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**Exploring the Concept of
Business Scapegoating:
key contributing constructs and preventative measures**

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Abstract

Title:	Exploring the Concept of Business Scapegoating: key contributing constructs and preventative measures
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Keywords:	Business scapegoating, Brand crisis management, Reputation management, Scapegoating, Core values
Thesis purpose:	The purpose of our study is to investigate the concept of business scapegoating and its influencing constructs and how they could be hindered
Methodology:	A constructionist approach is used with a grounded theory strategy. Concerning our qualitative research, an exploratory method was used followed by discourse analysis, serving as a support function, which constitutes a triangulation method.
Theoretical perspective:	The theoretical framework is largely based on theories regarding brand crisis- and reputation management, and product-harm crises management. In the analysis, theories are adapted to a scapegoating approach.
Empirical data:	Our empirical data was collected mainly through qualitative semi-structured in-depth-interviews with professionals within brand crisis management, media relations, sustainability, and sociology. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for us to gather additional qualitative data and new insights in addition to the interview questions.
Conclusion:	We conclude that there are five key external constructs contributing to the phenomena of business scapegoating, with two supporting constructs. There are measures that have preventative effects on the phenomena, but the phenomena cannot be fully avoided. A detailed description concerning the key constructs, root causes of the phenomena in the example cases, and preventative measures are provided.

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. BACKGROUND – EXAMPLE CASES	2
1.1.1. <i>Findus</i>	2
1.1.2. <i>McDonald's</i>	4
1.1.3. <i>Nestlé</i>	5
1.2. DISPOSITION.....	5
1.3. DEFINITIONS.....	6
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.1. THE ROLES OF BRAND CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND CORE VALUES IN A SCAPEGOAT SITUATION ...	7
2.2. CORE VALUES IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT	9
2.3. BRAND REPUTATION.....	10
2.4. PRODUCT-HARM CRISES.....	12
2.5. THE CONCEPT OF SCAPEGOATING.....	16
2.6. SCAPEGOATING IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL FIELD	17
3. METHODOLOGY.....	19
3.1. PHILOSOPHY	19
3.1.1. <i>Role of theory</i>	19
3.1.2. <i>Epistemological and ontological approach</i>	20
3.1.3. <i>Constructionism</i>	20
3.2. RESEARCH STRATEGY.....	21
3.3. RESEARCH METHOD	22
3.4. CASE STUDY	24
3.5. DATA COLLECTION.....	24
3.6. RESPONDENT SELECTION CRITERIA	26
3.7. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA	27
3.8. ETHICAL ISSUES	28
4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.....	29
4.1. UNBIASED SOURCES	29
4.1.1. <i>Ingela Stenson</i>	29
4.1.2. <i>Jeanette Fors-Andrée</i>	31
4.1.3. <i>Hongzhi Gao</i>	34
4.1.4. <i>Anders Persson</i>	36
4.1.5. <i>Katarina Skalare</i>	37
4.1.6. <i>Anna Gustafsson</i>	39
4.1.7. <i>Lena Mellin</i>	39
4.1.8. <i>Jan Helin</i>	41
4.2. COMPANY SOURCES.....	41
4.2.1. <i>Frida Berg</i>	41
4.2.2. <i>Marie Louise Elmgren</i>	43
5. ANALYSIS	46
5.1. CONSTRUCTS CONTRIBUTING TO SCAPEGOATING	46
5.1.1. <i>Culture</i>	46
5.1.2. <i>Media</i>	47
5.1.3. <i>Consumers</i>	48
5.1.4. <i>Social media</i>	50
5.1.5. <i>Authorities</i>	52
5.1.6. <i>Competitors</i>	53
5.1.7. <i>Suppliers</i>	54
5.2. BRAND CRISIS MANAGEMENT	54
5.2.1. <i>Preventative Measures</i>	54
5.2.2. <i>Authenticity & Core Values in Crisis Management</i>	56

5.2.3. <i>Reputation in Crisis Management</i>	58
5.3. WHY A COMPANY BECOMES A SCAPEGOAT.....	59
6. CONCLUSION & CONTRIBUTION	61
6.1. CONCLUSION	61
6.2. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	61
6.2.1. <i>Which key constructs are central in a company becoming a scapegoat?</i>	61
6.2.2. <i>Why does a company become a scapegoat?</i>	64
6.2.3. <i>What company efforts can decrease the risk of becoming a scapegoat?</i>	65
6.3. CONTRIBUTIONS.....	68
6.3.1. <i>Theoretical implications</i>	68
6.3.2. <i>Managerial implications</i>	69
6.4. LIMITATIONS	70
6.5. FURTHER RESEARCH	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	72
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	79

1. Introduction

Over the past decade we have seen many industry scandals blow up in media. Child labor in the carpet industry, underpaid clothing factory workers, greedy bankers and so forth. In many of these cases there is a sole company who gets the majority of the attention. Thus their part in the scandal has a smaller impact than the other companies involved. Our interest for this topic was raised when the recent news about the horsemeat scandal reached Swedish media. For this scandal the scapegoat has been the Findus Group (Thambert, 2013), mainly in Sweden. Hence, Findus is one of our example cases in this study, presented more in-depth later in the introduction.

This study will focus on the risks of becoming a scapegoat in a scandal, and what brands can do to reduce the harm. A product-harm crisis could decrease trust in a whole supply chain, if perceived as an industry-wide problem, even if beginning with one brand (Gao et al., 2012). In the horsemeat scandal for instance, we believe consumer trust for ready-made food has decreased, not just the trust for Findus. Consumers anger from a crisis creates negative word-of-mouth, which is a great threat to companies, even greater than reduced purchase intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Therefore, it is of great importance that companies strategically manage the crisis or somehow respond. Yet, product-harm crises are not equal to scapegoating situations, even though there are mutual traits.

In common for many industry scandal situations are that the scapegoat companies have not committed the initial error, which in many cases can be traced further down the supply chain, yet they have all served as scapegoats for the scandal. What aspects that impact, and how one becomes a scapegoat are still not brought up to light. If companies would know why and how, it could benefit future work with corporate branding and crisis management, both managerial and theoretically.

A strong reputation is central in brand crisis- and reputation management, and Aaker (2004) claims *perceived quality* as one of the main building blocks of a corporate brand. If the brand promise is high quality that is what the brand must deliver. To gain trust a brand must consistently deliver reliable, high quality if promised. When facing a crisis like the ones we are studying, brands are struck with their quality promises.

Greyser (2009) argues for complete honesty and transparency in a crisis, even though it embarrasses the company. Content substance and credible communications are central. Omar et al. (2009) agree, adding credibility and trust to the equation as most significant elements to maintain reputation and corporate image. We want to emphasize that theories commonly states *what* companies should do in a crisis, not mentioning *why* they are in that situation. Hence, we want to take those theories a step further, by studying how companies actually do to maintain their reputation and crises. To prevent a crisis, Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) suggest a set of different response strategies, such as denial, recall and effort in a larger perspective.

The purpose of our study is to investigate the concept of business scapegoating and its influencing constructs and how they could be hindered. The goal of our research is to create a framework in which the constructs that lead to a company becoming a scapegoat for a scandal will be clarified and analyzed in order to gain greater knowledge of what forces that cause this phenomenon to occur. In order to build a framework, we will discuss the issue with several experts within the field of study, and company stakeholders, facilitated by example cases in which several companies have been involved, but one sole company serves as front figure for the scandal. Example cases are used in order to concretize the issue, however not used comprehensively throughout the study. Analysis and building of the framework will be undependable of the case examples, even though the cases are analyzed as well. We will also study the process of becoming a scapegoat, based on the framework. What aspects to consider, and how having knowledge of this could decrease risks. This brings us down to our research questions;

- Which key constructs are central in a company becoming a scapegoat?
- Why does a company become a scapegoat?
- What company efforts can decrease the risk of becoming a scapegoat?

1.1. Background – Example cases

1.1.1. Findus

In early 2013, the Irish government discovered horsemeat instead of beef in burgers made for the Irish and British market. When this is revealed, Findus contacts their suppliers to assure this does not affect Findus and their product range. However, Findus supplier of ready-made

lasagne, the French company Comigel, could not guarantee that their meat was 100 percent beef at the time (Findus, 2013a). Findus replied by doing a DNA analysis of the product internally, and found that it did consist of both horsemeat and beef. Due to the DNA analysis, the international fraud was uncovered, afflicting Findus and many other manufacturers in Europe. Findus recalled the lasagne right away and started a legal process against the beef supplier (Findus, 2013a).

Since the horsemeat was found in internal controls, Findus was the only brand involved in the scandal initially, outside the UK and Ireland. The issue was widely reported in Swedish mass media, and soon after, private label brands (ICA, Axfood, COOP) recalled their products manufactured by Comigel (Granlund, 2013; Expressen, 2013). However, the media and consumer focus was still on Findus, and *Aftonbladet* (Svensson, 2013) published slideshows with pictures making fun of Findus, made by consumers and found on Twitter and other social medias. Two days after the scandal revealed, Swedish Minister for Rural Affairs, Eskil Erlandsson, holds Findus responsible in the scandal, since the company brought the product to the market, arguing that Findus should be reported to the police due to fraud and cheating (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2013).

Jari Latvanen, CEO of Findus, says in a press release (Mynewsdesk, 2013) February 10th that Findus got an unproportionately big share of the blame, as the company took responsibility and acted fast. Findus is also the company, which has taken industry responsibility by having consistent contact with the Swedish *Livsmedelsverket* (National Food Agency). Furthermore, Findus state that Comigel has breached their contract, and consumers are the ones being troubled by this issue, beyond Findus (Mynewsdesk, 2013). Findus' Head of Communications, Anna Broekman, says in an interview with media magazine *Resume* (Thambert, 2013), becoming the scapegoat of the scandal is the downside of working proactively, as the negative publicity is based on emotional reaction. Findus' core values are quality and sustainability (Findus, 2013b), which they have a clear focus on during the recovery process. As a part of Findus' recovery process, they started a co-operation with industry organizations and competitors in order to discuss quality issues and consumer protection. The aim is to reduce the risk of future scandals and frauds (Findus, 2013c). Findus posted a public statement on its website, forgiving the situation and inviting over 2000 consumers to their manufacturing plant in Bjuv, Sweden, where the majority of Findus products are produced. The goal of the invitation is to show consumers how Findus work with

quality and quality control. The public statement was also communicated in a TV spot on national channels (Findus, 2013d).

1.1.2. McDonald's

Over the last decade, people have tried to sue McDonald's for causing child obesity many times. Back in 2002, eight obese youths sued the company, arguing that they did not know fast food was unhealthy, due to the lack of nutrition information at the restaurant (Santora, 2002). The case made it to court, but the judge ruled McDonald's was not responsible for any individual's obesity (Wald, 2003). Yet, two of McDonald's' core values *prioritize the consumer experience* and *operating ethically* (McDonald's, 2013). In Morgan Spurlock's documentary "*Super Size Me*", Morgan himself eats every meal of the day at McDonald's for a month as an experiment, inspired by the previous lawsuit. Supervised by doctors and nutritionists, Morgan gained weight, got mood swings and ultimately, liver damage and highly increased risk of diabetes (Scott, 2004). The documentary raised discussion, and McDonalds UK opened a website, *supersizeme-thedebate.co.uk* (archive.org, 2013) in order to share their perspective, arguing for the changes they have already made, e.g. introducing more salads and remove the super size-option. Furthermore, McDonald's started a recovery program in 2004 in order to perform better in all areas. By the end of 2006, McDonald's had their strongest financial year recorded, but the brand was still associated with obesity (Pehrson, 2007).

In more recent years, McDonald's shareholders have proposed some changes that would reduce the impact on child obesity, such as smaller sizes of french fries in the Happy meal, while the company have started to use more vegetable options than ever before (Baertlein & Lewis, 2012). However, the latest shareholder proposal required McDonald's to assess their impact in child obesity, but the proposal was voted against. According to Ogunjimi (2011), children who go to school nearby a fast-food restaurant suffers greater risk of obesity, as they eat less fruit and vegetables and drink more soda.

Rosie Baker argues in a Marketing Week (Baker, 2013) article that McDonald's is often scapegoated to represent everything bad about corporate business, sometimes reasonably, sometimes not. However, big business is positive in aspects of doing good, as they could have bigger effect on certain areas, such as farming, compared to smaller business. Furthermore,

Baker argues the blaming of McDonald's causing obesity is a lazy, an ill-informed opinion without having the bigger issue in mind (Baker, 2013).

1.1.3. Nestlé

For almost 40 years, Nestlé has been boycotted by consumer groups due to the aggressive and unethical marketing of breast milk substitutes, especially in the third world (Baby Milk Action, 2013). Starting in the U.S. 1977 and then spreading to Europe in 1980 and 1981, the organization criticizes Nestlé for malnourishing babies, leading to death of infants in poor countries where the water is contaminated. Today, the boycott is operated by over 200 groups in 100 countries worldwide (Baby Milk Action, 2013). Throughout the years, the criticism against Nestlé is mainly focused on products meant for children. In 2004, Nestlé was blamed for adding sugar in their infant food (Carnhede, 2004), and as a response, Nestlé removed all the sugar in their infant food targeting at the youngest infants (Nestlé, 2005).

Nestlé have heavy focus on communicating its work with improving nutrition, health and wellness (Nestlé, 2013a, and the brand's core values are *people, quality, brands, consumer, customer, and performance* (Nestlé, 2013b). Through the heavy focus on nutrition and health, Nestlé tries to reduce the blame and improve its reputation within the categories being contaminated for a long time. More recently, Nestlé became a part of the European horsemeat scandal (Reuters, 2013), but did not suffer as a scapegoat, eventually since their products were found contaminated over a week after the first reports.

1.2. Disposition

The structure of this study is based on our personal perception of the research purpose and suitable disposition. In the second chapter we present the theoretical framework used in our research. In chapter three, we describe and discuss the methodological process, choices, research philosophy and strategy. The fourth chapter contains our empirical findings, where we categorize information from various sources, making it reasonable and structured. In the fifth chapter, we analyze our findings in comparison with the theoretical framework and cross case. Based on the fifth chapter, analysis, we will in the sixth and final chapter present our conclusions, implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

1.3. Definitions

Media logic

Altheide and Snow (1991, p. 9) define media logic as “...a form of communication, the process through which media present and transmit information”. Furthermore, media has turned into a postmodern phase, where the product is difficult to separate from the process. The understanding of media logic is found on a general approach to culture, media, and social control, given that mass media has significant impact on social life. Included in the concept is that mass media publishes news or information that consumers of media want to process, and by that, media shapes peoples lives (Altheide & Snow, 1991).

Scapegoat

The concept *scapegoat* is derived from ancient Hebrew, but the use today is rather more sophisticated. Douglas (1995, in Gao et al., 2012, p. 1272) describes the concept as “an ancient process for transference and disposal of evil, which seems to have existed ever since humans held the belief that they were under the supervision of divine beings”. A definition of the concept that fits our perceptions is “a person or group made to bear the blame for others or to suffer in their place” (Dictionary.com, 2013). Yet, the concept needs some further adaption to a corporate perspective. Payne and Davidson (2008) argue that a scapegoat brand or company is one that finds itself in focus of criticism from media, politics and/or consumers. By combining these two definitions, we find business scapegoating as *a brand made to bear the blame for other or suffer in their place, by finding itself focus of criticism from media, politics and/or consumers.*

Doing a whole poodle

Derived from a Swedish saying, first mentioned by PR consultant Pål Jebsen in 2002, when a Swedish minister chocked media by a public penance in a remarkably humble manner, in contrast with previous, cockier approach. The expression is a metaphor for a trained circus dog doing exactly what its master tells it to do (Språkrådet, 2002). Financial Times, who claimed it was one of the most notable expressions in a long time, translated the expression to English in 2003 (Financial times, 2003).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The roles of brand crisis management and core values in a scapegoat situation

Greyser (2009) introduced a framework consisting of the major factor contributing to a brand crisis. Brand crises and reputational problems come in many forms, sometimes they have been existent for a longer period of time and sometimes they occur without any warning signs. Therefore it is important that companies are well prepared when it comes to handling these problems, no matter of their size. Greyser (2009) developed categories to distinguish the different types of brand crises and reputational problems that could affect companies in today's business world. The categories involve product failure, social responsibility gap, corporate misbehavior, executive misbehavior, poor business results, spokesperson misbehavior and controversy, death of symbol of company, loss of public support, and controversial ownership (Greyser, 2009).

