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The Philanthropic Brand?

An exploratory study of consumers' perceptions of brands communicating moral messages on social media

by

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Abstract

Thesis Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to provide an understanding of how brands relaying moral messages in their communication are perceived by consumers. Therefore, it investigates consumers' brand meaning resulting from exposure to brands' moral messages on social media. This thesis thereby enhances knowledge regarding the consumer perspective of moral branding and furthermore contributes to brand meaning literature.

Methodology: Conducting an exploratory qualitative study allows to reveal different facets of consumers' brand meaning. Applying a netnography on a retail brand's social network sites grants the collection of unbiased data in the specific context in which the phenomenon occurs.

Findings: The findings include five themes describing positive and four themes implying negative brand meaning. The themes demonstrate the broad variety of contrasting brand meaning consumers derive from the brand's communication of the moral message. An additional theme sheds light on the role of the social media context of the phenomenon. The study furthermore reveals that the brand's moral message has the potential to evoke actual behaviour changes of consumers.

Conclusion: This thesis contributes an understanding of the consumer perspective of brands relaying moral values to literature on moral branding. The variety of contrasting brand meaning uncovered contributes to brand meaning literature by supporting that brand meaning is subjectively created by the individual consumer. Furthermore, it is concluded that many consumers grant the brand the right to communicate moral values and appreciate the brand's action.

Practical implications: This thesis indicates that the communication of morals provides the brand with the potential to offer personal value to consumers and to demonstrate its interest in societal well-being. The relay of morals further constitutes a differentiating factor for the brand. Conversely, this thesis exhibits that consumers on social media draw on various arguments to criticise the brand due to its moral message.

Originality/Value: This thesis combines perspectives from management and consumer research and enhances the understanding of the consumer side of the phenomenon, thus enabling to draw implications for both fields. An important value of this thesis lies in the rich empirical data allowing the researchers to demonstrate diverse and polarising consumer views on the brand's moral communication. These views range from consumers' notions of the brand being presumptuous to the impression of a philanthropic brand facet.

Keywords: moral branding, moral communication, citizenship, brand meaning, social media

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1   Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of the development that more and more brands utilise moral values in their communication. The problem formulation illustrates the theoretical and managerial problem associated with the research phenomenon. It further outlines present academic knowledge concerning the phenomenon and highlights the consumer side as an under-researched area in need for additional investigation. In order to provide this required knowledge, the purpose of this thesis is presented and the resulting research question guiding the study is derived. Furthermore, the chapter contains the aimed theoretical and managerial contributions of this thesis. After delimiting the topic covered by this study, the structure of the remainder of this thesis is described.

1.1   Background

What do brands mean to society? There is an ongoing debate about the role brands should play in society (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017; Hilton, 2003; Minár, 2016): How can brands do good, or at least contribute to the well-being of society? These questions are raised in recent publications mentioning a "phase of deep rethinking" (p. 211) of the role a brand should play in society (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017). This phase of rethinking stems from the assumption that brands can act as entities contributing to current public debates, by raising awareness for certain societal issues (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017). Similarly, civic engagement is argued to increasingly move away from state institutions. In line with this, actions that are usually conducted by the state tend to move towards companies and their brands (Minár, 2016; Palazzo & Basu, 2007). By engaging in such initiatives, companies and brands can contribute to the well-being of society. Hence, they can use their power to 'do good' (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017; Hilton, 2003).

Two popular and well-established methods for brands and companies to contribute to society are cause-related marketing campaigns or donating money to charity (Porter & Kramer, 2002). These are widely known methods of corporate philanthropy companies can use to do good for society. However, recently a different approach, which can arguably be seen as 'doing good' has been observed: Brands start to initiate discussions about relevant topics in society. For example, they raise awareness for road safety (AT&T, 2016), family values (Edeka, 2016a; Edeka, 2015b), and encouragement of young girls (Always, 2014). One popular example is the brand Dove. In 2004, Dove launched the successful campaign for 'real beauty', a critical comment on the beauty ideal shown in media, portraying skinny and flawless women (Taylor, Johnston & Whitehead, 2014). This campaign included women with very different visual characteristics and was intended to inspire women to think differently about the definition of beauty (Clinch, Dorso & Osland, 2010). All these examples exhibit a commonality: The brands' marketing communication includes rather indirect critique of

society. Thereby, it can make consumers think and reflect about these societal issues. However, what are the consumers' opinions of the brands' communication?

A global study by Edelman in 2016 found that 60% of the consumers think 'doing good' should be part of what a brand does and stands for. This is in line with the ongoing trend identified in the study that consumers expect more and more from brands. Based on the study results Edelman concludes that consumers have given "brands a license to inspire social action" (Edelman, 2016a) by increasing awareness for social issues through the promotion of discussions (Edelman, 2016a; Edelman 2016b).

However, in times where consumers show increasingly sceptical reactions towards marketing communication (Holt, 2002), the question remains: Do consumers indeed give brands the license to initiate social action? And does this mean that brands have the power to do good?

1.2   Problem Formulation

In the past decades, companies and brands have been increasingly encouraged to show their interest in contributing to the enhancement of society by taking social responsibility (Morsing, 2006). As argued by Minár (2016) and Palazzo and Basu (2007), this development is explained by the rising expectations consumers hold towards brands and companies to act beyond their pure business purposes and demonstrate their care for society. The presence of these expectations is proven by a global consumer study by Edelman (Edelman 2016a; Edelman 2016b), revealing that 60% of the consumers believe brands should do good. As one approach to meet these expectations, it is claimed that brands and companies should engage in moral communication towards consumers (Morsing, 2006). In line with this claim, an increasing number of brands articulating moral messages regarding current social, ethical, health or communal issues has been witnessed (Minár, 2016; Morsing, 2006; Sachs, 2015). As more and more brands are expressing such moral opinions, this phenomenon is of vital interest for academics and marketing practitioners (Minár, 2016; Morsing, 2006).

The aforementioned recent development and the benefits for brands associated with such moral or ethical positions have been recognised amongst scholars in the discipline of brand management, coining terms such as the ethical or moral brand (Fan, 2005; Jeanes, 2013; Morsing, 2006). These scholars argue that engaging in moral or ethical communication does not only allow brands to demonstrate their interest in society's well-being (Fan, 2005), but also grants them a way of differentiation (Bertilsson, 2014; Morsing, 2006). Furthermore, brands applying morals are believed to entail favourable and positive associations among consumers (Morsing, 2006).

However, despite the above benefits, the use of moral and ethical messages by brands is delicate and involves certain risks (Bertilsson, 2014; Fan, 2005). Firstly, an immense risk is presented by the potential criticism consumers may exert towards the brand as they discover weak aspects related to the brand's morality and ethicality. This risk for scrutiny emerges because ethical issues can occur at multiple layers connected to the brand and organisation, providing various arguments consumers may invoke to utter critique (Bertilsson, 2014; Crane,

2001). The potential damage to the brand resulting from critique reaches an ample level in today's connected world where opinions can spread rapidly through social media and criticism towards brands becomes publicly available (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Secondly, the perception of moral statements is highly subjective to the consumer because it depends on the individual's judgement of what is right or wrong (Brunk, 2010). This fact implies the risk of the consumers' reactions to such messages being difficult to predict as they are highly individual (Holmes, 1986). Building on this subjective judgement concerning the moral message, the consumers' resulting perception of the brand communicating the moral is likewise individual (Batey, 2008). This is due to the fact that the consumers' meaning towards a brand is a result of their subjective interpretation of an encounter with the brand, being influenced by past brand-related experiences and information. Yet, rather than passively receiving brand communication, the meaning towards the brand is actively created by the consumers themselves (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008). Hence, the outcome of the brand's moral communication, in terms of its consumer reactions outlined above, depends to a considerable extent on the consumers and cannot be fully influenced and anticipated by brand managers (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008). Due to these reasons, an understanding concerning the consumers' perceptions of the brand transmitting moral values is considered indispensable.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, previous research focusing on the consumer perspective of the phenomenon of brands communicating moral messages is limited. Adopting a broader view on the topic, the brand's actions can be explained as an act of displaying social responsibility, hence, insights from the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) specifically focusing on the consumer side can be applied. In this field, previous research dealing with consumer behaviour has linked a brand or company's ethical and CSR-activities to consumer responses (e.g. Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006; Schmeltz, 2017; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) have found that the consumer's evaluation of the CSR issue is more positive when a perceived congruence between the consumer and company is present. Furthermore, Schmeltz (2017) states that the consumer's personal values play a role in his or her evaluation of the CSR activity. A specific focus on the consumer's brand perceptions concerning ethical company and brand behaviour has been applied by Brunk (2010) and Brunk and Blümelhuber (2011): First, Brunk's (2010) study has revealed sources determining the consumer's perception of a brand or company's ethical behaviour. The findings indicate that consumers evaluate the brand's ethical behaviour based on its impact on, for example, consumers and employees. Second, Brunk and Blümelhuber (2011) have found that the consumer's perceptions of the brand's ethical behaviour are asymmetrical, meaning that a single incident being evaluated as unethical may harm the overall ethicality perception. Referring to these studies, it can be summarised that the mentioned scholars predominantly focus either on the consumer's perception of a brand or company's strategic act of exhibiting responsibility (e.g. Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006; Schmeltz, 2017; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) or the consumer's perception of a brand's ethical behaviour (Brunk, 2010; Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). However, this thesis aims to examine the consumer perspective of a brand's moral communication. Thus, based on the studies above, the authors of this thesis suggest that, to the best of their knowledge, an understanding in this area falls short and demands further investigation.

While the consumer perspective is predominantly investigated from a CSR angle (e.g. Ellen, Webb & Mohr, 2006; Schmeltz, 2017; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), research on the brand's moral communication mainly applies a corporate brand management perspective (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017; Fan, 2005; Morsing, 2006). In this context, different research foci exist: On the one hand, Morsing (2006) is concerned with corporate brands addressing moral issues, but focuses on highlighting the resulting challenges for employees. On the other hand, Jeanes (2013) examines the creation and control of the moral brand by brand culture. Moreover, Fan (2005) studies ethical branding as a means to enhance the corporation's reputation. In a recent publication, Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz (2017) propose that a corporate brand may function as an entity which enables social discourse by communicating about societal issues.

In conclusion, due to the management perspective adopted by these scholars, research falls short in providing an understanding of how the brands addressing moral values are perceived by consumers. However, it is currently argued that in "The Age of Criticism" (Fournier & Avery, 2011, p. 200) the brand management perspective should embrace knowledge about the consumer's view, because consumers attain increasing power to damage the brand through social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Furthermore, the consumer plays a crucial role regarding the success of moral brand communication, as eventually it is the consumer who individually derives meaning from this action (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008). Therefore, the authors of this thesis propose that an understanding of the consumer's perceptions of the brand's moral communication will provide valuable insights for the aforementioned scholars (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017; Fan, 2005; 2017; Morsing, 2006). Specifically, it is suggested that these scholars will benefit from knowledge concerning the following aspects: (1) whether consumers show the proposed favourable reactions towards the brand, which currently lacks empirical prove, (2) whether consumers show unfavourable reactions and criticism towards the brand, (3) whether the assumed differentiating benefits of moral branding are recognised by consumers, and (4) consumers' overall brand perceptions resulting from the moral communication. With these insights, the authors of this thesis aim to provide scholars with a more encompassing view regarding outcomes of the brand's transmission of moral messages.

Finally, as indicated above, consumers' potential scrutiny towards the brand which criticises society and communicates morals, constitutes a particularly harmful potential when it is articulated in a social media context (Fournier & Avery, 2011). This is because criticism becomes publicly accessible and can spread rapidly on social networks (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Fournier & Avery, 2011). The social media context renders an investigation into the phenomenon particularly relevant and interesting. For this reason, this thesis focuses on studying brands' moral communication taking place in a social media context. To be precise, the phenomenon studied in this thesis includes brands which criticise societal issues and communicate moral messages related to these problems on social media channels.

1.3   Purpose and Research Question

As there is a need to explore the consumer perspective of moral communication, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate how brands relaying moral messages are perceived by consumers. This is achieved by studying consumers' reactions to such brand communication in social media.

In order to investigate this phenomenon, the following research question will be addressed:

How is a brand communicating moral messages on social media perceived by consumers?

This thesis applies a qualitative inquiry into consumers' reactions towards a German retail brand transmitting moral messages embedded in video commercials on social media.

1.4   Aimed Thesis Contributions

The theoretical contribution of the present thesis is threefold.

First, it contributes to the literature on moral and ethical branding (Fan, 2005; Jeanes, 2013; Minár, 2016; Morsing, 2006) by adding the understanding of the consumer's perspective on brands applying moral messages. This enhances knowledge as there is limited research on the consumer side of the phenomenon and it is hence in need of further investigation. Second, in the field of ethical branding one of the specific insights this thesis will offer answers to Fan's (2005) call for future research. Fan (2005) expresses the need for understanding regarding "the relationship between brands/branding and society" (p. 348). Amongst others, he asks if a brand should yield public good to society by communicating basic moral values, or if this goes too far. The consumers' perceptions revealed by this study will offer insights regarding this question by illuminating the consumers' opinions.

Third, the present thesis contributes to literature on corporate branding, answering specifically Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz' (2017) call for research about the investigation of the role of the brand which aids in the improvement of society. To reach this goal, the authors of this thesis specifically claim that interactions between brands and consumers on social media are in need of research.

Furthermore, the investigation of consumer reactions will provide managers with insights into the potential for a brand to be relevant and offer value to consumers by using moral messages. It furthermore adds knowledge to the potential of moral communication as an instrument to differentiate the brand. By enhancing the understanding of consumers' reactions, it will be possible to define the strengths and risks of this strategy. This serves marketers as guidance when deciding for or against such content for branding and advertising. Furthermore, insights into consumers' reasoning provides marketers with advice about which factors need to be paid attention to when crafting moral messages. Finally, by revealing and examining a broad

spectrum of consumer reactions on social media, practitioners are provided with a deeper understanding of the patterns and content of discussions among consumers.

1.5 Delimitations

This thesis focuses on consumers' perceptions of brands using moral messages. It will, however, be limited to the investigation of messages transmitted on social media. Hence, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine consumers' perceptions resulting from exposure to messages on other channels.

Moreover, this thesis focuses on the investigation of consumers' brand perceptions which will be determined using the concept of brand meaning. Therefore, this thesis does not engage with consumer behaviour outcomes such as attitudes towards the brand, brand image or purchase intention.

Finally, as this thesis seeks to understand how consumers perceive brands' moral messages, the focus of the empirical investigation lies on the consumer side of the phenomenon. For this reason, the brand management perspective treating the strategic incorporation of morals into the brand is disregarded. Further, as this thesis narrowly examines brands' moral messages on social media, the corresponding companies' general CSR-activities will not be studied.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis introduced the phenomenon of brands criticising societal issues and communicating moral messages on social media. The problem formulation showed that the consumer side of this phenomenon is in need of further research. The purpose of this thesis addresses this lack of research and was followed by the illustration of the research question, the aimed contributions and delimitations of this thesis. The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: The second chapter provides a literature review in which previous research related to the phenomenon is presented. Moreover, it introduces relevant concepts in order to describe the phenomenon and concludes with a theoretical framework. The thesis continues with chapter 3 presenting the methodological approach regarding the conducted study. The chapter includes the authors' research philosophy, the research design, method, and a reflexive evaluation concerning ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the research and its limitations. Chapter 4 provides detailed descriptions of the empirical findings. The findings are analysed in the following chapter 5, using relevant literature to support the evaluations. Chapter 5 continues with a discussion of the findings and gives an answer to the research question. The conclusion in chapter 6 highlights important findings and provides the theoretical as well as managerial contributions of this thesis. The thesis concludes by suggesting directions for future research.

