area at hand. The literary review will allow us to visualize the relationship between existent theory and the aim of this research through the review of academic textbooks and journal articles. Further, due to the currently evolving nature of the subject of study, we will include professional literature when is considered necessary in order to reach a holistic understanding of the nature of our research.

Through the review of relevant literature, we aim to generate a theoretical framework through the description of the main fields relevant to our analysis and setting in order to follow a fundamental, systematic, and meaningful approach towards the main purpose and research problem.

In the text below, a set of pivotal concepts that compose the theoretical framework used in this case study is presented followed by the main theories reviewed in order to aid the identification of theoretical and practical problems identified after extensive research. We would like to note that the set of theories is not exhaustive. Hence, the literature review includes the conceptual framework that we identified as pivotal and will serve as foundation for analysis and data interpretation of the case study.

## **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

The brand is the ultimate personality, which discards atypical, dissonant elements in disagreement with its personality. A brand provides consumers' a sense of stability and consistency. Along those lines, a brand is less flexible than its product categories. Because once the personality image of the brand is created in the minds of consumers, is very difficult to change. Thus, therein lays the importance of understanding consumers' rejection of products and brands (Kapferer, 2008).

Along the same lines, the complexity of consumer behaviour in regards to choice comes to our attention when we see it under the light of consumer behaviour motivations. Consumers' motivations are frequently originated in underlying aspirational values. Further, consumers are not usually willing to communicate these underlying desires or often are not aware that their product evaluation behaviour is an extension of whom they are and who they want to be. (Solomon et al., 2006).

Further, to the extent that Customer Based Brand Equity entails strong, positive, and distinctive brand associations from the consumers' side (Keller, 1993), it is of interest to research negative brand extension product evaluations. Specifically, in order to gain further understanding of the nature of brand related consumer created negative content and its relation to costumer based brand equity. In addition, by doing so, we will be able to identify the weaknesses in brand image along with the possible motives of negative brand equity.

Moreover, the use of the expanded Customer based brand equity (CBBE) model in the analysis of product related negative eWOM will allow us to reach further understanding of the nature and relationship of this phenomenon in relation to the brand building blocks, which in turn will lead us to link it to the specific motive of negative association to the product and Corporate Brand.

The next section will highlight the importance of Corporate Brand Equity and its relationship with Customer Brand Equity in order to set a foundational understanding of the logic behind the use of the Customer Based Brand Equity Model as Brand Equity monitoring/ tracking framework.

### **2.1.1. Corporate Brand Equity**

The Corporate Brand is defined by its core values. The corporate brand conveys internal and external views related to the organization. Along the same lines, the Corporate Brand can be defined as a consumer overall perception of intangible characteristics of an organization, involving the corporate identity as a whole, which can include social responsibility, employee relations and trust towards the corporation. Moreover, the corporate brand's objective is to be appealing to different audiences, including stakeholders and customers. Further, corporate branding integrates the corporation's common product attributes and benefits, consumer relationships, social values and corporate trust (Keller, 1998, in Hassan, 2011).

Thus it follows, Corporate Brand Equity is defined as “differential response by consumers, customers, employees, other firms, or any relevant constituency to the words, actions, communications, products or services provided by an identified brand entity” (Keller, 2000). Moreover, Corporate Brand Equity includes all intangible elements of the corporate brand that add (or subtract) value to the brand identity, which include, corporate brand reputation, corporate image, corporate associations and relationships (Motion et al., 2003). Moreover, positive Corporate Brand Equity is achieved when its stakeholders have strong, favourable, and unique memory associations (Keller, 2000).

On the other hand, consumers give meaning to their consumption by purchasing brands that agree with the image they want to project, hence, consumers adopt brands that provide intangible added values that are aligned with their beliefs (Kapferer, 2008). Further, a strong corporate brand creates a powerful tale deeply embedded in consumers' culture, which can turn ordinary consumption into a quasi-religious activity (Palazzo & Kunal, 2007). Hence, the consumers' brand perceived image is the brand source of demand and lasting attractiveness. The brand's image of superior quality represents an added value that justifies its premium price (Kapferer, 2008). In addition, the importance of sustaining brand reputation and image lay in the financial value derived by the price premium consumers pay for it (Keller, 2008).

Further, the brand added value lays in being a choice cue, a guide that reduces perceived risk by the buyer. Perceived risks of purchasing a product can be monetary, functional, physical, social, or psychological. If the brand ceases to reduce the risk perception, the brand does not provide added benefits to consumers and hence, it becomes only a name on a product (Kapferer, 2008; Solomon, et. al, 2006). Therefore, Corporate Brand Equity value is determined by stakeholders' memory associations towards the corporate brand's image (Keller, 2008).

On the other hand, organizations influence brand meaning in the process of attempting to control a brand by expressing common values, supporting ideas, positions, habits, and norms. All these factors converge to give a corporate culture its character (Urde, 2003). Further, the consumer's perception of corporate brand core values forms the consumer's view of the brand as an identity. Therefore, the corporate brand is the result of the combination of meaning and values relating to different identities as a whole, including the identity of the organization, the identity expressing the corporate brand, and the identity as perceived by consumers and other stakeholders (Urde, 1997; 2003).

Thus, brand management ought to be market and identity oriented in order to be appealing to a large-scale audience. In addition, the core values, which comprise brand identity, are to be tailored to this audience. Consequently, the management of brand image through corporate communications and behaviour should have the objective to make the company the consumers' first choice (Kapferer, 2008).

As a result, it is fundamental to gain an understanding of Customer Based Brand Equity in order to track the results of Corporate Branding efforts in today's brand reality, where consumers are empowered to create brand meanings in media content through the practice of eWOM.



### **2.1.2. Customer Based Brand Equity & Brand Extensions**

The definition of the brand has evolved through time from an elemental depiction as a logo (AMA, 2011; Keller, 2008) to a more holistic view which includes the brand's purpose; a name with influence on buyers (Kapferer, 2008). Along the same lines, brand is defined as a combination of mental associations held by the consumer, with the goal to increase the value perception of a product or service. Moreover, a brand has gained positive Customer based brand equity, when consumers' have mental associations of unique (exclusivity), strong (saliency) and positive (desirable) nature (Keller, 1998; Kapferer, 2008). A well-managed brand can transform a product by providing a common set of added values, both tangible and intangible. This holistic conception of branding leads to extensions into different categories of products (Kapferer, 2008).

Keller and Aaker (1992) point out that product extension evaluations depend on what kind of information comes to mind about the corporate brand in the extension context, whether this information is seen as suggestive of the type of product or service that the brand extension would be, and whether this information is viewed as good or bad in the extension context in comparison with competitors. When overall similarity is high, consumers are more likely to base their extension evaluations on their attitude toward the corporate brand (Boush & Loken 1991; Boush et al., 1987; Herr, Farquhar & Fazio, 1990). Overall similarity judgments could be made in different ways (Loken & Ward, 1990), though researchers typically assume that they are a function of salient shared associations between the core brand and the extension product category. These similarity judgments could be based on product-related attributes, as well as non-product-related attributes such as user type or usage situation (Bridges, 1990; Park, Milberg & Lawson 1991 in Keller, 1993).

Companies understand that the financial value of positive Customer Based Brand Equity is the fact that the brand adds value to a product by providing an image of quality superiority and as a result, justify a premium price. In addition, a strong brand can act as an entry barrier to competitors because it acts as a reference in its category (Kapferer, 2008).

Above all, a successful implementation of brand strategy paves the product way into new markets due to the fact that leverages upon pre-existent brand awareness. In theory, a successful brand can enter other markets when it is well known, is a symbol of quality, and offers a certain promise that is valued by the market. Hence, positive Customer Based Brand Equity can result in

royalties and important leverage effects from the price premium, increment in attraction, loyalty, and margin (Keller, 2008; Kapferer, 2008).

A brand has reached positive Customer based brand equity (CBBE) when consumers react with positive mind associations towards it. As a result, a brand with positive consumer-based brand equity might result in a series of benefits such as:

1. Be perceived differently and produce different interpretations of product performance.
2. Enjoy greater loyalty and be less vulnerable to competitive marketing actions. 468
3. Command larger margins and have more inelastic responses to price increases and elastic
4. Responses to price decreases.
5. Receive greater trade co-operation and support.
6. Increase marketing communication effectiveness.
7. Yield licensing opportunities.
8. Support brand extensions.

On the other hand, a brand has negative customer based brand equity when consumers have negative reactions towards a particular brand (Keller, 2008). Hence, not all consumers react favourably towards brands, and as a result, marketers face the challenge to build strong brands while ensuring that consumers have positive experiences with products and services. In addition, marketing campaigns objectives include building the right brand image on consumer's minds.

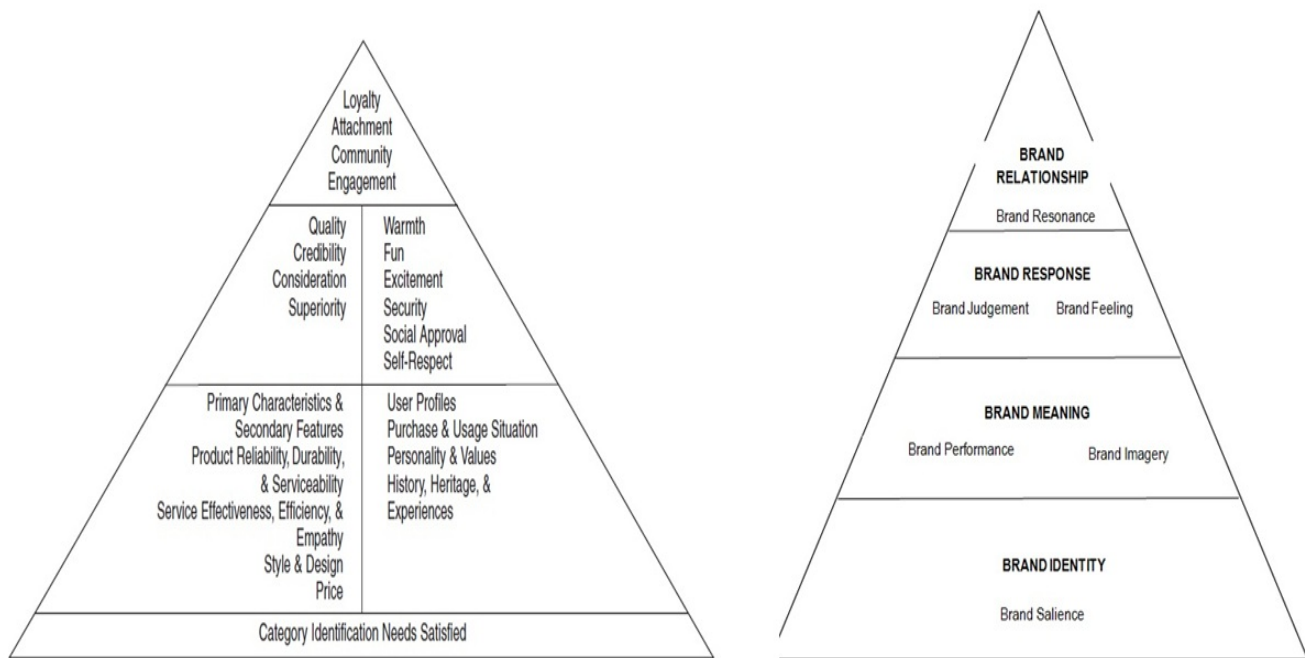
The brand's objective is to evoke on consumers desired thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions and opinions as a result of marketing campaigns and prior experiences. Next, we will introduce the Model of choice for this study, the Customer Based Brand Equity Model by Keller (2008)

### **2.1.3. Customer Based Brand Equity Model (CBBE)**

Keller's Customer Based Brand Equity model assumes that the value of a brand is based on consumers brand knowledge as sources of brand equity (Keller, 2008). Consequently, the customer based brand equity (CBBE) model has been chosen as a result of the literary review research stage of this study because it offers a holistic measurement of brand objectives and it serves our research aim of analyzing instances of brand product related negative eWOM. Specifically, because we believe that the CBBE sub dimensions and building blocks are ideally designed to aid us in the analysis that will link negative eWOM to CBBE. Moreover, the CBBE focus on the connection between consumers and the brand value makes it an ideal holistic model. In addition, the CBBE is particularly appropriate to use on the evaluation of consumer brand/product related negative eWOM, specifically because the CBBE takes into consideration the fact that consumer's opinions are based on their expectations, which in turn, are based on prior brand knowledge and experiences (Solomon et al., 2006).

The consumer-based brand equity model (CBBE) presented below provides a holistic and detailed view of brand building and equity. Moreover, the CBBE model conveys the dimensions and measures of well-known industry models, including one of the most successful industry models, Young and Rubicam's Brand Asset Valuator (BAV) (Keller, 2008). In addition, the CBBE model provides both rational and emotional considerations to brand building, which makes it particularly adequate as the tool to analyze consumer created product related negative eWOM.

Therefore, the CBBE model can aid organizations reaching their goal of building a strong brand. The CBBE model provides a guideline for brand managers to achieve the right brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses, and brand attachment. The CBBE model includes the consumer perspective in the six brand building blocks. Each Step of the Brand Building Process, Brand Building Block, and Brand Building Block Sub-Dimension builds into each other progressively and make the Customer Based Brand Equity pyramid (Keller, 2008)



**Model: Customer Based Brand Equity Pyramid (Keller, 2008; MSI).**

This study focuses on a detailed study set of objectives based on the Customer based brand equity pyramid. Monitoring of each stage of branding objectives allows building strong brand equity. All levels involve the accomplishment of certain objectives with consumers, including current and potential consumers.

The first Brand Building Block is Brand Salience, which refers to consumers brand awareness and relates to consumers needs. The next level objective lays into establishing brand meaning in consumers' minds, specifically, connecting tangible and intangible brand associations. The third level is to provoke reaction or consumer responses to brand identity and brand meaning. The final level involves brand response, which entails creating passionate, active loyal relationships between consumers and the brand.

Overall examination of Customer based brand equity pyramid shows that the achievement of brand equity from consumers' perspective highly depends on consumers' needs and wants. Needs and wants entice consumers to purchase brands and to evaluate of what they learned, felt, seen and heard (Keller, 2008). Hence, the Customer based brand equity pyramid proposes a holistic understanding of the consumers' perception of brand equity. Further, studies showed that

brand awareness or brand identity is reached when consumers recognize the brand, or to the extent that consumers link brand elements to the function of the product.

Detailed examination of the brand equity process allowed us to understand chronology of the factors that establish the successful harmonization of a strong brand (Keller, 2008). The CBBE pyramid above shows the four steps to build Brand Equity and each level is of significant importance for brand identity in terms of consumer perspective and helps the consumers understand a new product extension under the brand name. Thus, the CBBE-pyramid further supports the idea of logical construction of each brand-building step in order to ensure consumer's needs are being met through the extended new product and as a result positive brand equity is reached at the parent brand level (Keller, 2008).

In the following section, we will describe the four steps for building a strong brand in terms of Kellers' CBBE model Brand Building Steps: brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses, and brand relationships, which build into each other in a sequential order starting with brand identity.

**First Step of Brand Building - Brand Identity:** Often, the brand-building process fails, in particular, when attempting to establish a new brand identity in a relatively short period of time (Keller, 2001). Moreover, in order to achieve a positive brand identity, it is necessary to implement a focused marketing program that takes into consideration the various dimensions and characteristics of the brand (Keller, 2001). Further, Brand Salience is a prerequisite of achieving the brand objective of a positive brand identity; hence, we expand on brand salience in the text that follows.

*Brand Building Block - Brand Salience;* Brand Salience refers to consumers' awareness of the brand which is actually the ability of the consumers to recall and recognize a brand (Keller, 2008). Kapferer (2006) also defines *Brand Salience* as a key brand asset. Achieving brand salience entails that the brand is evoked spontaneously in consumers' minds during the buying decision process. It seems possible that these results can identify the brand salience's important functions, as a basis for the formation of brand image. Brand salience gives a meaning to a brand, a potential of maximizing the probable consumption opportunities and can influence the purchase choices of the consumers. Further, Keller (2008) includes the salience brand building

block as a foundation of the Customer based brand equity Pyramid. Further, Brand Salience involves two sub dimensions: (1) Category identification and (2) Needs satisfied. In the first stage of Category Based Brand Equity, the objective of the brand is to create deep, broad brand awareness on the consumer.