The above-mentioned categories can differ in size and impact; therefore it is of great importance that companies have the capacity to realize the potential damages. The crisis situations vary in impact. If the crisis only affects a small number of consumers, the impact of the problem might not harm the brand's position or meaning, but if it affects a large number of consumers the seriousness of the crises significantly increases and can threaten the brand's position severely (Greyser, 2009). The company's behaviors and actions facing brand crises are crucial in the solution process of the crises (Greyser, 2009).

Corporate communication and corporate authenticity play an essential part in managing crises (Greyser, 2009). However, simply communicating with the affected publics and media does not provide the optimal solution (Greyser, 2009). In order to convince the affected media and affected public, the company has to have a high degree of authenticity present in the communication that is well adapted to the situation at hand (Greyser, 2009). Incorporating authenticity in the communication is a challenge for companies in a crisis (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Greyser (2009) states that there are two significant challenges that hinder the efforts to generate authenticity, one situational and one generic (Greyser, 2009). Using generic communicational methods are in many cases over exaggerated, and whilst in crises consumers tend to put more focus into the information the company communicates (Greyser, 2009). Over exaggeration in company communication is generally accepted by consumers and media

when it is broadcasted in advertising, but crises situations this approach is not as accepted and it decreases the odds of gaining or improving authenticity (Greysen, 2009). To generate, maintain, and improve authenticity there are four contexts suggested by Greysen (2009): talking authentic, being authentic which relates to the organizations core values, staying authentic, and defending authenticity in crisis situations.

When companies end up in a brand crisis there are several angles to tackle the problem. However, the companies approach should highly depend on the situation they are facing. Greysen (2009, p. 598) states, *“in the face of a crisis, especially when it is rooted in a problem that is or will become visible, I believe an organization should admit the truth, even if embarrassing”*. Facing the problem, no matter if it forces the company to change corporate behavior. In support with credible communications, it is the best approach towards solving the brand crises (Greysen, 2009). The solution to the problem is not communications solely; it’s a synergy between communication and actions taken by the company facing the problem (Greysen, 2009). Another potential benefit of a properly handled crisis is that the service recovery paradox can occur (McCollough, 2009). The service recover paradox occurs when a company exceeds the initial expectations of company stakeholders when handling a product- or service failure, which will increase the customer satisfaction (McCollough, 2009).

An example of successful handling of a brand crisis is the Tylenol scandal in 1982, a product produced by Johnson & Johnson (Stewart & Paine, 2011). The product failure caused seven consumers to loose their lives due to taking Tylenol pills that contained cyanide (Stewart & Paine, 2011). Johnson & Johnson’s reaction to the incident was focused on proper communications, and by recalling the product from the market (Stewart & Paine, 2011). The company undertook their “Credo” which was emphasized on safety and trust (Stewart & Paine, 2011). Johnson & Johnson quickly recovered from the incident, and Tylenol became the dominating product in the category once again (Stewart & Paine, 2011). Johnson & Johnson constantly proves their commitment to their credo, and they have served as an outstanding example for ethical behavior (Stewart & Paine, 2011).

By staying committed to their credo in every situation that can potentially become a brand crisis, Johnson & Johnson have managed to create a strong presence of authenticity. Its credo can be traced back to the organizations core values, which according to Greysen (2009) contributes to building authenticity. This implies the importance of having core values that are

“true”, which means that the values are well rooted both within the company and by consumers (Urde, 2009).

2.2. Core Values in Crisis Management

According to Urde (2009) there are three different types of value related to a brand: values related to the organization, values that summarize the brand, and values as they are perceived by the consumers. The values relating to the organization itself are products of common values, supporting ideas, habits, and norms, which contribute to building the organization's character (Urde, 2009). Values that summarize the brand are referred to as the brand essence, which is a concept with many different definitions (Urde, 2009). The brand essence is according to Kapferer (2008, in Urde 2009, p. 621), “*three to five word phrases that capture the irrefutable essence or spirit of the brand positioning.*” The values perceived by the customers are in most cases more explicit according to Kapferer (2008, in Urde 2009), therefore those values should not be associated with core or organizational values.

In order for an organization to discover their core values, they can investigate their track record, which holds the information of the different identities existent in the corporation (Urde, 2009). McCracken (2005, in Urde 2009) states that corporate brand building is a continuous process and negotiation of meaning between the above-mentioned types of brand value (Urde, 2009). Core values can evolve over time, be rooted within the organization, be build brick by brick, come out of a summary of the most essential dimensions of a corporate brand, or come out as a result of the support of the promise (Urde, 2009). Urde (2009) describes four types of core values that can be present that can be present internally and externally in a company: true, aspirational, potential, and hollow core values. True core values, are values that exists both internally and externally and is present in the organizations culture, such as safety is in Volvo (Urde, 2009). Aspirational core values are values solely present within the organization, and not to the external environment (Urde, 2009). Potential core values are values that the customers recognize, however they are not defined or understood by the organization, and therefore not part of the current corporate brand identity (Urde, 2009). Hollow core values should be avoided, since they are not rooted internally and they are in many cases simply big words with no true meaning, hence their name (Urde, 2009).

Uncovering an organizations true core values is a difficult task, but as Urde (2009) suggests the track record can provide valuable information and structure for building true values. A change of core values is necessary if they are outdated. The market- and competitive environment around the company continually changes, and therefore the core values will need to be adapted to the environment (Urde, 2009).

In order for companies to build true corporate core values while avoiding hollow core values is a hard task to accomplish, therefore Urde (2009) framework can serve as a guideline when a company attempts to improve, develop, or create true core values. The first steps in developing true core values are to remove hollow core values that lack internal and external rooting (Urde, 2009). Developing and uncovering core values that can be found in the company's track record, is a continuous process (Urde, 2009). Therefore it is of great importance that companies invest in this process in order to strengthen and maintain their true core values (Urde, 2009).

To build a solid foundation of the existent true core values in a corporation, uncovered or not, the company must incorporate working with them otherwise they will deteriorate (Urde, 2009). *"A corporate brand cannot be stronger externally than it is internally rooted in the organization"* (Urde, 2009, p. 634).

2.3. Brand Reputation

In 2003 Argenti and Druckenmiller (2003) addressed the increased importance of corporate reputation in order to achieve goals and remain competitive. Over the past decade the importance of a good corporate reputation, has significantly increased (Corkindale & Belder, 2009). Corporate reputation is a valuable and critically intangible asset, a reflection of the respect and credibility the different stakeholders consider the organization possesses (Corkindale & Belder, 2009). The corporate reputation is built over time by the combined judgments of the stakeholders about the company's actions and communication (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010; Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

The stakeholders play an essential role in improving the corporate reputation, but due to the wide range of different stakeholders, companies must consider their communicational efforts and behavior in order to satisfy their stakeholders. The key to this is through ambiguity

(Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010). By using ambiguous brand messages that are vague and emotionally satisfying to stakeholders in order to promote authenticity, it opens up a broad perspective of interpretations that can exist simultaneously, which minimizes the risk of stakeholder conflicts according to Davenport and Leitch (2005). Using the ambiguity approach in brand communication can ultimately unite employees, external customers, and critics simultaneously as it generates support for the corporate brand and limit criticism or external threats (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010). Therefore it is of great importance that companies should emphasize on their stakeholders and investigate the stakeholder traits that affect their perception of company actions, steps that are necessary if a company wants to possess the benefits associated with a strong corporate reputation (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010).

A strong reputation can significantly improve a company's strength (Lai et al., 2010; Corkindale & Belder, 2009; Dolphin, 2004; Greyser, 1999). It can improve sales (Dolphin, 2004), create a sustainable competitive advantage (Dolphin, 2004), and improve overall financial performance of the company (Dolphin, 2004; Bennett & Kottasz, 2000; Greyser, 1999). Furthermore corporate reputation can serve as a buffer in negative events (Siomkos et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007; Greyser, 1999).

In the event of a brand crisis, a favorable corporate reputation can hinder the effects and influence competitor strategies due to their respect for the company in crisis according to Herbig and Milewicz (1995). However, a brand crisis can still cause severe damage and significant losses (Siomkos et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007), hence the importance of appropriate crisis- and reputation management.

The stakeholders of a company attain their information through direct information from the company, mediated reports about the company, and secondhand information from word-of-mouth and social media (Coombs, 2007). The emerge of social media has significantly changed the speed of which information travels and the means companies use to research out to their target markets (Romaniuk, 2012; Trusov et al., 2009; Winer, 2009), factors that will most certainly increase the level of criticalness for some crises (Coombs, 2007). Therefore companies must take the danger of social media into concern when in a crisis situation.

The approaches towards crisis- and reputation management vary from country to country (Custance et al., 2012). According to Greyser (1999) there are major differences between executives in different countries. Executives in France and Germany tend to put more emphasis on recognizing corporate responsibilities than US executives, while US executives are more concerned with high standards of ethical business practice than executives in China, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Singapore (Greyser, 1999). These differences prove that cultural beliefs has an effect when it comes to priorities and it will therefore most certainly be reflected in how a given company handles a crisis situation depending on which countries the crisis occurs within (Custance et al., 2012).

2.4. Product-harm crises

Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) argue for four different response strategies during a product harm crisis. With a *Denial* strategy, companies deny responsibility for the issue. *Involuntary product recall* is described as a recall of the product only after government intervention, while *Voluntary product recall* is when a product is recalled before request from government instance. Fourth, companies could use a *Super effort* strategy, making additional effort to simplify the recall process for customers, widely advertised. By this strategy, companies could also offer discount coupons and other favorable offers.

Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) use Johnson & Johnson's crisis in the U.S. with Tylenol, their Paracetamol painkiller brand that was confronted with severe criticism back in 1982. In that case, none of the competitors took advantage of the situation. They were all aware of the risk being a part of the competitor's crisis, since they used partly the same constituents in their products (Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994).

Cleeren et al. (2013) discusses crisis characteristics in terms of *negative publicity* and *blame*, and the combination of crisis characteristics and marketing adjustments in product-harm crisis situations. Price and advertising could be adjusted in various combinations due to blame and negative publicity. Berger et al. (2010) claim that negative publicity can increase product awareness, and also the likelihood of purchase, even though the increase of purchase intention is not as great as if the publicity is positive. Furthermore, Dawar (1998) argues increased brand awareness and media attention can be translated into higher ROI on advertising investments.

Cleeren et al. (2013) argue that product-harm crises could affect competitor brands, due to shared ingredients suppliers or manufacturers. Roehm and Tybout (2006) claim that product-harm crises may spill over on both the brand and a whole category, affecting competitor brands. However, consumers must activate a spillover target, e.g. a category or a competitor, when processing the scandal information. This occurs if the scandal brand is typical to the category and when the attributes of the scandal could be associated with the category. If there is fierce direct competition between two brands, the scandal brand can spillover on the competitor (Roehm & Tybout, 2006). If the extent of the crisis is wide, and affected brands are highly reputed, the crisis could threat competitors within the category, due to the uncertainty of the extent (Siomkos et al., 2010). Moreover, firms being affected by a spillover can beneficially deny the issue, aiming at correcting the consumers' view of the brand. However, if there is no spillover, competitors should not deny, due to the boomerang risk (Roehm & Tybout, 2006). Gao et al. (2012) claim that a denial is not a useful strategy if the brand is first in focus of a single- or multi-brand crisis.

Internally, Roehm & Tybout (2006) and Siomkos et al. (2010) argue high reputation reduces the threat of negative spillover to other brands in the portfolio. The increasing number of private labels is a possible concern for national-brand manufacturers, not only because of their increasing market shares, but also due to more frequent quality problems and recalls, which could erode category sales (Szymanowski & Gijsbrechts, 2012). Sometimes, private label- and national brand products are manufactured in the same factories, which could intensify the risk of spillover effects.

Due to umbrella branding, Cleeren et al. (2013) claim it is possible that crisis within one category could spillover on other categories. However, these effects are feasibly smaller than direct spillover within a category. Cleeren et al. (2013) believes product-harm crises occur more frequently in today's marketplace than ever before, constituting a danger for both brands and categories as a whole.

Gao et al. (2012) believe the first accused company should accept responsibility and compensate customers, even though the problem is industry-wide. The aim is to not make the crisis enlarged to an uncontrollable level where consumers demonize the first brand publically being a part of the issue. If so, the brand may become a scapegoat for the entire crisis. Any

brand could be vulnerable in a product-harm crisis if they cannot provide trustworthy evidence of the issue (Gao et al., 2012).

Product-harm crises could affect companies' reputation and image negatively (Dean, 2004), but outcomes as loss in baseline sales, reduction of own effectiveness for its marketing instruments and increased cross sensitivity to rival firms' marketing mix activities (Van Heerde et al., 2007). Social responsibility is considered one of the main associations of good reputation. Assiouras et al. (2013) argue that CSR could be an effective managerial tool in unexpected situations, including product-harm crises. However, a strong reputation is not equal to protection against negative impact during a crisis. Park (2008) claims that a strong reputation may be a disadvantage, since NGOs and Media have excessive attention to companies with strong reputation.

Sirdesmukh et al. (2002) argues that brand trust is an important factor in consumer behaviors and beliefs, and the consumer trust in brands impacts the perceptions of value and loyalty to a brand. Yet, in product-harm crises, decrease of trust is seen as a frequent indicator of loss of brand equity (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Ma et al. (2010) claim that a product-harm crisis significantly damages a brand through their study of Nestlé and the milk powder-crisis that occurred in China 2005. The market share and penetration critically decreased, but recovered soon. All milk powder brands in China at the time took part of the scandal, but Sanlu, one of the main manufacturers, took the biggest hit. They even filed for bankruptcy due to the crisis.

Consumers and/or government agencies could pursue legal cases against an affected company in a product-harm crisis, which will negatively affect the troubled company, as well as loyal consumers might lose trust in the company if the crisis is deep enough (Siomkos, 1999). If the extent of the crisis is high, Siomkos et al. (2010) believe marketing tools of the affected company becomes ineffective, decreasing its competitiveness.

During an extensive product-harm crisis, Eagle et al. (2005) claim that consumers share negative information about the contaminated product and brand, while media is seen as non-trustworthy, since sensationalized stories and inaccurate facts tend to be shared in the media stream. However, Siomkos (1999) states that media impact customers' response during a

product-harm crisis, aggregating the perceived danger among customers if negative information about the affected company is distributed (Siomkos, 1999). Furthermore, Tsang (2000) claims that one of consumers' main sources of information in times of crises is mass media, while Eagle et al. (2005) argue that the same strategy is used whether there is an actual crisis or just a hazard.

Siomkos et al. (2010) argue that competitors of an affected company could act responsibly by not attack the affected brand directly, but instead take advantage of the situation by indirectly influence and attract consumers, openly communicate the issue and assure that their product is safe, and will keep that way (Siomkos et al. 2010), a strategy by Pheng and Sirpat (1995, p. 38) with the conceptual name *"kill with a borrowed knife"*. Siomkos et al. (2010) suggest competitors to an affected company should work proactively; ready with a crisis plan to use immediately if a crisis is erupting in the own company or if a competitor or the entire industry is affected.

If a crisis turns into an industry crisis, Fitzsimmons (2008) suggest the industry participants should cooperate instead of compete, in order to eliminate rumors and consumer uncertainty. Cooperation shows consumers unity and that they actually work for the consumers' best interest, and over time, confidence is built up (Fitzsimmons, 2008). By that, an industry response to a crisis could be more effective.

Siomkos (1999) suggest three major factors in an industrial product-harm crisis: The company's reputation, the company's response to the crisis, and the external effects during and after the crisis. The aspect of a company's reputation is defined as following; *"...well-known companies are better able to successfully overcome crises than less well-known, or low-in-reputation companies"* (Siomkos, 1999, p. 20). Companies could respond in four different ways, according to Siomkos (1999), where the least favorable for consumers would be a denial, and along a continuum to the fourth level, super effort, where the consumer is first in mind. A super effort response strategy entails extensive information and ultimately some kind of compensation. The factor of external effects during and after a crisis comprises external factors such as press, government and NGOs monitoring the crisis and influencing the company's communication ability. However, organizations like these could work either favorable or unfavorable in the company's perspective, depending on the crisis characteristics.

In a crisis, Siomkos (1999) argues that the consumer is the ultimate judge concerning the performance of the affected company and its effort. Therefore, the perceived image of the company is key, and an important factor in the brand building, prior a possible crisis. Siomkos (1999) claim that companies should work socially responsible, not only in a crisis management-perspective, but also in a brand-building perspective.