2   Literature Review

As has been highlighted in the previous chapter, there is limited literature treating the consumer's perspective of the phenomenon of brands communicating moral messages. Hence, the aim of the literature review is to present an overview of previous research and provide relatable knowledge on the phenomenon studied in this thesis. To provide a foundation of terminologies for the following literature review, the first sub-chapter establishes the terms of morality and ethics and results in the definition of a moral message. The following sub-chapter includes the relevance of using morals in branding, a review of existing literature and classifies the phenomenon investigated in this thesis. Furthermore, the concepts of corporate philanthropy and corporate citizenship are introduced to further describe the phenomenon. Moreover, literature on the consumers' perceptions of corporate philanthropy and citizenship is reviewed. This is because the authors of this thesis argue that this literature provides insights relatable to the consumers view on the phenomenon at hand. Next, as the purpose of this thesis is to reveal the consumer's perceptions of brands communicating moral messages, the concept of brand meaning is introduced. Brand meaning is deemed suitable to reveal the individual consumer's perception of brands during data analysis. Lastly, as the phenomenon is investigated in a social media environment, social media literature is briefly introduced to shed light on this particular context.

The literature review concludes by introducing a theoretical framework illustrating the relationship between the crucial elements that describe the investigated phenomenon.

2.1   The Moral Message

The phenomenon investigated in this thesis encompasses a moral message communicated by a brand. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the meaning of morality and what can constitute a moral message. To achieve this, the authors of this thesis will initially provide a brief overview of the terms of ethics and morality and further define how the term 'moral message' will be applied in this thesis.

Ethics is defined as a part of philosophy and seeks to comprehend and determine how human actions in a society can be perceived as right or wrong (Holmes, 1986). The term as such derives from the Greek word 'ethikos' which stems from 'ethos' that signifies habit (Phelps & Hassed, 2012). Following this root, ethics describe certain habits individuals are prone to follow. The words morality and ethics are often used interchangeably, however, there is a clear distinction between the terms (Crane & Matten, 2010). Accordingly, morality is concerned with the values, norms and beliefs entrenched in social processes, whereas ethics provides the knowledge about what is right or wrong for a community or an individual (Crane & Matten, 2010). Building on this, ethics deals with the "study of morality and the application of reason to elucidate specific rules and principles that determine right or wrong for a given

situation" (Crane & Matten, 2010, p.8). Consequently, morality antedates ethics, as it is argued that all people have a sense of what can be judged as right or wrong in relation to certain activities (Crane & Matten, 2010).

As mentioned, morality depends on human values and is understood as the belief that a certain behaviour is culturally or socially more acceptable than the opposite behaviour (Rokeach, 1973, cited in Batey, 2008). Thus, values can either be culturally accepted norms, or derive from the subjective notion of what is beneficial or good. The values people hold therefore influence their behaviour (Rokeach, 1973, cited in Batey, 2008).

Considering these elaborations, moral communication thematises morals, for example by describing moral values or by narratively conveying examples of morals (Luckmann, 2002). The use of moral arguments in communication can be applied to affect an individual's actions or behaviour. Moral communication may hence encourage the individual receiver to change their behaviour to solve a perceived issue (Täuber, van Zomeren & Kutlaca, 2014). The understanding of a moral message applied in this thesis is therefore based on the definition by Holmes (1986), who claims that morality is the judgement of what is right or wrong based on certain individual or cultural values (Rokeach, 1973, cited in Batey, 2008). Hence, as this thesis investigates the communication of moral messages by brands, a moral message in this context constitutes a statement of what is right or wrong. The brand acts as the sender of this statement.

2.2 Moral Branding

2.2.1 Relevance of Moral Branding

Before reviewing literature related to morals in branding it will first be established what a brand signifies. Various definitions of a brand have been developed over time (e.g. Aaker, 1991; American Marketing Association, 2017; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1998). To cite one definition, Kapferer (2012) suggests an organisation should see the "brand as a name that symbolizes a long-term engagement, crusade or commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services and behaviours, which make the organisation, person or product stand apart or stand out." (Kapferer, 2012, p. 13). This definition reflects Kapferer's (2012) strategic brand management view. Contrastingly, Keller (1998) understands a brand as "a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service" (Keller, 1998, p.4). As this thesis examines the consumer perspective of a brand's moral message, Keller's (1998) definition is applied because it is more consumer-centred.

Generally, brand management scholars are concerned with achieving strong and unique brands (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, Sternthal & Tybout, 2002). In line with this, Keller, Sternthal and Tybout (2002) argue that the associations mentioned in Keller's (1998) brand definition are supposed to be unique, positive and strong. Moreover, they claim that brands should encompass certain benefits that make them stand out against their competition. The scholars

call these benefits "points of difference" and emphasise their need to be desirable. This implies them being perceived as believable and relevant by the consumer (Keller, Sternthal and Tybout, 2002). Thus, to achieve differentiation is one goal of brand management (Kay, 2006) and it is crucial that the consumer considers the brand's differentiating aspects as relevant (Keller, Sternthal & Tybout, 2002).

According to Bertilsson (2014), the demonstration of social responsibility and ethical considerations is one suitable way for brands to achieve differentiation because it grants the brand a position distinct from competitors. Furthermore, being ethical and showing responsibility adds value, not only for the company, but also for consumers (Bertilsson, 2014). Adopting a similar opinion, Palazzo and Basu (2007) claim that exerting responsible behaviour will become an important driver for a brand's success in the future. They explain this with the fact that consumers increasingly seek brands which offer them value that is not only related to consumption activities, but goes beyond this, including the concern of social and environmental dimensions (Palazzo & Basu, 2007). In a similar vein, Borgerson et al. (2009) suggest that to become successful, brands should use social responsibility and ethics to build strong relations with consumers. This view is supported by Morsing (2006) who specifically claims that in order to offer value to consumers, brands should engage in moral communication. She suggests that communicating such morals entails favourable and positive brand associations by consumers (Morsing, 2006).

2.2.2   Previous Research and Definition of Moral Branding

As has been elaborated in chapter 2.1, morals and ethics are distinct but closely related concepts (Crane & Matten, 2010). This becomes visible when examining the literature reviewed in this chapter, where scholars at times use the terms "moral" and "ethical" in parallel, without making clear distinctions on their signification (e.g. Jeanes, 2013; Morsing, 2006). For these reasons, it is important to note that the literature reviewed in the following includes both terms with reference to brands. There is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with ethics and morals applied by brands, with a majority of scholars applying a corporate brand management perspective, although the foci of their publications differ (Borgerson et al. 2009; Fan, 2005; Morsing, 2006; Palazzo & Basu, 2007). The consumer side is only applied by two studies (Brunk, 2010; Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011), besides the research covering the consumer perspective from a CSR-point of view, which will be reviewed in chapter 3.

Concerning the brand perspective, two publications specifically treat brands addressing moral issues (Jeanes, 2013; Morsing, 2006). Jeanes (2013) examines brands addressing moral issues, but uses this phenomenon to investigate the creation and control of the brand by brand culture. Morsing (2006) looks at the phenomenon from a corporate brand management perspective and uses it to shed light on the risks associated with corporate moral branding, specifically the resulting challenges for employees. A corporate brand management perspective is furthermore applied by Borgerson et al. (2009). However, the researchers examine ethics used for brand building and the relationship to corporate and organisational identity. As the focus of the aforementioned publications differs from the angle this thesis

uses to explore the phenomenon, the insights provided by these studies do not advance the specific knowledge required for this thesis.

Applying a focus on ethics, Fan (2005) stresses the importance of a brand's ethical behaviour and its impact on society, and hence examines the ability of ethical branding to enhance the company's reputation. Although his emphasis does not match the phenomenon studied in this thesis, he poses various questions touching upon problems this thesis seeks to understand. He calls for future research regarding "the relationship between brands/branding and society" (Fan, 2005, p. 348). Amongst others, he requests insights into whether a brand should yield public good to society by communicating basic human and moral values, or whether this goes too far (Fan, 2005). As this thesis aims to provide an understanding of consumers' perceptions of brands communicating moral values, the authors of this thesis suggest that progress in answering Fan's (2005) questions can be made based on the findings.

Interesting insights are furthermore offered by Minár (2016). He describes 'goodvertising' as an upcoming type of branding and marketing. The term encompasses the recent phenomenon of brands covering topics of societal good, by addressing relevant issues, such as social or cultural values from a moral position. Thus, 'goodvertising' describes the valuable communication implemented by "brands that care" (Minár, 2016, p. 11). According to the author, such branding activities gain increasing importance because they represent an appropriate response to consumers' rising expectations towards brands to show a purpose beyond their mere business activities. Moreover, he suggests that these issues become important to consumers because the brand addresses them, which in fact makes the topics more meaningful to consumers than if a state institution addresses a similar topic (Minár, 2016). These references to the consumer side of the phenomenon presumably offer valuable background information to understand the consumers' perceptions uncovered in this thesis.

Concerning the consumer perspective, it has only been addressed by two studies examining how consumers' perceptions of a brand or company's ethical behaviour are formed (Brunk, 2010; Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). Brunk (2010) identifies that these ethicality perceptions originate from six main domains that are influenced by the brand's behaviour. These domains include consumers, employees, the environment, the overseas community, the local community and the business community. Moreover, she clarifies that what is being perceived as ethical or unethical depends on the individual consumer's subjective judgement (Brunk, 2010). For the thesis at hand, this highlights the subjectivity of the consumer's reactions, underlining that the use of ethics and morals by brands is a challenging and uncertain practice. Moreover, Brunk and Blümelhuber (2011) find that the impact of a brand's behaviour on consumers' ethicality perceptions is asymmetrical, implying that one incident perceived as unethical can severely damage the overall perception of the ethical behaviour. The authors of this thesis propose that this understanding may be beneficial to comprehend the consumer's evaluation of brand's moral communication. Considering all of these publications, it can be concluded that brands using moral messages in their communication, and specifically the consumer side of this phenomenon (Brunk. 2010), lack attention from academic research and are therefore in need of further investigation.

As outlined before, the above scholars illuminate different facets of brands using morals. However, the scholars show different understanding of the meaning of terms such as "moral

brand" (Jeanes, 2013; Morsing, 2006) or "ethical branding" (Fan, 2005). Fan's (2006) understanding of "ethical branding" emphasises ethical decision-making in branding and refers to the moral principles applied to determine right and wrong in these decisions. Nevertheless, the author further mentions the responsibility of an ethical brand to contribute to or support public good (Fan, 2005). Conversely, Morsing (2006) describes a 'corporate moral brand' as adding a moral commitment to the brand which includes the promise of the entire organisation to adhere to and live this moral position. In contrast, Jeanes (2013) defines a "moral brand" as "a brand that communicates moral or ethical issues" (Jeanes, 2013, p.163). Minár (2016) links brand management to advertising and describes "brands that care" as those that engage in "goodvertising" (p. 11). According to the author, this involves the brand exerting a value gesture by commenting on certain, for example social or community, issues of the world from an ethical and moral position (Minár, 2016). Considering these definitions, their differences become visible: Whereas Fan (2005) emphasises the role of ethics in brand related decision-making, Jeanes (2013), Morsing (2006) and Minár (2016) focus on moral messages and promises made by brands.

As the purpose of this thesis, however, lies in examining the consumer's perceptions of the brand sending the moral message, the definitions of Fan (2005) and Morsing (2006) are not applicable because they cover a different aspect. Although Jeanes' (2013) definition of the 'moral brand' touches upon what is being studied in this thesis, her particular study topic does not match with this thesis. The authors of this thesis suggest that Minár's (2016) conceptualisation best describes the phenomenon this thesis aims to investigate. This is argued for by the fact that Minár's (2016) explanations explicitly mention the relationship between the brand and its advertising and comprehend those elements as inevitably linked. Thus, the brand shows that it cares through commenting on important issues and showing its moral position (Minár, 2016).

2.2.3   Potential Issues in Moral Branding

Taking positions regarding moral or ethical issues carries considerable risks for brands. This comprises not only consumer criticism concerning the brand's actions, but also a resulting potential alienation of consumers (Fan, 2005). According to Fan (2005) on the one hand, the above risks arise if a brand communicates moral issues which are very controversial. On the other hand, the risk increases if the issue the brand touches upon shows a small relation to the core business of the organisation. Both cases bear the risk of consumers becoming alienated from the brand (Fan, 2005).

A review of ethics literature, which specifically deals with ethical brands (Bertilsson, 2014) and products (Crane, 2001), is deemed suitable to illustrate how consumer criticism towards the brand's moral and ethical communication arises. One insightful concept is Crane's (2001) investigation of the "ethical product". Crane (2001) suggests that a product can be augmented by ethical claims at four levels. He suggests that it is also at these levels that problems related to these claims can occur: the product, marketing, corporate and country level. At the product level, ethical considerations can result, for example, from the potential of the product to do harm to society or individuals, spanning across the entire lifecycle of a product, from manufacturing to disposal. At the marketing level, critique can evolve due to perceived

unethical practices to market the product. The corporate level refers to the ethical behaviour of the firm and the country level to the respective ethical practices associated with the country of origin of the product (Crane, 2001). With this, Crane (2001) explains that critique of an ethical brand can occur at all levels, making ethical branding a highly challenging exercise. This is because, ideally, all four levels have to withstand scrutiny by consumers who become increasingly sceptical. Bertilsson (2014) builds on Crane's (2001) work and summarises that this can result in the paradox that a brand or company offering ethical products can nevertheless be perceived as unethical by consumers due to critique at other levels. This is further complicated by the fact that consumers and firms may have different notions of what constitutes being ethical (Bertilsson, 2014; Clavin & Lewis, 2005 cited by Brunk, 2010). The authors of this thesis suggest that Crane's (2001) illustration above may offer insights for the investigation of brand's moral communication, because consumers may evaluate a brand's moral claims referring to other levels mentioned by Crane (2001).

2.3   Corporate Philanthropy and Corporate Citizenship

2.3.1   Corporate Philanthropy

Scholars have long argued that the expectations of society towards businesses in general have increased (e.g. Hilton, 2003; Palazzo & Basu, 2007), which is why companies have started agendas to promote human welfare (Carroll, 1991). These agendas are covered by the concept of corporate philanthropy which encompasses activities desired by society. These activities include, for example, monetary or other contributions to different types of educational, social, cultural or recreational purposes (Carroll, 1991; Matten, Crane & Chapple, 2003). Corporate philanthropy can be categorized into the concept of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) pyramid by Carroll (1979). The pyramid encompasses four types of corporate responsibility the company holds towards stakeholders: Namely economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibility (Caroll, 1991).

Corporate philanthropy is often associated with monetary charitable giving (Porter & Kramer, 2002; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). However, some scholars argue that showing philanthropic responsibility covers more activities than charity only (Pearce & Doh, 2005; Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). A few examples are the donation of goods, the launch of non-profit foundations with an altruistic mission (Pearce & Doh, 2005), involvement in communities or cultural sponsoring (Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) describe these activities as following a "win-win logic" where both consumers and companies benefit. Several studies highlight the benefits of showing philanthropic activities. They can lead to an improvement of company reputation, image and brand loyalty (Green & Peloza 2011; Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio 2009).