Many marketers have argued brand salience as a driving to brand development. Keller (2008) considers the brand salience as it is not enough to build brand equity. Hence, the author chronologically highlights the second brand building step, brand meaning and its two brand building blocks, imagery and performance, which play a crucial role in brand equity.

**Second Step of Brand Building- Brand Meaning:** Second main step of Keller's (2008) Customer based brand equity pyramid is brand meaning. According to Keller (2001), brand salience is important in brand equity but it is considered not sufficient of strong brand equity, but Brand Meaning is the objective in the brand building process that entails achieving a brand image. Brand Image is characterized by having meaning in the minds of consumers. Specifically, Keller highlights that brand meaning can broadly be distinguished in terms of functional performance related consideration and second imagery related consideration. Thus, brand meaning existent in consumers' minds is related to performance and imagery, which is achieved through consumers own experiences or contact with the brand or indirectly through advertisement, for example: word-of-mouth.

*Brand Building Blocks- Brand Imagery;* Brand meaning also involves brand imagery, which is related to extrinsic properties of brand. Further, brand imagery is an intangible aspect of the brand and its underlying concept involves psychological and social needs (Keller, 2008). Kapferer's (2008) states that brand imagery is achieved when perception has moved from objects to benefits and from tangible to intangible values. It may be the case therefore that these variations are based under the consumers' evaluations and experiences. Keller (2008) argues that brand imagery can be formed under two big categories, directly and indirectly. Directly founded brand imagery can be achieved just contacting with product and brand second indirectly, achieved from external sources such as: word of mouth, brand advertising, and other sources. Keller (2008) lists the main intangibles of indirect formation of brand imagery as follows: it is user profiles, it is purchase and usage situations, it is personality and values. User profiles include consumer's history, heritage, and experiences.

*Brand Building Blocks- Brand Performance;* The next main type of brand meaning is Brand performance, which is related to the intrinsic properties of the brand. According to Keller (2008), a product represents tangible attributes, which is ensuring the results of satisfaction that primarily affects the brand equity and its perception, positive or negative.

Consumers often believe that brand negative or positive reaction, builds up through primary ingredients of the product (Keller, 2008). This view is also supported by Kapferer (2006:312) who argues that: “many extensions fail simply because they are inferior to existing products and are more expensive”.

Brand Performance is related to satisfying the consumers’ needs with the products and services’ functional features including the (1) primary characteristics (2) durability and serviceability, (3) service effectiveness, (4) efficiency and empathy, (5) style and design, (6) price.

**Step of Brand Building - Brand Response:** The nature of brand responses is highly related to the nature of brand relationship for their brands. Keller (2008) in Customer based brand equity pyramid states that consumer’s favourable or unfavourable brand responses are based on two major factors: Brand Judgement and Brand Feeling (Keller, 2008).

*Brand Building Blocks- Brand Judgement;* According to Keller (2008), the term “Brand Judgement” associated with consumers’ individual opinions and evaluations. Further, author under the personal opinion and evaluation are underlying a collection of all different performance and imagery associations of brand. There is, therefore, a definitely clear that consumers make all types of judgements with respect to a brand, and Customer based brand equity pyramid highlights four types of brand judgements are particularly important: (1) Brand quality, (2) Brand credibility, (3) Brand consideration, (4) Brand superiority.

*Brand Building Block- Brand Feeling;* The term “brand feeling” is used by Keller (2001) to refer to consumers’ reaction and responses in taking account brand value assets. Kapferer (2008) suggests that brand feeling is reached when a brand evolves in the consumer’s minds from a feeling of existence or brand awareness and recognition to a feeling of significance in regards to the personality of consumers and finally result in emotional attachment. Further, consumers’ responses of feeling in regards to a brand are dependent of the values evoked by the marketing program for the brand. Brand feeling in consumers is also influenced by the social environment certain brand is identified with (Keller, 2001). Brand Feelings involve consumers’ reactions;

these can be mild or intense, positive or negative depending of the nature and scope of the brand. Keller (2003) lists the main brand building feelings as follows: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval, self-respect. Hence, the Brand Feeling block of the CBBE is more than just a personal opinion about a brand. Brand Feeling is strongly associated with the consumers' emotional responses and reactions with respect to the brand.

**Step of Brand Building - Brand Relationship:** The final and ultimate objective of Customer based brand equity pyramid is Brand relationship. Brand relationship entails strong consumers' feelings of affinity with the brand. Brand relationship, from consumers' perspective, encourages consumers' attitudinal attachment and sense of community in day-to-day consumer's behaviour towards the brand. Moreover, day-to-day consumers' loyalty behaviour, allows deepening the consumer-brand relationship, and builds an emotional connection with the brand (Kapferer, 2006).

*Brand Building Block- Brand Resonance:* According to Keller (2001), brand resonance involves consumer's behaviour or feelings towards brands. More specifically, author says that impact of psychological bond that consumer have with the brand which is result of: repeat purchase, loyal consumers and so on. A perception of a set of values can stimulate emotional resonance (Kapferer, 2006). In fact, brand resonance is the most valuable step in the Customer based brand equity model, and brand resonance can be achieved upon reaching the three first steps on brand building, Identity, Meaning, and Relationships. Once achieved, brand resonance consumers display a high degree of loyalty and strong attachment. It also involves consumers sharing their experiences with others. In other words, brand resonance entails a holistic and well-balanced relationship between consumers and the brand (Keller, 2001).

Next, we will explain the relationship between the Customer based brand equity model by Keller (2008) and consumer Behaviour, consumer Choice and consumer Culture theories, which will allow us to gain further understanding of the nature of brand and product related consumer created negative eWOM.



#### **2.1.4. Factors Influencing consumers Evaluations of Products & Brands**

In the contextual term, *Consumer Evaluation* is defined as a consumer mental process where core parent brand associations transfer to the product (Glynn et al., 1998). Therefore, in order to recognize the reason of the negative evaluation of a product, it is of value to understand consumer perception towards the parent brand (Barwise, 1993). Further, on the other hand, the perception towards a product experience can also affect the brand image (Solomon et.al, 2006). Hence, it is of interest to understand the consumer behaviour factors affecting consumer evaluations of products and brands. Specifically, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of consumer negative eWOM by expanding our understanding of the sub dimensions of the Customer based brand equity model (Keller, 2008) with consumer Behaviour Theory related to Choice. Further, in the text below, we described the main consumer Behaviour theories what we have found relevant to expand the Customer based brand equity model by Keller (2008).

##### **A. Consumer Behaviour & Customer Based Brand Equity**

Consumer behaviour shows the process of consumers' buying process and the way they use the products they buy (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2008) in order to satisfy their needs and desires (Solomon et al., 2006). Moreover, understanding the behaviour of consumers is important in the fields of reducing the uncertainty of marketing managers (Lamb et al., 2008) for their marketing mix strategies. Further, it is of our interest to understand the consumer behaviour in order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of consumer negative eWOM by expanding our understanding of the sub dimensions of the CBBE model (Keller, 2008) with consumer Behaviour Theory related to Choice.

Every single day, we as a consumers consume buy products in order to satisfy our needs, wants and desires (Khan, 2007). Moreover, when consumers make buying choices in their daily lives in regards to what and how they buy, where and when they buy and even the quantity they buy, is based on factors. Further, factors influencing consumer's purchasing behaviour can be external or internal. External factors include cultural, psychological, personal, and social factors. Internal factors involve needs and desires, life-styles, occupations, cultural backgrounds, ages and family cycles, attitudes, beliefs and values, social class, status. These factors influence the consumers'

preferences regarding to a product or a brand (Armstrong et al., 2009). Moreover, marketers cannot control most of these factors but they need to take into account all of them in order to develop meaningful marketing mix strategies (Armstrong et al., 2009).

In the text below, we will discuss the factors affecting consumer behaviour in relation to Customer Based Brand Equity.

*Cultural Factors* affect consumer behaviour and consumer evaluations about a product or a brand. Further, cultural differences impact the evaluations of consumers regarding to brand extensions (Monga & John, 2007). With respect to cultural factors, Armstrong et al., (2009) points out that social class is classified in divisions where members have similar values, interests, and behaviours. Therefore, it could be inferred that people in the same social class can see a particular brand or a product from a similar point of view. Further, social class is an important factor affecting consumers' buying decision process. In addition, the desire to reach a higher social class by purchasing a product can also be a factor affecting the purchasing decision making process. Moreover, certain products have become status symbols in some groups; these products are purchased with the objective to categorize their owners' social class (Solomon et al., 2006).

Moreover, a considerable amount of literature has been published on *psychological factors*; its immediate goal is to understand behaviour and mental processes. Armstrong et al. (2009) identified the distinction of four major psychological characteristics influencing consumer behaviour as motivation, perception, learning and beliefs & attitudes.

A strong relationship between motivation and consumer behaviour has been discussed frequently in literature (Nijssen, Uijl & Bucklin, 1995; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998 in Czellar, 2003). On the other hand, consumers needs can range from social status, spiritual fulfilment, hunger to even thirst of love, which Maslow describes in his model of hierarchy of biogenic and psychogenic needs. Moreover, Solomon et al. (2006) points out the important point that people feel needs and wants at the psychological level. However, desire is of sociogenic nature and is a result of the individual's concept of society.

Antonides & Fred van Raaij, (1998) state that consumers' awareness and understanding process are dependent of perception. Solomon et al., (2006) defines the process of selecting the stimuli, organizing it, and then interpreting with our sensory receptors as eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and

fingers which consumers perceive the reality in their own experiences. Before buying a product, a consumer cannot perceive all these five senses. For instance; the product may be a phone, then a consumer can perceive that product by just seeing and touching it. When touching a product, perception of the consumers can also link to the product's 'feel' whether it is soft, rough, or tough. This feeling can also influence the 'brand feeling' which is the consumers' reactions regarding to the brand (Keller; MSI, 2001).

Moreover, the consumer perceptual selection has three stages, exposure, attention, and interpretation. Exposure can be selective when the degree to which consumers accept exposure can be affected by their past experiences. Further, the attention of consumers can be gained by using massive marketing efforts, such as advertising stimuli on the product itself, on TV or on online places (Solomon et al., 2006). Consumers start to become familiar with the 'brand identity' by knowing the brand's name, recalling, and recognizing it with these massive marketing attempts (Keller; MSI, 2001).

In addition, when the consumers see a product, they give meaning to it. The meaning each consumer gives to a product depends of different motivation forces (Armstrong et al., 2009). In fact, a brand name can influence the way consumers perceive the product. Further, consumer based 'brand meaning' exist when consumers' experience the brand (performance) or the descriptive image of the brand (imagery) in advertising or by some other sources such as word of mouth (Keller; MSI, 2001).

Further, *Personal factors* can also influence consumer behaviour, thee factors can include age and life cycle stage. For instance, Salthouse, (1991) findings indicate that as age is increases, affect becomes more important than knowledge in consumers' decision-making process (Czellar, 2003). Therefore, the consumer process evaluation process is more oriented towards affective bases rather than on cognitive ones (Salthouse, 1991 in Czellar, 2003).

Research finds that in the brand extension evaluation process, social symbolic meaning of brands such as prestige, status, and personality are perceived with more sensitivity by people who have high personality and self-concept than by people with low personality and self-concept (DeBono, 1987; Hogg et al., 2000 in Czellar, 2003). Thus, these levels of self-concept may affect the evaluations about any products in a negative or in a positive way. Moreover, people who have different occupations may evaluate and choose a product or a brand in a different way. Further,

people can be from the same subculture, social class, and occupation but they might have different life-styles (Armstrong et al., 2009). On the other hand, the lifestyle concept can help marketers understand consumers' values and their role on buying behaviour. In addition, marketers can use the lifestyle concept in marketing strategies (Armstrong et al., 2009). Further, the economic situations of a person can also affect the consumers' buying behaviour. For instance, when one consumer cannot afford to buy a particular product, the product evaluations of that person can change negatively. Hence, personal factors affect the consumers' opinions about a brand or a product (Armstrong et al., 2009), and as a result, different consumers can have different perceptions of the meaning of a brand (Keller; MSI, 2001).

Finally, *Social Factors* have a crucial effect on consumers' purchasing decisions behaviour. Social factors include, social small groups, family, social roles and status, group of reference, opinion leadership, friends, family, celebrities, and teammates (Solomon et al., 2006).

Some groups or individuals have strong influence on consumption decisions. Influence can be normative; the affect of our parents' values on the attitudes about marriage to selecting a university to go; comparative influence, which occurs when there are two reference groups to compare and affect the decisions about the brands or activities (Solomon et al., 2006). In addition, Solomon et al., (2006) defines reference groups as serving as a reference or comparison in a direct or indirect way in terms of an individual's behaviour or attitude which can be small and informal as group of friends with a powerful effect on consumers as individuals or can be large and formal organization, such as officers which are more helpful for marketers because of their types of more identifiable and accessible rather than informal ones, thus they have high comparative influence on consumers. The other types of reference groups are aspirational reference groups. Aspirational reference groups include the known and admired figures, such as well-known performers or business people, from which consumers can admire their traits or qualities and can desire to have the similar qualities by copying their behaviours, and even their consumption choices, such as their choice of cars, clothing (Solomon et al., 2006). This factor is called the *Referent Power* affecting the consumer behaviour (Solomon et al., 2006).

The reference group can be an identificational reference groups, which involves ordinary people because they give informational social influence on their consumption activities (Solomon et al.,

2006). Further, the reference groups can be positive or negative affecting on consumers' consumption behaviours. For instance, people can avoid and set a distance between themselves and the other people or groups through buying anything that the other groups buy and use which is avoidance groups (Solomon et al., 2006).

In addition, the reference groups can be virtual communities as well where people can share their ideas on online chat rooms, boards and blogs with the people who have never met in order to work together by evaluating the products' quality, performance, and make judgements that have a big influence on a person's product choices (Solomon et al., 2006). Moreover, the reference group can be also brand communities and tribes; a group of people who have similar lifestyle such as car enthusiasts as well, where consumers share the social relationships based on their consumption or interest about a product (Solomon et al., 2006). Consumers can also be affected by the information power, which consists on affecting the opinions of others. Further, this power can be legitimate by the virtue of social agreements or the power can occur with the ideas of expert professional or journalists, which in turn, can affect consumption choices (Solomon et al., 2006). In addition, instances of an individual or a group of people willing to affect others by providing positive support, is defined as *Reward power* (Solomon et al., 2006). Further, the brand can also influence consumers' feelings to the extent that consumers are willing to look similar, favourably on their behaviour or appearance. This relationship is described in the Feeling brand building block of Customer Based Brand Equity (Keller; MSI, 2001).

According to Solomon et al., (2006), the power can also be of coercive type, which aims to influence the consumers' buying behaviour by marketing efforts such as annoying calls. By making use of reference group, marketers can control their marketing strategies through following their buying behaviours (Solomon et al., 2006).

Further, the importance of social roles and status, which represent an individual's position in a group, affect consumers' consumption choices. In addition, some consumers are affected by the desire to *buy up* to a higher social class by purchasing products considered status symbols by in order to be identified by their consumption preferences (Solomon et al., 2006).

## **B. Consumer Culture Theory**

This section will refer to some important consumer culture theory researchers' opinions slightly considering this concept's importance in order to understand the consumers' perceptions about a product or a brand.

According to Belk (2004) in a consumer culture, people see the consumption as a desirable activity in order to satisfy their different types of needs and desires such as competing for a status. Moreover, Rassuli & Hollander (1986) stated that the consumers make evaluations about others and also themselves according to the consuming lifestyles they have. Moreover, consumer culture theory is assumes that people have a desire to gain status with recognition and prestige (Bourdieu, 1984; in Bertilsson, 2009; Corrigan, 1997). In addition, authors also pinpoint the importance of symbolic capital, economic, social, and cultural capital. In addition, according to Bourdieu (1986 in Corrigan, 1997), cultural capital flows from an individual's family background, the individual's education to his/her competences as speaking, behaving and being well-oriented in a given culture and the society as well.