Stephens et al. (2005) claim that companies' affected by a crisis should target their stakeholders differently in the crisis message strategies. Most commonly used is a mortification strategy, where the company tries to gain forgiveness or public approval by communicating their eager for future consumer certainty.

2.5. The concept of scapegoating

Douglas (1995, in Gao et al. 2012, p. 1272) defines scapegoating as *“an ancient process for transference and disposal of evil, which seems to have existed ever since humans held the belief that they were under the supervision of divine beings”*. In modern times, scapegoating is commonly practiced as public and social behavior. Payne and Davison (2008) claim that a scapegoat brand or company is one that finds itself focus of criticism from media, politics and/or consumers. Raven & Rubin (1976) argues that one of the sociological reasons to scapegoating is that people simply does not want to assign from blame, responsibility or giving credit for events before all facts are on the table. Due to the cognitive processes, people want to jump to conclusions about situations. Furthermore, Gao et al. (2012) argue that the motive of scapegoating is comparable to the human behavior to manifest itself by relieving guilt and fear of punishment by transferring the responsibility to someone or something else.

Payne and Davidson (2008) discuss McDonald's and the fact that the brand is often blamed, or even made a scapegoat, within the case of consumers not being able to keep a healthy diet. Most of their consumers don't have that issue. McDonald's main competitors; Subway, Burger King and KFC could possibly benefit from McDonald's situation, even though the whole fast food category suffers negative attention.

Gao et al. (2012) claim that the first brand caught in a scandal is most certainly the one becoming a scapegoat in the consumers' mind in a multi-brand crisis. However, negative publicity regarding any brand could possibly make that brand a scapegoat. Furthermore, Gao

et al. (2012) believe that not only consumers, but also government and competitors want to target a well-known brand or person for the scapegoat role. The brand receiving the greatest negative publicity will also be allocated disproportionate responsibility for the crisis.

2.6. Scapegoating in the sociological field

The philosophical anthropologist René Girard describes a scapegoat in *The Scapegoat* (1986) as a persecution myth from the past, which still holds relevant to the modern world. Girard (1986) perceives scapegoating as symbolic violence as social groups shapes an identity. A group's boundaries could be defined by performing scapegoating. Furthermore, a group will carry away possible blame to other groups or individuals through scapegoating. Sacrificial of a scapegoat is, according to Girard (1986) a key institution of social solidarity, conceptualized as internal violence. A sacrificial within a group or a community will reduce rivalries or jealousies and harmonize the group from tension, and even make it stronger.

Girard (1986) argues that the victim of scapegoating often is a part of the group, however in the peripheral, possibly due to adaption difficulties of some kind, not rarely the last member of the group. Bonazzi (1983) suggests different types of scapegoating, where *expressive* scapegoating is generally equal to Girard's (1986) description of symbolic violence. Yet, scapegoating could be instrumental, or *calculated scapegoating* (Bonazzi, 1983), mainly within organizations when the goal is to hide flaws or distract the public opinion. Instrumental scapegoats have done anything wrong, but due to hierarchical organization, higher instances will hold an individual further down the chain responsible or blamed when they feel threatened for mismanaging certain situations (Bonazzi, 1983). Power holders could also perform *offensive scapegoating*, underscoring their power by making an example of a few individuals within the organization, illustrating their supremacy and will to use it.

Rothschild et al. (2012) suggest two main motivations for scapegoating by their study of individuals' perception of international corporations and their interference with the climate change. The first motivation is to "*maintain perceived personal control by obtaining a clear explanation for a negative outcome that otherwise seems inexplicable*" (Rothschild et al., 2012, p. 1148), and secondly, "*maintain perceived personal moral value by minimizing feeling of guilt over one's responsibility for a negative outcome*" (Rothschild et al., 2012, p. 1148). However, these two motivations are somewhat correlated, and individuals could find

both motivations relevant simultaneously, yet the correlation is not significant (Rothschild et al., 2012).

Zawadzki (1948) argues that group prejudice is an internal process of frustration, which may be provoked by external events. Yet, the frustration generates aggression, which one wants to direct to somebody – a scapegoat. This scapegoat is preferably someone, often innocent but defenseless, weak or dependent on the offender. Commonly, the scapegoat is a minority of some kind, hated by the offender in lack of conscious reasons, frustration aside. Furthermore, Zawadzki (1948) claim that blaming others for one's own shortcomings is beneficial in two dimensions; It saves one's own face, and it's a reason to express the unexpressed aggressiveness. However, the aggressor needs to find some sort of proof of the victim's guilt, made up or true.

3. Methodology

3.1. Philosophy

3.1.1. Role of theory

In the specific research area of business scapegoating, reputation- and crisis management, the previous theory specific to the area of business scapegoating is limited. This study aims on the process of becoming a scapegoat and the bias of different stakeholders and aspects, in combination with company core values, reputation- and crisis management, and sociology; constructs that have not been combined in the area of research concerning scapegoating prior to this study. Hence, the role of theory is important in this study, and we consider a grounded theory stance most appropriate, due to the lack of previous research, and the aim to generate theory and a theoretical framework with an inductive approach. We did pre-study research to make sure we do not repeat previously conducted academic research in the same area. However, we could not find anything even similar. Yet, our ambition is not to follow the grounded theory process comprehensively, but it is our found perspective on the role of theory within this study.

Grounded theory will function as our constructionist method in the thesis. Grounded theory is designed to be an alternative to positivist methods, however there are approaches that contain elements both from the positivist side and the constructionist side (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). In the constructionist method the main task is to develop theory through by comparing the same event or process from different perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Everything we as researchers find during the process could be considered valid data within the concept of grounded theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In our case this will be emphasized on both event and processes taken by companies and their surrounding environment in brand crises and scandals. Glaser and Strauss (1967) both suggest two main criteria for evaluating the quality of a theory. The two criteria are that the theory has to be analytic and sensitizing the researcher's own perception (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), in which the theory has to be sufficiently analytic simultaneously as the theory can be related to peoples' own experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

3.1.2. Epistemological and ontological approach

Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 15) defines epistemological considerations to concern “*the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge*” and “*whether or not the social world can and should be studied accordingly to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural science*”. Obviously, we do not apply natural science in our study, which is strictly focused on social science, humans and meaning attached to their social actions. Thus, this study will apply an interpretive take, through the aim to understand to understand and analyze attitudes and beliefs. Bryman and Bell (2011) defines interpretivism as studies based on the experience of social actors, and that the individuals are the foundation of organizations. Saunders et al. (2007) argues that organizations are constructs of perceptions and consequent actions of individuals. We are studying individuals, interviewing them about their conceptions of a certain phenomenon, companies, and their environment, given that there is no absolute truth. An additional concept similar to interpretivism is social constructionism, defined by the aim to increase general understanding of a certain situation through rich data, where the researcher interprets and discusses reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Social constructionism is opposed by positivism, where the human interest is irrelevant and the aim is to statistically proof hypotheses probability (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This thesis does not intend to statistically proof any hypotheses, and the human interest is central. Therefore, a social constructionist perspective on research is engaged in this study.

3.1.3. Constructionism

Bryman and Bell (2011) discuss ontology and the implications of such, depending on the role of social entities in the research. The ontological approach could be considered constructionist if “*social constructions are built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors*” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 20), which holds true to this study. We believe that the area of research is a social phenomenon constructed by social actors (journalists, consumers, corporate managers et cetera) and their actions.

Constructionist research design associated with the relativist and nominalist ontologies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The research design evolves from the assumption that there is no absolute truth, in which the researcher will clarify different truths and to determine a variety of claims for truth and reality are constructed in in our daily life (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Therefore there is a broad spread of different methodologies in which each fits within the constructionist paradigm (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

The validity of constructionist designs is hard to assure (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). According to Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) there are three key criteria that must be present in a constructionist design, authenticity, plausibility, and criticality. Authenticity relates to the researchers ability to prove that he or she has a significant understanding of the environment in the organization (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Plausibility involves connecting the research with relevant concern and/or issue, while criticality encourages readers to question commonly accepted assumptions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). It is of high importance that the constructionist research is believable and achieved through methods that are transparent (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Therefore it is essential that the researchers explain their procedures in great depth in order to generate valid results.

3.2. Research Strategy

This study has a qualitative strategy, as we use words to collect and analyze data. The research area is unexplored, which is a fair argument to use a qualitative strategy (Bryman & Bell, 2011), as well as that the desired outcome is text, and not numbers. However, qualitative research is commonly criticized for the lack of reliability and validity. Yet, to study and understand people and their interpretations of phenomenon, qualitative studies are more appropriate (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The research question “*Which key constructs are central in a company becoming a scapegoat?*” could certainly be answered by a quantitative method where we conduct a survey answered by communication- and PR managers and other stakeholders. However, since the amount of existing research in the area of business scapegoating is limited, there are no theories to test, which according to Bryman and Bell (2011) are one of the foundations of quantitative research – to test theories. Hence, a qualitative strategy is better suited for this study. The same issue goes with the other two research questions, as the subject is scapegoating in those questions as well.

We are using an inductive approach, collecting language data by interviews. Generating new theories is the outcome aim, rather than testing existing theories. However, we will test pre-conceived aspects of scapegoating. These aspects are not theoretically anchored, but not to be perceived as hypotheses, since the aspects are not actually known. Prior the study, we have

searched for existing theories in the field, but have not found anything that could confirm our pre-conceptions. However, we find the theories relevant, since they are used within the field of crisis management, which could be adapted to fit our study since scapegoating is familiar to crises. We will also use theories from the sociological field, in order to learn if individual scapegoating influences business scapegoating aspects. Bryman and Bell (2011) claim it is natural in inductive studies to gain some initial knowledge in order to find relevant theories for the framework to analyze the collected data with. An inductive approach is mostly used in combination with interpretivism as epistemological orientation (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which holds true for our study.

3.3. Research Method

Our outline of our qualitative research will consist of a core set of questions surrounding the concept of being a scapegoat. To strengthen our results and to avoid conformability we include unbiased sources in order to balance and increase the dependability of our results. The first main steps will consist of general research questions relating to the investigated concept and the constructs affecting it. Since our research will consist of respondents with expert knowledge of the brand crisis and brand management field, we have verified that their knowledge will have different perspectives, and will therefore allow us to develop reliable theories and a framework with a high level of dependability, based on an analysis of the gathered data.

Using qualitative research will be the best approach towards our research questions since our area of research is fairly unexplored. However there are several challenges we will have to overcome due to selecting this research method. Qualitative research cannot be validated in the same manner as quantitative research can (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The internal- and external reliability and validity are all difficult criteria to measure due to the complexity persistent in qualitative research methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The alternative criteria for measuring the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research will lie upon four types of measurement: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Credibility relates to the extent that the findings in research are acceptable to others as well. In our case this will relate to the application of our findings to scapegoat scenarios that affects

companies not mentioned in our research. To establish credibility, the research must be carried out in good practice and applicable to the respondents in our research, which is referred to as respondent validation (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Respondent validation is when the researcher introduces the findings from each interview for the specific respondents in order to validate the results (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Using respondent validation provides the possibility to verify findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It also allows for the respondents to balance their interpretations of the findings compared to the researchers, which ultimately leads to more accurate framework (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We will use this strategy in our research in order to enable an idea generating process, however not to a full extent.

Transferability corresponds with external validity in quantitative research, which is to the extent that the findings can be generalized across social settings (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In qualitative research the investigation emphasizes more on depth rather than a broad spread of respondents; which makes qualitative research harder to generalize (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Concerning our research, the respondents will be professionals, and in combination with respondent validation to verify of our findings, it will be transferable into situations affecting companies within other industries, given that there are no traits found specifically for the food industry, which our example cases are active within. In this study, we have a rather large number of respondents with a broad spread in terms of profession to enable us to draw conclusions about the concept of business scapegoating in a wide perspective.

Dependability is a parallel to reliability and serves as a measurement of trustworthiness (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It concerns the accessibility of the records gathered from the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore we will keep detailed records of every step we take in our research in order to maintain a sufficient level of dependability in our research. Last of the four trustworthiness criteria of qualitative research is confirmability. Researchers must maintain a level of high confirmability in order to avoid confirmation bias that lacks objectivity. However, complete objectivity is impossible (Bryman & Bell, 2011), but we will try to be as open minded as possible, even though the study is partly based on pre-conceptions.

Additional to the four main criteria of trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the criteria of authenticity. The research needs to ensure fairness by which the results will cover the different perspective represented across the specific industry (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We

will strive to build research that has ontological and educative authenticity. To strengthen our research results we will use a triangulation method. The benefit with triangulation is that it increases the confidence level of the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore we will use both in-depth interviews and discourse analysis of company press releases, website, mission statements and core values, and other relevant public material released by example case companies and independent bloggers with professional proficiency of areas covered in our research.

3.4. Case Study

Our research design will take the shape of a case study in which we will investigate the phenomena of becoming a scapegoat. A regular case study normally emphasizes on a single case, but in our study emphasis will lay of the phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There are several different types of case studies. Our investigation will contain both revelatory and representative case (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The past research committed on our topic is thin, and therefore our case can be considered revelatory. However, our case is also representative since we seek to explore the concept (Bryman & Bell, 2011) of scapegoating and its impacts in the business world. Cases will be used as examples in order to concretize the issue, which could be rather intangible for some respondents. However, some of our respondents are well informed about the matter, and examples are not needed.

3.5. Data Collection

The data for our empirical analysis will be gathered through in-depth interviews and discourse analysis. The in-depth interviews will be committed via telephone since many of our respondents will be difficult to interview in person, due to geographical distance or lack of time. The in-depth interviews will be conducted with respondents that are specialists within the field of brand management, especially with crisis- and reputation management experience, but also with professionals from other areas, responsible of issues regarding scapegoating.

In-depth interviews were selected as data collection method since they generate a deep insights and probing concerning the organizations actions and procedures whilst in brand crises and their beliefs about the concept of scapegoating (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012; Malhotra, 2010). Another additional reason to why we chose in-depth interviews is because our respondents are professionals (Malhotra, 2010), and we hope for them to be able to share

their experiences valuable for us. Critical incident technique will be used due to the time constraints for both our respondents and us make the interviews more relevant, since the critical incident technique will filter out irrelevant data and therefore it will make our data collection more efficient (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Additionally it will also allow us to investigate the respondents behavior in past brand crises and it has a great effect with in-depth interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

The in-depth interviews will be semi-structured in order to allow for possible generalization and creation of a framework consisting of the constructs that contribute to a company becoming a scapegoat. Before each interview the respondents will be provided with an interview guide, in which the topics that will be discussed in the interview are provided since our interview questions will be specific. The exact interview questions will not be presented until the interview to avoid biases that will decrease the reliability of our empirical findings. The length of the interviews will be approximately 20 minutes long and consist of between 7-15 open-ended questions depending on the respondents' expertise and time. Since time is a big factor, we will have a set of core questions with the purpose of providing material for our framework, while remaining questions will be industry specific and used for comparative reasons.

Additionally, we will use email interview with one respondent, namely Karin Gustafsson at the Swedish National Food Agency, due to lack of time at a specific moment. However, email interview is not the method of choice, and we are aware of the risks and drawbacks by using the specific method. Furthermore, one interview question was formulated through an online chat with Jan Helin, Editor-in-Chief at Aftonbladet. This might be an inconvenient method, but we believe the answer we got was straight and honest, and therefore we claimed it useful in our research. Additionally, in this short chat interview, we did not state our purpose of the study, which could result in an open-minded response. The reason we used an online chat was also because we could not reach the respondent in other ways.

The discourse analysis will serve as a support function for our in-depth interviews. In comparison to content analysis, discourse analysis is emphasized on alternative forms of communication rather than oral communication (Bryman & Bell, 2011), it will allow for us to commit a broad analysis of the involved organizations behavior in media, annual reports, and websites during brand crises (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Using discourse analysis creates

an opportunity to view organizations behavior through a psychological perspective, in which we will attempt to explain the reasoning behind the organizations behavior, and ultimately strengthen the contributing constructs gathered from the in-depth interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Using in-depth interviews and discourse combined in order to develop a framework will increase credibility and dependability. The data gathered from the in-depth interviews will be cross-referenced with our discourse analysis, which serves the purpose of reflecting the behaviors the respondents addressed in the interviews with the information presented in media, on their websites, mission statements, and CSR related activities concerning the crises.