A relevant term which needs to be considered when discussing the term philanthropy is the meaning of "altruism". Altruism is defined as a "disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others" (Oxforddictionaries, 2017). In other words, it can be described as the purpose to benefit others, based on internal values while disregarding own interests.

Connecting this to philanthropic responsibility, it is argued that a philanthropic act is altruistic when the main motive is not to make a profit and the activities go beyond the core business responsibilities (Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). Brunk and Blümelhuber (2011) found through a qualitative study that those altruistic behaviours of a company are not expected by consumers, nevertheless they evaluated them as "nice-to-see" (p. 137). Thus, it is argued that an association with altruistic behaviour can improve consumers' perceptions of the brand (Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011).

2.3.2 Consumers' Perception of Philanthropic Activities

Many companies draw attention to their philanthropic activities through communication, for example through cause-related marketing to promote the company or brand's image (Porter & Kramer, 2002). Cause-related marketing (CRM) directly connects sales with charitable giving (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). The academic field investigating consumer responses towards CRM and philanthropic activities is extensive and should not be the focus of this thesis. However, the authors of this thesis deem it appropriate to review important findings from this literature stream. This is suitable because the cause promoted in CRM is comparable to the communication of a moral, thus consumers' perceptions towards CRM may be valuable to understand the consumers' perceptions revealed in this thesis.

In their study, Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) have found that the perceived company-consumer congruence plays a role in the success of the communication of a cause. The congruence denotes the consumer's identification with the company. Moreover, the authors have demonstrated that the success of a CRM campaign positively depends on the consumer's identification with the cause (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). A similar finding is drawn by Schmeltz (2017), who has found that the perceived relevance of the cause for the individual consumer positively influences consumer attitudes towards the company. She further argues that the consumer's personal values influence their perception of the relevance of the cause. However, she also expressed an increase in the sceptical audience showing a cynical attitude towards companies communicating about "their own good deeds" (Schmeltz, 2017, p. 51). Similarly, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) have found that when the communication rather focuses on the social issue than on the products, it can cause scepticism, as consumers presume a money-making motive behind the communication. Investigating specifically into the perceived altruistic motive of a company, Ellen, Mohr, and Webb (1996) have found that consumer responses are most positive if consumers perceive such an altruistic motive. Therefore, product donations are, for example, perceived as more altruistic than cash donations (Ellen, Mohr & Webb, 1996). Furthermore, Lii and Lee (2012) have found that corporate philanthropy activities have a more positive impact on brand image than CRM. This is because CRM is perceived as less altruistic due to its monetary component (Lii & Lee 2012).

Summarising the learnings of the aforementioned studies with regards to the topic of this thesis, the following conclusions can be drawn. Consumers need to perceive the issues being addressed by the company as personally important in order for the communication to be successful (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Moreover, the congruence between the consumer's personal values and the company's values play a role in the success (Schmeltz, 2017).

Additionally, the more altruistic the act is perceived to be, the better the consumer's evaluation of the brand (Ellen, Mohr & Webb, 1996; Lii & Lee, 2012). However, the audience sceptical towards companies' promotion of philanthropic activities is rising (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

2.3.3 Corporate Citizenship

Besides CSR and philanthropy, the term corporate citizenship recently emerged and discusses the role a corporation should play in society. There is no clear consensus regarding the meaning of "corporate citizenship" (Néron & Norman, 2008; Carroll, 1998), however, Crane, Matten and Chapple (2003) early provided three different views: the limited view, the equivalent view and the extended view. The extended view, in comparison to the other views, exceeds the concept of CSR by including a 'political' role of the business in society (Crane & Matten, 2010). In line with Crane and Matten (2010), the authors of this thesis follow this view. As such, the extended view of corporate citizenship has introduced a change in the normative understanding of how a business should be related to stakeholders (Crane & Matten, 2010; Logsdon & Wood, 2002). It expands the responsibility of a company through the belief that a corporation is metaphorically a citizen in society (Logsdon & Wood, 2002; Matten & Crane, 2005). This implies that, being a citizen, a company must participate in various ways in society, ranging from using its power to act as a pressure group on a higher political level to solve problems within communities (Moon, Crane & Matten, 2005). Often, this notion is viewed in an increasing context of globalisation due to the fact that in some countries governmental institutions often fail to safeguard and provide civil, social or political rights (Crane, Matten & Moon, 2004). Extending on this, Aßländer and Curbach (2014) further argue that corporations become part of a political community and are encouraged to contribute to society by taking part in public discourses, political rule-creation and civic activities. Furthermore, other scholars suggest that some of the social activities which should usually be conducted by the state, can be accomplished more efficiently and with more competence by organisations (Néron & Norman, 2008; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

2.3.4 From Corporate Citizenship to Brand Citizenship

The term "citizen brand" has been formed by Willmott (2003). He has introduced the term due to the background of an increasing group of consumers judging a corporation based on its behaviour in society. Thus, brands increasingly "incorporate a feeling, a sense, of how in touch with the world a company or product is" (Willmott, 2003, p. 363). According to the author, this part of brand equity is increasing in importance. He concludes by stating that corporations can build a strategic advantage when they build brands supporting and embracing values, thereby showing citizenship-like characteristics. Furthermore, he argues that a brand should understand society, including the people and their issues, by placing the society "at the heart of the company" (Willmott, 2003, p. 369). However, as noted by Ryder (2003), it is not obvious what Willmott (2003) means when describing the term "citizenship" and in what way a brand can become a good citizen (Ryder, 2003).

Recently, a new approach to citizenship regarding brands has been introduced by Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz (2017). The authors base this idea on corporate citizenship literature, however, they place the corporate brand in the role of being a citizen. This is because the authors argue that a brand does not originate solely from the corporation, but is rather created through the exchange between individuals in society and companies. The scholars therefore introduce the approach of "societal corporate branding". They define it as "the humanistic tension of a company to use the corporate brand as an enabler of social discourses and actions through which the company carries out quasi-governmental interventions in favour of society" (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017, p. 208). They argue that corporate brands adopt roles as "sociopolitical citizen[s]" (p. 208) to actively get involved in the community and to contribute to the societal well-being (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017). Thereby they draw on the aforementioned thoughts of Aßländer and Curbach (2014). Furthermore, Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz (2017) suggest that brands can contribute to society by capitalising on their influential power to raise awareness for issues and educate consumers. The scholars conclude with a call for research from the consumer side as people connect with brands based on their individual agendas. Thus, they argue that investigating interactions between individuals and companies on social media will reveal insights into the role of a brand as a contributor to a better society (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017). This thesis is responding to this call for research by conducting a study on social media.

To conclude, Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz (2017) do not provide a clear and specific concept which can guide this study. However, the authors of this thesis suggest their ideas to give valuable information for the empirical investigation.

2.4   Brand Meaning

2.4.1   Introduction to Brand Meaning

The term 'brand meaning' is used in different marketing literature streams, where a major distinction can be drawn between brand management literature (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1993) and literature from consumer culture theory (CCT) (e.g. Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Holt, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The former group of scholars understand brand meaning as consisting of brand associations which result from brand-related information the consumer is exposed to (Keller, 1993). Thus, these scholars are mainly concerned with the management perspective of creating information about the brand to achieve a specific brand meaning. Hence, they see managers as initiators and in control of such meaning (Kapferer, 2012). In contrast to this, the authors from consumer culture theory oppose the view that brand meaning merely originates from brand-related communication (e.g. Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Holt, 2002). Accordingly, they contend that not only the corporation, but also the consumer plays a crucial role in meaning-creation (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008). Consequently, instead of perceiving the consumer as a passive recipient of brand meaning, CCT scholars recognise the consumer as an active meaning-creator (Holt, 2002). Furthermore, they acknowledge that brand

meaning emerges from various sources, with marketing communication being one of them (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008).

As the purpose of this thesis is to examine consumers' perceptions of a brand communicating moral messages, the authors of this thesis deem the concept of 'brand meaning' and specifically its conceptualisation by CCT as appropriate to inquire into these perceptions. The authors of this thesis argue for this choice by drawing on Holt (2002) and Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) to acknowledge the individual consumer's active role in the interpretation of brand communication and brand meaning creation. Therefore, in this thesis brand meaning is defined as "the customer's dominant perceptions of the brand" (Berry, 2000, p. 129). This is complemented by an illustration of brand-meaning creation by Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) who explain meaning-making as assembling small pieces into an abstract, complex whole. Brand meaning is therefore the result of making sense of small units of information and experience regarding a brand (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008).

2.4.2 Brand Meaning Creation

First, Batey's (2008) concept of brand meaning is introduced. It draws on learnings from psychological consumer behaviour and is beneficial to reveal the individual's active role in the interpretation of messages and subsequent brand meaning creation (Batey, 2008). As mentioned above, marketing communication is one source which can trigger brand meaning, (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008). In this thesis, specifically the communication on social networks is in focus. However, although the brand is the sender of such messages, it is not the sole producer of meaning. Instead, the derived meaning is actively created by the recipient through interpretation. A communicational message transmitted by the brand includes various sensory information and the selection and processing of these stimuli by the consumer is marked by subjectivity. The selected information is transmitted to and interpreted by the human brain. In this process, interpretation describes the meaning the person attaches to the perceived stimuli. These meanings can evolve from the stimulus as such, as well as from the individual's mind. The role of the person's mind hereby implies that the process of interpretation is highly influenced by the person's schemas. Schemas refers to a system of feelings and beliefs each individual hold, which reflect his or her knowledge and experience about certain factors of the world. These schemas direct the actions of encoding and retrieving information and hence incline the person to perceive a stimulus in a particular manner (Batey, 2008).

Additionally, Batey (2008) points out that the interpretation of stimuli is largely influenced by the consumer's individual values, experiences, motivations and aspirations. Consequently, the resulting brand meaning is subjective and differs for every individual consumer. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the specific context in which a stimulus is received plays a crucial role in the process of interpretation. The context includes not only personal and socio-cultural circumstances, but also situational ones, such as a specific time and place. This means two consumers perceiving the same stimulus may arrive at significantly different interpretations and hence derive different brand meaning from the same situation. Additionally, it should be considered that brand meaning is built and sustained every time the consumer encounters the brand. Therefore, during the interpretation the human brain may also

draw on past brand experiences and meaning which may then contribute to shaping the meaning derived from a certain stimulus (Batey, 2008).

Finally, it is important to be aware of the role of emotions in the creation of brand meaning (Batey, 2008). A brand is encoded in the human memory based on cognitions and emotions. These two components are indivisibly linked (Gordon, 2001) and therefore the consumer's feelings about a brand are integrated into his or her thoughts about the brand (Batey, 2008). When the consumer is exposed to a brand stimulus, the probability of noticing the stimulus is determined by the emotions rather than cognitive thinking (Gordon, 2001). As a result, emotions are indispensable for brand meaning creation because it is not possible to establish a mental connection without them (Batey, 2008). Also in advertising the use of emotional images and visual metaphors is highly effective because it appeals to the intuitive part of consciousness (Batey, 2008).

To sum up, the brand meaning resulting from the consumer's interpretation of stimuli is highly subjective. This is due to the fact that it is influenced by the consumer's individual values and experiences, past encounters with the brand, as well as the specific context and the emotions present during exposure to the stimulus (Batey, 2008).

2.4.3   Brand Meaning in CCT

In the field of CCT, research including brand meaning encompasses a variety of topics and facets. A considerable stream of researchers examine how consumers transform and rework symbolic meaning inherent in brands in order to advance their own identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Holt, 2002; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Covering another angle, McCracken (1986) studies the transfer of meaning and contends that meaning originates in culture; from there it is transferred into brands and ultimately into consumers (McCracken, 1986). However, the above research streams, considering meaning as originating in culture and being used for the consumer's identity projects, are not applicable for this thesis. This is because a study on how consumers perceive the brand requires research on the individual consumer's brand meaning creation, with a focus on it being a response to brand communication (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008). For this specific purpose, a deeper understanding of the concept of brand meaning should be generated, extending the illustration at the beginning of this chapter. According to Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) the consumer is not a passive recipient of a brand's marketing communication and hence, the meaning intended by the company. Rather the consumer is an active creator of meaning. The authors explain this meaning-creation as assembling small pieces into an abstract, complex whole. Brand meaning is therefore the result of making sense of small units of information and experience regarding a brand. Additionally, they emphasise, in line with Batey (2008), that the context in which meaning is derived plays a major role and has the potential to influence the resulting meaning (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008).

One contextual factor Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) point out is the marketing-savviness of today's consumers. This is noteworthy because a specific brand message has a different effect than at another time when it is interpreted by today's marketing-knowledgeable consumer. The authors explain that consumers increasingly possess insider's knowledge

about marketing techniques which shapes their assumptions and frames used when interpreting brand messages. This results in reactions such as cynicism or the consumers' beliefs in their own superiority (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008). A similar notion is expressed by Holt (2002) who predicts in his post-postmodern condition that in the future consumers will comprehend all brands as commercial entities. This is because it will no longer be possible for a brand to conceal its commercial motivation. He supposes that, as a result, the brand's distance from the motive of making profits will play a minor role in consumer's judgement of brand authenticity and hence consumer's brand meaning assessment (Holt, 2002).

Studying brand communities, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) see them as taking on an active interpretive function of brand meaning. The authors claim that brand meaning is socially negotiated between marketers and consumers, instead of being passed on unchanged from the company to the consumer and on to another consumer. Activities illustrating this active role of the brand community include the evaluation, negotiation and interpretation of brand meaning between consumers in the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Considering the reviewed literature above, the brand meaning concept by Batey (2008) will be used in this thesis due to its comprehensiveness. It is complemented by the elaborations of Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) who support many of Batey's (2008) arguments. Thus, predominantly based on Batey (2008) the concept of brand meaning, as applied in this thesis, includes the following characteristics: It is actively created by the consumer and hence it is individual and subjective. Moreover, brand meaning is influenced by the consumer's schemas as well as his or her values, experiences, motivations and aspirations. Additionally, brand meaning is contextual and affected by the consumer's emotions. Finally, brand meaning is shaped by the consumer's past experiences with the respective brand (Batey, 2008; Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008). To conclude, this concept will be applied during data analysis as it is considered beneficial to reveal how consumers perceive the brand sending the moral message.

2.5   The Context of Social Media

2.5.1   Branding on Social Media

The term 'social media' incorporates a broad variety of different online platforms, such as online forums, blogs, chat rooms, product rating websites, social networking sites and content communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The rise of social media has increased the power of consumers and provided them with the opportunity to proactively create content and exchange opinions, rather than passively act as recipients (Labrecque et al. 2013; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Thus, the advantages of social media brand pages for marketers lie in the direct interactions between brands and consumers (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Social media marketing is hence more time-efficient and lower in costs than traditional marketing (Pitt et al. 2002). Many recent studies have proven the effectiveness of social media marketing and branding, due to its positive impact on brand performances, brand

loyalty, awareness, brand trust and sales (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Laroche et al. 2012; Rapp et al. 2013; Sonnier, McAlister & Rutz, 2011).

On social network sites, brand pages are being utilized to accomplish these relevant marketing outcomes. Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social network sites (SNS) as

"web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211).