## **2.2. eWOM, Social Media & consumer Brand Content Creation Power**

Nowadays, brand meaning and as a result, brand image, has ceased to be controlled by managers, and now is co-created as a result of consumers' ongoing interactions (Cova & Cova 2002; Fournier 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001 in Thompson et al., 2006). The effect of consumer power has been intensified with the exponential growth of consumers' involvement on social networks in today's digital market. Moreover, nowadays, consumers are empowered in the virtual world due to the fact that the internet has enable them to create corporate brand meanings through social media, blogs, forums, and websites. The following text describes some of the risks created by the abovementioned dynamics in relation to the Brand.

### **2.2.1. Social Networks**

Before the emergence of social networks, consumer would limit themselves to search information online.

After the massive adoption of social networks, consumers found themselves in a completely new social world, a world where they are empowered and anything is possible: the virtual world of social networks. The virtual world of social networks can be described as what Bourdieu (1991) calls the Social Space. Social networks confer power to their possessors, the consumers, under the sets of attributes active in it. The social network is constructed by this set of attributes, which in turn, embodies the social network principles (Bourdieu, 1991). Moreover, the exponential growth of consumers' adoption of virtual social networks, can be explained by the fact that the consumer feels empowered and free to be who they want to be and to communicate their opinions, desires and evaluations. Hence, consumers have found on social networks a new social space with massive reach, where they can make use of eWOM communications as a medium of power, through which they pursue their own interests and display their desired selves (Bourdieu, 1991).

As a result, nowadays, consumers use social networks to create, evaluate, and distribute information in collaboration with other consumers (Lerman, 2007).

Social networks enable to express themselves in new ways due to their inherent characteristics. In these sites, consumers can create or contribute with content in a various types of media.

Further, consumers can annotate content with tags. Moreover, consumers can evaluate content in an active manner by inputting their opinion or passively view it. In addition, consumers can create social networks with other users with similar interests or friendship relationships (Lerman, 2007).

Social networking is changing traditionally known sources of influence in consumer behaviour. In fact, the social networking phenomenon provides consumers with easily accessible information about their correspondent reference groups in a forthright manner through consumer-to-consumer communications. Moreover, some social networking sites store consumers' information in a quasi-permanent manner and make it publicly accessible to anyone on the web (Hartzel et al., 2011).

Moreover, nowadays, consumers use social networking sites to communicate their personalities. In addition, consumers build their social network profiles as a representation of how they want to be perceived as by others (Casteleyn, 2009). Consumers are marketing themselves through social networks, and by doing so, they are showing their future intentions (Beer, 2008 in Casteleyn, 2009). Consumers use social networks to show what they consider a desirable personality along with opinions, purchases, and product evaluations. Further, for instance the mechanics of the social network Facebook allow user actions to be displayed in their connections profiles so that they can see it at sign in (Casteleyn, 2009). As a result, consumers are playing a role on Facebook, the role of their desired image, which can involve a display of their choice or rejection of products, brands, music, language, etc. Consequently, consumers can become product endorsers, or the worst enemies of a brand with the click of a mouse.

However, the use of traditional marketing push strategies such as mass advertisement can easily be regarded as intrusive and can easily get lost in the sea of net information. Moreover, traditional marketing techniques disregard the intrinsic nature of the social networks, which is in turn its main asset as a marketing outlet. This yet to be leveraged asset lays in the fact that consumers are interconnected and the nature of social networks allows the instant transfer of information amongst each other (Gil-Or, 2010). Moreover, the interest for marketers lays in the brand and product related contents of this information along with patterns of consumer behaviour showcased in social networks.



On the other hand, due to the nature of social networks marketers must choose the right approach to be let inside the network, since the risk of consumers perceiving marketing communications as non-genuine is latent. In general, nowadays consumers have lost trust in corporate communications. Hence, traditional marketing communications have become less effective both in and out social networks due to the fact that nowadays, consumers are exposed to information that influences their level of trust towards advertisement in general (Gil-Or, 2010).

Nowadays, consumers have become sophisticated and sceptical to some degree due to the discovery of deceptive advertising. Social networks play a very important part in the consumer shift of trust. The emergence of eWOM in combination with social media has changed the view of consumers towards corporate communications due to the fact that modern technologies allow the massive dissemination of information (Gruhl & Liben, 2004). As a result, consumers are able to search for information and achieve a level of expertise in regards to products and brands (Davitz et al., 2007; Adamic & Adar, 2005).

Hence, effective marketing in these settings is a very challenging task, but the possibilities have never been more promising due to the massive scale of social networks as data source and marketing outlet. As a result, the importance reaching an understanding of negative eWOM in Social networks has become essential for both academicians and practitioners due to its potential source to furthering consumer behaviour and broadcasting future and present demand trends.

### **2.2.2. Negative e-WOM**

The focus of this case study is mainly to gain further understanding of negative eWOM mainly due to the fact that research has found that negative product evaluations have a tendency to have a higher impact on consumers purchase intention in comparison to positive evaluations (Weinberger & Dillon, 1980 in Sen & Lerman, 2007). In addition, consumers' credibility of information on social networks is found to be incremented by the fact that consumers are interconnected with friends and acquaintances in these sites. Moreover, these connections increase consumers' perception of trustworthiness of the messages that are transferred especially amongst friends (Gil-Or, 2010). No to mention that consumer created eWOM has higher credibility than any other internet marketer created information (Huabl & Murray, 2006). As a

result, eWOM through social networks has become a source of brand related content with higher credibility than advertisement.

Consequently, it becomes pivotal for both practitioners and academia to gain further understanding of the nature of the negative consumer created brand related content in these sites due to the potential detrimental effect in brand equity and product sales.

Further, the internet works as a mass medium of affinity amongst consumers, since users can communicate to their friends and acquaintances their likes and dislikes, opinions and evaluations in an instant, with just the click of a mouse. Electronic word of mouth or eWOM exponentializes the reach of traditional word of mouth and in some instances can become viral and spread at massive scale (Kapferer, 2008), hence therein lays the importance of describing negative eWOM and its relationship with Customer based brand equity. Companies need to control negative eWOM before it goes viral and causes irreparable damage to brand value.

### **2.2.3. Consumer as Brand co-Creator**

The disproportional growth of online Social Media has caused a fundamental consumer behavioural shift. Nowadays, consumers have power of brand meaning and identity co-creation like never before. For instance, research by McKinsey finds more than 15 million Americans, which equates to 10 % of the US workforce, now post online product reviews on a weekly basis. Not to mention that US consumers now rate online user reviews as the top influencer of their buying decisions (aside from recommendations by friends), which equals to double the influence old-style advertising has in consumers nowadays (McKinsey, 2010).

The issue presented to companies is the loss of power in regards of control of brand image creation due to the fact that, as consumers' connections amongst each other increase, the consumer achieves an incremental degree of brand control, despite companies marketing campaign goals (Hartzel et al., 2011).

Moreover, consumers have adopted crucial active roles in creating brand related media content at the same level as companies and their respective brands through eWOM in Social Media (Hanna et al., 2011). The importance of this phenomenon lays in the fact that word of mouth affects the majority of all purchase decisions, (Brooks 1957; Dichter 1966 in Kozinets et al., 2010a).

Moreover, a major factor influencing positive brand equity and consumer choice is consumer sponsorship (Almquist & Roberts, 2000 in Kozinets, 2002). Hence, positive Word of Mouth becomes a source of Customer based brand equity.

Moreover, eWOM through Social networks empowers consumers to influence brand image and perceptions at a massive scale. (Reynolds, 2006; Urban, 2005 in Jansen et al., 2009) due to the fact that consumers are able to adopt more and more active roles in co-creating brands and marketing content (Hanna et al., 2011).

In fact, technology has empowered consumers to a degree that has resulted in the significant increase in the number of anti-brand content on the internet in the past 5 years; as a result, brand related negative WOM is more visible than never before (Kucuk, 2010). The importance of this phenomenon lays in the negative effects of consumer evaluations related to a brand, which are negatively correlated with brand value (Kucuk, 2010) and ultimately, with the dilution of brand image (Keller & Aaker, 1992).

For companies, the fact that social media has become so prominent that today millions of people engage in it on a daily basis represents both an opportunity and a threat. Social media is easily accessible and reaches the largest audiences in the history of media. However, companies have lost control over information and brand images over consumers. Further, consumers are able to create brand related content including products and services evaluations and share it publicly in networks that can reach the other side of the world in an almost immediately. Moreover, conversations related to brands take place and in the majority of cases, companies do not participate in them (Thoring, 2011).

As a result, the owners of media communication means have turned the power of control and content creation to consumers. As a result, this fundamental change in dynamics results in a necessity of marketing strategy from both theoretical and managerial points of view to change and adapt in order to both leverage the new information available and attempt to control negative eWOM by participating in the conversation with consumers (Thoring, 2011).

## **2.2.4. Potential Negative e-WOM Effects**

### **A. Negative Effects on consumer Choice**

Research shows that consumers consider EWOM as an important source of information for purchasing decisions. Specifically consumers are increasingly looking for eWOM related to product evaluations in order to decrease the perceived risk of purchase in their purchasing decision process (Kozinets, 1999).

The importance of e-WOM lays in how easily can be produced by a consumer. In order to create a product evaluation, the consumer needs only access to the internet and in matter of minutes a brand or product related media content can be created. These opinions would be available presumably with people whom look for such information online. However, now with the emergence of social networks, consumers' reference group information can be accessed at all times, through direct and easily available consumer-to-consumer communication in social networking sites such as Facebook.

For instance, in Facebook, every time one signs in the information of their friends/connections activities are posted in the consumers profile called 'newsfeed'. Hence, often, consumers are exposed to product evaluations from their friends on Facebook. Consequently, as consumers' connections amongst each other increase, their degree of control over the brand is amplified, despite corporate marketing pains to create a desirable brand image (Hartzel et al., 2011). Consequently, nowadays consumers are better informed and as a result, their ability to evaluate brands and products is more sophisticated (Kapferer, 2008).

As a result, the importance of monitoring and managing negative eWOM is evident for both theorists and practitioners. Further understanding of the contents of brand and product related negative eWOM will allow theorists and practitioners to create strategies specifically tailored to address negative eWOM media content, which are now absent in theoretical literature.

Knowledge of the media content of brand related negative eWOM would allow marketers to reach further understanding of the reasons of consumer post-purchase dissatisfaction and brand avoidance. Further, the description of the relationship between Customer based brand equity and the content of brand related negative eWOM will identify areas of weakness related to brand image and as a result will provide guidance to marketing activities tailored to address such

deficiencies in brand equity. In addition, consumer created negative media content is of pivotal importance due to the fact that consumers look for information online before making a purchase, hence negative eWOM has direct influence in the purchasing decision process (Kozinets, 2010a).

A latent risk of negative eWOM is that would spread through social network channels and seed negative Customer based brand equity amongst consumer's networks.

### **B. Negative Customer Based Brand Equity**

A brand has negative Customer based brand equity when consumers have negative reactions towards a particular brand (Keller, 2008). Moreover, the main marketing challenge lays in building a strong brand while evoking the right image on the consumer. The marketing objective is that consumers would have positive experiences with products and services in order to achieve positive Customer based brand equity (Kapferer, 2008). However, there are instances when consumers are not satisfied, or do not feel identified with the brand product. This research analyses instances of negative product and brand associations through the description of the content of negative eWOM. Further, the text below describes an extreme form of negative consumer Brand Equity, anti-branding.

### **C. Anti-branding Online**

Consumer generated online anti-branding is defined as consumer generated negative brand identity creation attempts, which are contrary to marketing generated positive brand meanings and brand identity building efforts (Kucuk, 2010). Anti-brand sites, blogs, and forums are community oriented online spaces oriented to create a negative identity for a targeted brand through the use of critical language and visuals. Furthermore, anti-branding activities often base their claims on socially irresponsible actions at the corporate level. These virtual spaces are a forum to voice brand discontent and can facilitate the organization of anti-branding activities, for instance, brand boycotts (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009).

Consumers are increasingly involved in markets and social media and as a result, are able to voice their opinions at a massive scale. The increased social connectivity provided by the internet has resulted in anti-branding sites increasing their influence. Further, research finds a

disproportionate increase in negative brand identity building efforts showed by the increase in the numbers of consumer generated anti-branding websites, blogs, videos, and social networking sites on the virtual environment.

Empirical research finds that the development of anti-branding activity online is the result of the existence of consumer empowerment as a precondition, and consumer dissatisfaction as the trigger. The internet has led to consumer empowerment on technological and social dimensions. Technological empowerment refers to consumers' power to create media content and virtual spaces to communicate their opinions to target audiences. As a result, consumers have ability to co-create of marketing messages and brand identity at the same level of companies (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Consumers' social empowerment is a result of the internet as an enabler of the construction of a collective social identity through the facilitation and increment of social interaction and organization, specifically through virtual spaces such as social networks and virtual communities. Consequently, the new dynamics created by social media allow socially sensitive, ethical, and expert consumers to launch meaningful anti-consumption campaigns (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009) that present a significant treats to the corporate brand image and value.

Furthermore, research finds that consumer dissatisfaction is the trigger that increases the likelihood of development of anti-branding activity, categorizes consumer dissatisfaction in three types: *transactional dissatisfaction*, *market dissatisfaction*, and *ideological dissatisfaction*. Consumers' *transactional dissatisfaction* is related to the quality of product or service. *Market-level consumer dissatisfaction* refers to disapproval of corporate irresponsible business practices. *Ideological dissatisfaction* refers to a sense of a chronic discontent with the marketplace economic system. Further, empirical research finds that market related speech is the most prevalent in online anti-branding content. In addition, research results show negative correlation between the presence of market speech and brand financial value. Consequently, market speech anti-branding content is particularly damaging to the Corporate Brand since it has a direct impact on the corporate brand value (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Further, anti-branding activities have become more visible than ever with the emergence of eWOM in social media. Hence, therein lays the significance of market speech as anti-branding online content and the urgent need for corporations to address and correct these issues in a prompt strategic manner, especially, given the latent risk to the corporate brand image and value.

Further, research finds that the higher the degree of positive Customer based brand equity, the higher the probability of the consumer getting involved in anti-brand retaliatory activity once the brand loyalty reaches to an end. In other words, anti-brand sites are more likely to target strong brands (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Consequently, consumers that once showed strong attachment to the brand or product can turn into brand enemies when they feel highly dissatisfied in the post purchased stage as a result of their expectations about the product or brand are not met (Solomon et. al, 2006).

Consequently, especially brands with strong positive Customer Based Brand Equity and brands that have become iconic in consumer culture have new obligations towards their communities.

These brands are particularly vulnerable to anti-branding attacks. Hence, since strong brands are recognized as influencing experience, their consumer based has high expectations in regards to the brand's image. As a result, a strong brand needs to be managed in both online and offline environments with a social and culturally sound orientation towards the communities that represents (Kay, 2006).

Companies are suggested to implement, as an anti-branding attack defence, a socially responsible approach. Both society and the corporate brand identity could be benefit from being connected to strong corporate responsibility values. Further, it is crucial for Corporations to address the brand image damage risk caused by anti-branding attacks by ensuring to emphasize their corporate responsibility practices in marketing communications. Nowadays, brand management must take a defensive stance to confront these risks. Integrating Corporate Social Responsibility to brand image in order to take credibility away from anti-branding movements is recommended. However, before Corporate Social Responsibility is included as part of the brand building efforts, the corporation must ensure that its supply chain is aligned to those values (Smith et al., 2010). Otherwise, the company risks to be perceived as inauthentic, and it can backfire and cause an increase of consumer anti-branding activity, and a significant damage to the corporate brand value.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The case study will analyse instances of consumer created negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone on the page ‘We hate Iphone !!’ of social network Facebook. The study will follow a Case Study Design and Grounded Theory methods of analysis under a complete observer approach.

#### **3.2. Scientific Approach**

##### **3.2.1. Qualitative Research Method – Exploratory**

The case study will follow qualitative exploratory methods in order to take into consideration the fact that we are looking to unveil the nature of product related consumer created negative eWOM content and its possible relation to parent brand’s Customer based brand equity. Further, due to the current nature of the eWOM phenomenon, we have chosen to conduct the research with neither a hypothesis to test nor a predetermined set of outcomes (Yin, 1984).