3.6. Respondent Selection Criteria

We want a wide range of respondents from different professional backgrounds in order to elaborate the subject. By having respondents being able to associate to each of the pre-conceived constructs, we increase the opportunities to develop reliable implications. Our respondents will be professionals within the field of strategic branding, communications or media, and some will have specific knowledge about brand crises- and reputation management. The respondents will also have been exposed to or have experience of scapegoating. The positions of our respondents will be Communications managers and Press managers of companies exposed for scapegoating, Professors, and PR/Crisis management consultants. However, using respondents from certain companies with experience from scapegoating comes with a risk of the respondents being biased towards their own company by either protecting themselves or withholding information for policy reasons. If asked for, we will align to complete anonymity.

Due to the spread of employee positions, we will have will use semi-structured interviews in order to attain relevant information from each respondent. Since we will use critical incident technique there is a high probability of attaining additional relevant data, and therefore we will use grounded theory to be able to improve, remove, or add categories in our analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

The question of why we don't use representatives from Findus as respondents might be raised, but we have been in contact with several employees at the company in order to set up

an interview, being resolutely rejected. According to their Press manager, Annika Mohlin, they refuse all interview proposals, academic and journalistic, since they do all their communications one way, following the crisis. The main argument is that they want to learn what went wrong and what they could have done different on their own, without involvement from external stakeholders, most certainly as a part of their crisis management strategy.

3.7. Primary and secondary data

Throughout the research process, our ambition has been to focus on collecting primary data, defined as data collected by the researcher (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The primary data collection focused on in-depth interviews, gathering information with direct relevance to the research area and purpose of our study. However, in our literature review and construction of theoretical framework, secondary data was collected. Secondary data is earlier collected information used by others before (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). When collecting secondary data, we have focused on academic journal articles and academic textbooks, relevant to our research area. The main source of academic journal articles has been LUBsearch, Lund University Libraries' online search system, where most of the articles we used are electronic copies. Databases commonly used, both through the search systems and individually, are JSTOR, Emerald and EBSCOhost. When searching for relevant journal articles, a set of keywords have been used, such as; '*Scapegoating*', '*Crisis management*', '*Brand crisis*', '*Brand reputation management*', '*Company scapegoat*', '*product-harm crisis*' and '*brand core values*'. We refined the results to peer-reviewed articles and the results of these keywords were relevant to our study. However, we also tried not to limit the search, but only a few articles found then were interesting to us.

The journal articles of Greyser (2009) and Urde (2009) will be emphasized in this study, since we found the findings addressed in these journal articles strongly correlated with our empirical findings, and therefore we decided to put more focus on the theories presented in these journal articles. In our literature review, we found other journal articles within the same area of research, but we found these journal articles less correlated with our empirical findings. By combining the journal articles of Greyser (2009) and Urde (2009), a valuable link between crisis- and reputation management, and core values is proven, which fit well with our empirical findings and will help clarify the role of preventative measures in a business scapegoat situation.

3.8. Ethical issues

Our research subject might be difficult to our respondents to discuss, due to lack of commitment or corporate policies. Some areas might not be allowed to talk about. We do not want to publish information that could harm companies or the respondent as an individual (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Furthermore, we would not want to enforce the respondent to tell us explicit information. That is one of the reasons we prefer open or semi-open questions, enabling the respondent to answer freely.

We are fully transparent and honest to our respondents through the process, thus individuals or companies should not feel denigrated by our thesis. During the interviews, anonymity has not been offered, yet not asked for. Anonymity would encourage respondents to speak more freely about the topic, but it does also affect our trustworthiness and credibility negatively. If the topic would have been sensitive, we believe our respondents would ask for anonymity. Hence, respondents are contacted late in the research process before publishing with the ambition to assure anonymity is not requested. Alternatively to anonymity, we have to consider leaving out sensitive parts if not necessary for answering our research question, if that is possible to do without losing focus from the research questions.

4. Empirical Findings

4.1. Unbiased Sources

4.1.1. Ingela Stenson

Global Analyst with focus on food and lifestyle, United Minds

According to our first respondent, Stenson, a majority of companies today do have some kind of preset crisis management procedures in which some are standardized and some are unique to the situation at hand. It is difficult for a company to know exactly which part of the company that will be affected by the potential crisis. Stenson suggests a procedure of mapping out the crisis in order to find the root cause of the problem. Additionally, a Q and A should be done both within the company and with the external environment to clear the air. However, the best approach is to work with preventative crisis management.

What causes a company to become a scapegoat varies significantly. Stenson argues that in the case of Findus, the admitted to the public that their lasagne contained horsemeat, which caused them to become the scapegoat. Stenson summarizes that admitting an error that potentially can cause a brand crisis is significantly better than being “caught red handed.”

Stenson states that the constructs that contribute the most to becoming a scapegoat is unplanned and inconsistent media relations, which can cause the problem to escalate further. If the company is prepared, is well connected, and possesses a strong communicational ability, the damage can be hindered. Therefore preventative efforts in crisis management are essential for a company. When asked about the efforts made by Findus to hinder the crisis damage, Stenson considered their approach more than sufficient. Out of the constructs to cause the scapegoat phenomena, Stenson considered media to be the most harmful construct.

Out of Stenson’s own experience the preventative work is the most efficient approach towards avoiding to become a scapegoat. Stenson also suggests that companies should avoid promising too much in company CSR programs et cetera, since it will cause more harm to the company if their CSR programs or other promises do not fulfill their intended promises.

Stenson argues that the reason behind the fact that larger companies tend to become a scapegoat easier than other companies can be related back to consumer behavior, therefore a majority of all media advisors have suggested the affected companies to take on the blame, thus the affected company is far from the only actor involved in the crisis. This behavior is referred to as “doing a poodle” according to Stenson, if translated from the Swedish expression. Committing to this behavior will decrease the media attention, which is the main reason why companies tend to use this behavior. If a debate concerning guilt, the “war” in media will blow up and cause more harm than if the company would have done a ‘poodle’ Stenson expresses. The factors that determine the size of a brand crisis highly depend on the type of error that was committed. Today, most brand crises are based on moral error, not legal matters, which cause a more difficult situation when developing preventative measures in order to be well prepared for potential brand crises according to Stenson.

Stenson considers culture to play a big role in the case of Findus, since it is still perceived as a Swedish company, thus owned by the British Findus Group. Stenson claims that the proximity consumers have to the market in which the crisis occurs, the bigger the brand crisis becomes. Findus possessed a large amount of trust from its customers, which caused the brand crisis to become much bigger. The closer the brand crisis is to our daily habits, our food, our children, the worse it gets Stenson concludes.

The reason to why Findus became a scapegoat is the sole fact of them admitting to the problem first, Stenson claims. If another company would have come through and admitted to the same problem, they would have become a scapegoat as well. However, out of the other means of because caught in a scandal, Stenson strongly recommends companies to admit the truth it before someone else does it for them.

When a company finds themselves in a crisis, Stenson suggests that honesty should be their first priority. In Findus’ case, Swedish National Food Agency still claimed that their standards and controls are high, and therefore it is surprising that there were trace of horsemeat in a large-scale of meat products Stenson tells. On the other hand, this scandal has caused the Swedish National Food Agency to increase DNA testing as a result of this scandal. Authorities play a role when their judgment or verdict is needed quickly in order for companies to proceed. Stenson provides an example of that was the suspicion of chicken containing too much antibiotics that could be harmful for humans, and it took significant time

for the Swedish National Food Agency to establish if it was harmful or not, which caused losses for the involved companies.

In brand crises, the number one threat to a company is media Stenson states. In most cases according to Stenson, the competitors will not take advantage of the situation which is either due to respect for their competitor or of fear of get exposed for the same type of scandal. Stenson argues that the consumer role is a challenge to deal with since consumers are at time irrational. They rarely interact with the company directly; they rather spread their opinions and beliefs through social media than confronting the company with their issues Stenson claims. Therefore the relationship between the crisis company and consumers, are mostly a mediated relationship between different forms of media. This causes media to become the key enforcer towards the crisis company; they alarm and come up with different demands on what the company should do. The role of the authorities and the suppliers highly depend on the situation, which makes them hard to rank in importance. In general the consumers quickly forget most brand crises, unless there were serious consequences of the crisis Stenson concludes.

*4.1.2. Jeanette Fors-Andrée
Crisis Consultant, Hill+Knowlton Strategies*

Fors-Andrée believes that the phenomenon of companies becoming scapegoats is rather new. However, it is comparable to traditional concept of scapegoating, where individuals are blamed personally, which will be even more common in the future. The main reason would be the media dramaturgy, as journalists want to sell papers, naturally. When journalists call a company, their story and angle is already set; they just need a confirmation or a denial. By working like that, the risk of writing strongly biased articles increases. Someone will become the scapegoat, justified or not. In Findus' case, Fors-Andrée argues they became the medial scapegoat because it is a big, well-known company that people are interested in, and that name on a newspaper poster will certainly increase sales.

Crisis management and crisis communication is moving towards an individual-related manner, as the public wants to blame a specific individual, adding a face to the crisis according to Fors-Andrée. However, this face could as well be a brand. This is a coming

trend, derived from the cultural differences worldwide. Fors-Andrée states that in Asian countries, mainly Japan, it is common to show strong feelings, while the Middle East wants a strong leader who is not apologizing or even show regret. Fors-Andrée argues that in the Western world, we are striving towards the Japanese approach, as the public wants an honest and genuine apology. By that, a leader must act genuinely sorry. As Western world citizens become more emotional, it is also possible that the need for scapegoats is developed further.

In Findus' case, they quickly communicated the issue to the public; reasonably one of the main problems of working proactively. Fors-Andrée claims Findus have managed the crisis correctly so far. Yet, journalists and consumers have condemned the brand, probably too soon. As Findus was the only publically visible brand in the crisis, originally, they became an easy target. Findus is a well-known brand, and the food industry is important to people. Therefore, blame is a convenient reaction Fors-Andrée summarizes.

Fors-Andrée claims social media have come to make the complexity of communication management even greater, since several of those medias allow consumers to interact with both journalists, companies and with other consumers. The role of media increases by that. In an extended perspective, crisis management becomes more complex as well. By working proactively and transparently, continuously communicate the situation, and still become the scapegoat, Fors-Andrée emphasizes that there is nothing else to do but keep on communicating the honest truth. Although if the strategy is incorrect from the very beginning, for instance if being dishonest or lying, the crisis will only get worse. Fors-Andrée suggests companies to be honest and transparent, there is nothing to lose. Sooner or later the crisis will end and hopefully, the brand can grow even stronger than before.

In crisis management, benchmarking is effective. By working with scenarios, crisis plans and so on, companies could learn a lot. Competitors' role in a crisis is important, since one learns from other companies' crises and issues. Being better than competitors is also an important force in getting better at crisis management, driving the development forward. Yet again, being proactive is key in effective crisis management.

In a crisis, the internal management is the most important construct, according to Fors-Andrée. Top management should prioritize the crisis management and act responsible and conscious of the situation, open minded. Fors-Andrée strongly believes companies with

strong corporate culture of “owning” the crisis on a top management level, having discussions in the boardroom, could manage a crisis more effectively.

Fors-Andrée claims that the governments’ role in scapegoat cases varies from case to case, but they have a monitoring role, being authority in the society and in a media perspective. Government response in a company crisis is important for the future outcome, meaning that a blaming announcement could damage the company, while a supporting announcement would certainly reduce the harm of the crisis. Governments’ authority is important to consider, in both a consumer- and a company perspective.

Fors-Andrée uses the case of Saab reconstruction and bankruptcy as example of suppliers’ role in a crisis. In that case, the suppliers got very little information, and all they got came through media. Naturally, the frustration grew larger than manageable. By that, transparency and honesty is important to suppliers as well as consumers and media, but the suppliers are equally, if not more, important to the company, especially short term.

Fors-Andrée states that the combination of all these aspects, and the complexity it brings, makes crisis management more difficult than before, as the addition of social media as a construct is strongly affecting who is becoming the scapegoat and why. Due to today’s fast communications, journalists frequently use Twitter as a reliable source of information. Not giving people the possibility of explaining what they have written makes the risk of misunderstandings rising Fors-Andrée concludes. Consumers are generators of news and creators of information, but mass media spreads it to the big mass.

Adding on to the interview with Fors-Andrée, information is collected from her blog where the topic is discussed. In times of crisis, consumers want to blame the closest possible actor, which was Findus on the Swedish market. People tend to perceive companies as escaping from their responsibilities by blaming others (Fors-Andrée, 2013). Furthermore, consumers blame Findus to choose the cheapest possible suppliers in order to reach high profits. However, the situation is complex and Findus is far from the only manufacturer involved, nor in Sweden or in Europe (Fors-Andrée, 2013).

Fors-Andrée (2013) argues Findus has acted responsible towards consumers, both ethically and legally, due to the product recalls, and the fact that Findus analyzed the product content at

an early stage (Fors-Andrée, 2013). The issue is society-based, as there are cultural differences in questions of responsibility. In Japan, companies act guilty, taking all the blame, while western societies search for someone to blame, in general. The Japanese way of thinking is based on kaizen, or lean, which is the foundation of Toyotas production system, focusing on improving rather than what went wrong (Fors-Andrée, 2013).

4.1.3. Hongzhi Gao

Professor in Marketing and International Business, University of Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand.

Gao believes that the company that becomes the scapegoat is either caught first or admits to their failure first. If media catches a company before the company admits to their product or service failure, Gao claims the attention of the scandal will become significantly higher. The impacts of the entire scandal will be dependent on the severity of the harm caused and if the company came forward with their mistakes first.

There are several different constructs that contribute to a company becoming a scapegoat according to Gao; much of it depends on the culture and the societal norms existent in the country where the crisis occurs. In China for example, the institutional norm is to quiet the crisis down through secrecy, which is an accepted approach to problems in that culture.

If the whole truth is told, you will directly become the scapegoat and may be subject to a death sentence in some cases (in China). However, China significantly differs from the rest of the western world and has a completely different approach towards crisis management, Gao states. In the western world, Gao considers crises of certain types can be a potential opportunity for a company to show their true colors in a successful manner, which will ultimately strengthen the brand through applying proper service recovery. In this process, brand loyalty plays a very important role and it is therefore important that the company can prove that they stand on a high moral ground and go beyond the expected demands of the public and media. Gao states that today, most crises are related to moral issues, which make it difficult to distinguish the balance between the contributing constructs to the phenomena of scapegoating. Clear, is the fact that consumers in most cases act irrational, which makes their

behavior hard to predict, and only leaves preventative efforts when it comes to avoiding a brand crises Gao concludes.

The reason why a company becomes a scapegoat, according to Gao, is due to the tension present in a market during a crises combined with the consumers need to know what is going on. The tension has to be released somehow, and in some cases that creates the scapegoat phenomena, but it is important to know that becoming a scapegoat is a process.

Gao considers the roles of the authorities to highly depend on the type of crisis and in which country the crisis occurs. In most countries the authorities possess a high degree of trust, has the capability to regulate, reduce uncertainty, and since it has legal ties to the government, which is selected by the people. If the trust level is high of the relevant authority, the authorities will be a significant construct in the scapegoating process since they can clear the affected company from their mistakes or blame them for the crisis. The uncertainty level is always high when a crisis occurs since no one knows the whole truth, Gao summarizes.

Gao expresses that if looked at from a religious perspective, society as a group is to pass on their own fear of being punished or viewed to an easier target, which will put the focus of the group at the easy target instead. Consumers collectively use a fear or something they can't make sense of to release anger or justify their own behavior. An individual consumer might no contribute much to a company becoming a scapegoat, but society as a whole has a significant power to make a company the scapegoat.

Gao argues consumers have a tendency to overlook the actual truth simply because of convenience. People react to a crisis and they want the results and consequences to be quick and convenient. In China, the government is not viewed as a viable scapegoat, which only leaves the consumers with one option, the manufacturers. Another construct that have increased the impact of brand crises, are the use of social media. Gao believes negative opinions are easier to agree with when tension is existent, which can be related back to convenience. Gao advises companies to not give consumers more reasons to react negatively, which makes the approach of 'doing a poodle' more common since it reduces the priming effect. The reason why other companies do not step forward when a competing company becomes a scapegoat is due to fear of becoming one themselves which is the reason behind

competitors not taking advantage of the situation when another competing company is in a brand crisis.

4.1.4. Anders Persson

Professor in Sociology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden.