Both academics and practitioners agree that the main advantage of SNSs is the possibility to stimulate consumer-brand interaction through an easy way to share, like and comment on postings (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). If consumers like, comment or share a post, it appears on their individual social network leading to the condition that their friends and peers also see the brand's post (Wallace, Buil & de Chernatony, 2012). Thereby, the reach of the post can be increased (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Dobele et al. 2007). In this context, as Mangold and Faulds (2009) state, it is important that the brand's content is relevant for consumers. The authors suggest that one way to be important for consumers is by supporting causes they find relevant, such as social values. This is because consumers on social media are open to messages which emotionally engage them (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Hence, relating this to the phenomenon investigated in this thesis, it is argued that messages communicating moral values may be seen as relevant by consumers and have the potential to engage them and to evoke discussions.

Besides the aforementioned advantages associated with a brand's participation in social media, such engagement bears the risk of brand's losing power (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013; Kohli, Suri & Kapoor, 2015). Due to the unpredictable development of consumers' conversations online it is argued that companies have lost control over their brands (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). Fournier and Avery (2011) claim that consumers achieve a considerable power in the creation of brand meaning, because it is shaped by their conversations online. In participating and collaborating with brands, consumers become creators and distributors of a brand's content. The authors explain four different themes to demonstrate their viewpoint that social media is not as promising for brands as scholars have argued (Fournier & Avery, 2011). The "Age of the Social Collective" refers to the sense of community consumers develop to serve the basic human need to fit in and to be accepted. Collectively, consumers hold a large power which can be used against a brand. Further, the "Age of Transparency" embodies the empowerment of consumers to have constant access to information. Consequently, consumers quickly note when companies and brands are not telling the truth, which can result in a destruction of reputation. Moreover, the "Age of Criticism" describes the current threat of brands being increasingly judged and criticised on social media because of the rating and ranking culture. Critical consumers can form alliances and are ultimately able to destroy a brand as criticism can spread easily. Lastly, the "Age of Parody" encompasses many hypocritical consumers who produce parodic content about a brand (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

Regarding the studied phenomenon of brands communicating moral messages, these illustrations reveal the risk of potential consumer criticism when such communication takes place on social media. Therefore, this knowledge may be beneficial for the analysis of consumers' brand perceptions in this thesis.

2.5.2   Consumer Behaviour on Social Media

Social media has altered the way people communicate, produce and share information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Researching the consumer behaviour, Shao (2009) has proposed three different activities consumers perform in a social media environment: the consumption of content for information and entertainment reasons ('reading'), participation by interacting with content and other individuals ('commenting') and the creation of own content as a means of self-actualisation and self-expression ('production').

The commenting activity can result in eWOM, which is defined as a positive or negative statement regarding a product or brand being articulated by consumers. This statement is made accessible to a large number of other people via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). eWOM has the power to influence consumers, as they trust their peers' opinion, leading to an increase of credibility of the information (Feick & Price, 1987). Thereby, it can influence the consumer's attitude towards a brand (Lee, Rodgers & Kim, 2009). Commenting on a brand's post grants consumers the possibility to agree or disagree with the content (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Users hence either share their support or refusal of the brand's message. As these comments become visible to the consumer's own network, they may unintentionally influence their peers through a mere liking or commenting of a post (Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012). In fact, consumers may alter the strength and meaning of the original brand message (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013).

To sum up, as consumers share their opinions regarding the brand's content, they are not only able to influence their peers, but also discuss the meaning of the original message (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). This provides valuable information as it helps to understand the consumers' perceptions investigated in this thesis.

2.6   Theoretical Framework

The aim of the literature review was to present an overview of previous research and provide relatable knowledge on the phenomenon studied in this thesis. The resulting theoretical framework (figure 1) illustrates the relationship between the elements included in the research question. Moreover, it determines the terminologies used for each of the elements in this thesis. The theoretical framework encompasses the brand and consumer side of the phenomenon, as well as the social media context.
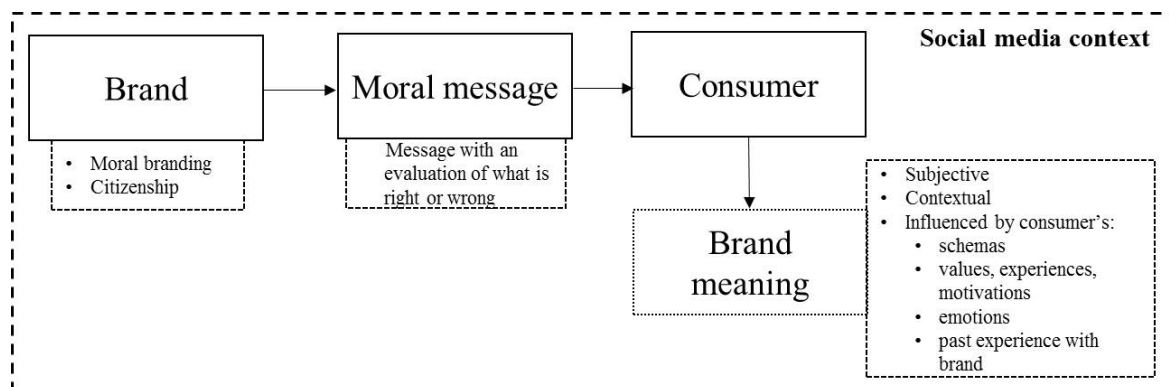
Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

As the purpose of this thesis is to investigate how brands communicating moral messages are perceived by consumers, the brand is the starting point of the relationship indicated in the theoretical framework. The brand is the sender of the moral message and is defined as a "set of mental associations, held by the consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service" (Keller, 1998, p.4).

The literature review covered two perspectives to describe the brand's behaviour in sending moral messages: Moral branding and corporate citizenship. Both perspectives offer suitable concepts to which the brand's behaviour can be related. From the branding perspective, the brand can be seen as a moral brand or a 'brand that cares' because it criticises society and addresses moral values (Jeanes, 2013; Minár, 2016). Regarding the corporate citizenship perspective, Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz' (2017) description of a 'societal corporate brand' is useful. The authors illustrate this brand as showing quasi-governmental actions to benefit society by fostering social discourse.

As the brand communicates a moral message it was established that morality is concerned with values, norms and beliefs and thereby provides the knowledge about what is right or wrong for an individual or a community. Based on this, the moral message is defined as a statement of what is right or wrong (Holmes, 1986).

Adopting the CCT view on brand meaning, the consumer is understood as an active creator, rather than a passive recipient of brand meaning (Holt, 2002; Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008). The consumer decodes and interprets a stimulus, in this case the brand's moral message, and thereby derives brand meaning. Brand meaning is defined as "the customer's dominant perceptions of the brand" (Berry, 2000, p. 129). Further, based on Batey (2008) and Allen, Fournier and Miller (2009), brand meaning encompasses the following characteristics: It is actively created by the consumer and hence it is individual and subjective. Moreover, brand meaning is influenced by the consumer's schema as well as his or her values, experiences, motivations and aspirations. Additionally, brand meaning is contextual, thus influenced by, for example, personal or socio-cultural circumstances, and is affected by the consumer's emotions. Finally, brand meaning is shaped by the consumer's past experiences

with the respective brand. To conclude, brand meaning is individual and thus differs from consumer to consumer (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008).

With regard to the purpose of this thesis, the social media context encompasses all elements. Social media incorporates a variety of different online platforms such as social network sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). On social media, consumers can actively create content, exchange opinions, and interact with brands (Labrecque et al. 2013, Singh & Sonnenburg, 2013), resulting in positive and negative eWOM, for example expressed as comments on social network sites. This interaction is publicly available, thereby revealing the consumers' opinions (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012).

In the empirical study, the authors of this thesis aim to reveal the currently unknown brand meaning consumers derive from the brand communicating moral messages. In this context, it is important to mention that the terminology brand meaning will be used in two ways: First, brand meaning refers to dominant perceptions of the brand held by the consumer (Berry, 2000), thus it describes the outcomes from the communication. Second, Batey's (2008) brand meaning concept including its characteristics is used in the data analysis to reveal how brand meaning is created by the individual consumers.

3 Method

Based on the revelation that the consumer's perspective of the phenomenon is under-researched, this chapter outlines the methodological choices applied in this thesis to answer the research question. As the theoretical framework illustrates, this thesis aims to reveal brand meaning on social media, which is highly subjective and contextual (Batey, 2008). Consequently, a qualitative approach is applied in this thesis. First, the philosophical stance of the relativistic and strong constructionist departure is clarified. Second, the research design and research strategy, namely a single case study which follows a qualitative and inductive approach, is elaborated on. As the authors of this thesis are interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of the consumer side of the phenomenon, these choices are deemed appropriate. Third, the choice of netnography and the way the empirical data was analysed is presented. Last, the chapter closes with a reflection about methodological limitations, trustworthiness of the research, and ethical considerations when conducting research on the internet.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Preceding the argumentation for methodological choices, it is necessary to understand the research philosophy underlying the thesis in view of the following reasons. On the one hand, the knowledge about the authors' philosophical stance helps to evaluate the research design. This is not only concerning the choice of data, but also the way data should be collected and interpreted in order to answer the research question: *How is a brand communicating moral messages on social media perceived by consumers?* On the other hand, the understanding increases the authors' reflexivity upon their own role as researchers in conducting the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012) which contributes to an increase of the overall trustworthiness of the study.

The ontological departure reflects the researchers' stance towards the nature of reality. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) outline four viewpoints: realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism. Realism implies that there is a single truth and that this truth can be revealed through investigation. The oppositional stance of nominalism holds that there is no truth which can be investigated as it is human beings who create facts. Relativism suggests the existence of 'many truths' and that facts highly depend on the viewpoint of the researcher (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The authors of this thesis take a relativistic stance due to the following reasons. The aim of this thesis is to investigate consumer perceptions. In chapter 2 it was elaborated that the consumers' perceptions differ as they highly depend on the individual and the context, such as time and place (Batey, 2008). Therefore, it is argued that there are different 'truths', or, as Collins (1983, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) states, "what counts for the truth can vary from place to place and from time

to time" (p. 49). Thus, the research question can only be investigated by considering the context and the individual consumers.

Following the ontological departure of relativism, the epistemological stance is shed light on. The term epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and is helpful for the researcher in understanding the best way of obtaining the required empirical data to create good knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The authors of this thesis take on a strong constructionist stance, as outlined by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015). As this thesis aims to investigate the perceptions of individuals, an emphasis is placed on what individuals or groups of people think and feel in a specific moment. This viewpoint is applied, rather than gathering facts and measuring them which would be a characteristic of the opposite, positivist stance (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) the adopted strong constructionist stance derives from the assumption that reality is socially constructed and people give meaning to reality by interacting with each other. Therefore, the focus of this study lies on how people use language to make sense of what is happening around them, in this case, when they are exposed to a brand's moral message in a social media context (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Consequently, the language needs to be interpreted to understand the phenomenon which is dependent on the individual consumer's perceptions. As constructionists, the authors of this thesis are not interested in generalising the findings but rather in exploring a topic within its real-life context as they argue that the context cannot be disregarded.

3.2   Research Strategy

3.2.1   Inductive Strategy

When studying topics treated by a large amount of literature, it is rather suitable to choose a deductive approach which tests theoretical propositions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In the case that the available literature on a certain topic is rather limited, it is claimed advantageous to follow an inductive approach. This approach implies that theory is generated based on themes which can be observed from the data (Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Although it is argued that more and more brands use moral elements in their marketing and branding strategy (Morsing, 2006; Minár, 2016), limited literature exists on how consumers perceive these moral messages. Thus, knowledge about the consumer's perspective is lacking or can only be drawn upon from related fields, for example CSR. A considerable extent of the literature which was elaborated on in the literature review deals with moral branding and corporate philanthropy. Moreover, social media literature was introduced because social media constitutes the context of the investigation. The authors of this thesis believe that these are suitable perspectives for an attempt to describe the phenomenon. Furthermore, this literature provides a background of topics and perspectives studied in this context. The concept of brand meaning (Batey, 2008) which was introduced in chapter 2 is applied in order to help reveal the consumers' perceptions of the brand. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework for this thesis which connects the vital elements of the phenomenon. As the research question is rather broad and designed to allow openness for

findings of consumer perceptions, the authors of this thesis will theorise based on these perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a result, although a concept is applied for data analysis, an inductive approach is adopted in this study.

3.2.2 Qualitative Strategy

The decision about the research strategy highly depends on the researchers' philosophical stance, the data which needs to be collected as well as the overall purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Following the philosophical departure outlined above, this study takes a qualitative approach. The purpose of this study is to generate an in-depth understanding of consumers' perceptions of a brand communicating moral messages. It will be achieved by revealing brand meaning which is influenced by the individual consumer's interpretations and is hence subjective (Batey, 2008). The exploration of individual consumer behaviour is a characteristic of a qualitative approach (Hoepfl, 1997). Moreover, qualitative methods are appropriate to investigate how the phenomenon can be understood in a specific context (Patton, 2002). This thesis studies brand meaning resulting from exposure to the brand's moral message in a social media context by investigating consumers' comments on social media. Therefore, the context of the phenomenon needs to be acknowledged and hence a qualitative approach is deemed suitable (Patton, 2002).

Additionally, as already mentioned, literature treating the phenomenon from the consumer's perspective is very limited and only touches upon a few of its facets. Therefore, it is deemed appropriate to follow a qualitative approach because it allows to be flexible when collecting and analysing the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Taking an exploratory approach constitutes that the researchers will be open and curious about findings, which is a further characteristic of a qualitative study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Single Case Study

Creating a research design is crucial when conducting a study because it provides the research with a framework. A research design organises the research activity "including the collection of data, in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p. 67). Consequently, the research design determines the choices made about what and how the empirical data will be observed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

It was decided to approach the research question applying a qualitative case study design. This is because the researchers are rather interested in the particular and not in drawing generalisable conclusions which can be applied to the whole population (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Yin (1981) argues that case studies "examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." (p.59). As stated before, to study consumers' perceptions of a brand

communicating a moral message in a social media context, it is impossible to disregard the context in which the opinions were formed. Additionally, a case study is suitable to shed light on abstract concepts and thereby generate interesting findings on a topic without much literature (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Siggelkow, 2007).

When establishing a research design, it needs to be decided whether single or multiple case studies would provide a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Different stances regarding case studies are present in academia. While Yin (2009) holds a more positivist departure, aiming to ensure that many cases are studied to increase generalizability, Stake (1995) takes a constructionist viewpoint. He argues that a small number of cases can be studied, in fact, only one case can be sufficient. This applies when a case is claimed to be unique or disruptive (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) defines this as an expressive case, where the case itself is studied, rather than an instrumental one, meaning that the case is only a means to an end. The authors of this thesis have identified such an expressive, interesting and unique case, which will be argued for in the following.

3.3.2   Choice of Case

The brand under investigation called 'Edeka' is a German retail brand. The brand has published several commercials over the course of the last three years on social media. An introduction of the brand takes place at the beginning of the findings chapter. Here, the authors of this thesis argue for the uniqueness of the case, which can be motivated through two factors, namely the commercials as such, and the consumers' responses to them.

All three commercials investigated in this thesis include moral messages combined with a subtle critique of society. The messages are crafted and expressed in a way that viewers are directly addressed. Moreover, the messages constitute rather general morals and values which are argued to be widely accepted by people. A detailed description of the content of the commercials can be found in chapter 3.4.3.1. The argument for the uniqueness of the case is further supported by the second reason why this case is interesting, namely the vast amount of attention it created.