We have studied main theories related to the subject of consumer product evaluation in order to delimit boundaries and set the basis for grounded theory building. Through the review of literature, we gained an understanding of the nature of consumer behaviour in regards to product evaluation and Customer based brand equity. Further, we have reached the conclusion that, given the fact that the subject of study involves the views of individual consumers, it was necessary to choose a research strategy that takes into consideration the individual’s interpretation of reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

As a result, we will follow Qualitative Methods of research, which, according to Kapferer (2008), are indeed necessary in order to uncover the possible causes behind negative evaluations of a product and its implications as a Brand Extension.

Through a qualitative approach we expect to be able to unveil the nature of consumer created negative eWOM and its relationship with Customer based brand equity. Moreover, by researching consumers’ negative eWOM on the social media Facebook, we aim to gain deeper understanding of objective and subjective attributes that consumers value the most in regards to the product. (Kapferer, 2008) Specifically by unveiling the nature of the contents of negative



eWOM, essential information for the implementation of brand strategy and marketing campaigns implementation could be obtained.

After careful consideration and taking into consideration our understanding of Customer based brand equity, eWOM, consumer behaviour in regards to product evaluation and social media, we reached the conclusion that survey techniques associated with quantitative research methods would not be appropriate for this research, specifically, due to the subjective nature of consumer's behaviour. In fact, we believe that the research value of this study lays in the fact that the use of qualitative techniques will allow us to reach a holistic understanding of the contents of product and brand related negative eWOM. Quantitative techniques although appropriate for other type of studies wouldn't allow us to reach the degree of abstraction needed in order to understand the developing phenomenon of negative eWOM in relation to consumer power of brand co-creation in social network settings.

Moreover, exploratory techniques associated with a qualitative approach are particularly appropriate for this case study due to the fact that consumers are not usually willing to communicate or are not aware of the underlying factors affecting their behaviour, choice and ultimately, consumption (Solomon et al., 2006). As a result, it would not be reasonable to stipulate a set of questions for consumers to answer, simply, due to the fact that the choice of questions would be based on the researchers' assumptions and as a result, a descriptive approach associated with quantitative methods would restrict the spectrum of consumers' answers.

Further, a descriptive approach cannot establish a causal relationship between variables; hence, it would not be appropriate for the study of consumer behaviour due to the spectrum of dimensions involved as noted in the Literature Review (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Moreover, survey methods are not usually sufficient in the study of consumers' behaviour due to typical issues associated with it, including the problem of meaning due to the fact that consumers might interpret a question in a different manner and as a result the analysis could be biased to certain degree. In addition, due to the spontaneous nature of eWOM, a survey would potentially alter the behaviour of the consumer. Specifically, it would be especially troublesome to unveil the nature of negative eWOM because consumers might fail to recall important aspects of their negative evaluations. Further, when answering questionnaires, consumers often fall into the Social desirability effect, which is a tendency to attempt to get the right answer according to their

perceptions of the survey situation. Further, consumers might feel threatened by certain kind of questions and as a result a failure to answer honestly could occur. Other pitfall of surveys is that consumers' answers could be influenced by the Interviewer physical appearance or personality.

In addition, it is recognized that inconsistency between what a consumer says and what a consumer does might exist (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, due to the fact that the spontaneity of eWOM is an essential aspect of its value as a source of genuine information, survey techniques will be avoided.

Moreover, as mentioned in the Theoretical Problem section of this study and noted by Fournier & Avery (2011), several aspects of traditional brand management appear disconnected with the emergence of Social Media and as such we need to explore this new phenomenon without restrictions in order to reach a holistic understanding of it. Specifically, social media is changing the meaning of branding significantly due to the fact that it provides consumers with the power of co-creating brands today more than ever due to the massive reach of e-WOM. Consequently, it is necessary for academic research to focus on expanding current knowledge in the area of brand strategy in the social media context in order to provide practitioners with necessary guidelines to interact with today's consumer and regain a certain degree of control of the brand assets in the new online Social Media environment (MSI, 2010).

Thus, due to the changes in the brand environment, research is needed in regards to brand related content analysis of social media in order to unveil the nature of consumer negative evaluations in regards to a product in the social media environment, the phenomenon also known as negative eWOM. In addition, judging by our literary research of academic textbooks and journals, the specific focus of our research, seems to be fairly new in the literature. Hence, a quantitative strategy would not be feasible to employ because there is little prior literature from which to draw leads.

In addition, qualitative exploratory research is related with an exploratory stance and the generation rather than the testing of theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007), which we deem to be the correct approach in order to gain deeper understanding of this subject. Consequently, we will take an exploratory stance, associated with the generation of theory that we believe will better serve our research needs.

### **3.2.2. Inductive Approach**

The inductive approach will allow us to gain further understanding of the phenomenon under study (Willis, 2007) due to the fact that the theory will be developed from data in order to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin in Easterby et al., 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Further, the aim of this case study is to theorize subsequent to the compilation and analysis of empirical data (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Moreover, in order to find recognizable patterns from the Theoretical Framework in the data analysis stage, an iterative strategy based on a grounded theory approach will be implemented (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

### **3.2.3. Epistemological Position: Interpretivism**

In order to unveil the nature of consumer created negative e-WOM in regards to a product (iPhone), the necessity for an approach that takes into consideration the complexity of human nature is evident. Specifically, due to the subjective nature of consumers' negative eWOM in relation to a product launched as a Brand Extension (Solomon, et al., 2006).

A positivist epistemological position lays into the phenomenalist principle that only knowledge that can be confirmed with our senses can be considered as such (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Therefore, given the subjective nature of consumer behaviour, it wouldn't be appropriate to take a positivist position for this study. Moreover, given the complex and specific nature of negative consumer evaluation of products and the subsequent participation in negative e-WOM, it is necessary to achieve an empathic understanding of human action, which is associated with an interpretive stance (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Further, in order for a social scientist to comprehend the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman & Bell, 2007) an epistemological position along the lines of Weber's definition of social science seems appropriate for this research study. Weber defines social science's purpose as an attempt to interpret social action in order to reach an understanding of its causality and effects (Weber, 1947 in Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Accordingly, the current research study will adopt an interpretivist epistemological position, with the aim to contribute with further understanding of the subject in regards to the nature of brand related consumer created negative content in social media settings. Specifically, the subject of study is negative e-WOM related to an Extension product and its relationship with the parent brand equity.

#### **3.2.4. Ontological Position: Constructionism**

Brand and product meaning is defined by the consumer, since, in theory, the brand should activate mental associations in consumers of a unique (exclusivity), strong (saliency) and positive (desirable) nature. Companies implement launches of products with the aim that consumers would perceive a transfer of the intrinsic equity of the brand to the new product (Kapferer, 2008). In addition, consumers play a crucial active roles in co-creating marketing content with companies and their respective brands through Social Media (Hanna et al., 2011). Consequently, an “objectivism position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman & Bell, 2007:22) would not be appropriate for the research due to the fact that would ignore consumers as creators and evaluators of brands.

On the other hand, a constructivist approach is specifically appropriate for the current case study due to the nature of the phenomenon of interest, today’s powerful consumers and their active role as brand co-creators through social networks. Thus, the case study will take a constructivist stance which considers social phenomena and their meanings as continually being created and re-created by social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2007), in this case consumers as co-creators of brand content online through negative eWOM. Along the same lines, the constructivist approach we follow, acknowledges that our perspectives as researchers of the social world represent our specific version of social reality, and as such, the results of the analysis will reflect our own views. Further, due to the fact that social reality is in constant evolution, knowledge is seen as indeterminate (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As such, the case study acknowledges the evolution of the market along with media and as a result seeks to reveal the nature of consumers’ negative eWOM by analysing it in its natural context, as it is presented in reality while taking a constructionist approach to the phenomenon.

### **3.2.5. Ecological Validity**

A complete observer role will allow us to capture genuine consumer negative eWOM for mainly two reasons. First, due to the fact that consumers present a tendency to freely express their opinion online without the need of the researcher participation (Solomon, 1996). Second, the presence of the researcher's foreign stimulus could potentially alter the behaviour and consequently consumer's evaluations, in the other hand, with unobtrusive observation, the observer has no influence over the situation being observed (Webb et al., 1966 in Bryman & Bell, 2007). This technique, is basically based on the observation of textual content will be unobtrusive in order to avoid the limited ecological validity of the results provided by the unnatural situation involved with answering a survey. Hence, we will adopt a complete observer role and perform text analysis (Thelander, 2011) of public unsolicited consumers' comments posted online with the aim to provide ecologically valid research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Further, through the employment of complete observer role as researchers, we aim of to capture the opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of consumers as expressed in their natural habitat (Cicourel, 1982:15 in Bryman & Bell, 2007), in this case, on social networks. In addition, a complete observer role will allow us to mitigate the Hawthorne Effect (Bryman & Bell, 2007), since we will use observation techniques where, in an unobtrusive manner, analyse unsolicited consumers' public comments posted on Facebook.

### **3.3. Research Design**

We have chosen a case study research design and Grounded Theory analysis methods. The research design describes the framework for the collection and analysis of data of the present study. The choice of research design was made taking into consideration the dimensions of the research process including the understanding of the particular behaviour in its specific social context, its sequential nature as social phenomena and interconnections amongst theory and data (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

#### **3.3.1. Case Study**

The case study research design will allow us to gain understanding of the complex nature of brand related consumer created negative content in social media settings, specifically, negative e-WOM, and to reveal the relationship between negative e-WOM related to a Category Extension product and Parent brand Customer based brand equity (Creswell, 2002 in Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007). Specifically, the case study approach will allow us to reveal the fundamental nature of the phenomenon of consumer created brand related negative eWOM through the analysis of the particularity and complexity of the case at hand within its delimited structure (Stake, 1995). Further, we will base our study on prior research and theory on the subjects of Strategic Brand Management and consumer Behaviour in order to avoid the recreation of theory and to gain further understanding of consumer power of brand co-creation in online environments such as online social networks.

The case study design in conjunction with qualitative methods will allow us to examine current the phenomena of consumer brand related content online and its relationship to Customer based brand equity in a real-life context. We deemed appropriate to adopt the case study research design due to the fact that, as mentioned in our literature review, brand related negative eWOM is a phenomenon currently developing and sofar, the delimitations of the theory involved are not clearly stated in academic literature. Hence, a combination of different sources of information will be used in our research, including, academic literature, professional literature, social media, and other relevant electronic sources (Yin, 1984).

The case study design will allow us to gain understanding about the current reality where consumers express themselves naturally through social media virtual reality. Further, the case study design will allow us to gather rich, detailed data in an authentic setting. In addition, the case study design allows us to take a holistic approach and to reach further understanding related to consumer behaviour as it occurs in reality, in a social context. Further, the case study design will allow us to approach our analysis with no predetermined hypotheses. Consequently, it will allow us to understand the phenomenon of consumer created negative eWOM related to brands without rigid constraints (Willis, 2007).

### **3.3.2. Grounded Theory Analysis**

Congruently with our qualitative exploratory approach, we choose Grounded Theory Interpretive methods for the present case study. We choose this method taking into consideration the fact that Grounded theory analysis is utilized in Netnographic research, which is a method of ethnographic research designed specifically for the study of cultures and communities online (Kozinets, 2010b). Further, studies about the meaning of brands in online community settings (Bertilsson, 2009) have successfully implemented Netnographic techniques. As a result, we acknowledge the appropriateness of these techniques for the study of the virtual world. However, due to the fact that the scope of this case study is to unveil the content of comments posted online contents per se, but not the study of the interaction amongst members within an online community, we have chosen to adapt recommended Netnographic techniques for our research. Further, after considering the different methods for analysis we deemed appropriate the use of Grounded Theory Analysis for this exploratory case study.

Grounded theory has been defined as theory built as a result of data systematically collected and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and theory are in close relationship amongst each other (Strauss & Corbin 1998 in Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The subject of study of this case is consumer created negative eWOM posted in the online world boundary of a Social Network. The online world is a version of the social space but the difference with the real world is the absence of the physical presence of the people who creates the content of it. The online world virtual reality is defined and delimited by virtual space, which is in fact real. Further, even though we are not able to see and examine people under physical

parameters, we can see, read and examine the content created by them (Gavrilović, 2004). Therefore, a grounded theory approach research method is fully appropriate for exploring the sphere of virtual reality (Gavrilović, 2004) since, through an iterative process between existent theory and data, theory is developed from the process of data collection in combination with theory, by referring back and forth to each other (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As a result, we will be able to capture the essence of the phenomenon of consumer created brand related negative eWOM by analysing it as it is presented in virtual reality without obstruction.

Moreover, we will mainly follow a modified Strauss & Corbin Grounded Theory approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Kozinets, 2010b) with the exception of the researcher role approach. Further, it was taken into consideration that grounded theory analysis is a technique recommended in Netnographic research.

Further, we have selected to adopt a complete observational stance due to the essential spontaneous nature of eWOM. Thus, in order to avoid affecting the content of consumers' eWOM, we will follow a complete observer role. Further, the data gathering will be performed under theoretical sampling and text analysis of comments already posted online. Thus, in this case, the researchers' participation in the community studied is neither necessary nor appropriate (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Because this technique is unsolicited, it presents a more naturalistic and unobtrusive approach than other traditional methods such as focus groups, surveys, or interviews.

We have selected a Theoretical Conceptual Framework in order to In order to set the boundaries of the case study at hand (Stake, 1995). As shown in the Literary Review, we have selected a Conceptual Framework comprised of theories widely used in Strategic Brand Management, Marketing and consumer Behaviour. Specifically, the main Conceptual Framework used in the analysis of data was the Customer based brand equity model by Keller (2008) due to the fact that it provides a holistic view of consumer equity and the different building blocks necessary to achieve it.

However, we acknowledge that a predetermined conceptual framework may limit the inductive approach when exploring a phenomenon (Yin, 1984). Hence, we have taken an iterative approach between data and literature and modified the Literature Review accordingly, in order to, at some degree, control for this effect.



Consequently, we will follow adapted qualitative techniques for netnographic research, due to the fact that netnography is a method designed specifically for online research. Further, the aforementioned methodology is in agreement with the stance and approach chosen for the current study. Accordingly, the steps to follow in data analysis are adapted from recommended netnographic techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994 in Kozinets, 2010b) combined with the steps for grounded theory analysis as suggested by Easterby-Smith et al., (2008).

We will follow steps of analysis each comprised of specific methodological approach in order to achieve valid and relevant results from our analysis.

The steps are: Coding; Categorizing, Abstracting and Comparing; Theorizing and Interpreting.

The following text will describe the procedures involved in each step.

**Coding:** We will begin the gathering of data conjointly with data analysis by scanning consumers' comments posted on the Facebook page 'We Hate iPhone!!!' Then, we will proceed to affix codes to comments relevant to the research aim. Further, the codes used will be theoretical dimensions found to be relevant and of essential nature during the Literature Review process. Further, we will look for indicative patterns within the comments that will lead to the designation of a code belonging to a theoretical dimensions from the emerged Conceptual Theoretical Framework found in the Literature Review.

The main theoretical dimensions we will consider in the analysis of data include;

- Consumer Behaviour
- Customer based brand equity Model building blocks and its sub-dimensions: Salience, Imagery, Performance, Judgement, Feeling and Resonance (Keller, 2008).
- Anti- branding, identified as a current issue in the Literary Review stage of research.

However, the above listed theories are guidance since additional categories could emerge from the grounded theory iterative process of going back and forth from data to theory in order to search for the most appropriate classifications. Hence, coding will emerge inductively through gaining an understanding of the data. Prescribed categories will not be imposed to the comments. On the contrary, in the case that the researcher due to prior knowledge acquired in graduate

marketing studies finds that an important theory is missing in the Literature Review, it will be included as appropriate.

**Categorizing, Abstracting and Comparing:** The comments (data) will be classified into groups related to the CBBE building blocks and then these will be connected into more general conceptual constructs from our literature review. In addition, subsequent research will be performed if we deem it necessary to include additional literature. Such additional literature will be added to the Literature review accordingly.