According to Persson, the reason to why companies such as Findus becomes the scapegoat has much to do with rivalry and competitors. Competing companies fear that they will end up as a scapegoat if they come forward with the same information as the company who already is the scapegoat, therefore they will not commit to any efforts to even out the balance of the blame Person states. Persson believes media heavily affects the phenomenon, since media tends to highlight things that will sell more, media logic. Media attacks companies and as a consequence direct competitors to the affected company go underground. When a company becomes the scapegoat it generates fear within the entire industry Persson summarizes.

Media takes advantage of the mistrust that exists against authority and power, since a large part of most populations are interested in such topics Persson states. Another obstacle is that consumers tend to accept what media writes, therefore the scapegoat that media appoints will in many cases become the scapegoat for the consumers as well, since it confirms the mistrust against authorities.

Persson believes that culture most certainly matters, however its significance depends on the type of culture. Culture can most certainly not solely cause a company to become a scapegoat, but in combination with other constructs it is possible that it can contribute to the phenomena.

In society there is a type of need existent to have someone or something to aim anger against or blame. Persson argues some of it can be linked back to competition and rivalry. Within politics the 'poodle approach' is also frequently used. The method is a response to societies reaction, when companies humiliate themselves and are on their backs, the guilt and anger aimed at the company slowly diminishes Persson concludes. It is impossible for a global postmodern system to cover everything, which has caused ethical programs to become more common.

The scapegoat mechanism is a little bit different Persson believes. A company can accept the collective blame for the entire industry in which many other companies are just as guilty. The scapegoat company can then do a poodle and take on the entire blame, which in the long run can give the company more credit than it had before the crisis. Taking on the blame will possibly increase the trust and reputation of the company, as more responsible than the other companies that didn't take the blame or admit their failures to the public.

Persson considers the reason to why consumers tend to miss the actual truth is the general distrust for authority and companies with great power, present in society. If the skepticism towards the authorities and major companies didn't exist, media will not react and exploit the way they do today. However, it is not a culture thing. Culture does not contribute alone to a company becoming a scapegoat. There will always be companies or authorities that are easier to target than others, and some of them truly deserve it. The companies often exploited by media even if the accusations are true or not. Persson draws a parallel between IKEA and the Swedish King, IKEA is a company that rarely seem to get stuck with a crisis, while the Swedish King have been exploited by media several times.

4.1.5. Katarina Skalare

Specialist within CSR and Sustainability, Sweco, Malmö, Sweden

From Skalare's experience, she believes that improper communication is a key construct in causing a company to become a scapegoat. If questions and issues are answered inconsistently or in a dissatisfactory manner, the consequences can be an escalation of a problem, which leads to the company becoming a scapegoat. Companies that work responsibly and have a set of strong core values that is reflected in the entire company can build up a solid reputation, which in crisis situations can hinder the damages. For example, IKEA is one of those companies that seem to be able to dodge problems no matter their size, a "teflon" company. Even media has a type of respect for IKEA Skalare claims. When the corruption scandal blew up in Russia, the headlines did not say IKEA was corrupted, they said IKEA had been affected by corruption. If it had been a different company, the headline would most certainly have been very different.

The key factors of crisis management according to Skalare are responsiveness and transparency. The company in the crisis needs plan their communicational strategy well when approaching media and the public. However, they still need to communicate in an open manner without predetermined answers and in a trustworthy manner.

Skalare believes the authorities are needed when the crisis has ties to the breaking of existing laws etc. The presence of authorities is needed when the companies of the affected market cannot regulate it themselves. This especially holds true for human rights, working conditions, environmental effects, and also ethical perspectives.

The obstacles that are hard to overcome after a crisis is the aftermath of how the initial stages of the crisis were handled, Skalare states. If a company cannot exercise honesty and openness in a crisis situation, the consequences such as significantly decreased reputation, can become more permanent. Admitting to errors that caused a crisis can cause a company to get heavily criticized, but it is better that the company admits on their own premises than another construct, such as media, forces them to come clean. Thus, the responsiveness and transparency should be present within a firm continuously Skalare argues, not just brought forward in crisis situations. Communicating responsiveness and transparency can hinder any crises impact. It is easier to preach these values continuously than bringing them out when the damage from a crisis needs to be repaired.

Skalare believes culture definitely has an effect on the scapegoat phenomena. An example would be the horsemeat scandal that caused Findus to become a scapegoat. Horsemeat is not harmful to eat, but since Sweden has a lot of horse enthusiasts, eating horsemeat is repelling to many, Skalare summarizes. In some countries eating horsemeat is largely accepted. There are certain aspects that increase the impact of a scandal, which is when the scandal affects either animals or children. Crises in these areas evoke a lot of emotions from the public, which leads to more media coverage.

Skalare does not necessarily believe there is a human need to have someone or something to blame to shift focus from oneself, but there is a control need to reduce uncertainty. The tendency consumers have to miss the real truth is for convenience and simplicity. Skalare argues, it is easy to accept the headlines media produces and the conspiracy topics spread across social media rapidly today. Conspiracy and anti-brand discussions are becoming more

frequent, and in some cases the topics discussed are rarely controlled by the host of the forum or page, therefore much false information also exists in these forms of communication. Skalare does not recommend companies to interrupt or correct discussions based on false premises, since people in general that communicate in those forums do not look for solutions or to learn, they communicate solely to complain.

The constructs that contribute the most to a company becoming a scapegoat highly depend on what type of crisis it is. However, most errors originate from the suppliers and depending on the consumer standpoint, e.g. if it involves children, their reactions will be stronger and harmful discussions will start spreading like wildfire in social media. Media blow up scandals, but they rarely causes them Skalare concludes.

4.1.6. Anna Gustafsson

Public Relations Officer, Swedish National Food Agency

Gustafsson states the Swedish National Food Agency works for food safety, upright food handling and good eating habits. In crises such as the horsemeat scandal, the agency's goal is to inform consumers about the food they buy and also being able to promise its safety. Consumer protection is key, and being able to ensure certain quality standards needs measures. Therefore, governments need to control companies and their products, but also communicate the right information towards companies and consumers, according to Gustafsson.

Companies within the Swedish food industry must follow the laws, both European and Swedish, which state that companies must perform certain efforts, as soon a harmful situation is present, Gustafsson states. These efforts are, among many, to be transparent towards consumers and quickly inform about the situation. By following the laws and having well-working routines, Gustafsson claims companies could avoid such crises. Furthermore, if the National Food Agency publishes information later shown incorrect, they would openly admit their erroneousness.

4.1.7. Lena Mellin

Deputy Legally Responsible Publisher and Commentator of Domestic Politics, Aftonbladet

According to Mellin, media's role in general is to tell their readers or viewers what is going on in the world, and if there is a scandal where one or several companies are involved, it might be interesting to report. If more than one company is involved, it tends to interest a larger group of readers Mellin states. People want to get informed of the issue, and if it affects them in any way, to be able to reduce the harm on their lives. Aftonbladet want to mediate information they believe is relevant to their readers, but every single article is not relevant to everyone.

Social media makes great impact on today's media environment Mellin claims. Mainly because there is no publisher responsible for what is written, but also because there are no press ethical rules to follow. In social media, anyone can post almost anything he or she wants without taking responsibility in an aftermath. Surveys are made regularly to measure the impact of Aftonbladet on brands, and brands with high reputation tend to increase sales when being referred to in media, while weaker brands seem to decrease sales when mentioned in media.

Authorities are assigned by government to inform the public and alarm when danger is approaching. Aftonbladet does not publish all reports made by authorities, but select those they find publically interesting. However, if found out a report is false, Aftonbladet publishes that information as well, even though it rarely is equally noticed Mellin expresses.

Aftonbladet and other medias hold a responsibility towards companies, consumers and other stakeholders according Mellin. What they publish is by some people considered as the truth, and therefore, they cannot publish lies. Sometimes, Aftonbladet uncovers their own "scoops" about companies or authorities, and if it is found interesting internally, it might be published, even though companies might be hurt. If the company does anything wrong, legally or ethically, the story is worth being brought to light, as it could benefit the public. However, if a story is incorrect, Aftonbladet must take their responsibility and correct the improper texts, which Mellin claim they always do.

4.1.8. Jan Helin

Editor-in-chief and Publisher, Aftonbladet

Helin argues Aftonbladet's role in business scapegoating is mainly to uncover and tell news in a context people can relate to. It is important Aftonbladet can do that without regard of particular companies. However, the newspaper should consider all different aspects in their news reporting, otherwise they would not do their job properly. That Findus have been medially scapegoated is not necessary, but Helin stands for all their publications regarding the issue.

4.2. Company Sources

4.2.1. Frida Berg

Head of Media relations, McDonald's Sweden AB

McDonald's Sweden AB has a standardized procedure for crisis management, according Berg. There is a broad range of potential brand crises that can affect a company within the fast food industry, and since 80% of the McDonald's restaurants in Sweden are franchised, there are different approaches taken depending on at which level the crisis occurs. When a crisis occurs, the responsible source is traced and followed up with information gathering to verify to the root cause of the crisis. When the root cause of the crisis is found, a possible solution will be suggested and the communicated. Berg addresses transparency as a key trait in these situations. It is very important to be consistent and not speculate when in contact with media since improper media handling can worsen a brand crisis.

The key reason that bigger companies have a higher tendency to become scapegoats is due to the media logic, according to Berg. Most people know of these brands, and if there is a conflict it will automatically attract more readers. Media also tend to focus on opposed version of what really went wrong which indicates lack of transparency at the affected company. Thus McDonald's have existed in Sweden for 40 years it is still viewed as a multinational company in comparison to Swedish companies, this makes it easier for consumers to target companies with big brands that are not viewed as rooted in Sweden. As an outcome, it sometimes leads to companies being stuck with a certain image, such as McDonald's is with obesity, according to Berg.

In brand crises situations it is important that the company answered questions asked by the media and public. Before these questions are answered, the company must know what caused the error and what could have been done to prevent it Berg states. If needed, the errors should be corrected in order to build up trust and show transparency.

Berg believes the toughest obstacles to overcome after a brand crisis is to get rid of the negative associations attached to the brand due to the crisis. With today's technology it is extremely hard to lose those negative associations. Especially since there people in general rather spread negative news than positive news. This could be due to the human need to warn people, but no one spends enough time with the crisis to realize the real truth or the solution to the problem. When a crisis occurs at the franchise level in McDonald's it is normally dealt with locally which in most cases tend to cause the crisis to become less harmful, since most franchise owners are common people and not a big corporations, which generates more sympathy from media and the public, Berg states. If the problem is national, the head office of McDonald's Sweden AB will handle it.

The association with childhood obesity and McDonald's exists worldwide. In Sweden, McDonald's were very quick to responds to the consumer demand of healthier options, Berg addresses. As a result, McDonald's broadened their menu and added more healthy options. Media should not control or affect the adoption process a company does in order to satisfy their customers, the customer need should. Berg informs about an interesting remark, that thus the wide range of healthy alternatives present in the McDonald's menu, a majority of its customers still buys hamburgers when they visit the restaurant.

International companies are easier to target than local ones in most cases, Berg believes, which could be the main reason why McDonald's has served and still serves as a scapegoat in many countries. Additionally, there are always a number of companies that will get more negative attention than other companies when committing a mistake, and some companies that never seem to get blamed, such as IKEA. Some companies get stuck with a negative image, and as mentioned before it is very hard to loose that image. McDonald's have therefore engaged heavily in social media in order to answer all the questions the consumers have concerning their company and its products. Another interesting note about Swedish consumers is that they want high quality, good taste, and Swedish made products, but when high quality and Swedish quality is put against each other, Swedish quality is preferred,

which is an interesting finding, according to Berg. This proves that most consumers believe that Swedish quality equals high quality, which is not always the case, Berg concludes.

As for the constructs that contribute the most to a company becoming a scapegoat, is media Berg claims. It is media that control the debate and brings attention to the issue. Competitors do not contribute to the phenomena since they know they can become as scapegoat as well for the same reasons. Consumers are affected by the news presented in media and in social media, while the governmental- and supplier role vary depending on what type of brand crisis it is.

4.2.2. Marie Louise Elmgren Head of Communication, Nestlé Sweden

As a multi-national corporation, Nestlé's role in industry scandals is often to defend against media, even though the company rarely is the "thief", involved or not, Elmgren claims. However, if being item of a harmful situation, Nestlé has control systems that warn managers within regulations and communications, and the Nordic organization immediately sets up a telephone meeting with affected parties of the company to discuss the issue and how to solve it. The result of those meeting is a *position statement* that is handled to the interests that would get questions about the issue shortly after the incident, Elmgren states. This could be industry organizations, governments, key customers et cetera.

Elmgren believes larger companies are more commonly scapegoated, as they are well-known and often visible in media, stores and maybe even life in general. For Nestlé, one of the main issues is that product-harm incidents present in another part of the world could damage the Nordic Nestlé organization as well, even though the actual product(s) is not available at the market, Elmgren states. In fact, it sometimes even harms the global corporate brand. As an example, the melamine incident in China 2008 became an issue in Sweden and the Nordics as well, due to consumer boycotts and negative publicity overall.

Elmgren argues media has a central role in business scapegoating. The lack of criticism of sources is troubling, but also a natural development with Internet and social media, and the speed in reporting that follows. In a company perspective, it is possible to have a dialogue

with mass media to discuss what is published and whether it is reasonable or not. The big issue with social media is that this kind of dialogue is not possible. As a company, it is rarely possible to get in touch with a blogger or a Twitter user, as those are often anonymous, especially those with extremist thoughts strongly biased. Yet, many social media users prefer to be anonymous, as they could write opinions they would never express in person. Elmgren claims it is easy to sit home at your computer expressing your deepest thoughts if you know no one will know it is you. This sort of criticism is impossible to control in a company perspective, and many bloggers or Twitter users have strong influence on other individuals; texts will be spread at a high pace, often with false accusations, not against Nestlé specifically, but it is not rare.

The volume of criticism consumers allied could create is way more substantial than newspapers or TV channels individually. A recent example is when Nestlé chairman Peter Brabeck said in an interview that fresh water should be privatized. However, this statement was taken out of the original context of an eight year old interview, and instantly, 700 bloggers wrote posts about how bad it was, totally without criticism of the sources or the context of it, according to Elmgren. Activist groups often have a strong interest in harming companies they believe are evil, and they do have strong influence in society.

In an industrial crisis, competitors play an important role as well. Elmgren believes competitors could react in two ways; either they are in the same situation as the mainly affected company (or will eventually be), otherwise they could seek profits in the harmed brand's misfortune by presenting itself as the better choice. The latter is risky, as the company might be involved in the issue on a later basis. Consumers, in general, could also react in two ways, according to Elmgren. Either they don't mind about the issue at all, continuing to buy the products they have always been, or else they express their criticism against the company, often through social media. However, anger and criticism could be latent and unexpressed.

Government have a monitoring and legislative role while they should, according to Elmgren, act in the best interest of developing industries further, mainly to ensure consumer safety in a longer perspective. At times, Swedish National Food Agency publishes articles and research reports criticizing industry companies without their knowledge. Elmgren argues it would be more effective and developing to let companies within the food industry know what is happening before media and the public, as consumers might get confused and choose

other, foreign alternatives instead. To evolve the Swedish food industry, government must be able to cooperate with companies.

Furthermore, Elmgren argues food retailers have large impact on who's subject of scapegoating, since the major retailers constantly want to reduce prices and sell larger quantities. This could affect brands, as they have to assure quality while decreasing prices.

5. Analysis

5.1. Constructs contributing to scapegoating

In order to provide an answer to our research question “*Which key constructs are central in a company becoming a scapegoat?*” we analyze aspects contributing to scapegoating, in terms of stakeholders and influencing phenomena’s. The constructs found through empirical findings and the theoretical framework are discussed and analyzed, enabling us to answer the question in the concluding chapter.

5.1.1. Culture

Custance et al. (2012) argue cultural beliefs influence crisis management in certain situations, and the country where the crisis occurs is important to the outcome. The empirical findings in this study suggest that societal norms and cultural traits affect both crisis management and who is becoming a scapegoat, as the Japanese way of dealing with a crisis is far from a European, and even further from a Middle Eastern operation. China manages crises completely different, through secrecy, which is culturally accepted in some societies, according to Gao. Greyser (2009) argues U.S.- and European business ethics are, compared to in Eastern-Asian countries, further developed with high standards. Hence, cultural diversity makes scapegoating complex, especially in international, cross-cultural companies. In the horsemeat scandal for instance, some cultures would not mind while others resent, depending on the equestrian relationship. Yet, our respondents argue that the Western society is moving towards a Japanese philosophy where business leaders should honestly apologize and take on the blame in a genuine manner, based on the idea of focusing on improving rather than process what went wrong. Furthermore, the society as a whole wants to blame individuals or specific brands in a crisis, linked to leaders showing their feelings, implied by Fors-Andrée.