All commercials induced high awareness on the internet: Not only have the videos been watched a million times on social media, but also the engagement in forms of 'likes' and 'shares' on social media is high (Edeka, n.d.-b). Therefore, it is stated that the commercials generated a high amount of eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). An investigation in Google Trends (Google Trends 2017a; 2017b, 2017c) shows that the search queries for all three commercials increased significantly after the commercials were published. This implies that people actively searched for the commercials online. However, what is particularly interesting about this case is the discussion taking place on social media, to be more precise, the consumers' comments containing their individual perceptions of the brand.

As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) exemplify, a single case study can be justified if a company shows a better performance than the competitors. Due to the above reasons, it is

argued that Edeka disrupted the German market with this advertising. The commercials generated high awareness also among non-German users of social networks, as the content of the comments reveals. Additionally, the media acknowledged the uniqueness of the videos by discussing the commercials in trade press (Campillo-Lundbeck, 2015; Campillo-Lundbeck, 2017; Fischer-Appelt, 2016; Schobelt, 2016; Strasser, 2015).

Additionally, ease of access was given to this case, as the advertisements and the comments on the videos are publicly available. The comments as reaction to the videos provided the researchers with rich empirical data, which is necessary when selecting a case study approach. Thereby, the authors of this thesis follow Stake's (1995) criterion for case selection, meaning that the authors want to maximize the learnings of this study. Finally, the researchers' epistemological approach of strong constructionism supports the choice of a single case study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This is because qualitative case studies are in need of the researcher's interpretation (Stake, 1995).

3.4   Research Method

In order to answer the research, question the perceptions of consumers who have watched the videos containing moral messages need to be investigated. Two steps are required to collect the needed data. First, it is considered valuable to briefly outline background information about the brand. Additionally, to ensure comprehension, the commercials are introduced and analysed in terms of their message and the way the message is conveyed. Second, the consumers' perceptions of the brand need to be accessed, collected and analysed. In the following, the decisions regarding these two actions are explained.

3.4.1   Content Analysis of Brand Website

Although the focus of this thesis does not lie in the overall branding strategy of Edeka, it is regarded as beneficial to provide a brief overview about the brand. The best way of acquiring knowledge about Edeka is using information available on the internet. This is due to the fact that the researchers lack access to Edeka's management and internal information. An appropriate method to study company documents like websites or company reports, is content analysis of textual data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). However, as the internet is a public space and everyone can easily distribute data, it is necessary to reflect about the authenticity of the sources (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The authors of this thesis therefore only chose documents which clearly indicate Edeka as the sender. This was assessed by checking the impressum of the website.

3.4.2   Netnography

The purpose of this thesis determines social media as the specific context of the studied phenomenon. As outlined above, the most appropriate way to consider the context of social

media is to investigate the comments on social network sites of Edeka. Therefore, it was decided to apply a netnographic approach, following the literature of Kozinets (2002b; 2015). A netnography is referred to as an online marketing technique to provide consumer insights for research (Kozinets, 2002). As similarly argued by Palazzo and Basu (2007) a netnography is suitable when seeking–critical insights of consumers towards companies' messages. However, a netnography in its traditional sense often focuses on longitudinal studies of online communities. Thereby it puts the culture of the community and the interaction between members of the community at heart (Kozinets, 2015). The following general elaborations regarding netnography are based on Kozinets (2002; 2015): Although this thesis does not neglect the interactions within the comment threads on social media, the community and the interactions do not constitute the foremost focus. Rather, consumers' individual perceptions, which can be revealed from the comments, will be studied. Additionally, the authors of this thesis are not interested in the culture which is formed on Edeka's brand pages, or in how users create their identities. Moreover, the users active on brand pages can rather be described as brand publics which are organised around a specific interest point (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), in this case, the videos. In contrast to brand communities, the classification as brand publics is argued for as follows: It is supposed that on Facebook not only users who follow the brand can see other users' comments, but, as soon as users like, share or comment something, their friends can also see the video on their newsfeed. This gives the latter the opportunity to also watch the video and comments. On YouTube, it is assumed that users either actively seek a video or the video was shared with them. Moreover, users could discover the video by chance on their YouTube homepage, for example because of its large amount of views. Therefore, it is argued that in the case of this study the consumers' main interest lies in the videos themselves, not in the community.

Due to these reasons, the authors of this thesis follow a netnographic approach as outlined by Kozinets (2002). However, they acknowledge the fact that the culture and the users' identities which are known to be constructed in these communities are neglected in this study (Kozinets, 2002).

The authors of this thesis collected publicly available data from social network sites, which Kozinets (2015) describes as archival data. Thereby, the researchers took on a complete observer role. The advantage of the complete observer role lies in the fact that it is an unobtrusive method (Kozinets, 2002). It is suggested that the comments are written directly after the consumers have been exposed to the videos. Consequently, the comments include immediate consumer brand perceptions, as they arguably occurred directly after the exposure to the commercials. This non-reactive method is advantageous as it increases the likelihood of generating unbiased data (Kozinets, 2002). Compared to conducting interviews or focus groups where respondents might be influenced by the interview setting, the researcher and the specific questions imposed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) users' comments on social network sites allow unbiased insights (Kozinets, 2002).

The unit of analysis (Long, 2011) within this thesis is the consumer's perception of Edeka as a sender of a moral message. The empirical material is therefore written comments as textual data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.4.3 Sampling of Commercials and Social Media

3.4.3.1 Sampling of Commercials

It is acknowledged that with the researchers' choice of a single case study, the sampling of the commercials of Edeka is also purposeful. However, to be transparent, the researchers argue for the choice of the specific commercials. First and foremost, the most important criterion for the selection of commercials is that they contain a moral message which the authors can identify. As stated above, Edeka has run and is running several different advertising campaigns. The brand has a more product-related portfolio of advertisements, for example claiming regionalism, freshness of the products and good service. Additionally, Edeka has been running overarching campaigns, containing moral messages, as the authors of this thesis argue, since 2015 (Edeka, n.d.-a). This review led to a sample size of three commercials (Edeka, 2015b; Edeka, 2016b; Edeka, 2017b). Another criterion which needs to be fulfilled is a sufficient number of consumer reactions in form of comments on social media. This is to ensure access to rich empirical data. All three commercials conveying a moral message are found to have a significant number of views and comments. A narrative description of the commercials, based on the researchers' understanding of them, is provided below:

"Heimkommen" (Edeka, 2015b) translates to "Homecoming"

The video "Heimkommen" was aired online starting in the end of November 2015. It shows an old man as the main character. He gets a message from his daughter on his answering machine apologising that she and her family will - again - not be able to visit him for Christmas. Seeing his neighbour's family coming over for Christmas and visualising that he had spent Christmas alone in the previous years as well, the man gets sad. The plot continues by depicting three persons, a doctor, a businessman and a mother, in a situation of their busy lives getting a sympathy card. Further, they are shown grieving and coming together in front of the old man's house where it becomes obvious that they are the old man's children and that he had sent a sympathy card for his own decease. Entering their father's house, they encounter a bountiful table and their father comes out from behind the kitchen. Everyone is relieved and happy to see him alive and the old man says: "How else should I have brought all of you together?". The video ends by showing the entire family at dinner and the text "Time to come home" is faded in (Edeka, 2015b).

The authors of this thesis propose the commercial to contain a critique on current society by showing three adults who do not have time to visit their father for Christmas. This portrays an issue in today's society in Germany where traditional family values seem to lose significance for people and many elderly people are neglected by their children due to them claiming to have no time (Kleinhubbert & Windmann, 2013). From this results the implicit moral message that the viewers should care more for their family. At the same time, this is a trigger for the viewers to reflect upon their own behaviour in relation to the illustrated situation and to change their behaviour towards others, according to the moral message.
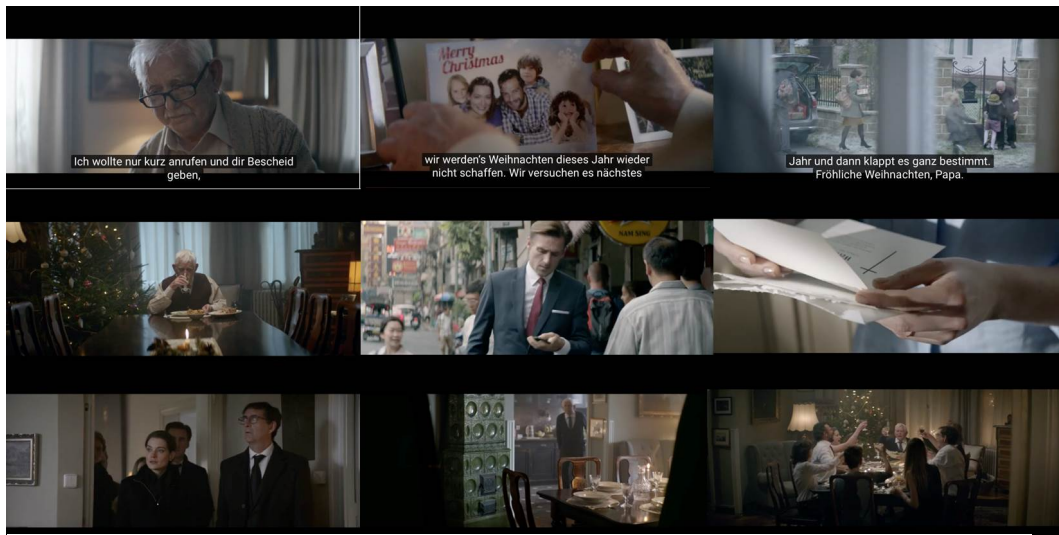
Figure 2 Storyboard 'Heimkommen' (Edeka, 2015b)

"Zeitschenken" (Edeka, 2016b) translates to "Giving time"

Released for Christmas 2016, this commercial depicts families in everyday situations during Christmas time. It illustrates the large number of duties parents face, which keep them busy and hinder them from caring better for their children. The impact this has on children is represented by children being bored or sad because their parents do not have time to play with them. The commercial shows multiple such situations, supplemented with a voiceover where a female person reads a poem matching to the scenes, making the content clearer. One of the scenes shows a mother who is making an effort to bake the nicest Christmas cookies and take photos of them, while her daughter signals that she needs attention and hence cuts off her hair to get her attention. Another scene includes a girl waiting for a long time for her mother who arrives late to pick her up from school as the mother has been busy with Christmas shopping. Further, a father is decorating the house with Christmas lights and destroys an installation of the lights his daughter made because he wants to put them somewhere else, making her sad. The climax of the plot is reached when the speaker of the poem concludes that one does not have to do anything, apart from "being there for you, my child" (Edeka, 2016b). Consequently, the resolution contains scenes where parents neglect their duties and play with their happy children instead. The commercial ends with the tagline "the most beautiful present is time" (Edeka, 2016b).

The authors of this thesis interpret that the commercial criticises society by illustrating the many duties people face, or impose on themselves. Thereby, it exhibits today's 'performance society' and criticises the change of priorities leading to a negligence of one's own family. This encompasses not only duties such as work and household tasks, but also the current social pressure to demonstrate one's greatness to other people - which has recently been aggravated by the rise of social media. This is showcased in the scene where the mother is arranging the cookies in a nice way to take photos of them which she, presumably, aims to share on social media.

The moral message transmitted in the commercial is that parents should take more of their time to spend it with their children. They can achieve this by prioritising and allocating time to the important people who need their care the most. The commercial tells the viewers that many of the tasks they think they must do can be delayed in favour of more important things.

Figure 3 Storyboard 'Zeitschenken' (Edeka, 2016b)

"Eatkarus" (Edeka, 2017b) a portmanteau of 'Eat' and 'Ikarus'

The video "Eatkarus" depicts a world where all people are only eating grey slime and therefore are severely obese, which is showcased by their balloon-like bodies. In this world it seems to be the norm to eat this grey slime, so nobody seems bothered by it. The main character is a little boy who dreams of being able to fly after seeing a bird doing so. He starts many attempts to fly using balloons and building airplane-like wings. However, all his efforts fail and he is exposed to the laughter of people witnessing his attempts. The people's confusion and contempt when seeing the boy doing something different than the mass is obvious. In the next scene, the boy notices a bird eating berries which inspires him to change his nutrition to berries instead of grey slime. The next scene plays some months later, when the boy has lost significant weight and everybody stares at him with astonishment when he starts running with his wings on. Finally, he takes off and flies next to the birds. The commercial ends with the tagline "Eat like the person you want to be" (Edeka, 2017b).

By depicting a world where all people look and behave similarly and those who do not act accordingly to the broad mass are looked at with contempt, the commercial illustrates an issue in society. It criticises that societal influences make people become alike and that the same behaviour is expected from everyone to fit in. Thus, those who behave differently and follow their dreams are not supported and even hindered in pursuing their goals.

The moral message following this is twofold. First, it shows that viewers should be courageous to follow their dreams which they will manage to fulfil if they work for their goals. The second message is represented by the tagline "eat like the person you want to be".

The subtle implication of this is that consumers should take care of their nutrition and bodies and, ideally, eat healthily. These moral messages include a prompt for the consumer to reflect upon and change his/her behaviour.
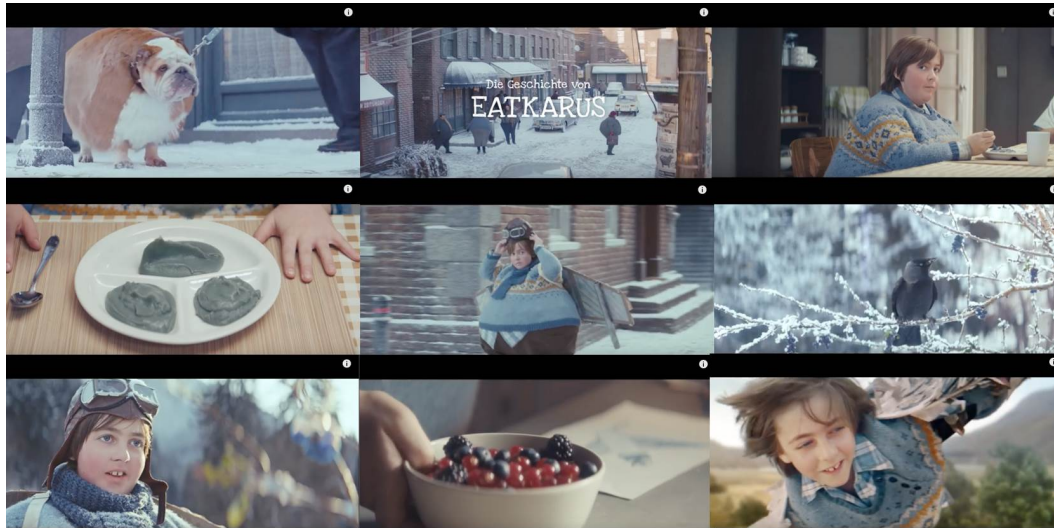

Figure 4 Storyboard 'Eatkarus' (Edeka, 2017b)

3.4.3.2 Sample of Social Media

The second sample decision concerns the choice of the social media platforms used to collect data. The sampling is purposeful because a set of predetermined criteria applies (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The first criteria for the platforms are that the brand Edeka needs to have a brand page on the social media platform. Moreover, Edeka's videos need to be published on the platform. The second criteria follow Kozinets' (2015) guideline and refer to the active engagement of users within the network in order to ensure rich data for analysis (Kozinets, 2015). The social networks Facebook and YouTube, where Edeka is administering brand pages (Edeka, n.d.-a; Edeka, n.d.-b) are found to fulfil these criteria and hence are deemed appropriate platforms to collect the data.