In the sampling and coding stage of the grounded theory analysis, consumers' comments were sampled from the page 'We hate Iphone!!' on the social network setting Facebook. Specifically, the representative consumers' comments were coded under the sub-dimensions of the brand building blocks; social user profile, personality and value, primary characteristics, product reliability, durability, style and design, price, social approval, self-respect, attitudinal attachment, active engagement and sense of community.

The CBBE model enabled us to categorize, through an iterative approach between literature and empirical data, the coded eWOM sample by ensuring that the particular coded comment corresponded to one of the respective CBBE Six brand building blocks: Brand Salience, Brand Imagery, Brand Performance, Brand Feeling, Brand Judgement, and Brand Resonance.

Then, we further corroborated the appropriate categorization under the main 4 steps of brand building according to the CBBE model (Keller, 2001); brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand relationship.

**Theorizing & Interpreting:** In this stage of the analysis, the above comments will be taken as representative to connect the holistic theories in order to reach further understanding of the nature of brand related consumer created negative content in social media settings, specifically negative e-WOM. A set of generalizations will be derived from the categorizations and consistencies in the data which will allow us to reach to conclusions in regards to the study. Theorizing will be performed by comparing the generalizations gathered from the data with holistic theories in order to develop new knowledge comprised of theory in combination with the conclusions reached from the analysis of data (Kozinets, 2010b). Through an iterative approach between data and theory identified as relevant in our Literary Review, we will be able

to gain a level of abstraction that will allow us to reach a certain degree of theoretical generalization (Sutton & Staw, 1995 in Arnould, 2006).

As a result of the grounded theory analysis we expect to be able to formulate theoretical and managerial implications related to our findings.

Specifically, the categorizing stage of the analysis will show the relationship between the content of consumer created negative e-WOM and Customer based brand equity Brand Building Blocks. In this stage we will find possible motives for consumer dissatisfaction or aversion of the Apple iPhone. To do so, we will connect the Brand Building Blocks Sub-dimensions to holistic theories related to consumer Behaviour. The concepts and theories listed below have been chosen to expand the CBBE model are used to make a list of possible rationales that will help us to reach a holistic understanding of consumer negative e-WOM;

e-WOM

Apple Mental Map

Brand Extensions

Factors affecting the consumer Behaviour

Anti-branding

Consumer Choice and Consumer Culture

### **3.3.3. Empirical Data Gathering- Sampling**

In order to guide both the theoretical sampling coding and categorization of data we have chosen the Customer based brand equity (CBBE) model by Keller (2008) as a holistic guide due to the appropriateness of the dimensions included in it in relation to the aim of this case study. The relationship between product related negative eWOM and the parent brand is directly correlated with Customer based brand equity. Hence, the data will be categorized as appropriate into the Customer based brand equity model 6 building blocks, which include Salience, Performance, Imagery, Judgements, Feelings, and Resonance.

We looked for patterns within the comments that would allow us to code the comments according to one of the sub-dimensions of each CBBE building block. Hence, a theoretical selection of data (comments) performed by relating the patterns found in them at the individual

level to our conceptual framework, which is based on the Customer based brand equity (Keller, 2008) and expanded with consumer Behaviour theories, will allow us to explain, synthesize and ultimately unveil the nature of consumer negative eWOM content (Sutton and Staw, 1995 in Arnould, 2006). Ultimately, we will analyse the relationship between negative eWOM and CBBE.

Above all, our sampling strategy is focused on choosing a sample of instances of consumer comments that will provide opportunities to gain insight about the properties and dimensions of the CBBE categories as well as provide insight as of how the categories are related to each other in relation to our research aim. Further, our data collection and coding paradigm is based on terms of categories and dimensions related to The Customer based brand equity Pyramid (Keller, 2008) and the Emerged consumer Behaviour conceptual framework. In other words, we will select a sampling according to the theories found of essential nature in our theoretical literature review. We expect the selected approach to be an aid of fundamental nature in the process of answering our research question. Specifically the Customer based brand equity model conveys the main dimensions of brand equity and its respective sub dimensions provide an ideal base to connect holistic theories in regards to the process of consumer product evaluation.

#### **3.3.4. Limitations**

In order to set the boundaries of the case study at hand (Stake, 1995) after strenuous research we have selected a Conceptual Framework comprised of theories widely used in Strategic Brand Management, Marketing, and consumer Behaviour. Nevertheless, we believe that the Conceptual Framework is reasonable in scope and at the same time, it has aided to structure the analysis stage of the case study. However, we acknowledge that a predetermined conceptual framework may limit the inductive approach when exploring a phenomenon (Yin, 1984). Further, we recognize the difficulty of the process of selecting the appropriate theory in order to link the abstract and concrete dimensions of our data. Specifically, due to the fact that the connection between theoretical concepts and their empirical manifestations is not always clear. Moreover, there are instances where the abstract concept does not perfectly depict the complexity of reality (Arnould et al., 2006). Hence, we have taken an iterative approach between data and literature and modified the Literature Review accordingly in order to control for this effect to some degree. In addition, we have chosen to include Social Media related content from electronic sources due

to the nature of the case study at hand. Further, we have limited the sample of comments to one page on a Social Network. The case study is limited to the analysis of consumer created negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone in the “We hate Iphone!!” page on the Social Network Facebook. Hence, we know that our analysis and sample is by no means exhaustive. We have made choices accordingly to time and practical constraints, as such, we acknowledge the limitations of the case study presented.

## **4. EMPIRICAL STUDY**

### **4.1. Case Study: ‘We Hate iPhone’**

In order to set the boundaries of the case study at hand (Stake, 1995) we have chosen to analyse instances of consumer created negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone on the page ‘We Hate Iphone !!!’ of social network Facebook. In addition, we, as researchers will adopt complete observer roles due to the fact that allows us to gain unobtrusive access to comments from consumers from diverse backgrounds, but with the commonality of having participated in negative eWOM on Facebook about a specific product launched under Category Brand Extension, the Apple iPhone. Therefore, we expect to obtain a diverse array of social perspectives related to the iPhone through the analysis of negative eWOM (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998). Hence, we expect that an exploratory research of Facebook users comments posted on the page ‘We Hate Iphone!!!’ will allow us to achieve a better understanding of the consumers, attitudes, opinions and/or intentions in regards to the Apple iPhone (Casteleyn, 2009).

### **4.2. Scope**

The unit of analysis are instances of negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone on the Facebook page ‘We hate Iphone!!!’.

We have selected this particular case in order to maximize the learning in the limited period of time available for the study. The case design was guided by the popularity and current relevance of the factors which make the whole case construct. In addition, the availability and relevance of data to be analyzed was a determinant of the selection of the particular case (Stake, 1995)

#### **4.2.1. Social Media**

Early research in the field of consumer product evaluations has shown to be far from reality to some degree mainly because this groundbreaking work (Aaker & Keller, 1990) was entirely based on laboratory research. Specifically, empirical results were collected in a fabricated environment, where consumers were presented with ideas about products and had to make an immediate evaluation. Conversely, in the real world, consumers form prior expectations and rely on information about the inherent value of a product from media communications and word of mouth (Solomon et al., 2006).

Due to the above-mentioned circumstances, consumers' negative product evaluations should initially be analyzed under its own premises in order to gain a holistic understanding of its nature (Solomon et al., 2006). Therefore, in order to unveil the nature of consumer-created brand-product related negative e-WOM; it needs to be studied in a "real life" scenario, in a Social Media setting. Hence, an unobtrusive analysis of a particular case of negative eWOM in a popular Social Media network page without intrusion of the researcher will be followed in order to uncover the nature of consumers' negative e-WOM.

In order to determine today's most influential Social Network, we researched on the Nielsen Company website. Nielsen is considered the global leader in measurement and information. On the Nielsen website, we found statistics in regards to the most popular website in the U.S. In the U.S., Google was the most popular website in March 2011, with 152 million unique visitors from home and work computers (Nielsen, 2011). Therefore, as a start point, we used Google Insights for Search, which analyzes Google web searches in order to determine the number of Google searches for a specific keyword over a specific time to find the most popular Social Network.

#### 4.2.2. Facebook

We determined that today's most influential social media is Facebook due to the following reasons:

1. Facebook is the number one keyword search in Google under the "Social Media & Online Communities" since December 2008 to date. Google Insights for Search analyzes Google web searches in order to determine the number of Google searches for a specific keyword over a specific time. (Google Insights, 2011a)
2. Facebook's user base more than tripled during 2009, to 400 million members, which equates the population that would make it the world's third largest country (McKinsey, 2010). Today, Facebook has more than 500 million active users, 50% of which log on to Facebook in any given day. Every month, more than 250 million people engage with Facebook on external websites. Since April 2010, an average of 10,000 new websites integrates with Facebook every day. More than 2.5 million websites have integrated with Facebook, including over 80 of comScore's U.S. Top 100 websites and over half of comScore's Global Top 100 websites (Facebook.com, 2011b).
3. In the U.S., Facebook was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular website with 135 million unique visitors from home and work computers during the March 2011 timeframe. In addition, Facebook led in average time spent on site by U.S. visitors (Nielsen, 2011).
4. According to a 2010 study, 50% of Facebook users follow a brand and 51% of brand followers will purchase that specific brand. 88% of all people are aware of Facebook (Digital Surgeons, 2010).

In addition, the social network Facebook presents inherent characteristics that increase its value as a marketing data source, mainly due to the fact that consumer's auto segment themselves and feel free to share their personal information. For instance, the Facebook platform allows users to join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region in order to connect and interact with other people. Users build their personal network by adding other users. Further, members of the micro networks share their profile updates amongst each other, or with the all the members of Facebook according to their profile settings (Casteleyn et al., 2009).

### 4.2.3. Apple iPhone

1. iPhone is the number 5 keyword search in Google under the “Product Category” in the US, number 2 in Germany and number 6 in the UK in the last 12 months (Google Insights, 2011b). Therefore, due to the growing current popularity of the Apple iPhone, we expect to be able to gather relevant data for our research.
2. During March 2011, 63 million unique U.S. people visited Apple.com using PC/laptops from home and work locations. Further, Apple was the number 8 most popular website during the same period (Nielsen, 2011).
3. Users of the iPhone surf the Internet 75 % more in comparison to users of regular cell phones, thus, their propensity of participating in e-WOM would be higher (McKinsey, 2010).

### 4.2.4. The Apple Brand

Apple was incorporated in the state of California on January 3, 1977. Further, Apple’s mission statement on the corporate website infers its strong focus on innovation (Abimbola, 2010):

*“Apple designs Macs, the best personal computers in the world, along with OS X, iLife, iWork, and professional software. Apple leads the digital music revolution with its iPods and iTunes online store. Apple reinvented the mobile phone with its revolutionary iPhone and App Store, and has recently introduced its magical iPad which is defining the future of mobile media and computing devices”*

*(Apple.com, 2011).*

Further, Apple has been ranked as the world’s most valuable brand in 2011 with an estimated brand value of more than \$153 billion, according to the 2011 BrandZ Top100 ranking of the most valuable global brands. The BrandZ Top 100 brand valuation methodology is based on quantitative consumer research and comprehensive financial analysis. The analysis is based on financial models that link brand perceptions to company revenues, earnings, and ultimately shareholder and brand value (Millward Brown Optimor, 2011).



Consequently, Apple is a brand with high resonance (Keller, 2008) resonance denotes that the consumer has the ultimate relationship and strongest identification with the brand according to the Customer based brand equity model. Further, brand resonance is regarded as the intensity of the psychological bond that consumers feel in regards to the brand (Keller, 2008).

Given the strong resonance and in order to analyze the nature of the relationship between Apple as the parent brand and consumers iPhone related negative eWOM, it seems necessary to include a general assumption on consumers associations in relation to Apple as a brand. Specifically, in order to relate the image of the iPhone as an extension product to Apple as a parent brand. We will look for associations in the comments that agree or disagree with the suggested Apple Possible Brand Image associations model of associations due to the fact that consumer's mental brand image influence product evaluation (Keller, 2008). We believe that insight gained from analysing comments against the mental brand image map will allow us to gain further insight into consumers' product evaluation. Hence, it will be useful information for the implementation of strategies that will allow marketers to identify and confront the challenges of brand image exposure through an extended product; hence, the impact in Customer based brand equity.

Specifically, we believe that the Apple Possible Brand Image map could provide guidance as a symbolic construct of consumers' expectations associated with a product by association to the parent brand in order to link negative eWOM content to possible consumers' expectations. Prior expectations have been associated with satisfaction and as a result, with product evaluations because consumers form expectations about a product based on prior experience and media communications (Solomon et al., 2006). Despite the fact that different consumers might have different expectations in regards to the Apple brand, we believe that the use of the Possible Apple Brand Image associations map could be used as an aid in the analysis of the nature of negative eWOM related to the iPhone and the links with the parent brands' Customer based brand equity (Keller, 2008).



*Possible set of Apple Brand associations (Image Map) (Keller, 2008).*

#### **4.2.5 “We Hate iPhone” Facebook Page**

Empirical data will be obtained by selecting negative eWOM instances in regards of the Apple iPhone on the social media Facebook on the page named ‘We hate Iphone!!’ (We hate Iphone). Further, comments will be selected as part of the sample following theoretical sampling. The particular Facebook page was chosen by typing the keywords “hate iPhone” on the search field of Facebook.

Further, the aforementioned group appeared number one in the search with the majority of Facebook users having clicked in the option ‘LIKE’ of the page, and as a result recording themselves as consumers “liking” the page “We Hate iPhone” page. Further, after Facebook users click on the option “LIKE” of the aforementioned page, their Facebook profiles become linked to this page publicly until they opt out of it by clicking the option “UNLIKE”. Thus, these consumers profile with demographic and other personal data is linked to this page as well. Moreover, the “We hate Iphone!!” page was “liked” by 2145 Facebook users (Facebook, 2011a) as of May 2011.

Consequently, the subjects of analysis determined to provide insightful and available data are instances of negative eWOM related to the Apple Iphone. The data will be collected from the Facebook page ‘We hate Iphone!!’.

### **4.3. Ethics**

Consensus about what is considered ethical research online is still emerging (Kozinets, 2010b). However, we have followed the below listed conditions to ensure ethical research in online settings:

Moreover, we have conducted analysis of online communications, which does not official constitute research of human subjects since we have based the research of this case study in Public Information available online for anyone (Kozinets, 2010b).

In addition, the information found in the particular website “We hate Iphone”, is available to anyone on the internet, it is not necessary to neither log in nor be registered on the social network Facebook.

Further, the identity of the authors of the comments analyzed in this research has been made anonymous in all cases.

## 5. ANALYSIS

As a theoretical framework, we have selected theories widely used in Strategic Brand Management, Marketing and consumer Behaviour in order to set the boundaries of the case study at hand (Stake, 1995) we have chosen to analyse consumer created negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone in the “We Hate iPhone” page on the Social Network Facebook.

Moreover, the following analysis is mainly based on the Customer based brand equity pyramid by Keller (2008).

The Customer based brand equity (CBBE) pyramid is a holistic model that conveys the building blocks for a brand and its corresponding sub dimensions. Further, according to this model, a brand has reached positive consumer-based brand equity when consumers react with positive mind associations towards it.

On the other hand, a brand has negative customer based brand equity when consumers have negative reactions towards a particular brand (Keller, 2008). Hence, not all consumers react favourably towards brands, and as a result, marketers face the challenge to build strong brands while ensuring that consumers have positive experiences with products and services.

In addition, marketing campaigns objectives include building the right brand image on consumers’ minds. Hence, the brand should evoke on consumers the desired thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, and opinions as a result of effective marketing campaigns and prior experiences. The CBBE model assumes that the value of a brand are based on consumers brand knowledge and sources of brand equity (Keller, 2008).

Consequently, The CBBE model has been chosen for this analysis because, in our opinion, offers a holistic measurement of brand objectives and it serves our research aim of analyzing instances of brand product related negative eWOM. Specifically, because we believe that the CBBE sub dimensions and building blocks are ideally designed to aid us in the analysis that will link negative eWOM to CBBE. Moreover, the CBBE focus on consumers and connection to brand value makes it an ideal holistic model to use on the evaluation of consumer brand/ product related negative eWOM, specifically due to the fact that consumers opinions are based on consumers prior brand knowledge and experiences (Solomon et al., 2006).