Culture as a concept on its own would not influence scapegoating appreciable, but in combination with other aspects, culture matters, Persson discusses. Persson mentions IKEA as a company that never get stuck with crises, as they are a non-stick company that have never gotten into deep scapegoating issues. In that case, culture certainly matters.

5.1.2. Media

Media is the construct considered highly influencing by our respondents, due to a number of reasons, such as the media logic and the media dramaturgy. However, according to Eagle et al. (2005), media is seen as a non-trustworthy source as inaccurate facts tend to be published, while Siomkos (1999) claim that media impacts customers' response during a crisis. Persson argues that media is taking advantage of consumer mistrust in authority and power at times, which large corporations are, while consumers tend to accept what media writes. Furthermore, crises could evoke public emotions, which lead to increased media coverage, implies Skalare. Hence, in some cases, media is seen as non-trustworthy, but it is still the main source of information in society. As our respondents Mellin and Helin suggest, media representatives claim their role as information mediator, with the aim to satisfy the public by offering an unbiased story about issues, such as industry scandals. Due to press ethical rules and regulations, media must stick to the truth, even though other respondents believe media steps on the borderline from time to time. Despite the intensified media climate being responsible is a part of the job within media, according to Mellin.

Media brings attention to issues and controls the debate, even though media rarely cause the issue or the scandal, Berg states. However, Stenson argues media can blow up stories and becoming the key enforcer towards the company, expressing expectations and demands. Yet, Mellin implies that stories only get attention if considered important and interesting in a consumer perspective. According to Dawar (1998), increased media attention could be translated into high ROI on advertising investments. In Findus' case, the company took action immediately by TV spots, inviting the public to their manufacturing plant, admitting that they lacked in their controls, promising to get better. It is possible that Findus had a strong reputation prior the scandal, which could be a disadvantage in some terms (Park, 2008), even though our empirical findings suggest a strong reputation to be central in avoiding a scapegoat position. Yet, a strong reputation is built up over time, in combination with stakeholder judgments of the company (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010).

Park (2008) argues that a strong reputation can negatively affect the company in a crisis, since NGOs and media have excessive attention to well-reputed companies. However, in Findus' case, the company was not revealed by media, the company revealed itself. Our empirical findings suggest it is better to come clean and admit the flaws as soon as possible, and transparency is the key to success in crisis situations, also implied by Greyser (2009).

Additionally, taking on the blame, as a strategy could be reasonable, given the possibility that there is more than one party in the crisis. Doing this would decrease the media attention, Stenson suggests. A brand crisis could worsen if media catches the brand before admitting their issues, as the attention is higher, according to Gao.

Fors-Andrée and Elmgren argue that well-known brands suffers greater risk of becoming scapegoat, due to the media logic and their visibility in stores and life in general. As people are, or believably are, interested in companies such as McDonald's, Nestlé or Findus, media focus on companies like these is intense. Naturally, journalists want to sell newspapers, and journalists often have a final story even before contacting companies in crises, according to Fors-Andrée, as they just want to have a confirmation or a denial. Furthermore, Elmgren assigns journalists' lack of criticism of sources as troubling, arguing that media often publish a single-sided, biased perspective. If a company is not transparent enough, there is a major risk that media will focus on the opposed version of the actual issue, Elmgren argues.

5.1.3. Consumers

Payne and Davidson's (2008) definition of scapegoating includes the public, or consumers. Consumers play an important role in scapegoating due to their relationship to brands and their will to talk about brands in social media (Eagle et al., 2005). Skalare and Stenson imply brands closer to people's daily lives to suffer greater risk of a severe crisis, and food is such category. Thus, if the crisis affects children or animals, reactions will be stronger, Skalare argues. Moreover, Greyser (2009) claim a crisis could be reduced if it impacts a small amount of consumers, and we believe food is not such category where only a few consumers are affected. Furthermore, Fors-Andrée (2013) argues consumers want to blame the closest possible actor, agreed by Gao et al. (2012), who believe the scapegoat in a scandal certainly would be the first brand caught, demonized by the public. Larger brands experience greater risk of scapegoating, given that they are well known, but consumer behavior is one major reason, known by large corporations, Stenson implies, and to reduce the risk, larger brands are often suggested to take on the blame.

In a crisis, consumer uncertainty is often high (Fitzsimmons, 2008; Siomkos et al., 2010). The uncertainty level is at its peak when no one knows the full truth, and blaming someone or something is a common in order to reduce the uncertainty level, which causes scapegoating,

Gao implies. In a sociological perspective, Zawadski (1948) argues blaming others is beneficial if one wants to save its face, but also to express underlying aggressiveness, and Raven and Rubin (1976) believes scapegoating is conducted since people does not want to take responsibility on their own, instead they transfer the responsibility to someone or something else (Gao et al., 2012).

The sociological perspective on scapegoating shows similarities to business scapegoating perspective. For instance, Rothschild et al. (2012) suggest a moral motivation for scapegoating, where the individual wants to minimize his or her guilt of a situation. Stenson implies that scapegoating is generally based on moral matters rather than legal matters today. Moreover, transferring responsibility might be a motive in business scapegoating as well, even though consumers or media for instance not certainly are mainly responsible in scandals, as Berg implies. Payne and Davidson (2008) claim the scapegoating of McDonald's in the case of obesity, mainly child obesity, is based on a few consumers' issue with keeping a healthy diet. This is not outspoken by McDonald's. Instead, the company focuses on offering healthy alternatives to burgers and soda. Nevertheless, most of the products sold are hamburgers, Berg comments. However, most of McDonald's main competitors do not suffer the same issue (Payne & Davidson, 2008). Thus, business scapegoating does not necessarily follow theories of individual scapegoating, where the weak or defenseless is offended (Zawadski, 1948).

The consumer is the ultimate judge in a brand crisis, and the perceived image is central in crisis performance (Siomkos, 1999). Thus, consumers own the power, and mentioned by Berg and Elmgren, consumer needs and wants should control a company's product range, rather than media. Hence, consumers could perform *offensive scapegoating*, illustrating their power and will of using it (Bonazzi, 1983), given that the theory is adapted to a corporate perspective rather than personal.

What will or will not be matter of scapegoating might vary from case to case, but if the consumer perception of a brand's values is distinguished from the values related to the organization or summarizing the brand (Urde, 2009), there is a risk. Our empirical findings show that consumers have a tendency to overlook the real truth, especially if their perception of the brand differs from the corporate identity. Yet, consumers as individuals might not have

the power of scapegoating a brand, groups of individuals or society as a whole definitely have, according to Gao.

5.1.4. Social media

In today's society, social media plays an important role, as information travels faster than ever before and companies must take the danger of social media in consideration (Trusov et al., 2009; Romaniuk, 2012; Winer, 2009). Since company stakeholders retrieve information from multiple sources, such as word-of-mouth and social media (Coombs, 2007), being aware of the phenomenon is key. In a consumer perspective, scapegoating companies is convenient, and negative opinions are easier to agree with. By 'doing a whole poodle', companies could reduce the reasons to react negatively, which is why it is a common strategy today, Gao and Skalare argues.

Furthermore, Skalare suggest convenience and simplicity to be the main reasons to avoid the real truth in scandals, as headlines are accepted and conspiracy theories spread through social medias, mainly online forums. These discussions are commonly anti-brand focused and the host seldom controls the topics. Thus, false facts are spread in a pace not manageable by companies, while the actual contributor often is anonymous, Skalare argues. However, since negative opinions are easier to agree with, no one interrupts these discussions, as they went there mainly to complain in the first place, Gao implies. There is no aim to gain knowledge or understanding in these forums, so the complaining spirit keeps on, Skalare argues.

As mentioned by Stensson and Skalare, reactions will be stronger if children are involved or affected by a crisis. Pointed out by Skalare, errors originating from suppliers are depending on the consumer standpoint. If it does not affect our children or close to our daily lives, the likeliness of becoming a scapegoat is lower than if close to our lives and affecting children. If so, consumers will spread their hatred against the company in social media, Elmgren argues, as seen in Findus' case (Svensson, 2013) where sarcastic pictures making fun of the brand (i. e. picture of running horses, and the message "Let's run before they Find us"). According to Elmgren, consumers could react on a scandal in two ways; either they don't care and keep buying the same products as before, alternatively, they criticize the company latently or openly through social media. Yet, companies could engage in social media in order to reduce the uncontrolled criticism and build a more positive image, Berg suggests. McDonald's for

instance, actively answers consumer questions concerning the company and its products. If consumers are caught buying the same products as prior the scandal, it indicates the importance of loyalty and trust, Gao implies. However, Erdem and Swait (2004) argue trust is usually decreasing in product-harm crises, possibly even more when a company is scapegoated.

With social media follows lack of criticism of sources, as a part of the speed in reporting, according to Elmgren. Media use tweets as main sources for articles, sometimes without letting the author comment or explain what he or she wrote, Fors-Andrée implies. Thus, the risk of misunderstandings increases, and false information might spread. However, consumers could be seen as creators of information in today's society, and the spread is done in social media, Fors-Andrée states. The possibilities of social media are two-edged. Consumers, media and companies can interact with each other, even though communication between media and company on social media is rare. Yet, consumers often interact with both media and with companies. Elmgren express a concern about the issues of social media. For instance, companies can call a journalist or a publisher at a newspaper if an article is unfair, but a blogger or a Twitter user is harder to reach, as they do not have the same responsibilities as a journalist.

Moreover, there are NGOs focusing on the legal and ethical matters of publishing, where all the major newspapers are involved, according to Mellin. In social media, there are no such organizations or legislations, and companies can rarely contact a blogger or a Twitter user to complain or discuss the content privately. Authors who write posts anonymously are often those who are highly critical against companies, not open for discussion, Elmgren argues. Being able to write whatever comes to ones mind without taking responsibility, according to Fors-Andrée and Elmgren, the downside of the development online. Companies want to be in control of the criticism, providing their point of view in an unbiased environment, Elmgren suggests. Bloggers and Twitter users sometimes have substantial influence on other consumers, even though what they write is not true every time. Thus, not only media lack in criticism of sources, Elmgren claims.

Stenson finds consumers irrational, as they rather share their opinions on social media than directly to the company, and in a scapegoat situation, the relationship between consumers and the affected company is mediated through different social medias. However, as Berg suggests,

if companies are active on social medias, such as Facebook or Twitter, the interaction will certainly increase between company and consumer, even though the majority of the comments in a crisis situation are expected to be complaints. Furthermore, consumers could act irrationally in McDonald's' case when demanding products they later will not buy, Berg states.

Business scapegoating is practiced as a public and social behavior today (Payne & Davidson, 2008), and previous theories, such as Girard (1986), claim scapegoating is symbolic violence where social groups shape an identity. In certain social medias, e.g. Facebook or Reddit, consumers can form groups, such as Baby milk action, to scapegoat companies, but the scapegoating doesn't have to be organized. If someone writes a blog post or a Tweet, the text could be shared on all sorts of social medias in a fast pace, according to Fors-Andrée. Social media have entailed a great complexity in corporate communication management, as consumers can interact with companies and media unrestrainedly. Hence, crisis communication is becoming more difficult, but the development is stressing companies to be more transparent, Fors-Andrée implies.

5.1.5. Authorities

In many brand crises authorities plays an important role, not least when food is the object of matter. Gao et al. (2012) argue that not only consumers and media, but also authorities want to scapegoat a well-known brand or person. Yet, Fors-Andrée and Elmgren claim government and authorities to have a monitoring and legislating role, meaning that they should strive for society safety and good by initiating reasonable laws and making sure companies follow the rules. It is possible that if companies don't follow the rules, authorities might publically blame the companies, as Gustafsson states that companies must follow rules. Moreover, Elmgren expresses that companies sometimes feel overridden by authorities, arguing that authorities detain the development within the industry, which could be beneficial in a consumer perspective.

Stenson and Skalare suggest authorities' response in a brand crisis could influence the future of a crisis. For instance, a supporting response will certainly reduce the damage followed by the issue, while a blaming announcement could deepen the crisis. Compared to sociological scapegoating theories, authorities' powerful position in society could be used as illustrating

supremacy, so-called *offensive scapegoating* (Bonazzi, 1983). When a judgment or verdict is needed, certainly when consumer uncertainty level is high, authorities play an important role, aiming to reduce uncertainty, Gao implies.

However, the importance and leverage of authorities differs between countries. In China, for instance, authorities and government is not viewed as a viable scapegoat in crisis situations according to Gao. In general, governments and authorities are important to both consumers and companies, even in moral matters, since governments can use their power to blame companies for being irresponsible in certain scandals or issues. Elmgren expresses criticism against authorities publishing articles diminishing the Swedish food industry without first giving industry parties the information, not giving them space to work proactively, which is widely recommended, even by the National Food Agency.

5.1.6. Competitors

In a scapegoating situation, competitors' role varies. Our theoretical framework suggests two options for competitors; either they take advantage of the situation, alternatively they lay low (Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994; Siomkos et al., 2010). However, in some cases, competitors choose not to react, due to the high risk of being part of the scandal, implied by several respondents. Additionally, if the contaminated brand has stronger reputation than the competitors, the likeliness of a competitor taking advantage of the situation is reduced (Roehm & Tybout, 2006). Our empirical findings align with the theoretical framework, arguing that the fear of becoming a scapegoat is substantial, and the main reason not to take advantage of a competitor's scapegoat situation. Yet, spillover effects could affect competitor brands if consumers believe a whole category is contaminated (Roehm & Tybout, 2006). Furthermore, competitors can use other, more silent strategies, with the goal to influence and attract consumers by being open about the issue, called "*kill with a borrowed knife*" (Pheng & Sirpat, 1995, p. 38), derived from ancient Chinese war strategies.

In sociological theories of scapegoating, it is argued that groups could scapegoat individuals within the group, internal violence, in order to evolve a social solidarity and reduce jealousy and harmonize the group (Girard, 1986). An industry could be seen as a group, and companies within it as individuals. However, our empirical findings show that scapegoating of competitors is rather unusual.

In order to learn how to reduce the risk of becoming a scapegoat, competitors are important for learning, Fors-Andrée suggests. When competition is fierce, companies are forced to improve crisis management strategies and hopefully get better than competitor companies. Rivalry is also a driver of scapegoating if competitors avoid coming clear in a scapegoating, as it could even out the blame, according to Persson.

5.1.7. Suppliers

According to our empirical findings, suppliers rarely play an important role in scapegoating. Scapegoating often is based on moral matters today, Stenson argues. Cleeren et al. (2013) discuss product-harm crises and spillover effects on competitor brands due to shared suppliers. In Findus' case, the French supplier, Comigel, played an important role. However, that certain case is a legal matter rather than a moral matter, and could therefore be seen as a non-regular scapegoating case. Yet, Findus was certainly already destined to be the scapegoat before the full story was uncovered.

5.2. Brand Crisis Management

5.2.1. Preventative Measures

Nestlé and McDonald's stated they have a type of preset crisis management plan. The extent, to which these crisis management plans are standardized, highly depends on the company and what type of industry it is involved in. Some industries are more prone to brand crises' in comparison to others. Many companies within the food industry have a standardized crisis management plan, but the depth and coverage of these vary according to our respondents. Every crisis situation is unique and therefore a crisis management plan cannot be standardized fully. The matters that should be standardized in a crisis can be related to the handling of media, how the root cause of the problem(s) is found, and so forth. However, the communications during a crisis is suggested not to be standardized, since all stakeholders can be approached in the same manner (Stephens et al., 2005), therefore generic communication is avoided (Greyser, 2009). However, communicating with media and public does not suffice solely (Greyser, 2009). A majority of our respondents either addressed honesty or transparency as key traits, when communicating with its stakeholders in a crisis. Using standardized communicational methods will not improve the relationship with the company

stakeholders, and it can worsen the effects of the crisis when communication is handled poorly and inconsistently, which confirms Greyser's (2009) observations. According to Siomkos (1999), there are different degrees of efforts that companies can respond with, in which one of the most desirable is referred to as a super effort, where the consumer is prioritized highly.