The Edeka Facebook brand page has, at the time this thesis is written, approximately 900.000 'Likes' (Edeka, n.d.-a). Edeka regularly provides content on the brand page. Further, Edeka counts approximately 84.000 subscriptions to its YouTube channel. The brand predominantly posts cooking videos on its channel, and additionally its commercials (Edeka, n.d-b). Due to the high amount of users' comments, which allow for revelation of perceptions of the brand, the social network clearly adds value in order to answer the research questions. As this thesis follows an explorative approach, the authors are interested in uncovering a variety of perceptions. Thus, they suggest that including an additional social network site will provide more room for exploration and possibly additional data and insights.

The use of two different social network sites furthermore allows triangulation as not only one source for data collection is used. This increases the overall trustworthiness of the study because the researchers can confirm that the empirical material is "telling you what you think

they are telling you" (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p.146). Examples of the comment threads of the commercials on the social network sites can be found in Appendix A.

3.5   Data Collection and Analysis

After it was decided which social network sites would provide the richest data, the empirical material was collected. First, the researchers read through the Facebook and YouTube comments and copied the comments which were evaluated as beneficial to answer the research question. Thus, the comments needed to be rich and relevant for the investigation of the phenomenon (Kozinets, 2015). Further, the comments were copied and pasted to an Excel sheet, which served as a storage medium and was also the base for the coding process, as also suggested by Kozinets (2015). In total, 719 comments were collected and analysed. An overview of the comments collected for each commercial on both social network sites is provided in Appendix B.

Following a qualitative and inductive approach, the authors of this theses did not have pre-defined categories in which to code the data. Rather, they followed an open coding process because they aimed to theorise from the empirical data. Open coding is commonly guided by answering open questions, for example "What is the data about?" or "How is the view expressed?" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Hence, a code book was not predefined but developed during the data collection. The code book used in this thesis can be found in Appendix C. In the first coding process, the researchers were open for many discoveries, in order to be "as inventive and imaginative" (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p. 436) as possible. After the first cycle coding, a second cycle coding put the research question about how the moral messages influence brand meaning in the foreground by entering a more abstract level. To achieve this abstract level, the researchers used all codes and clustered them into overarching themes (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A few codes which were originally created but found to be not relevant for answering the research question were neglected.

During the process, the researchers analysed every comment by thinking about what it encompassed. Then, either codes which had already been used were given, or a new code was attached. The codebook was kept in another Excel spreadsheet and was continuously developed. For generating overarching themes a more creative process was used. This implied writing down all the codes on post-its and clustering them on a white board. This ensured that all codes were visible at all times when thinking about encompassing themes. In doing so, the authors of this thesis mainly looked for similarities and differences in the identified codes in order to make sense of the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Within the process of collecting and analysing data, an iterative approach was taken to generate an interplay between collecting and analysing data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The collected data was constantly analysed and compared to the emerging themes. This was conducted until the researchers came to the conclusion that theoretical saturation was reached

(Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This means, that by reading more comments, no new information was found, or that the codes were exhausted.

Furthermore, as Edeka is a German brand, the comments on social media are in German language. As German is the native language of both researchers this does not pose an issue because both authors can fully understand the empirical material. However, to adhere to the language in which this thesis is written, the coding was conducted in English. Furthermore, during the writing process the comments which are employed in the text of this thesis were translated into English by the researchers. Some of the comments were found to be difficult to translate literally, which is why these comments were translated in a way that the original meaning is preserved. As both researchers have a very good command of English, the bias imposed by this is assumed to be minimised.

3.6 Reflexivity

3.6.1 Trustworthiness of the Research

For qualitative research, the traditional concepts of validity and reliability do not apply in the same way as when conducting quantitative research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012; Elo et al. 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have introduced a different terminology which is generally accepted by researchers in the qualitative field. The authors of this thesis will adopt these four criteria defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These criteria encompass credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and their application ought to produce trustworthy research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility deals with the question of how well the findings conform with reality and is considered one of the most important criteria among the quality of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As this study aims to collect data from a social media context, it is argued that the perceptions communicated through comments can be defined as "real" and unbiased data. The researchers acknowledge that the comments have not been posted as intended answers to the research question. However, as the comments include consumers' perceptions of the brand, the authors of this thesis can be confident that the data which was addressed served the intended focus of this study (Polit & Beck, 2012, cited in Elo, 2014). An additional facet of credibility refers to the fact that researchers should get familiar with the context, as claimed by Kozinets (2002). Therefore, from the beginning of the investigation, the researchers put an emphasis on getting familiar with the freely-available data to ensure they immersed themselves in the empirical material. Last, following a predefined approach in this method chapter and being transparent on how data is analysed and how the researchers drew on findings further increases credibility (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Transferability refers to the degree to which it is possible that the findings can be transferred to different settings or contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The responsibility of this transferability lies in the hand of the researcher who wants to transfer the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, it is important that the context is acknowledged and that the research

process is well argued for and described in detail. Consequently, the researchers carefully draft their argumentation within the method chapter in order to ensure transferability and overall transparency. Additionally, the empirical data and the analysis are presented in separate chapters of this thesis to enable the reader to clearly distinguish empirical material from analysis. Furthermore, the findings chapter of this thesis includes real quotes from the comments. This ensures that the reader can search for other interpretations than the ones the authors of this thesis have provided (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Dependability relates to the acknowledgment of the ever-changing context where research takes place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is therefore high when researchers provide the necessary information about their decisions so that a replication of the study would be possible (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In this thesis, a description of the videos, including a link to the videos where the comments are publicly available is provided (chapter 3.4.3.1). This gives other researchers the possibility to collect the same data. However, if a user decides to delete a comment, or the brand decides to take down the videos, the dependability can be weakened. However, this cannot be controlled by the researchers. Consequently, the researchers feel that the level of dependability, which would make a replication possible, is achieved.

Confirmability relates to the degree to which results can be considered as congruent between two or several independent researchers regarding the accuracy, importance and meaning of the data. In other words, confirmability means how much the conclusions of the research could be confirmed by someone else (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several strategies can be applied in order to increase confirmability. First, the analysis should be performed by more than one researcher. This is referred to as investigator triangulation and implies that several researchers are part of the study (Thurmond, 2001). This was the case in this thesis as two researchers were involved in the study. It was decided that both researchers read all comments and conduct coding individually. Afterwards, they came together and discussed the results, which ensures credible interpretation of the empirical material (Burla et al. 2008; Schreier, 2012, cited in Elo, 2014). Second, it is important to consider that the confirmability of the findings refers to the accurate representation of the data, and to the fact that this data is not a production of the researcher's imagination (Polit & Beck, 2012, cited in Elo, 2014). As there was no interference of the researchers into the collection of data which could have created bias (as for example in interviews) the level of confirmability is increased.

3.6.2   Ethical Considerations

Within this thesis, one crucial aspect of answering the research question is to observe opinions, beliefs and emotions in the form of comments on the internet.
In terms of netnography, there are two types of considerations which need to be addressed. The first one deals with the question of whether online platforms are considered private or public (Kozinets, 2002). In this study, the researchers focused on gathering data which is publicly available on both social network sites. The Edeka brand pages on Facebook and YouTube can be accessed without the need to sign up for the networks, and the users' comments are publicly visible. Hence, Kozinets (2015) argues that people who openly share

their views on a public Facebook or YouTube page have deliberately chosen to publish their own thoughts and opinions. Drawing on Kozinets' (2015) argument, the researchers suggest that there are no ethical issues associated with the collection of the empirical material for this thesis.

The second question is dealing with the informed consent in an online environment. None of the participants were informed about the fact that they are being studied or, as Eysenbach and Till (2001) state, "internet communities' members do not expect to be research subjects" (p. 1103). This can result in high ethical problems as it was argued by Boyd (2010) that just because consumers willingly provide and share data online does not imply that the use of the data is without privacy concerns. Therefore, the authors of this thesis ensured confidentiality of the participants by following Kozinets' (2015) recommendation to handle the names of the social network users anonymously. Consequently, when citing quotes from the comments in this thesis the user names were changed for the term 'anonymous'. Furthermore, the researchers commit themselves to not use the collected data for any other reasons than this study. They will solely collect the data and will remain uninterested in the social network profile or any other information of the individuals who posted the comments.

3.6.3   Limitations

There are several limitations which ought to be addressed to increase the overall transparency and therefore trustworthiness of the research. The first limitation lies in the one-sidedness of this research due to the single-case study design.

The second limitation is associated with in the general concern of qualitative research, namely subjectivity. To draw relevant conclusions for the research question relies to a large extent on the researchers' worldview of facts and their interpretations. However, this subjectivity is also considered a strength in the generation of knowledge as the researchers are able to uncover an in-depth understanding of the consumer side of the phenomenon. Therefore they can "contribute to the evolution of new theories" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p.56). Nevertheless, subjectivity still applies. In order to reduce bias of the researchers, it is not only ensured that both researchers analysed the data independently from each other before validating it, but that they also employed a high level of reflexivity. Being reflexive ensures that the researchers constantly think about the research process by challenging their own assumptions. Moreover, they are reflexive about their own role as researchers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The third limitation relates to the type of data which is collected. This study aims to understand consumers' perceptions of a brand. Hence, comments from social network sites were collected, analysed and conclusions were drawn based on the data. However, in computer-mediated communication and especially in textual data, actual emotions, behaviour or opinions are often not visible or eliminated (Kozinets, 1998). Additionally, the researchers do not have the possibility to ask participants about the underlying reasons for their opinions. Therefore, it remains unknown to the researchers how much the consumers' views expressed on social media differ from their opinions that could be revealed when being asked in, for

example, an interview setting. Asking follow-up questions would have generated an even deeper understanding of the phenomenon. However, as the aim of the thesis is to collect a broad range of consumer perceptions of the brand and to acknowledge the social media context, the method applied was the one most appropriate.

4 Findings

As outlined in the method chapter, 719 comments on Edeka's brand pages were gathered in order to reveal how consumers perceive the brand. The findings of this data collection are presented in this chapter. It commences with a brief introduction of the case study brand Edeka. This provides general background information on the brand, thus enabling a better understanding of the empirical data presented thereafter. The rich empirical data includes a diverse range of consumer reactions to the three advertisements transmitted on the social networks. The findings include 10 themes emerging from the data, as the researchers were taking an open approach and were interested in the diversity of consumer views. Although the findings and analysis are presented in two different chapters, the names of the themes already reveal the brand meaning in the finding chapter, ensuring an easy comprehension. Nine of the presented themes encompass different types of brand meaning. The tenth theme treating the social media context of this study, constitutes a specific theme which emerged from the data, demonstrating the interaction of consumers on Facebook and YouTube. This chapter commences with background information on the brand and is thereafter structured according to the themes. The initial five themes include rather positive brand meaning and the following four rather negative brand meaning. The tenth theme describes the social media context. The chapter concludes with a general overview and comment on the empirical data.

4.1 The Brand under Investigation

Edeka is a German full range supermarket chain. The brand Edeka belongs to their corporate mother, "Edeka Verbund", which is the largest German supermarket corporation (REF). The Edeka brand is thus a retail brand (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004), with more than 11.200 supermarkets across Germany (Edeka Verbund, 2017a). Edeka is one of the most popular food retailers to shop at (Best for planning, n.d.). Moreover, a recent study found that Edeka is the most trustworthy retailer in Germany (Buehner, 2015).

The core values of the Edeka retail brand are articulated by the corporate brand, embodied in the brand's two basic principles: "managing sustainably" and "integrity". Additionally, Edeka claims to have five fields of action the brand is most interested in: regionality, assortment, environment, employees and society. While the first and second fields are related to the product being offered in the branded stores, the latter three are associated with the brand's general responsibility. Regarding the environment, Edeka invests into the protection of resources and energy efficiency. Further, the corporation claims to support the education and the well-being of its employees. Concerning the society field, Edeka states it contributes to societal purposes for human welfare. For example, it launched a foundation in 2008 to support healthy nutrition and sport for children and adolescents (Edeka Verbund, 2017b). Additionally, Edeka offers a service to promote and facilitate healthy eating: Consumers can

get advice regarding their healthy nutrition by calling or e-mailing Edeka. Moreover, Edeka stores conduct activities to promote healthy eating (Edeka, 2017).

Additionally, to provide more encompassing information on the case at hand, Edeka's stances on the messages of the commercials are provided below. These are drawn from the comment section on Facebook, where Edeka has communicated the intention behind the commercials of "Heimkommen" and "Eatkarus". For the commercial "Heimkommen", the following was claimed: *"Edeka wants to raise awareness, especially for Christmas, to spend the time with their loved ones and thereby enjoying life together ..."* (Edeka, 2015a). The intention of "Eatkarus" was explained as the following: *"The aim of the videos is to raise awareness for healthy and conscious nutrition. ..."* (Edeka, 2017a). However, no publicly available stance on "Zeitschenken" was found on their Facebook page.

4.2 Identified Themes

4.2.1 Brand is Acting Like a Citizen in Society

The consumers' comments regarding the advertisements reveal their interpretations of the commercials and specifically of the moral message. Building on this, they perceive Edeka as communicating certain values. Furthermore, many consumers decode and elaborate on the societal critique inherent in the commercials which will be presented in the following.

Concerning the "Heimkommen" commercial, consumers understand the main message to be "spend more time with your family", with many consumers referring especially to elderly family members. With this as a starting point, they interpret further values the commercial and the Edeka brand seem to convey, such as the importance of family.

"The commercial makes people think about what is really important in this world. Not jobs and all that, no, family and friends are the most important and precious things." (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)

Furthermore, consumers mention that the video "depicts current reality" and say it portrays a "sad" or "painful truth" and the "true Christmas". They speak about the situation in Germany where many elderly people are alone because their families claim to have less and less time. Further, they contend that people today have lost sight of the important things in life, such as family. This is because they are occupied with "superfluous things", such as the pursuit of a career or money. One person claims the German society "lacks familial solidarity". These interpretations reveal that consumers do not only understand the critique on German society, but that they interpret and extend it.

"A very nice and socio-critical commercial^^ A nice illustration of the people's change of priorities - time and care for grandparents slip more and more to the back of people's minds. And only for the funeral everybody finds time." (Anonymous, Heimkommen, YouTube)

Finally, many users mention that the commercial has the potential to make people reflect. They express their hopes that it will achieve a behaviour change for the better for some people: *"... I wish that the commercial finds imitators and thus makes many lonely elderly people happy again!..." (Anonymous, Heimkommen, YouTube)*

In "Zeitschenken", consumers interpret the moral message as making people take time for the "important things in life". They also acknowledge the relevance of this commercial by stating that it illustrates the "hectic times" in today's society. Further, they articulate the societal critique of a "skewed world" where things such as work and appearance overshadow the importance of taking time for one's children. Some consumers thank Edeka for reminding them to pause for a moment and to take more time for their loved ones.

For "Eatkarus" consumers predominantly identify messages such as "eat healthy", "follow your dreams" and "dare to be different from the broad mass". Many consumers explicitly state that they think obesity is a "huge problem in today's society" and therefore they describe Edeka as being "at the cutting edge" with their advertisement. Some consumers further elaborate on the negative consequences of unhealthy eating on individuals, and as a result, on society at large. Others specifically refer to the contemporary obesity amongst children and one person suggests that the Edeka commercial should be shown in schools for education. The importance of the message is also reflected by some consumers who suggest that this message should be spread, for example to the US, where they perceive it as being especially needed.