The consumer-based brand equity model (CBBE) used in the bellow analysis provides a holistic and detailed view of brand building and equity. Moreover, the CBBE model conveys the dimensions and measures well-known industry models, including one of the most successful industry models, Young and Rubicam's Brand Asset Valuator (BAV) (Keller, 2008). In addition, the CBBE model provides both rational and emotional considerations in brand building, which makes it especially adequate as a tool to analyze consumer created brand/product related negative eWOM.

In the following text, the analysis is done considering the grounded theory analysis's stages, which we combine the first and second stage of the grounded theory analysis by describing the coding and categorizing together in our analysis. The codes are given to the representative consumer comments recurred from the particular page as 'We hate Iphone!!' on Facebook with the sub-dimensions of 6 brand building blocks respectively; social user profile, personality and value, primary characteristics, product reliability, durability, style and design, price, social approval, self-respect, attitudinal attachment, active engagement and sense of community, then categorize them under the 6 brand building blocks of our particular model as Customer based brand equity which are Brand Salience, Brand Imagery, Brand Performance, Brand Feeling, Brand Judgment and Brand Resonance when the consumers' comment fit with the meaning and content of these blocks and their sub-dimensions.

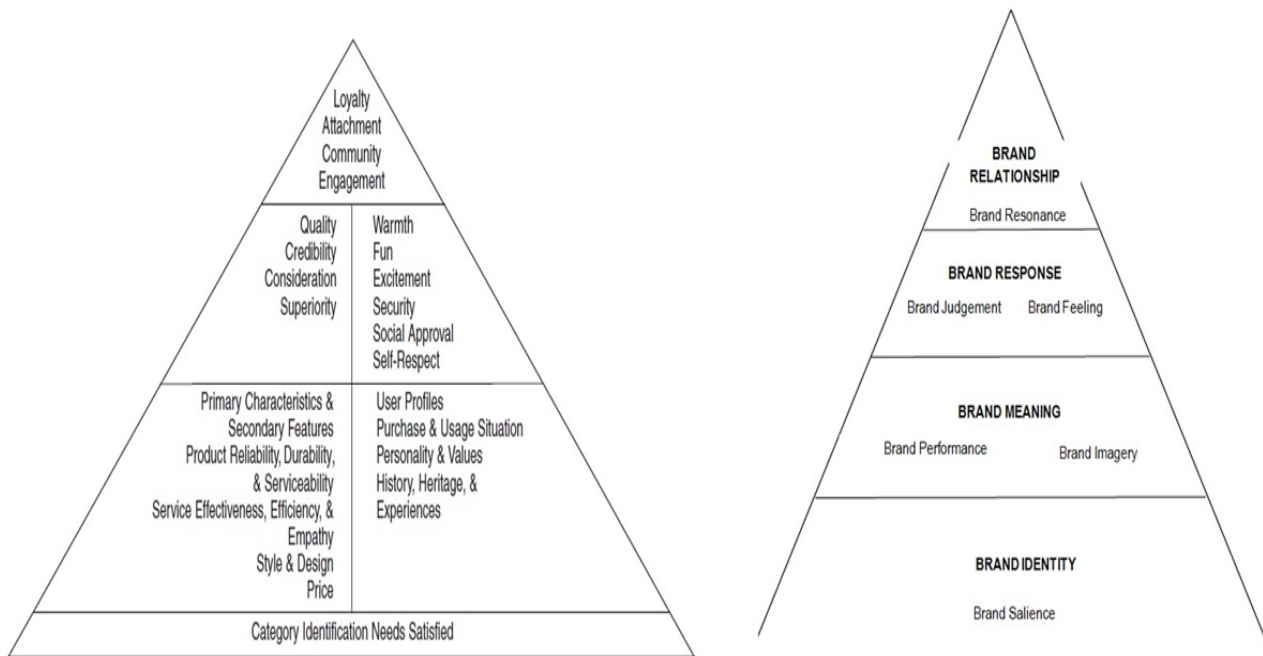
After giving codes and categorizing the representative consumers' comments, they are applied to the utmost important theories and concepts respectively; consumer Behavior, Factors affecting consumer Behavior, consumer Choice, consumer Culture and Apple Mental Map, Brand Extensions, e-WOM, Anti-branding which are issued in the literature review part of the thesis in order to describe the relations among these theories, concepts and consumers' negative evaluations about Apple's iPhone.

## **5.1. Sampling & Coding**

In the sampling and coding stage of the grounded theory analysis of our particular product iPhone, the consumers' comments were gathered for sampling from the particular page as 'We hate Iphone!!' on a social network setting as Facebook. Then, the main 4 steps of brand building according to the CBBE model (Keller, 2001) are brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand relationship were used in order to categorize the 6 blocks as Brand Salience, Brand Imagery, Brand Performance, Brand Feeling, Brand Judgment, Brand Resonance by giving codes to the representative consumers' comments with the sub-dimensions of the brand building blocks respectively; social user profile, personality and value, primary characteristics, product reliability, durability, style and design, price, social approval, self-respect, attitudinal attachment, active engagement and sense of community.

## **5.2. Categorizing**

In this part of the analysis, we will analyze the representative consumers' comments content related to the Apple iPhone and the Apple corporate brand on the 'We hate Iphone!!' page of Facebook when there is a fit with the Customer based brand equity model's sub-dimensions by considering the relevant factors as cultural, psychological, social, personal factors affecting the consumer behaviour in each steps of sub-dimensions with categorizing the 6 brand building blocks as Brand Salience, Brand Imagery, Brand Performance, Brand Feeling, Brand Judgement, Brand Resonance with the help of the main steps for brand building of Keller (2001) CBBE model as Brand Identity, Brand Meaning, Brand Response and Brand Relationship.



**Model: Customer Based Brand Equity Pyramid (Keller, 2008; MSI).**

### **5.2.1. Category: Step of Brand Building - Brand Identity**

The categorizing starts with the first brand-building block as brand salience with the help of the main step of Customer based brand equity model of Keller (2001) as brand identity. Further, Keller (2008) noted that achieving a true brand identity includes brand salience, which in the following will be adapted to our particular brand/product as Apple’s iPhone.

#### **A. Sub-Category: Brand Building Block- Brand Salience**

According to Keller (2008) in establishment of brand identity as a first step considered Brand salience, the author referring to the term Brand Salience has come to be used to refer to the consumers’ awareness of the brand which is actually the ability of the consumers to recall and recognize a brand. Kapferer (2006) also suggests Keller’s explanation of *Brand Salience* as a key brand asset to be evoked spontaneously in consumers’ minds in the process of buying decision.

Moreover, according to all consumer evaluations about Iphone product with its parent brand as Apple on ‘We hate Iphone!!’ Facebook page, we found appropriate to state the salience of iPhone as its ‘*association with Apple Corporate brand*’ since most of the consumers relate the product iPhone with its Corporate brand, Apple which in the below comment is now coded as a representative comment for describing the salience of iPhone.

“*iphone is a trendy piece of s...t<sup>1</sup> just like everything else apple produces.*”

(*We hate Iphone!!*, 2011).

### **5.2.2. Category: Step of Brand Building- Brand Meaning**

The categorizing continues with the brand imagery and brand performance blocks with the help of the main step of brand meaning in the customer based brand equity model of Keller (2008). One of the utmost important stages of Customer based brand equity (CBBE) model of Keller (2008), considered *Brand Meaning*, which is based previous brand identity and further brand response.

#### **A.Sub-Category: Brand Building Block- Brand Imagery**

Brand Imagery is the branding associations that exists in consumers’ minds-related to the product and highly influenced by prior expectations regarding all aspects of brand meaning (Keller, 2008) involving four categories as user-profile, purchase and usage situations, personality and values and history, heritage and experiences. In the analysis, we used the consumers’ evaluations on our particular page on Facebook and apply to the Customer based brand equity sub-dimensions when there is a fit, therefore only the best-fit evaluations are taken into consideration.

According to the Apple Mental Map of Keller (2008), Apple brand have achieved a *wealthy brand* image in the minds of people that consumer see the associations of Apple brand extension accompanied by sharing word of mouth.

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<sup>1</sup> Highly offensive profane language



a. Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- User Profile:

Consumers often believe that a brand is liked by many people and therefore view the brand as *popular* or a *market leader* is accepted (Keller, 2001) which the below comment describes that iPhone owners are the followers of fashion trends, have a desire to look cool but seems like sheeps and is coded as a representative comment for describing the user-profile of iPhone.

*‘‘Typical apple smugness! The iRony is that these iSheep only see a fashion accessory - iphone does less and costs more and the iSheep are happy to be led and hand over fistfuls of iBills because apples marketing makes them think it will make them look iCool - I’m glad I’m not one of them with their fisher-price iToy!’’*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011)*

b. Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Personality and value:

Consumers may also find personality and values from a brand, which is referring to the brand owners’ treats. Moreover, the above comment is also coded as a representative comment for describing the personality and value which consumers associate Apple brand with a smugness of an individual. Further, the consumer allocates the attention to the happy buyers with sparing money to the less doing phone. Just for descriptive personal image in society and have values within the similar group of users, brands take personality traits similar to people which this consumer associates the Apple brand with smugness (Keller, 2001).

B.Sub-Category: Brand Building Block- Brand Performance

A significant number of the comments of “We hate Iphone!!” page evaluate the iPhone negatively according to *performance*. This allow us to use Keller’s (2008) Customer based brand equity Model in order to evaluate if any prior needs are being fulfilled by the iPhone by analysing consumer created negative eWOM under the *performance* dimension.

a. Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Primary characteristics:

Keller (2008) noted the importance of the primary characteristics of a product for consumers which they often hold beliefs about the levels as low, medium or high (MSI) which the below comment taken from our particular page on Facebook is coded as primary characteristics for describing the negative opinions of the consumers regarding iPhone's primary characteristics.

*' send a song?.....nop not happening*

*Got good earphones?....nop*

*Can you install themes....nop*

*Applications for free?.....nop*

*Battery life?.....c...p<sup>2</sup>*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

b. Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Product reliability, durability:

Consumers can evaluate the performance of the products in a broad sense as its reliability or its durability (Keller; MSI, 2008).

*'I HATE MY IPHONE 3G WITH SO MUCH PASSION!!! WORST PHONE IVE EVER OWNED, drops calls every 5 min with full bars, autotext drives me INSANE, locks up daily, Slooooooow, i can't wait to get a droid phone. Worst software ever, i compare it all the time to a computer from 1989.'*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

The above comment is coded as product reliability, durability in order to describe the consumers' evaluations about iPhone's durability and reliability characteristics in a negative way.

c.Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Style and Design:

Consumers are interested in the aesthetic features of a product such as its shape, looks, sounds, colour etc. (Keller, 2008, MSI). Some participants of "We hate Iphone!!" expressed the belief that style and design of iPhone is important. Their expressions are like "it is ugly phone" which is mostly related with products functionality features, hence there are similarities between expressions by participants of "We hate Iphone!!" and those described by Keller (2008) who

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<sup>2</sup> Highly offensive profane language

found aesthetic considerations: size, shape, material and colour which the below comment is coded as style and design for describing the negative opinions of iPhone consumers about its style and design.

*'I'd prefer an iStone... a stone to throw at all the i....c<sup>3</sup> iPhones :)'*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

#### d.Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Price:

Consumers often assess the price of the iPhone from the “associations of the price and value of the brand” (Keller, 2008:91). According to the below comment taken from our particular page on Facebook describes the consumers opinions about iPhone which is clearly said that ‘it is very expensive’, which the below comment is coded with price for describing that expensive price of iPhone affects the consumers’ evaluations in a negative way.

*'its very expensive, and he have nothing to offer, except design maybe''*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

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<sup>3</sup> Offensive profane language

### **5.2.3. Category: Step of Brand Building- Brand Response**

The categorizing process continues with the brand judgement, which is one of the block of Customer based brand equity of Keller (2008) with the help of the main step as brand response. The nature of brand responses is highly related to the nature of brand relationship for their brands. Keller (2008) in Customer based brand equity pyramid states that consumer's favourable or unfavourable brand responses based on two major factors: Brand Judgement and Brand Feeling.

#### **A.Sub-Category: Brand Building Block- Brand Judgement**

According to Keller (2008), the term *Brand Judgement* associated with consumers' individual opinions and evaluations. Moreover, Keller (2008) studied the lack of basic functional features may cause the negative judgement about brand which can be seen from the below comment.

*'The only app they haven't developed yet is one for all those dropped calls, horrible battery power, poor signal. Multi tasking (oh wait it does that on the 3GS, just very poorly). How about push email? instead of having to check your email, it should tell you!''.* *(We hate Iphone!!, 2009).*

#### **a.Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Quality:**

Brand quality is defined in terms of consumers' general evaluations of a brand (Keller, 2008). Moreover, the above comment is coded as quality in order to describe iPhone's disqualify pertain to perceptions of value and satisfaction.

#### **b.Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Superiority:**

Superiority exists when consumers believe that the brand is better than the other brands by giving much advantage to them rather than the others give.

On the other hand, Keller (2008) indicated as one of the key reason of rejection of extension and harm of parent image is inferiority of extension. Therefore when consumers evaluate extension with inferior quality or inferior performance, it makes disappointment first from the extension and then from parent brand.

The evidence of result inferiority which is disappointment from the parent brand can be clearly seen in the following comment which is coded as superiority in order to describe the consumers' negative opinions about Apple's iPhone.

*“BLAME ON APPLE!!!! APPLE IS WORST!”*

*(We hate Iphone, 2010).*

## **B. Sub-Category: Brand Building Block- Brand Feelings**

Brand feelings is one of the blocks of Customer based brand equity which has also importance in the analysis for understanding the emotional responses and reactions of consumers about a particular brand which constitutes the brand responses (Keller, 2008). Moreover, Keller (2008) described the six important types of brand building feelings as warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval, and self-respect which we will apply some of them which fit with the evaluations of iPhone consumers on the page of Facebook. Moreover, in coding the factors affecting consumer behaviour will be considered in each steps of sub-dimensions.

### **a.Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Social approval:**

Social approval is one of the sub-dimensions of 'Feelings' block in Customer based brand equity model of Keller (2008) which is defined by Keller (2008) as the positive feelings of consumers regarding the behaviours of others. With respect to, the below comment is coded as social approval for describing negative feelings about the consumers who are belong to a same group as 'Iphone brigade' on 'We hate Iphone!!' Facebook page.

*“one of my friends updated her status to say how happy she was to join ‘the Iphone brigade’. I wanted to tear my place up when I read that!. Apple are taking over the world and I think its got to be taken down!”*

*(We hate Iphone, 2010).*

### **b. Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Self-respect:**

According to Keller (2008), self-respect exists when a person feels a sense of pride or feels better about themselves.

*'I have an iPhone, I hate myself...no, I really do!'*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

With respect to, personality and self-concept involve in the personal factors affecting the consumers' consumption choices. The most noticeable comment in this category is the one above which the coding is done considering the self-respect feeling of consumer about a brand and association with the personality and self-concept as personal factors.

#### **5.2.4. Category: Step of Brand Building- Brand Relationship**

The final step constitutes the Customer based brand equity model of Keller (2008) is brand relationships which also involve the block of brand resonance.

##### **A. Sub- Category: Brand Building Block- Brand Resonance**

Brand resonance is categorized with its sub-dimensions as attitudinal attachment, active engagement, and social community. A brand achieves the step of resonance when the other core brand values became completely associated among each other according to the needs, wants and desires of consumers (Keller, 2008). In this brand building block, we continue to give codes to the sub-dimensions of resonance when there is a fit with the consumers' evaluations about iPhone on our particular page in Facebook.