The difficulty of being well prepared for potential brand crises' is that many of the brand crises that occur today are based on moral grounds instead of crises that are caused by breaking laws according to Stenson and Gao. The diverse beliefs that exists today makes it challenging for companies to satisfy every consumer, and in combination with social media where negative word-of-mouth is spread during extensive crises (Eagle et al., 2005), these two factors serve as a potential threat. Consumers act irrational in many cases, according to Gao and Stenson, and wants to jump to conclusions (Raven & Rubin, 1976), which makes it hard for companies to predict what type of crises that can potentially be harmful for the company. With that information in mind, it is clear that not even a best practice company can avoid ending up in a brand crises. Therefore it is common that a company that is in a brand crisis and becomes the scapegoat solely accepts the blame, which is referred to as 'doing a whole poodle'. 'Doing a whole poodle' involves accepting and taking on the whole blame for the crisis, even though in most cases, there are several actors involved in the crisis. Which tends to shift the focus away from the company since the debate in media and the bad word-of-mouth deteriorates over time, and it reduce the risk of the crisis becoming larger (Gao et al., 2012).

As suggested by our empirical results and supported by Greyser's (2009) theories concerning crisis management, a good way to avoid suffering from the extended damages caused by a brand crisis and being the scapegoat is to demonstrate authenticity and tell the truth according to Greyser (2009). Our respondents expressed that honesty, transparency, and clarity were of great importance when handling a crisis, which is also supported by Greyser's (2009) findings. Corporate authenticity plays an integral part in crisis management, and it is therefore essential that companies maintain and improve their authenticity. As mentioned by many of our respondents when discussing the phenomena of scapegoating, and the reasoning behind why some companies had a higher tendency to become a scapegoat; the generic answer was due to the company size, and the awareness and image the public had of the company. Several respondents gave IKEA as an example of a global company that whilst in a crisis, all

accusations against the company never tend to stick. If this is due to high levels of corporate authenticity or other brand related matters we cannot confirm, but it is certain the company is well respected.

5.2.2. Authenticity & Core Values in Crisis Management

Delivering authenticity to the public is a challenge; using generic communication will suffice for advertising but not in crisis situations since consumers pay more attention to information communicated by a company whilst in a brand crisis (Greyser, 2009). Adapting the communicational strategies during a crisis is therefore of great importance, and it can also improve corporate authenticity. Our empirical evidence suggests that companies tended to focus more on communicating in an authentic manner than being authentic and remaining authentic, concepts developed by Greyser (2009). Being authentic relates to the organizational core value (Greyser, 2009) and how they reflect the brand behavior and actions (Urde, 2009) made by a company in crisis. In order to recover and improve after a crisis, the solution is a synergy between credible communication and the actions taken by the company (Greyser, 2009).

The Johnson & Johnson Tylenol scandal can serve as a good example of demonstrating core values in combination with credible communication during crises (Steward & Paine, 2011; Greyser, 2009; Siomkos & Kurtzbard, 1994). They developed their credo that is based on their core values, and in all crisis situations the credo is applied, which improves their corporate authenticity as well in the context of being authentic (Greyser, 2009). When discussing the preventative effect of core values our respondents believe that it could have a hindering effect on the damage in a crisis. Stenson addressed that it is important to not promise too much in CSR programs and to not have hollow core values (Urde, 2009). The bigger the promises are, the worse it will make the company look when these promises are either broken or proved to be over-exaggerated in a crisis situation Stenson states. According to Gao, a crisis situation also provides a company with an opportunity to prove to its true colors for the company stakeholders, which puts more pressure on the strength of core values in order to improve and deliver authenticity. Successfully turning a crisis into an opportunity can potentially cause the service recovery paradox phenomena to occur according to Gao. Thus this theory is linked to product- or service failure, it has the potential to occur in crisis situations as well, since it relates to companies delivering above consumer expectations which

leads to a higher degree of satisfaction than if the product- or service failure never occurred, but the satisfaction results highly depend on the severity of the failure (McCullough, 2009).

Finding true core values is difficult and time consuming (Urde, 2009), which can potentially explain why core values of certain companies does not fully reflect what the company stands for, hollow core values, which should be avoided (Urde, 2009). True core values adapted and taken into action (being authentic) in the crisis situation in combination with credible communication (Greyser, 2009) can improve authenticity. For a company to find their true core values, they need to look back at their track record (Urde, 2009). However, when these true core values are found, companies must maintain and adapt them in order for them to remain (Urde, 2009)

In the case of Findus and the horsemeat scandal, their core values are quality and sustainability (Findus, 2013b). After the crisis occurred, they committed to informational TV-advertising in which they invite its customers to their production facility to show how their products are manufactured and to prove that, thus the scandal, quality is still highly prioritized. It is certain that the product line that was effected by the scandal will suffer from a decline in sales over a period of time, but the efforts made by Findus to recover from the crisis by demonstrating credible communication and being authentic, by using their core value of quality, serves as a good example of how to act in a crisis according to Stenson.

In the case of McDonald's, the company has served as a scapegoat for a mere decade regarding childhood obesity globally. Two of their core values, prioritizing the consumer experience and operating ethically, are reflected in McDonald's efforts to respond to this bad image (McDonald's, 2013). The company adapted its menu with more healthy alternatives that was desired by the customers, and provided calorie measurements for meals, Berg states. McDonald's have also engaged in Social Media in which they answer all consumer questions, which can improve authenticity if the questions are answered in a credible manner. Concerning McDonald's' crisis management procedure, it highly depends on the type of crisis. Since 80% of the restaurants in Sweden are franchise owned and McDonald's owns the rest, they handle the situations differently if there is a crisis caused by a franchisor or a crisis related to the entire company, according to Berg. When the crisis at hand is national, and not local, McDonald's handles the crisis centrally, in which they emphasize on transparency,

clarity, and adaption toward the consumer needs; which reflects the organization's core values.

Nestlé being a master brand with a broad brand portfolio causes challenges since the master brand core values must be reflected in each of the sub-brands. Nestlé's core values are people, quality, brands, consumer, customer, and performance (Nestlé, 2013b). A broad set of core values that need to be reflected in each of their sub-brands. Therefore Nestlé use their control system that informs the relevant personnel within the company about the potential issue at hand Elmgren describes. The Nordic organization then sets up a meeting in which the crisis, and the potential solution is discussed. The final decisions and standpoints of Nestlé are then communicated to the company stakeholders.

5.2.3. Reputation in Crisis Management

There are means and actions that can hinder the potential damage of a brand crisis (Siomkos et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007; Greyser, 1999). As many of respondents discussed, the strength of a brand and the ability some companies have to shake off brand crises. IKEA is one companies that our respondents brought up as nearly invulnerable when it comes to be affected by crises. Another company with this ability is Johnson & Johnson and their credo (Stewart & Paine, 2011; Siomkos & Kurtzbard, 1994). This ability can consist of many unique factors, but a significant factor is the built up corporate reputation. A good corporate reputation can serve as a buffer in crisis situations (Siomkos et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007; Greyser, 1999), which can be an explanation to why companies such as Johnson & Johnson and IKEA seem to stand strong in every crisis they become affected by or are involved in. A good corporate reputation does not completely protect against damage from a brand crisis, severe damage and significant losses can still occur (Siomkos et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007).

Skalare addressed that the type of reputation IKEA has does also affect media. Media serves as a key contributor to the scapegoat phenomena, although when IKEA was involved in a bribing scandal in Russia, media headlines stated that IKEA had been affected by a bribing scandal rather than saying IKEA was involved (Blomgren, 2009). Corporate reputation is a reflection over time of the combined judgments of the stakeholders about the company's actions and communication (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010; Balmer & Greyser, 2006), which is an indication that IKEA and Johnson & Johnson have a well established corporate

reputation considering how crises' does not seem to harm them to the same extent as other companies in brand crises.

McDonald's is still associated with obesity but is still performing well (Pehrson, 2007), Nestlé became a scapegoat for sugar in infant food (Carnhede, 2004) and Findus' most recent involvement in the horsemeat scandal (Findus, 2013a) have awoken many reactions from the companies' stakeholders. However, the reactions from the public and media in all these cases have been strong and caused the companies to become scapegoats to different extents. Findus is the company that suffered from a brand crisis and the scapegoat phenomena most recently. Stenson and Gao believe that many of the crises' today are caused by different moral views. Moral views can be affected by culture and trends et cetera, which make the potential crises' unpredictable in many cases.

5.3. Why a company becomes a Scapegoat

There are several different constructs that contribute to a company becoming a scapegoat. In the cases investigated with Findus, Nestlé, and McDonald's, all companies that are present in the food industry. As Stenson and Skalare addressed, the closer the crisis are to us as consumers, the worse it gets, especially when it comes to children and animals. In Nestlé's and McDonald's' case, it affected children which consumer highly cherish, which is an explanation to why these crises' were widely broadcasted by media and between consumers and caused these companies to become scapegoats.

Another remark concerning the McDonald's case, is for example the existent beauty ideals, as Persson and Fors-Andrée stated that the public desires to blame someone or something and as Gao mentioned, consumers are irrational in many cases. This can be a potential reason to why McDonald's has become a scapegoat for overweight and obesity, thus the consumers can control what they eat themselves, and eating too much of anything is never good.

In Findus' case, they partially caused the scapegoat situation themselves. By admitting they found traces of horsemeat in their lasagne, it automatically sparked anger and interest from the public, and since media responds to what the consumers are concerned with, it became very highlighted in media; even though the reason their lasagne contain horsemeat was due to a supplier further down the supply chain (Svensson, 2013; Expressen, 2013). An additional

construct that contributed to Findus becoming a scapegoat was Swedish culture and Swedish societal norms, since horse are popular animals that are more considered as pets than food, thus horsemeat is an edible meat, according to Persson, Skalare, and Stenson. Thus many consumers in Sweden were aware that the cause to the horsemeat was a supplier to Findus, Findus became the scapegoat; which can be explained by the convenience factor, implied by Gao and Skalare. Findus being a known brand in Sweden is much easier to target than companies further down the supply chain, the true cause of the error does not mean much when it comes to the scapegoat phenomena.

Avoiding a debate in media even if the company is innocent will still be harmful, since it increases the media focus and the attention from the public, according to Stenson and Berg. The reasoning behind this is due to the exposure the scandal will get, and since a majority of the readers will not pay attention long enough to find out the real truth about the cause of the crisis, it is not recommended to start a debate in media. An interesting remark relating to the media and the degree of uncertainty a crisis creates, Fitzsimmons (2008) suggests that corporations should work together during crisis situations, which can decrease uncertainty, and neutralize rumors that are either spread by media or through word-of-mouth. However, sometimes the public just needs to release the tension created by a crisis according to Gao, and it might not always be the right company this tension is aimed at, which is mainly due to convenience. Hence the 'poodle concept' might become more common in business today, Gao implies. Companies admit their error and then go underground while finding the root cause of the problem and the solution, and then introduce it to media and the public, instead of staying in the headlights of media and the public during the entire crisis process, which will harm the company more.

6. Conclusion & Contribution

6.1. Conclusion

In this study, we have found that scapegoating is an up-to-date topic many non-respondents as well as all of our respondents, found interesting. Yet, there is no substantial previous research done within the field. We believe our study could work as a foundation for further research, as it combines the sociological field of study with brand crises- and reputation management studies, constituting new theories in the unexplored field of business scapegoating.

We had pre-conceptions of what constructs affects scapegoating entering this research project, which were found true, more or less, given the lack of existing, fully adaptable theories. Yet, we were not stating the obvious by arguing for our pre-conceptions only. More constructs were found throughout the process and put in a tangible and understandable context resulting in the framework we have developed.

6.2. Answering the research questions

6.2.1. Which key constructs are central in a company becoming a scapegoat?

To answer our first research question, a framework including the constructs found in this study is developed and presented. The framework consists of five key external constructs contributing to a company becoming a scapegoat, and two supporting constructs. The model and its components are explained further below.

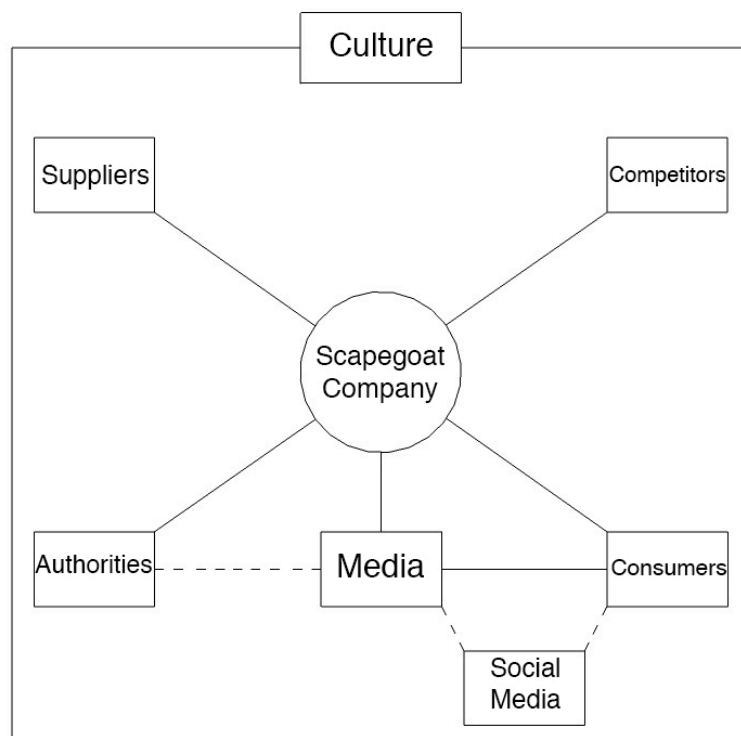


Figure 1. Framework for contributing constructs in business scapegoating.

We have found that all aspects of business scapegoating, as well as the concept of scapegoating itself, are influenced by *culture*. For instance, consumer culture varies over the world, as well as corporate culture, not least in crisis situations, stated by our respondents. Furthermore, we believe culture is a difficult construct to relate to, in a company perspective, since it could come in many forms, especially if the scapegoated company is international or global. However, we find honesty and transparency as key to avoid scapegoating.

Media is the construct most mentioned and discussed during our interviews, which we find reasonable, but also one of the constructs mentioned in our definition of scapegoating. The impact of media in our daily lives today is fierce, and in an extended perspective it also impact companies heavily, as companies consist of people. Media impacts scapegoating in a large extent, since it regularly is people's main source of news, which could regard companies within a scandal.

Due to the media logic, well-known brands will suffer higher media attention, which requires more active work with keeping up media communications within the company to make sure what is reported in newspapers and other medias holds true. Yet, it is arguable if media is as unbiased as claimed. Since several of our respondents criticize media and its common routines, it is possible media is not as monitoring and informative as said. However, that is a discussion left to other studies.

Another aspect in the framework is the *consumer*, as a natural part of scapegoating. Without consumers, or the public, nobody would bother. Since all of our example cases are companies working with food, the relevance of the consumer is certainly higher, given that product categories closer to people's daily lives make greater impact on scapegoating. Thus, people want to reduce their uncertainty level. Furthermore, if consumers decide to scapegoat a company, we believe several other stakeholders will follow; mainly media, and depending the matter and magnitude of the issue, authorities, suppliers, and/or competitors could follow.

We also find *social media* as a contributing construct, enabling a mediated relationship between consumers and media, but also works as a tool for organizing anti-brand events and such. In the framework, this relationship is composed by the dotted line from the social media-box. Yet, as media uses social media as a trustworthy source of information, the risk of publishing faulty information is increasing, and we believe it will keep increasing in the future since social media is, as we perceive it, growingly important. Thus, we argue social

media as a tool and phenomenon is strongly contributing to scapegoating. Consumers tend to become creators of information and with social media they also become broadcasters, which could be harmful if consumers decide to blame a certain company, correct or not. With today's pace in information flow, it is not surprising companies get faulty accused with untrue information. Hence, companies must adapt to such environment.

Authorities have direct impact on business scapegoating, but also a mediated relationship with media, as authorities' reports and information is broadcasted through media, explained by the dotted line in the framework. Yet, if mass media don't find the information interesting, it will not be published, and the public will rarely be affected by the information. However, people put great trust in authorities, in general, and therefore, authorities have a responsibility towards companies and consumers to provide correct information. Thus, authorities work as a contributing construct of business scapegoating.

In some cases, *competitors* contribute largely in scapegoating. However, theories claiming that competitors could take advantage of a scapegoat's situation does not hold true, at least not in the cases we have studied and our respondents unanimously emphasize the risk of it. There might be cultural differences globally in competitor roles, but as far as we know, a common corporate policy is not to denigrate competitors. Hence, competitors, and competition in general, is important in scapegoating, since contaminated brands must pay regard to competitors reactions.