Furthermore, consumers perceive Edeka as helping to educate people by transmitting the "Eatkarus" commercial. They think it makes people aware of the dangers of poor nutrition or even "galvanises" them. They see this as an extremely important action in order for people affected by obesity to realise its dangers. Thereby, consumers perceive Edeka as pursuing the goal to "strengthen the awareness of healthy nutrition". Some consumers connect this perceived goal to other institutions, such as the government, and express their opinion that in fact these institutions should support such causes: *"Great commercial, which can move people to a healthy diet! Maybe the federal government should take example of Edeka's actions and invest their budgets in a better way!" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, YouTube)*

Additionally, consumers see the "Eatkarus" commercial as "motivational", "encouraging" and "uplifting" and express their confidence that it can help others to successfully change to a healthier lifestyle. One person directly addresses Edeka by saying *"... especially the motivation to change something should be increased, and this is something you managed to convey". (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)*

4.2.2   Brand is Personally Relevant

As shown in the theme above, many consumers can see the value of the moral messages for society. However, it is also obvious how people relate the message directly to themselves. Besides a group of consumers who embrace the fact that Edeka's moral message is an "eye-opener" for them personally, three additional interesting findings emerge from the data:

Consumers reveal personal insights related to the message, they state how the advertisement motivates them and some explain that they will in fact change their behaviour.

First of all, many consumers offer information about themselves and their own experiences. They explain in depth what they do themselves in their everyday lives to live up to the communicated morals, for example by baking Christmas cookies with their children or visiting and taking care of parents. This can be illustrated in the comment below for "Heimkommen", where a consumer elaborates on the relevance of celebrating Christmas with his father-in-law:

"I could watch that ad a hundred times more. It shows what is relevant in life ... I personally drive over 600km every year only to pick up my father-in-law so that we can all celebrate Christmas together. I am looking forward to this every year ..." (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)

After he talked about his own experience this consumer further addresses the audience on Facebook and prompts other people to take time for their loved ones. Thereby, like many others, he passes on his personal learnings to the other Facebook users. Another person elaborates on the fact how important her father is to her and how glad she and her father "found themselves back together" after they have had many "conflicts".

Regarding "Zeitschenken", on the one hand consumers relate to the moral message of the commercial by explaining how they usually try to "spend time" with their children, for example by going on holidays with them. On the other hand, consumers state they would like to spend more time with their children and grandchildren, as "time is the most relevant thing for families".

Building on the observation that consumers reveal personal stories prompted by the message, some consumers also state that they have already followed Edeka's advice. For example, one consumer relates to the message in "Eatkarus" and states he "pulled the ripcord" and stopped eating unhealthily. Another consumer is even more dramatic:

"Edeka, great message. Maybe some people overthink their eating behaviour. If I had continued like this, my doctor said I would not have lived much longer." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

However, not only do consumers relate the brand's message to their past experiences, but they also tell how the message will influence them to change their life in the future. In the case of "Eatkarus", a user says:

"I watched it last week for the first time and it immediately made me want to be slim and able to live a life worth living. I have already lost 9lb since then ... I can't believe something so simple could have affected me so much but thank you, I have shared it so many times and all of my friends really enjoyed it. I watch the film before I have my breakfast, lunch and dinner for inspiration..." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

Another consumer mentions that the "Eatkarus" video will act as a motivational video which might help him to remember that he can accomplish all his goals. Furthermore, people claim a

precise action of how they will change their behaviour, as can be seen in this comment on "Zeitschenken": *"...sometimes we just need a "trigger", it does not matter from whom! I will now clean the bike together with my son." (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, YouTube)*

These action claims can also be revealed in some comments regarding the commercial "Heimkommen". While one user says: "I will now call my grandmother", another one admits that "I really have the urge to drive to my parents now and cuddle them." Another consumer claims she would have probably postponed visiting her 94-year old grandmother again, but that the commercial made her visit her grandmother. She indicates she is "entirely grateful" for this trigger.

4.2.3   Brand is Humanised

Many consumers seem to be impressed by the advertisements and the brand's messages. They express this in many different ways, by saying "thank you", "congratulations" or by showing strong emotions towards the brand.

First of all, many consumers are thanking the brand. Not only do they express their thankfulness for the advertising as such, but they also thank Edeka for using the message to remind them of something relevant: *"We should never forget the meaning and the relevance of Christmas. Thank you Edeka for reminding us!" (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, Facebook)*

Additionally, they thank the brand because they are emotionally moved by the message and the advertising: *"Thank you Edeka, for the best advertising that has touched upon my heart like no one did before." (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)*

Moreover, many congratulate and praise the brand because they think the advertising is meaningful. They say that they value the effort the brand put into the creation of the advertising, which is illustrated in the following quote: *"This advertising deserves praise and appreciation because it shows us the important things we actually oversee. The humanness and sense for family!" (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)*.

Lastly, people describe the brand as brave because it addresses a contentious issue: *"I think it is great that you have the courage to pick up on these taboo-topics." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)*. Many users express their "admiration" and "respect" for Edeka's action. And one consumer cherishes the brand so much that she states that she would "bow" to Edeka.

4.2.4   Brand is Different Due to Moral Message

As reactions to all three commercials the consumers use positively laden words to describe the advertising, ranging from "inspiring", "special", "meaningful", "revolutionary" or even a "highlight in the brainless advertising jungle", thereby also praising the brand for its work:

"EDEKA is revolutionary with its advertising. The story is ingenious. Moving people to a healthy lifestyle like this, there is not much to add. A big praise to the marketing department".
(Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

Many consumers express their opinion about a certain commercial by comparing it to previous commercials by Edeka. One argument they use is that they find the videos remarkable. Others express that Edeka "always" raises awareness for important issues and offers meaningful content.

"It is incredible, how Edeka always succeeds in making my day better with these advertisements because they ALWAYS make me aware of something!!! Thank you!"
(Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

"If there is a brand that creates great advertising that I voluntarily watch, then it is really Edeka. You are doing a great job, because you do not put the brand in the foreground, but because you master it to pass on relevant topics. ... You pick important topics which should really make us think." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

In this comment, an additional favourable perception is visible: Many consumers claim to be in favour of Edeka's advertising, so that they watch it voluntarily. While some of the consumers imply that this is because the brand makes them aware of relevant issues, others relate it to the entertainment factor. One user in fact says the people at Edeka are the "only ones" whose advertising consumers voluntarily watch. Lastly, a YouTube user elaborates on the irony that he would spend time on YouTube to avoid advertising, but then nevertheless watches the "Eatkarus" commercial voluntarily.

Furthermore, many consumers relate Edeka's advertisements to advertisements by other brands and express their perception that Edeka does something different from others: *Edeka really stands out from the mass when it comes to advertising, and is different from all this uninspired mass advertising" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)*

From this and many other comments, it is visible that advertising is usually not appealing to consumers. A consumer referring to "Zeitschenken" also supports the impression that this advertisement is different and asks another user, whether he would rather prefer standard advertising which only communicates cheap prices. Some consumers elaborate on that and describe Edeka's moral messages as a good "strategy" or "format", as the following comment shows:

"Who is sitting in Edeka's marketing department? They broadcast one advertisement after another which makes it impossible for you to not pay attention because you have to look closely. Really good! I am wondering why other firms do not switch to this kind of format because it is so much more useful than these "we are cheap, cheap advertisements".... Thank you Edeka for such a great commercial once again. Please continue on this path!"
(Anonymous, Eatkarus, YouTube)

As indicated in the above comment, many consumers not only relate the commercial to past advertising, but also to the future. They express the view that they are already excited for next

year's commercial and encourage Edeka to continue this "strategy". One consumer touches upon many of the factors previously elaborated:

"Whoever is working in your advertising department, promote them. Your advertisements are really the best on the market. ... emotional and making people think. I am always really looking forward to your new advertisements, because to be honest, in times where advertising gets more and more stupid and we do too, it is great that there are actually people who create well thought-through advertising. Please go on like this". (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

4.2.5 Brand is Altruistic

Consumers do not only express opinions based on their impression of Edeka's advertising as such, they also more specifically relate the moral message to the brand. Based on this, they evaluate Edeka as the sender of such messages and mention that Edeka shows "humanity", "Edeka loves the people" or claim "Edeka wants to set a sign" by raising awareness for important topics.

One main argument consumers use to arrive at such positive opinions for "Heimkommen" and "Zeitschenken" is that they positively acknowledge that Edeka does not put the products, the brand or the company in the foreground in these advertisements. Rather, consumers say that Edeka focuses on the moral message or on "the people". Therefore, they perceive the brand as being "selfless": *"I think it is remarkable that a food corporation puts the true significance of family in the focus and subordinate its product" (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)*. One consumer goes even further and remarks: *"Edeka spends money [for this commercial] and does not even advertise a product" (Anonymous, Heimkommen, YouTube)*

Having similar thoughts as points of departure, other consumers explicitly reflect upon the advertising purpose of the commercials. Some of them see the message in the foreground and say that "the promotion is subtle". Others even deny the advertising purpose: *"I assume that this commercial doesn't have a direct advertising purpose, but rather (without advertising) points at the subject matter" (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)*

Conversely, a considerable number of consumers realise that the purpose of the commercials is to advertise and to, ultimately, make money. Based on that, some consumers tell that they recognise the advertising purpose, but they still appreciate the message. Others even perceive the message as so important that they positively grant Edeka the attention, PR and sales derived from the advertisements. They describe the circumstances as a kind of win-win situation.

Finally, foremost in the case of "Eatkarus", consumers respond to others criticising Edeka as not credible because the brand promotes healthy eating but still sells unhealthy food. The opponents state that ultimately Edeka needs to make money and explain that this is not possible by solely selling healthy food. Nevertheless, the consumers defending the brand value Edeka's effort to support a healthy lifestyle. One consumer even says: *"Thank you Edeka for making such advertising, despite being a company which makes money with unhealthy products." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)* (Comment by the authors of this

thesis: the consumer refers to the fact that Edeka is a full-range grocery chain and consequently sells a variety of different food products. Some of these products the consumer perceives as "unhealthy")

Especially as reactions to the commercials "Eatkarus" and "Heimkommen" some consumers reflect about the potential impact of the moral message. They say the commercials "bring families together" and "make even more people happy this Christmas". Consumers accredit this impact to the brand and hence go so far to perceive Edeka's actions as "a service to humanity":

"Edeka's advertisement sensitises people and possibly makes them get informed about healthy nutrition. If overweight can be prevented through this commercial, or adipose people slim down, then it is (despite the thought of selling) a service to humanity" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

4.2.6 Brand is Misusing Morals for its Own End

Many consumers claim their recognition of the brand's money making motive, but they do not see this as a contradiction for conveying the moral, as explained in chapter 4.2.5. On the contrary, this theme encompasses a large number of consumers who think that they can see through the "true" intention of the brand. First, people claim to understand that the commercials are "only" advertising used by the brand to pursue economic goals. Second, they think the use of the moral message is to make profit.

First, many people are wondering why other users are thanking the brand, as they claim that it is "only advertising". Further, they try to explain the intention of the brand to other users as the following example shows: *"...Why do you think Edeka is advertising like this? It is to make us consume, as much as possible, no matter what." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)*

These consumers do not talk about the value of the message, but rather about Edeka's intention. They do not believe in a good or even "serious" intention of Edeka. Rather, they say Edeka uses the message for advertising purposes: *"I do not believe that they are really interested in our health" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)*. Therefore, they perceive Edeka to be "scheming". Some consumers are more radical by stating the goal of the commercials does not lie in "public enlightenment" ("Eatkarus") or "charity" ("Heimkommen") but only in making money. Moreover, some consumers attack the brand by stating Edeka does not care for consumers at all: *"...it is all about you selling overpriced products..."*. More doubts towards Edeka's intention can be found in the following ironic comment:*"Ah okay, so Edeka thought: 'Hey I will take on this role and make people aware of being obese'? Are they off their rocker or what? xD" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, YouTube)*

In the case of "Heimkommen", one person elaborates on his or her thought that Edeka "pretends to be social" and that this can hide the fact that Edeka is a "profit-driven capitalistic corporation". Many consumers further argue moral messages should not be used for advertising purposes: *"Using this moral just for the sake of advertising groceries is really bad. There are boundaries. This is not cool!" (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)*

Additionally, consumers elaborate on the fact that the moral communication appeals to people's bad conscience. They accuse Edeka of playing with consumers' emotions only for reasons of "eagerness for power" and perceive this as "impious". Building on this, someone interjects that Edeka would "hold nothing sacred, as long as the sales look good". Moreover, consumers argue the use of the moral is a "bad marketing trick", with Edeka as the sender being completely misplaced.

4.2.7   Brand is Hypocritical

Some consumers express their perception of a mismatch between Edeka's moral message and the company's behaviour which will be explained in the following.

As reactions to "Eatkarus" many consumers criticise Edeka as they perceive the moral message to eat healthy as standing in contrast to what the company does. The main argument consumers use is that Edeka's message is not credible because the company sells unhealthy food. They elaborate on a variety of unhealthy products the grocer Edeka sells, such as sweets, ready-made-meals, deep frozen food, soft drinks and pastries. Doing this, they claim that Edeka contributes to the deception of consumers and to obesity - which Edeka themselves criticise. Also, some consumers say selling unhealthy food shows that Edeka does not care about their customers' well-being, although the brand claims to do so. The users thus call Edeka "hypocritical", "dishonest" and accuse the brand to have "double standards". As a consequence, some of them state they will stop shopping at Edeka.

> *"Edeka pretends as if they were a fruit- and vegetable stall on the market. If I go to the supermarket I see all the packaged industrial-muck, as everywhere else. THIS IS MISLEADING!" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, YouTube)*

Many consumers mention Edeka needs to take action and ban "all these unhealthy foods" from their shelves in order to make the moral message credible. Moreover, they evaluate Edeka as not credible based on the fact that Edeka makes profit with "unhealthy food". It is noteworthy that a large number of users in this case use irony to express their opinion:

> *"Do I understand it right? Edeka now bans all the sugar-crap and all the ready-made-food-trash from the shelves? Oh no, they do not take it that seriously after all.... Edeka - we love profit :D That is ok, we all work for money. But this ad is just non-credible." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)*

A few consumers seem to have a more nuanced view and show their understanding that in the end the individual consumer is responsible for what he or she is eating, and not the grocer. With this argument, they oppose the critics and explain that, in their opinion, Edeka selling unhealthy products is not an issue. However, they still demand Edeka to take actions - which are less drastic than the ones suggested above - such as marking unhealthy food with distinguishing symbols.

For the commercial "Heimkommen" a few consumers express rather negative opinions about Edeka. This is a consequence of perceiving the brand as not credible as the sender of the

moral message, although they say Edeka shows humanity by spreading the moral message. The consumers perceive a discrepancy, as they express Edeka does not act humanely itself, which they prove with different reasons. These reasons include Edeka's bad treatment and payment of employees, as well as the fact that Edeka discards food with expired shelf-life. Moreover, consumers argue that due to the long store opening hours Edeka employees do not have enough time to spend with their families. Based on these arguments one consumer claims that Edeka is the wrong organisation to criticise this issue in society. Another person calls Edeka a "liar". The perceived discrepancy between the brand's claims and its actions is depicted in the following comment:

> "... And Edeka turns people adrift just before Christmas because they come back from parental leave, although they have 3 small children at home. Edeka calls on humanity externally and to practice inhumanity internally. :(" (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, Facebook)

Furthermore, some consumers prompt Edeka to take action in order to make the message more credible, for example by donating food to people in need.