##### **a.Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Attitudinal attachment:**

Keller (2008) pointed out the importance of strong personal attachment to a brand such as 'love' the brand. However, in the 'We hate Iphone!!' page on Facebook, the below comments are coded as attitudinal attachment in order to describe the negative attitudinal attachment towards the brand as iPhone which are repeated throughout the page:

*'I really hate my Iphone...*

*'I extremely don't like Iphone...'*

*'We hate Iphone...'*,

*'I swear I hate Iphone...''*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

c. Code: Brand Building Block Sub-dimension- Active engagement, Sense of community:

When consumers invest their time, energy and money into a brand such as participating on the brand-related websites, chat rooms etc. (Keller; MSI, 2008) which the consumers of ‘We hate Iphone!!’ page on Facebook is actively engaging into this brand-related website, making comments, sharing their opinions based by negative e-WOM in this social network setting.

The below information is coded as active engagement and sense of community in order to describe the consumers’ behaviours to share their ideas and generate a group of people who hate iPhone. The below information is taken from the Facebook page of ‘‘We hate Iphone!!’’ where a person opens this page in order to show the behind scene of Apple and iPhone. The expectation is to get together the consumers who had bad experiences about iPhone and against Apple with several reasons. Moreover, it is also expected that these attempts be mostly related to the Anti-branding efforts of the consumers which will be discussed in the next section as Theorizing & Interpreting.

*‘‘ Ugly Truth Behind Shiny Phone! MUST READ!..iPhone are now selling for 499 USD. Foxconn a factory in China (which is the manufacturer of the iPhone) only get 4 USD. This included the salary for the workers. Which is about 2% of the overall net profit for producing per iPhone. However, on the other hand, APPLE get a total of 200% Net PROFIT!! And Yet, Apple Inc. request them for VERY HIGH Quality Work. So, China’s Factories can just push their workers HARDER since Apple have very high standards. But the Factory Can’t Reach the speed they required.... so They just again PUSH the workers harder. In the End, few Workers had too much pressure and went commit suicide. Apple suggested the factory to use toxic materials to replace alcohol for cleaning iPhone’s screen. But you know why? Not because it good for the environment or the worker’s health, it’s BECAUSE that toxic material is cheaper and they can make the most money out of it! Now some of the workers were poisoned (Like about few thousand people). So who’s to blame? The China Factory... OR Apple? Yeah, I agree, iPhone is somehow nice... But do you know that ugly Truth, and hard work behind that shiny phone? Now you know!’’*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

Moreover, consumers also can feel an ‘affiliation’ with the other people who own and use the same brand (Keller, 2008) which the below comment is chosen as the best fit and coded as the sense of community to describe how the iPhone users feel about themselves.

*‘‘..... they just wanna be sheep and look good whilst displaying their knowledge of...yeah you guessed it, nothing!’’*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

### **5.3. Theorizing & Interpreting**

The analysis above shows the relationship between the content of consumer created negative e-WOM and Customer based brand equity. Moreover, we identified areas of weakness related to the steps of brand building. In addition, in order to describe and to get an extensive picture of the consumer based negative eWOM to brand equity, we have chosen Kellers' Customer based brand equity model and its main blocks and utmost concepts and theories which are issued in literature review part of the thesis project. These concepts, theories and chosen CBBE model are used to make a list of possible rationales that will help us to reach a holistic understanding of consumer negative e-WOM which are in the following;

e-WOM

Apple Mental Map

Brand Extensions

Factors affecting the Consumer Behaviour

Anti-branding

Consumer Choice and Consumer Culture

#### **5.3.1. e-WOM effect on Customer Based Brand Equity**

Negative information and the past experiences of the others are a major factor influencing the consumers' pre-purchase evaluation process (Solomon et al., 2006). Negative WOM is also expanding on online which dissatisfied consumers create websites or join into the existing ones to share their ideas by evaluating the qualities or performances of the products in order to provide a meaning to the brand. With respect to consumers' negative evaluations, entail strong, positive, and distinctive brand association with Customer Based Brand Equity (Keller, 1993). According to the six sub-dimensions in Customer Based Brand Equity, salience, performance, judgement, feelings and resonance (Keller, 2008), the negative effect of the "We hate Iphone!!" page is apparent. Participants created negative brand meanings online relation to what they learned, felt, seen and heard from their experience with the product. Moreover, due to the fact that the power of brand lies in consumers' perception of its attributes, it is of pivotal importance



for the corporation to address the negative image created. Further, this finding further supports the use of Keller's (2006) Category Based Brand Equity model for the analysis of product related negative eWOM. Specifically, because the negative e-WOM related to a Category Extension Product and the parent brand Customer Based Brand Equity.

### **5.3.2. Apple's Mental Map & Customer Based Brand Equity**

According to Keller (2008), Apple is a brand with high resonance. A strong relationship between Apple mental map and negative eWOM can see in the "We hate Iphone!!" page on Facebook. One of the issues that emerge from these findings is negative eWOM concerning performance of Iphone brand affects to the Apple as a parent brand. Because, Apple Mental Map indicates that brand associations come in all forms and it is mirror characteristics of the independent of the product itself (Keller, 2006). Moreover, when consumers purchase an iPhone product, first comes to Apple's attributes which contradict in the perception of iPhone brand.

*"Iphone is a trendy piece of s...<sup>4</sup>t just like everything else apple produces"*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

It can be seen in the comment that consumer behaviour to the iPhone brand is totally negative and at the same time refer to the 'brand image' of Apple. Also this consumer sees contradiction of iPhone brand to the Apple mental map, and it must be recognized that this trigger of brand image exposure through an extended product.

### **5.3.3. Brand Extensions & Brand Salience**

**Brand Extensions:** Keller & Aaker (1992) pointed out the extension evaluations will depend on what kind of information comes to mind about the core brand in the extension context. Researchers typically assume that they are a function of salient shared associations between the core brand and the extension product category.

*"Iphone is a trendy piece of s...<sup>5</sup>t just like everything else apple produces"*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

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<sup>4</sup> Highly offensive profane language

<sup>5</sup> Highly offensive profane language

**Brand Salience:** Regarding to the above comment, Kapferer (2006) also suggests Keller's explanation of *Brand Salience* as a key brand asset to be evoked spontaneously in consumers' minds in the process of buying decision. With respect to, according to all consumer evaluations about iPhone product with its parent brand as Apple on 'We hate Iphone!!' Facebook page, we found appropriate to state the salience of iPhone as its '*association with Apple Corporate brand*'.

### **5.3.4. Consumer Behavior Factors Impact on Customer Based Brand Equity**

#### **a. Psychological Factors affecting Brand Feeling**

**Psychological Factors-(Perception):** When deciding a product to buy, consumers give importance to the aesthetic features of a product such as its shape, looks, sounds, colour etc. and also they perceive the reality in their own experiences (Keller; MSI, 2008). With relevant to, Solomon et al., (2006) pointed out that the people perceive an object by our five senses as sight, smell, sound, touch and taste which the below comment describes that this consumer saw and touched the phone.

*'I'd prefer an iStone... a stone to throw at all the i...<sup>6</sup>c iPhones :)'*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

**Brand Feeling:** According to the above comment, when touching the phone, the perception of this consumer regarding to the product's feel is tough, which this feeling can also influence the brand feeling which is the consumers' reactions regarding to the brand (Keller; MSI, 2001: 14); therefore this consumer feel the brand as a stone.

#### **b. Personal Factors affecting Brand Performance**

**Personal factors- (Economic situations):** The economic situations of a person can also influence the consumers' buying behaviour when one cannot afford to buy a particular product, the evaluations of that person can probably be negatively (Armstrong et al., 2009) which the below comment describes us the evaluations about iPhone as expensive.

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<sup>6</sup> Offensive profane language

*‘its very expensive, and he have nothing to offer, except design maybe’*

(We hate Iphone!!, 2009).

**Brand Performance- (Price):** Consumers can evaluate the price of the iPhone product from the “associations of the price and value of the brand” (Keller, 2008). According to the below comment taken from our particular page on Facebook describes the consumers’ opinions about iPhone which is clearly said that ‘it is very expensive’, therefore the expensive price of this product affects the consumers’ evaluations in a negative way which can be seen above comment as well.

### **c. Social Factors affecting Brand Imagery**

**Social factors- (Reference groups):** It can be concluded from the below consumer comment that these iPhone consumers actually generate a reference group (iSheep) which is an *identificational reference group* involving ordinary people affecting the consumption activities of consumers (Solomon et al., 2006). And the opposite site is the people who do not own an iPhone whom are also a reference group as against to iPhone owners which Solomon et al., (2006) also stated that people can avoid and set a distance between themselves and the other people or groups through buying anything that the other groups buy and use which is avoidance groups.

*‘Typical apple smugness! The iRony is that these iSheep only see a fashion accessory - iphone does less and costs more and the iSheep are happy to be led and hand over fistfuls of iBills because apples marketing makes them think it will make them look iCool - I’m glad I’m not one of them with their fisher-price iToy!’*

(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).

**Brand Imagery-(User profile):** Moreover, the relationship between social factors and brand meaning lay into the user profile sub-dimensions of the product iPhone’s brand imagery which the above comment describes the relation between them as well. With respect to this comment, this consumer wants to express with the ‘iSheep’ comment for the iPhone owners that these consumers want to look like as sheep which want to be identified from the other who are not an iPhone owner. Moreover, this consumer believes that iPhone owners are the followers of fashion trends who do not mind spending more money for an advertisement despite its lower

performance (*iSheep*). And marketing, imaginary relation to the idealized brand with mass people of owners leads to be in the centre (*iCool*) of group, that try to be promoted as a *popular* or a *market leader*.

#### **d. Cultural and Social Factors affecting Brand Feeling**

**Cultural factors-(Social class):** Armstrong et al., (2009:166) pointed out that social class as a category of cultural factors is an ordered divisions where members have similar values, interests and behaviours as well which is an important factor affecting the consumers' buying decisions in order to reach a higher social class on their purchase decisions and some products are used as status symbols by some groups which are used to categorize their owners' social class (Solomon et al., 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that people in the same social class can see a particular brand or a product from a similar point of view. According to the below comment, this consumer expresses that the people who buy an iPhone sees themselves in a group which is for iPhone *Iphone brigade*.

*'I hate Iphone..one of my friends updated her status to say how happy she was to join  
'the Iphone brigade'*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

According to the comment above, there is a *comparative influence* which occurs when there are two reference groups to compare and affect the decisions about the brands or activities (Solomon et al., 2006) with one *Iphone brigade* and the one who are against.

**Social factors-(Aspirational reference groups):** This kind of reference groups occur when consumers admire their traits or qualities and have a desire to have the similar qualities of the admired figures such as well-known performers or business people by copying their behaviours even their consumption choices such as their choice of cars, clothing (Solomon et al., 2006). The comment below is chosen as the best representative comment to describe the probable reasons of consumers to buy an iPhone as in the following:

*'I hate Iphone...They buy it for the name and will buy it just because celebs have one.....'*  
*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

As it can be seen that the consumers are affected by the aspirational reference groups because *the celebs have one*.

**Brand Feeling-(Social approval):** Moreover, the above comments describe us that these consumers want to feel social approval in other words; they want to be approved by the given society with having an iPhone which also Keller (MSI, 2001) stated that the brand influences the consumers' feeling in a positive way in order to look similar, favourably on their behaviour or appearance with respect to *brand feeling* block of Customer based brand equity people. However, from the people who do not own an iPhone, they do not approve them in the society they belong to.

#### **e. Psychological Factors affecting Brand Feeling**

**Psychological Factors-(Attention):** Attention of consumers can be gained by the massive marketing attempts by the marketers which can be advertisements on the products itself, on TV or on online settings (Solomon et al., 2006) in order to make consumers get familiar with the *brand's identity* make them to know the brand's name and recognize the brand (Keller; MSI, 2001).

*“Marketing was superb...made this crap a status symbol!!”*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

**Brand Feeling-(Social approval):** The above comment conveys that Apple marketing made its product iPhone as a status symbol. This consumer seems dissatisfied with the marketing created need affecting consumers' social approval perception in a given society (Solomon et al., 2006). The comment above expresses the consumers' awareness that marketing manipulates people by sending the message that Iphone owbers are different then the rest. This comment pertains to the 'brand feeling' block of the Customer Based Brand Equity model (Keller; MSI, 2001).

#### **f. Personal Factors affecting Brand Imagery**

**Personal Factors-(Personality and Self-concept):** Prestige, status and personality perceived more sensitively by people who have high personality and self-concept than people have low personality and self-concept (DeBono, 1987; Hogg et al., 2000 in Czellar, 2003).

With the comment below, this consumer feels hate towards himself with the reason of having an iPhone which is a very critique evaluation of an iPhone owner does towards his self-concept.

*“I have an iPhone, I hate myself...no, I really do!”*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

**Brand Imagery-(Personality and value):** Moreover, consumers may also find personality and values from a brand, which is referring to the brand owners' treats (Keller, 2001). According to Keller (2008), self-respect exists when a person feels a sense of pride or feels better about themselves which this consumer associate Apple with a personal traits as smugness. Smugness could be associated with rejection towards the common memory association of Apple as a 'wealthy brand', according to Keller (2008)'s Apple Mental Map. Moreover, the below consumer comment describes how the memory association of the brand with a personality trait.

*“Typical apple smugness!....”*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

#### **g. Social Factors affecting Brand Resonance**

**Social Factors-(Social approval & Reference groups):** Moreover, these consumers have an iPhone in order to gain a social approval or an acceptance in a society (Solomon et al., 2006). This feeling of social approval also occurs in order to look similar, favourably on consumers' behaviour or appearance with respect to brand feeling (Keller; MSI, 2001). With respect to, the reference groups can be brand-related communities as well where people can share their ideas on online chat rooms, boards and blogs with the people who have never met in order to work together by evaluating the products' quality, performance and make judgements which have a big influence on a person's product choices (Solomon et al., 2006) which these against consumers toward iPhone do on Facebook.

**Brand Resonance- (Attitudinal attachment):** Keller (2008) pointed out the importance of strong personal attachment to a brand such as ‘love’ the brand. With respect to the below comment, it can be concluded that this consumer has an attitudinal attachment against the people who own an iPhone and it is the same for iPhone owners whom want to be ‘sheep’ for looking good.

**Brand Resonance- (Active engagement, Sense of community):** As Keller (MSI, 2008) stated that active engagement and sense of community occur when consumers invest their time, energy and money into brand such as participating on the brand-related websites, chat rooms etc. With respect to, the overall evaluation about the ‘We hate Iphone!!’ page on Facebook, the consumers are actively engaging into this brand-related website, making comments, sharing their opinions based by negative e-WOM in this social network setting with the expectation of getting together the consumers who had bad experiences about iPhone and against Apple for several reasons.

*‘Just to introduce myself, I just dont hate iPhones...I hate anything Apple!!...they just wanna be sheep and look good whilst displaying their knowledge of..guess.. nothing!’*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

### **5.3.5. Anti-branding & Brand Resonance**

**Anti-branding:** Anti-branding is a concept which nowadays has an increasing importance of online consumer power on the Internet (Kucuk, 2010). As it can be seen from the below comment, this information about Apple’s lack of corporate social responsibility efforts is given with the aim of creating hostility amongst consumers towards Apple and iPhone which can be described as an anti-branding effort against the Apple Iphone.

*‘In the End, few Workers had too much pressure and went commit suicide. Apple suggested the factory to use toxic materials to replace alcohol for cleaning iPhone’s screen. But you know why? Not because it good for the environment or the worker’s health, it’s BECAUSE that toxic material is cheaper and they can make the most money out of it! Now some of the workers were poisoned (Like about few thousand people). So who’s to blame? The China Factory... OR Apple? Yeah, I agree, iPhone is somehow nice... But do you know that ugly Truth, and hard work behind that shiny phone? Now you know!’*

*(Info/We hate Iphone!!, 2011).*

With respect to, Thompson et al., (2006); Kucuk, (2008a); Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, (2009) define the anti-branding as a negative effort against to a brand's identity which is also contrast to the efforts of the marketers with respect to generate positive meanings and identity to a brand (Kucuk, 2010) which shows its significance for marketers to consider in their marketing strategies.