Suppliers are rarely an important construct of business scapegoating. However, we want to include it in the framework, emphasizing that it is considerable, but not certainly important. If there is a situation like Findus', the supplier plays an important role, even though the supplier itself does not scapegoat the brand. Yet, the supplier is one of the central reasons why the brand was scapegoated from the beginning. We believe that suppliers' roles could increase in relevance over time, especially in the FMCG industry, as the amount of *private label* products are increasing in a fast pace (Accenture, 2012) and the brand used is rarely the manufacturer.

To summarize, the model consists of the constructs we found contributing to business scapegoating, without order of rank, even though we believe some constructs certainly are more important than others. However, mainly in a long perspective, an important construct in scapegoating is *the affected company itself*, and how it manages a scandal, both proactively and reactively. If a company keeps taking wrong decisions and mismanages the brand(s), a

scapegoating situation is unavoidable.

6.2.2. Why does a company become a scapegoat?

The constructs contributing to the scapegoat phenomena are many, and their balance highly depends on the type of crisis. The closer the crisis is to consumers, the worse it gets. When a crisis affects children or animals, the reactions become much stronger and the company becomes a higher-level scapegoat.

Generic communication was addressed as a key contributor to the scapegoat phenomena. Standardized communication is not accepted by consumers during crisis, and worsens the scapegoat phenomena. The constructs that catalyzed our surveyed companies to become scapegoats were different, however Nestlé's and McDonald's' case directly and indirectly affected children, which caused much of the attention for these crises. While Findus came forward with the truth themselves, in which horses were involved, that in Swedish culture are considered more of a pet than food.

Another reason behind the scapegoat phenomena presence in today's business is much because of convenience. Consumers are skeptical towards bigger corporations, and with the rise of social media, it forms a harmful threat towards companies. The popular conspiracy theories spread quickly in social media, and in combination with the existent skepticism and irrationality consumers possess, a potential scapegoat situation can occur from anywhere, with or without any truth.

The scapegoats of business today, mostly become scapegoat due to differences in morals. There are of course cases in which companies deserve to be the scapegoat. The best way to avoid becoming a scapegoat, assuming it is not a deserved scapegoat situation, is for a company to unite their core values through actions and well-adapted communication when the situation calls for it. With the presence of social media today, there is not much companies can do to avoid or hinder false information being spread or to control the convenience factor in consumers minds. Therefore companies must be proactive in social media and demonstrate transparency and honesty through these communication mediums as well and through genuine actions, not just in crisis situations. Committing to genuine behavior, that is a reflection of the company core values will not protect completely against the scapegoat phenomena, but the

behavior will stick to the consumers and ultimately medias mind, that a company that demonstrates the above mentioned traits will certainly be easier forgiven for their failures.

6.2.3. What company efforts can decrease the risk of becoming a scapegoat?

As confirmed by our empirical evidence a majority of companies today have a standardized procedure for dealing with crisis situations. Companies today are aware of the importance of adapted and authentic communication, yet the importance of being authentic (Greysen, 2009) by demonstrating the company core values seems to be of less importance in comparison to authentic communication. Properly applying authentic and well-adapted communication is a difficult task. All companies have a broad range of different stakeholders with different beliefs and perspectives. Therefore companies must first of all be aware of their stakeholder profiles before communicating simultaneously to all of its stakeholders (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010). According to Dickinson-Delaporte et al. (2010), ambiguous communication is the key, since it will allow stakeholders to interpret the messages according to their own perspectives; which will ultimately lower stakeholder conflicts.

Action speaks louder than words in many cases, and therefore being authentic is equally as important, if not more, than communication during a crisis situation. During a crisis the consumers pay more attention to the information given by the company (Greysen, 2009), and due to human error there will always be situations in which statements either come out wrong or become widely misinterpreted.

A recent example is the BP oil spill in the Mexican Gulf. The BP chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg, mistakenly referred to the affected public as “small people”, which was widely taken as BP seeing the affected as lesser humans (NBC News, 2010). When the original thought certainly was, that thus the size of BP, they still cared about all affected parties in the crisis. However, the heavy media broadcasting of the crisis combined with the increased attention levels of the public caused the crisis situation to escalate, and it definitely did not make the situation better when the BP CEO was caught sailing with friends and family in the middle of the crisis (Bergin & Waterman, 2010).

With today’s technology communicational mistakes spread rapidly, and it is therefore almost impossible to control for the involved companies. The only things they can do, is to give their

information to their stakeholders, but the consumers also attain information from secondhand sources (Coombs, 2007). It does not matter if it was a fair mistake, the truth, or something taken out of the air. Conspiracy theories being a popular topic online do not make companies less vulnerable either, and since many crises' today are mostly caused by moral differences, there is little companies can to prevent a brand crisis or becoming a scapegoat. The consumers today, act irrationally in many cases which makes it challenging for companies to know the reasons that causes a crisis in a given situation, unless the company was aware of the issue before it became public knowledge. Consumers today want to see action, and a company acting after its core values will not only satisfy their stakeholders, but also build and improve their authenticity. However, to the extent authenticity can be improved highly depends on the type of crisis and its consequences.

The increased threat of brand crises and rapid growth of social media has caused company to use the concept of doing a whole poodle in crisis situations. A concept, in which the whole blame for a crisis is taken by one company, even if the company in the scapegoat situation is not entirely responsible for the crisis. Doing a whole poodle was addressed by a majority of our respondents as a successful approach towards handling a crisis since it significantly decreases the attention from media and public, unless the damages caused by the crisis severely hurt consumers. However, our respondents also expressed the importance of honesty and transparency, which does not match the concept of doing a whole poodle, since the true causes of the crisis is rarely of great importance. The rise of doing a whole poodle is due to the power of media, if a company solely accepts the blame and then goes into hiding, much of the attention will decrease over time. If a company stays in the spotlight to fight for the honor and to prove that they were not the true cause of the crisis, the damages can potentially become worse, which explains the popularity of doing a whole poodle. Doing a whole poodle is least minimum damage approach, thus far from a perfect alternative.

There is no best practice way to avoid becoming a scapegoat in a crisis today, but there are measures that can be taken to hinder the damage. Genuinely incorporating company core values contributes to improving authenticity, and having an established corporate reputation can also serve as a buffer in crisis situations. However, having and developing an established corporate reputation is a difficult task for many companies today. Fitzsimmons (2008) argues for companies in the crisis-affected industry to work jointly to reduce the levels of uncertainty, which ultimately will reduce the damage on the entire industry by lowering the

spillover effect. Applying this approach will certainly decrease the intense focus on the scapegoat company and spread the focus industry wide with a reduced power, and in the consumers mind, the uncertainty levels will decrease, since it is less doubtful that a number of companies addressing the same root cause of a crisis than a single company. Therefore this approach can serve good solution in crisis situations, but it will force competitors to work together, which seems like a rather radical approach. As addressed previously, many companies that are not the scapegoat but are present in the same industry tend to go into hiding when a competitor is exposed, it makes it very doubtful that companies will apply this concept in the future unless the crisis is an absolute threat to the entire industry,

As our respondents mentioned, they were expressed their wonder concerning why certain companies seemed to be able to dodge crises and becoming scapegoats, in which IKEA was mostly mentioned. Johnson & Johnson is also a company with similar characteristics, companies with superior reputation.

The reputation and authenticity present in these companies, the balance between the two cannot be verified, allows for these companies to gain acceptance and forgiveness from the public, and in IKEA's case even media. Attaining these levels of mere immunity towards crises and becoming a scapegoat are rare findings. Johnson & Johnson's success can be much accredited to their credo, a genuine approach judging by the acceptance levels by consumers, and IKEA can basically be considered a part of Swedish culture, which can be compared to loyal sports fans of a team, strongly biased and unable to see their team's weaknesses. However, there is no doubt that IKEA also possess a strong reputation, proven by their global success. Additionally, it is of great importance that companies focus on remaining authentic also, authenticity is built over time and is simply not something that can only be brought up and demonstrated in crisis situations, similar to core values it needs continuous maintenance adaption.

Considering our case companies, Findus, McDonald's and Nestlé, their situation is different. Findus, thus British owned, possess a strong reputation in Sweden, and through successful crisis management methods, the company will certainly come out strengthened from the horsemeat scandal, since they were one of few companies that stepped forward and took the blame, which potentially can cause the service recovery paradox to occur. In McDonald's case, the type of scapegoat they are is of a more or less permanent, but the company is putting

in significant efforts to both strengthen their reputation and authenticity by showing responsibility for health and by showing commitment in social media. The McDonalds case itself is unique, the company have made efforts to improve their menu through healthier alternatives that was an adaption based on consumer needs, thus the tainted image of McDonald's still exists and a vast majority of the consumers still buy the food considered unhealthy from the restaurant, which is a different kind of phenomena. Nestlé, possessing an broad product portfolio, became scapegoats since their failures affected infants, which as mentioned in the analysis, is a key catalyst to becoming a scapegoat. Being a global company as Nestlé comes with both pros and cons, crises in one part of the world can blow over to another, but due to their size, an average crisis can be turned over or waited out without significant damage for an extended period of time. This was proven by the milk powder-crisis in China 2005 (Ma et al, 2010), when Nestlé market share and penetration significantly decreased, but recovered quickly (Ma et al, 2010),

6.3. Contributions

6.3.1. Theoretical implications

First, as far as we know, this is the first study done within the field of business scapegoating including a sociological perspective. Traditional sociological theories regarding scapegoating argue the scapegoat often is the weak or unadapated individual of a group (Zawadzki, 1948; Girard, 1986). However, this does not hold true in business scapegoating. Our findings show that scapegoated companies often are strong, well-known companies, opposing sociological theories used in this study. Yet, this is our interpretation of the phenomenon based on our empirical findings and theoretical framework. With this study, we shed new light and further developed the concept of business scapegoating.

Second, the framework developed constitutes aspects vaguely mentioned in previous research, but not together in a context like in this study. The question of how a company becomes a scapegoat has never before been studied, and by conducting a study including both how to become, and how to reduce the risk of becoming a scapegoat, we can show an entirety of the subject. The framework combines sociological- and business contexts, constituting a new perspective on the concept of business scapegoating.

Third, the crisis- and reputation management theories created prior to our study matched our

empirical findings in many occasions. However, in symbiosis with each other, many of these theories have never been associated in this context. The relationship between reputation, authenticity, and core values is untested in the context of crisis management and business scapegoating, yet they are interrelated in many aspects of preventative crisis management.

6.3.2. Managerial implications

The framework we have developed is useful in a managerial perspective in sense of what to consider in a scapegoat situation, but also when initializing crisis management strategies. We believe many companies have to reflect on the contributing constructs of becoming the scapegoat of a situation. Hence, knowing the risks of becoming a scapegoat is central in brand reputation- and crisis management. Consumer demands in crises could vary worldwide, just as it could vary in product characteristic demands. Thus, considering culture as a key-contributing construct is not mentioned before in scapegoating theories. Culture is also important in a corporate perspective, where the reaction on the scandal could be central in the question of becoming scapegoat or not. As societies over the world crave different response from a business leader, culture is key. Moreover, consumers are the ultimate judges, meaning that if consumers don't mind a scandal, it is probably not worth fighting about in media. If neither consumers nor media bother, the scapegoating could be considered hidden, and certainly it will blow over quickly. Additionally, the learning that strong, well-known brands suffer great risk of becoming the scapegoat does not mean smaller brands could not be affected.

As previously established, communication plays an essential part in crisis management. However, companies must also put significant focus on being and remaining authentic. Our empirical findings showed that core values can contribute to improving authenticity by making the company more genuine, and it is therefore important that companies find their own synergy between communication and actions both on a daily basis and in crisis situations. Hollow core values without internal or external rooting (Urde, 2009) can also prove to be harmful. Companies with hollow core values and over-exaggerated CSR programs, that solely exist because they "look good", promise too much in many cases, and when a crisis situation appears, and the core values and CSR programs come short, it can significantly worsen the crisis situation. Therefore, hollow core values must be avoided, which Urde (2009) also recommends in contexts outside of crisis management.

The main managerial tasks to consider are:

- Social media has changed the game. Companies cannot manage negative word-of-mouth or rumors. Therefore companies need to develop proper crisis management procedures and true core values. The brand must act with the core values as a foundation in order to build a strong reputation. A strong reputation will work as a buffer in crisis situations.
- Consider corporate- and consumer culture in scapegoating situations. The effect of culture varies, but in a global company the impact of becoming a scapegoat could be extensive.
- Companies should be aware of their external environment, which can be applied to our framework, revealing the strengths and weaknesses in order to waterproof against a potential scapegoating situation.

6.4. Limitations

The example cases we have used in this study are from the FMCG industry and the Restaurant industry, and many of our respondents are working mainly on the Swedish market. It is possible that the framework we have developed is not applicable to other industries, but we strongly believe that the framework could work as a foundation for future research, eventually on cases within other industries or other countries. Our main goal is not to generalize, but we strongly believe that the framework is applicable to other industries than the food industry, as a grounded theory strategy is used. Thus, the balance of the constructs in the framework could vary in different industries. Furthermore, a research studying a single- or multiple cases with traditional case method would eventually draw other conclusions than this study. Since the research area is rather unexplored, we find our contributions slightly conceptual.

6.5. Further research

Further research within the area is proposed, since we believe the issue will grow larger and become a more important part of crisis management. Who is trustworthy, and why? Consumers tend to trust neither companies nor media, which traditionally is the main source of information. It is possible that new generations put their trust mainly in other sources, such as other consumers or authorities. However, companies and media must consider how to regain their trust, given that the trust actually is absent. Additionally, we believe further

quantitative research with our framework, as foundation would be interesting and meaningful for managers, aiming at finding the relative importance of each construct, and eventually find even more constructs. With such study, managers could learn how to weigh strategic commitment to various stakeholders.

Considering the increased risk of the business scapegoating phenomena to occur due social media, it is of great importance that the specific area of business scapegoating is further examined. Through our study we managed to clarify the role of preventative measures that, and provide a framework with key constructs contributing to the business scapegoating phenomena. The balance between these constructs can be further analyzed through quantitative research and specifically adapted to the surveyed industry(s).

Moreover, further research within the field of business scapegoating should dig deeper into the sociological perspective. The question of why business scapegoating motives differ from individual scapegoating motives could be valuable in both academic and managerial perspective.

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Appendix: Interview questions

Introduction

- Name
- Purpose of our project
- Ask if they have had the time to check the pre-interview info
- Explanation of the steps in the interview, scapegoat concept, and explain the reason behind the specific questions
- Inform that the interview can be anonymous if needed/wanted

General questions

- Is there a standardized procedure for handling brand crises, if so, described briefly its functions?
- What causes a company to become a scapegoat?
- What factors contributes the most to becoming a scapegoat?
 - If these factors can be rated, which factor is the most harmful?
- Out of your experience, what is the best and most efficient approach to avoiding becoming a scapegoat?
- Why do some companies tend to get blamed/ more highlighted more often than others?
- Does culture have an effect on the public reaction of a service failure/product failure, and potentially causing the scapegoat phenomena?
 - Out of your experience, does some markets have a tendency to react more or less?

Out of these mentioned factors, which factors do you believe contribute the most to the process of becoming a scapegoat/front figure of a scandal? Please also address the three most contributing factors.

- Media's role?
- Competitor's role?
- Consumer's role?
- Government's role?
- Your own company's role? (Only for scapegoat affected companies)
- Suppliers' role?
- Any other aspects?

Questions for crisis affected companies

- How harmful has past crises been to your company, what was your role?
 - If previous crises, what was the main learning?
- What will be the biggest obstacle to overcome after this crisis?
- Why do you think, your company became the scapegoat?

Questions to unbiased parties

- Why do companies become a scapegoat?
 - Could it have been someone else?
- How do you consider your own role in Findus/Tesco becoming the scapegoat?
- What other aspects do you believe is central in scapegoating?
- Does the consumer expectations affect the impact a service or product failure, and to what extent do you believe this contributes to a company becoming a scapegoat?
- What role do you believe the authorities will play in affecting the impact of service or product failure?
- How do you think a company should manage such crisis?
 - And how could they avoid it?
- Out of a sociologic perspective, is there a “need” for society to find something or someone to blame?
 - Why is there such need?
 - How can a company tackle and control such obstacles?
 - When attacked, what can a company do to gain control again, in a sociological perspective?

Why do you believe there is a tendency for consumers to overlook the true cause of the service or product failure and focus their dissatisfaction on an “easy” target?