**Brand Resonance:** With respect to this concept, consumers also use websites, blogs or social networking spaces to share their feelings (Kucuk, 2010) and ideas about a brand or a product they own and experienced. Further, this practice, called positive eWOM or consumer sponsorship, is favourable to the brand when consumers' shared opinions are positive. In contrast, it is threatening to Brand Equity and Brand Value when consumers' eWOM related to a particular brand or its extended product is negative because it has a direct impact on Brand Resonance. Along the same lines, the subject of this research, the Facebook page 'We hate Iphone!!' content of negative evaluations of the consumers about the Apple iPhone, is threatening to the Corporate Brand, Apple.

### **5.3.6. Consumer Choice affecting Brand Performance**

**Consumer Choice- (Post-purchase satisfaction):** Moreover, sometimes consumers' expectations are not met. When the actual performance quality of a product or service fails, consumers feel dissatisfied. On the other hand, as Solomon et al., (2006) states, when performance exceeds expectations, consumers become satisfied and pleased. However, if the contrary occurs, then consumers realize the risk involved with purchases and begin to act as decision makers. In this cases, consumers experience each step of the consumer choice process, by starting with problem recognition, which, according to the above comment, is the lack of performances of the Apple iPhone. As a result, when the product fails to meet consumers' expectations, this influences the consumers' perception about that brand in a negative way and the brand meaning as well. After this stage, consumers begin the stage of gathering information on virtual brand communities where consumers make 'brand judgements' about the product or brand by evaluating both performance and imagery associations of the brand with a negative eWOM. Then, this consumer expresses his desire to switch to another brand as *Android* because his expectations have not been met by the iPhone purchase. The consumer is now disappointed with the iPhone and became dissatisfied with the parent brand Apple.



*‘‘I HATE MY IPHONE 3G WITH SO MUCH PASSION!!! WORST PHONE IVE EVER OWNED, drops calls every 5 min with full bars, auto text drives me INSANE, locks up daily, i can’t wait to get a android phone. Worst software ever, i compare it all the time to a computer from 1989’’*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

**Brand Performance:** Performance is an important sub-dimension for generating a brand meaning and has a big role in affecting the consumers’ evaluations towards a brand or a product. With respect to, Solomon et al., (2006) says that ‘‘performance happens to exceed our expectations’’, otherwise expectation is not met and occurs a negative reaction by consumers. As it can be seen from the above comment, the dissatisfied consumer provides his negative reactions about the product he owns.

### **5.3.7. Consumer Culture affecting Brand Feeling**

**Consumer Culture- (Cultural capital):** Bourdieu (1991) stated that people have a desire to gain status with recognition and prestige. With respect to, this consumer actually expresses that his concept of status is very different than owning an iPhone. Moreover, according to Bourdieu, (1984; in Bertilsson, 2009; Corrigan, 1997) regarding to the below comment, this consumer denotes cultural capital. Specifically, the comment below, expresses that this consumer does not believe that the iPhone is a status symbol.

*‘‘Are people that stupid,they buy the phone not because it's a good phone.They buy it for the name and will buy it just because celebs have one,there are so many better phones out there’’.*

*(We hate Iphone!!, 2010).*

**Brand Feeling-(Social approval):** Social approval which is a brand feeling of brand response block has big influence in consumers’ behaviours towards deciding a product to buy or own. With respect to, sometimes consumers have a desire to buy a product which is used as a status symbol with the belief of increasing up to an upper social class and desiring to feel identified by their consumption preferences (Solomon et al., 2006). The above comment describes a consumer’s negative opinions towards the product iPhone with the reason of its characteristic as a *status symbol*.

## 6. RESULTS/DISCUSSION

This analysis aimed to describe the content of negative eWOM in social network settings, identifying the possible motives of consumer dissatisfaction or product avoidance. In addition, we describe the relationship between negative eWOM and Customer based brand equity.

These findings provide the following insights;

The CBBE model (Keller, 2008) is an appropriate tool for brand equity audit in the social network environment. Specifically, we found that the CBBE is a good tool to analyze negative eWOM related to a brand, due to the fact that the CBBE structure shows the Brand Building Objectives, thus, we could identify areas of weaknesses in corporate image and customer based brand equity. In addition, by expanding the model with further consumer Behaviour related theory, we were able to examine possible motives of dissatisfaction or rejection of a brand of product. Further, we gained further understanding in regards to consumer created negative brand/product meanings related to the Apple iPhone.

The detailed description of negative description eWOM content under CBBE in the Analysis section of this research provides guidelines in regards to the weaknesses of corporate brand equity due to negative consumer created brand meaning. The findings of this study have a number of important practical implications.

The CBBE model enables marketers to audit negative eWOM in social networks and provides a means to identify weaknesses in brand image. In addition, the CBBE sub-dimensions provide detailed explanation of empirical phenomena and possible motives behind consumer created negative eWOM brand image online. It is recommended that Managers of the Apple iPhone brand address these issues by reformulating strategies directed to sustain brand equity in the virtual environment.

Through the analysis of the negative eWOM found on the Facebook page “We hate Iphone!!”, under the Customer based brand equity model by Keller, we were able to audit the consumer Based Brand Equity related to the Apple iPhone. Further, the comments lead us to the conclusions listed below in regards to the CBBE Brand Building Blocks:

**A. Brand Salience:**

- We identified the Brand Salience of iPhone as its ‘*association with Apple Corporate Brand*’ since consumers relate the iPhone product with the Corporate brand.

**B. Brand Imagery:**

- This category describes that according to the user-profile and performance coded comments, iPhone owners are the followers of fashion trends without considering its lack of performance, durability, and reliability.
- Moreover, consumers whom express their hate for iPhone associate the Apple brand with a person’s smugness. Hence, consumers attribute a personality trait to the brand.

**C. Brand Performance:**

- On the “We hate Iphone!!” page, there is a significant number of negative evaluations of the Apple iPhone’s performance. Moreover, consumers have negative experiences about iPhone regarding its durability and reliability, which is considered a motive of consumer dissatisfaction. This issue is important due to the fact that consumers have a propensity to switch to another brand when the performance quality of a product fails to meet expectations.
- Consumers’ evaluations are affected by the products’ style and design, for instance, some consumers see iPhone as ugly as a stone.
- In addition, price is an important factor affecting consumers’ evaluations about a product. In this case, consumers see iPhone as a very expensive product, thus economic situation of a person also affects its evaluations towards a product.

**D. Brand Feeling:**

- Consumers own an iPhone because they have a desire to belong to a social reference group, the feeling, as social approval is an important factor affecting the consumers' consumption preferences.
- Moreover, Referent Power, aspirational reference groups with well-known people also affect the consumers' behaviours towards a product.
- In addition, consumers want to have an iPhone because they have a desire to buy up to a higher social class. Hence, some consumers see the iPhone ownership as a status symbol in society.
- As mentioned above, Apple uses iPhone as a status symbol, and for this same reason, some consumers owning an iPhone feel hate towards themselves for being part of the social scheme.

**E. Brand Resonance:**

- Consumers constantly have negative attitudinal attachment towards the brand iPhone with the feeling 'hate'. Moreover, these consumers use Facebook for sharing their ideas by forming a group of people whom hate iPhone. These attempts are mostly related to the Anti-branding efforts.

## 6.1. CONCLUSION

The analysis shows Anti-branding as a latent threat to corporate image.

Anti-branding sentiment triggered by market level consumer dissatisfaction was found in the content analysis. Market-level consumer dissatisfaction refers to disapproval of corporate irresponsible business practices. That is, consumers are unsatisfied with Apple's corporate responsibility practices. The presence of anti-branding content in social networks is especially threatening to the corporate brand because there is a negative correlation between the presence of market derived dissatisfaction speech and brand financial value. In fact, the Facebook page subject of analysis, "We hate Iphone!!" was initiated by a consumer showing his dissatisfaction in relation negative events involving Apple's supply chain. Further, the consumer specifically includes in the description of the abovementioned Facebook Page complaints about the Apple iPhone Chinese suppliers paying low wages to workers and demanding so much of workers that some committed suicide. The description of the page also mentions that Apple's profit on the iPhone is 200% (We hate Iphone!!).

Apple, as the most valuable brand in the world in 2011(Millward Brown Optimor, 2011), has grown to be a strong brand, and as such, it is more vulnerable to anti-branding attacks (Kucuk, 2010). Consequently, it is recommended that Apple marketing communications send a clear message in regards to Corporate Responsibility (CSR) issues. In addition, corporate management needs to continue working towards a solution to the irresponsible business practices in its supply chain as a prerequisite to include CSR as part of their corporate image. Hence, Apple, as a corporation must ensure that its supply chain is aligned to CSR values. Otherwise, the company risks to be perceived as inauthentic, and it can backfire and cause an increase of consumer anti-branding activity (Smith et. al, 2010). Moreover, market speech anti-branding content is particularly damaging to the Corporate Brand since it has a direct impact on the corporate brand value (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Therefore, it is recommended that Apple implements further measures to correct the negative issues in its supply chain in order to be responsible to society and to avoid serious financial devaluation of the brand.

## **6.2. Theoretical & Practical Implications**

This research examined consumer created negative eWOM related to the Apple iPhone in the “We Hate iPhone!!” page on the Social Network Facebook in order to describe brand related consumer created negative content in social media settings, specifically negative e-WOM. Further, the analysis objective was to describe the relationship between negative e-WOM related to a Category Extension product and the parent brand equity.

As a result, we identified that The Customer based brand equity model (Keller, 2008) is an appropriate analysis tool for Social Network settings due to its dyadic nature, which provides both tangible and intangible dimensions to Customer based brand equity.

Further, we find that contents of consumer’s negative eWOM are aligned with Strategic Brand management theory, specifically, we were able to analyse consumers’ negative evaluations and map them under the Customer based brand equity model by Keller (2008). Further, we were able to find direct relationship between product related consumer created negative eWOM and Customer based brand equity. Therefore, we believe that the CBBE pyramid by Keller is useful tool to analyze negative eWOM comments on Social Media. However, we find that research on Social Network context should be specifically tailored to take into consideration the accentuation of consumer power and its implications on brand identity and meanings creation.

Moreover, the results of both the empirical and theoretical research show that the monitoring of consumer created media content through negative eWOM in Social Media related to brands and products is of crucial importance for several reasons.

The monitoring of Customer based brand equity through the tracking of content of negative eWOM allows brand managers to identify areas of brand equity weakness and thus, create and implement strategies to correct them in order to avoid damage to Corporate Brand Image and Identity. Specifically, companies would potentially be able to avoid negative repercussions to Brand Value by monitoring consumer Brand equity in social networks.

In addition, monitoring negative eWOM would allow the early identification of anti-branding activities in its earlier stage and as a result to implement strategies to control it.

The text below describes the findings of our research on both theoretical and practical considerations. We would like to point out that the findings and implications are overlapping in

regards to both theoretical and practical dimensions due to the fact that the main issue found on this research are aligned with both recent theoretical and professional publications on this issue including; the Marketing Science Institute (2010), Hanna et al., (2011), Fournier & Avery (2011) and Hartzel et al., (2011) to name some.

Brand management has changed, nowadays, brands management in the virtual reality, especially social networks, further; it has reached equal or even greater importance than the traditional offline world. Specifically, because Social networks inherent characteristics of speed on information dissemination and search in combination to the sense of belonging that creates on consumers have made them a pivotal medium to influence today's consumers' society.

On the other hand, social networks have become omnipresent vacuums of massive quantities of consumers' data ideal for empirical analysis (Lerman & Ghosh, 2010). Further, social networks provide rich data sets that provide evidence of consumer behaviour and their interaction between brands and personalities that companies yet have to leverage.

Specifically, e-WOM content on social networks has become a crucial consumer data source for companies, mainly, due to the fact that WOM has high influence on new consumer buying attitude of products or services (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Hence, it has become a necessity to understand the dynamics and content of eWOM on social networks for both academicians and practitioners in order create tailored strategies designed to protect the brand assets and brand value.

The necessity of understanding consumer created negative brand identity online is of pivotal importance due to the increasing influence of social networks, consumers have become market participants in brand meaning creation rather than passively accepting the brand identity created by corporations (Kucuk, 2010). Hence, in order to protect and sustain the corporate brand is necessary that companies monitor consumer created negative meanings in online settings in order to address the issues with a strong and clear online presence aligned to consumers' values.

In addition, companies need to monitor and promptly address consumer created negative brand media content before it goes viral and creates irreversible damage to brand image and as a result, brand value. Further, the raise of anti-branding sites is a clear treat to corporations, especially those holding strong brands, hence, more now than ever is of pivotal importance that corporate

brands align their identity with a strong socially responsible image. However, a prerequisite to incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility in the brand strategy is to find a solution that addresses supply chain issues, otherwise, there is a latent risk of the brand image being perceived as unauthentic.

Further, companies need to regain power in regards to brand meanings and identity creation in order to sustain and protect corporate brand value. Negative brand associations created by negative eWOM and anti-brand sites directly affects the perception of value towards a brand and hence becomes a liability in the eyes of consumers. As a result, negative eWOM directly impacts brand image, brand demand and as a result, brand value.

Product and brand related eWOM has become essential to control and understand with the exponential growth of social networks. For instance, currently, there are more than 500 million active Facebook users (Facebook, 2011b); hence, the data linked to these consumers' profiles can signify a data source that could aid companies in gaining insight in relation to consumer preferences, new trends, and consumer culture.

Thus it follows, companies have the opportunity to leverage the accelerating popularity of social media in consumers' daily lives by using this channels of communication for both listening to consumers opinions and engaging into two way conversations, and to gather information in regards to demographics, trends and consumer behaviour in general (Goyette et al., 2010).

From the managerial point of view, times have changed and the times when management was able to carefully control brand image are over. Social media has provided consumers with power of brand co-creation and they are expressing their opinions and evaluations about brands online to friends and members of their networks.

eWOM on social networks should be viewed as a distinctive form of media content. Hence, companies can apply content-management practices and metrics to it in order to gain further understanding and leverage its power. Moreover, the most challenging characteristic of eWOM on Social Networks is that it cannot be purchased and at the same time, it is priceless. Social media eWOM must be earned and it is the most effective form of marketing nowadays. Companies can only leverage it by collaborating, offering true value to consumers both online, and offline (Zeisser, 2010).



As a result, the emergent Social media marketing new principle is lead by participation as a form of marketing. Moreover, in social media, the traditional pushing marketing approach is not efficient. On the contrary, marketers ought to participate actively in social media. Moreover, companies need to gather and analyse content available in relation to their brands and be open to dialogue and collaboration with consumers in order to reach solutions and establishing relationships (Thoring, 2011).

Consequently, consumers expect brand to listen, and get involved in the conversation is not an option anymore, it is a necessity in order to regain a certain control of brand related communication in social media. It is clear that some companies will be more reluctant to change and traditional marketing roles will have to evolve to current consumer power times (Dwyer, 2010). Further, new marketing positions specifically created to brand management in social media are a necessity due to the massive scale of its dimension.

The understanding of consumer created negative eWOM in Social networks represents an opportunity for marketers leverage on and design marketing techniques tailored for the virtual environment in order to influence consumer-to-consumer communications and consequently, the purchasing decision making process (Kozinets et al., 2010a).

Above all, social networks are a crucial medium that influences today's consumers. As a result, companies need to be present on Social networks in order to manage brand image. Moreover, companies need to have corporate values that are socially and culturally oriented, and these values must be reflected in the online environment, especially on social networks. Moreover, corporate values should strongly be connected Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporate Social Responsibility practices are rewarding for both the corporate brand equity and society. As a result, consumers will feel proud of carrying the brand despite anti-branding ideology pressure both online and offline.

### **6.3. Future Research**

The case study suggests the need for additional research. Specifically a cross-sectional longitudinal case study approach would be useful in order to analyse the effects of changes in marketing strategy, branding and product development have in the intensity, quantity, content and nature of negative eWOM. To conduct further studies through interviews of consumers participating in negative eWOM in order to reach further understanding of negative Customer Brand Equity and related anti-branding activities in virtual social networks.

Research oriented towards an examination of the effect of the exposure of anti-branding online content in social networks on consumer perception towards the brand would aid to further understanding of the impact of anti-branding content in social networks (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Further knowledge of consumer created negative brand identity and meanings in the social network settings will aid both theorists and practitioners in tailoring strategic management techniques to the online environment in order to protect and sustain the corporate brand image and value.

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