> "I think this is a well-made advertisement!!!! If you now also organise something for the people who are really alone during Christmas, then it would be hard to surpass this act of humanness. [...]." (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, Facebook)

Reacting to "Zeitschenken", consumers mainly argue Edeka should take action and also "give time" to their employees who have to work long hours, which results in a lack of time to spend with their children. Thus, consumers say the employees lack time to spend it with their children. This makes Edeka, according to the consumers, not credible:

> "Then start with your employees who sometimes have to work until 22.00h. These are double standards and [the commercial] should only strengthen the image of the ideal world in the supermarket. (...) As last year: The advertising agency did their job. The sender was, again, the wrong one." (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, Facebook)

4.2.8   Brand is Presumptuous

As reactions to all of the commercials, some consumers explain they have the impression that Edeka is telling them what to do and how to live their lives by telling them the moral. They feel offended and patronised by Edeka and say that how they live their lives, for example what they eat, is none of Edeka's business. Moreover, some suggest Edeka is intervening into their private lives and express their disapproval about that. Due to this, they find Edeka's action to tell them a moral "presumptuous". In line with this, some consumers explain their opinion about right and wrong differs from Edeka's opinion. Therefore, they oppose Edeka's moral standpoint and hence reject the message, as can be seen in the "Eatkarus" comment below:

> "Edeka, this is the limit. Everybody has the right to look the way he or she wants, to weigh as much as he or she wants. If I want to be fat, without a "disease" then this is not better or

worse just because the ideal at this time is to be slim. You can keep your presumptuous comments to yourselves." (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

Additionally, some consumers explain they do not like being enlightened and "educated" about their lifestyle by Edeka. Based on this, one consumer claims Edeka feels "morally superior". The consumer below expresses her dislike of Edeka's educational act and also she questions Edeka's intention, by using irony:

"Thank you for the instruction about healthy nutrition and the significance of exercise. I haven't known all of this before. Thank God there is Edeka, and someone like you, who enlightened me about this. Great. I always thought advertising would be a means to make money. But what concerns Edeka, I guess I was wrong. Now I am sure that you only want to save the world. That is so nice!" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

Another aspect consumers mention is their perception that Edeka tries to make them feel guilty. One consumer says he does not need a brand which tries to make him feel bad about not caring for his elderly parents. He goes on to explain how he is showing his care for elderly, coming to the conclusion that he is doing enough and therefore finds it offensive that Edeka tries to make him feel guilty.

The comment below concerning "Zeitschenken" sums up many of the points above. Particularly, it points out the consumer's opinion that Edeka is not entitled to interfere in her private life because Edeka is, in her opinion, just a retail brand:

"This act of moralising and making parents feel guilty is heavily in fashion at the moment… . Stay out of our private lives and concentrate on the factors why people come to your stores: attractive stores, friendly personnel and good offers. You are a grocery store chain, nothing more and nothing less." (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, Facebook)

4.2.9   Brand is Using Unethical Methods

A certain number of consumers expressing their opinions is not directly related to the moral message, but rather to the context of the advertisements in which the message is embedded.

In the comment section of the "Eatkarus" video, a lively and partly harsh discussion between users about the perceived usage of obese people emerged. Consumers mainly criticise the usage of balloon-like people in the commercials because they discern it as a discriminating act towards people suffering from overweight. Some consumers consequently accuse Edeka of engaging in "fat shaming". Others say that this advertisement is hurting obese people and that Edeka is playing with their emotions.

"Most of all, this commercial is one thing: discriminating. You should be ashamed that nothing better came into your minds, and also for the fact that you make profits with advertising at the expense of obese people. You would be beaten round the head with this in court (justifiably) if this was about disabled or dark-skinned people. [...]" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, Facebook)

Further, users criticise Edeka because, in their view, the commercial gives the impression that obesity is only a result of bad nutrition, and therefore disregards that obesity can also occur due to diseases. They call Edeka "stereotyping" for transmitting such an image. Moreover, some consumers mention that in the commercial obese people are depicted as being continuously eating, lazy, silly and not having ambitions. They call this an impudence. Other consumers say that with this advertisement Edeka supports the stigmatisation and mobbing of people suffering from an excess of adipose.

Using the above arguments consumers call Edeka words such as "heartless", "misanthropic" and "hurtful". They say the brand should be ashamed and demand an excuse from Edeka. One consumer even insults the Edeka employees responsible for the commercial and calls them "lacking empathy" and having a "narcissistic personality disorder".

Likewise, in the comments for "Heimkommen" consumers express much critique, mainly regarding two aspects: the usage of death in advertising and the perception that Edeka is playing with the viewer's emotions.

Many users find it impious to use the topic of death for advertising in general. Others criticise especially that the old man in the video fakes his death. They call this macabre and say that one should not joke with the topic of death. A considerable number of consumers talk about the fact that they have recently lost a loved family member and hence cannot spend Christmas with them. They mention that this advertisement made them feel really sad or made them cry, thereby arousing emotions. Consequently, they accuse Edeka of playing with the emotions of those people who had lost their loved ones and call the brand "heartless". One consumer refers to elderly people and asks if Edeka had thought about how they, who are directly suffering from this situation, feel. He hence calls Edeka "pathetic". As they were offended by the commercials, some consumers claimed they would stop buying at Edeka. Many of the aforementioned arguments are visible in the following emotional comment:

"[...] BUT it is not only macabre and impious but also totally misplaced to use such a topic as advertising for a grocery store!!! I myself have just lost my father this year - like many others have - and it is just insensitive to disregard the feelings and pain of your customers to capitalise on it. If I could, I would give you a big thumbs down for this. As I said, @EDEKA, a brilliant video, but as advertising this is more than indelicate!!!!" (Anonymous, Heimkommen, Facebook)

"Zeitschenken" seemed less polarising and attracted less critique than the other two commercials. Only few users expressed their negative perception that Edeka just "pulls at people's heartstrings" because it is Christmas and they dislike that this is only done for advertising purposes.

4.2.10 The Role of the Social Media Context

During the data analysis process the researchers observed many interactions between consumers on the social network sites. They suppose that these discussions might influence the consumers' evaluation of the brand. As the purpose of this thesis involves the examination

of the phenomenon in social media, the authors of this thesis will present the findings emerging from the social media context in the following.

As can be seen in the previous themes, consumers raise critical and negative voices towards Edeka. These opinions often seem to evoke discussions between users who have watched the videos, as can be illustrated in the following conversation on YouTube about "Eatkarus":

User 1: *"Maybe the ones responsible for this commercial do not want to advertise for groceries but rather to set a sign for humanity?!?!"*

User 2: *"Those do-gooders… :D" (sarcasm)*

User 3: *"… I have to agree with User 1! The marketing has done a terrific job and can really move the people… !"*

User 2: *"As if Edeka would invest so much money, to make everyone love and visit each other… this is pure calculation - it is about economic goals and not about reminding of humanity (…)"*

The aforementioned themes can be revealed within these conversations on Facebook and YouTube, implying that users actively discuss their different perceptions. Moreover, users are also defending the relevance of the message against criticism. One person for example states that it is a "fact that more and more people are suffering from obesity in Germany", thereby defending Edeka's intention to raise awareness for this issue. Further, it was noticed that many consumers say they were annoyed by users who are expressing their negative opinions on the social network. In the case of "Eatkarus", one consumer sarcastically says: *"People feel offended by commercials, which should motivate for a healthy lifestyle. Welcome to the year 2017" (Anonymous, Eatkarus, YouTube)*

Similarly, another user states he really likes the message, but after he has read the negative comments regarding "fat shaming" he starts to wonder: "where is the people's tolerance? (…)". Building on this, another consumer pleads others to stop "destroying this amazing message" with their negative comments. Others wonder how "bull-headed" some consumers can be when they cannot perceive the relevance of the moral message. Another consumer sums this up and states: *"Can we not see the good anymore and just look for the bad in everything?" (Anonymous, Zeitschenken, Facebook)*

4.3   General Information about the Empirical Material

The variety of themes clearly displays that there are many different and contrasting ways that consumers react to the brand and the brand's moral message. On the one hand, there is a large consumer base who is amazed by this type of communication, claiming how valuable this is for them and for society. On the other hand, a group of consumers generally holds more negative opinions towards the message and the commercial. However, it is also noticeable that the themes sometimes interrelate, meaning that consumers may for example perceive the message as valuable but they still evaluate the act of the brand negatively.

Overall, the authors of this thesis found that the number of positive voices outweigh the number of negative opinions. Additionally, the authors of this thesis perceived a highly emotional sentiment among many consumers, either being extremely enthusiastic about the brand and the commercial, or showing a strong antipathy towards the brand.

5 Analysis and Discussion

The ten themes previously presented are analysed and discussed in the following chapter. The first sub-chapter analyses each individual theme. Here, the consumers' views and reactions are interpreted using the concept of brand meaning (Batey, 2008) to allow a deeper understanding of how consumers derive brand meaning. The names of the themes thereby embody the brand meaning consumers attach to the brand when being exposed to moral messages. Further, the findings are linked to the relevant literature presented in chapter 2 to support the analysis. The second sub-chapter contains an overarching discussion based on the previous analysis and concludes with an extended theoretical framework including the revealed types of brand meaning. Moreover, two additional interesting findings are highlighted and discussed with regards to literature. First, the theoretical framework is further enhanced to shed light on the perceived right of a brand to communicate moral messages. Second, the finding that the brand has the power to prompt a change in people's behaviour based on the moral message is elaborated on. Collectively, this chapter answers the research question and thereby highlights the contribution of this thesis.

5.1 Analysis of the Identified Themes

5.1.1 Brand is Acting Like a Citizen in Society

Based on the empirical material, it is argued that Edeka is perceived as adding value to consumers and society as a whole, by communicating moral messages. This is confirmed because many consumers feel the issue Edeka addresses through the morals are actual, relevant problems in German society.

Applying the concept of brand meaning as defined in the theoretical framework, these perceptions can be explained by the fact that brand meaning is influenced by contextual factors. The consumers' interpretation of the moral message is affected by the socio-cultural, temporal and local context in which the message is received (Batey, 2008). In this case, it is inferred that the consumers interpret the moral message under consideration of the current state of German society, as this denotes the context. The consumers recognise the issues Edeka addresses as in fact present in German society and thus relevant for German citizens and society at large. Thus, they perceive Edeka's societal criticism as important. When connecting this impression to the brand, consumers derive the meaning that Edeka addresses relevant issues. Furthermore, they see Edeka as a motivational or educational entity which imparts important values. Moreover, by interpreting the message and Edeka's behaviour based on the socio-cultural context, the consumers perceive the brand as taking over the role of other institutions, such as the government.

Referring to the above perception and by comparing Edeka with institutions in society, the authors of this thesis argue that consumers attach brand meaning of a 'citizen' in society to the brand. This thought fits with the idea of Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz (2017) who observe that brands more and more take responsibility for society and communities and act as quasi-governmental entities. The data of this thesis reveals that consumers value these efforts by brands, but acknowledge that these values should be conveyed by a different party in their view. When further relating this to corporate citizenship literature, it is possible to draw on Matten and Crane (2005) who argue that some companies have replaced functions of powerful institutions within society because certain institutions fail in fulfilling their responsibilities. Therefore, it is highlighted that Edeka is not only perceived as a 'private' citizen who reminds consumers of moral values, but as a citizen on a higher, institutional level. This is interesting, as those simple moral messages of a healthy diet or spending more time with the family could arguably also be communicated by parents, other family members or friends, who are 'private' citizens.

Relating this argument specifically to brands, the aforementioned assumption can be supported by the argument of Minár (2016). He claims people increasingly turn to brands that care about and address relevant topics for society. He further contends that these topics become more relevant in people's minds than if a state institution remarked on the same topic. This is because, in his opinion, people turn away from standard institutions as they do not see the significance of the topics on political representatives' agendas anymore (Minár, 2016). Although the authors of this thesis cannot and do not want to prove this shift in society, the data reveals that consumers indeed do embrace brands taking on this role in society.

5.1.2   Brand is Personally Relevant

Based on the findings, it is inferred that consumers perceive Edeka's moral messages as personally relevant to themselves. This is visible as consumers relate the message to their lives and narrate their own experiences and opinions regarding the moral.

The importance of the moral message to the individual consumer is explained by the process by which consumers actively create brand meaning (Batey, 2008). Marketing communication is one source of brand meaning (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008) and in the context of this thesis the focus lies on the moral message embedded in this communication. As Batey's (2008) brand meaning concept implies, the interpretation of a stimulus, in this case the brand's moral message, is severely influenced by the consumer's individual values, experiences and motivations. Based on this, it can be explained that a consumer who describes a particular message as important does so because he or she possesses certain values or lived experiences which are in line with this moral belief. For example, the consumers claiming that "Heimkommen" shows "what is relevant in life" presumably hold family as an important personal value. As the data indicates, many consumers perceive Edeka's messages as significant to themselves as they do not only state this opinion, but extensively narrate their own experiences related to the moral. Consequently, Edeka's moral messages appeal to a broad audience of consumers who hold the same moral belief and hence see the message as essential for them personally.

The individual consumer's interpretation of the moral message explained above shapes the resulting brand meaning (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008). Based on this contention, it is interpreted that the brand meaning consumers derive about Edeka includes the facet that Edeka is the brand which offers them relevant insights and opens their eyes for important things in life. As explained in chapter 4.2.2, some consumers say that the message made them reflect and was the trigger for them to actively change their behaviour in order to live up to these moral standards. Consequently, consumers further deduce the brand meaning of Edeka being the brand which has an actual impact on their life and made them change their behaviour for the better. By doing this, it is striking that the brand plays a role in consumers' lives which goes beyond its specific product and service related competences.

A further aspect the data reveals is that morals which resonate with consumers' personal values are seen as important by them and consequently lead to favourable brand meaning. This observation is supported by Batey (2008) stating that personal values influence consumers' interpretation of a stimulus, which in turn determines brand meaning. This finding can be related to conclusions from the field of CSR. Specifically, Schmeltz (2017) examines the "CSR-consumer fit", implying a fit between CSR engagement and the personal relevance. Schmeltz (2017) has found that a tight fit between the consumer's individual values and the company's CSR activity leads to positive consumer reactions. Furthermore, it results in consumers recognising the CSR initiative as significant (Schmeltz, 2017). In line with this, it is concluded that consumers perceive Edeka's messages as relevant to themselves because the communicated morals correspond to their own values. Hence, they derive positive brand meaning.

5.1.3 Brand is Humanised

As can be seen in the empirical material, consumers articulate their appreciation towards the brand because it communicates a moral message. Additionally, they mention having a sense of affection towards the brand. This is embedded in the observation that they are thanking the brand, praising it and congratulating it for the communication of the moral message.

According to Batey (2008), the brand meaning consumers derive is influenced by their individual values, motivation and aspirations. As illustrated above, consumers see the message as relevant and hence derive highly positive brand meaning because the message reflects their own values and motivation. Furthermore, it is assumed that consumers possess aspiration and motivation to learn about valuable messages. Therefore, they are thankful and appreciate the brand reminding them to think about relevant issues and for making them aware of moral values. It is argued that they perceive this as a benefit or service to them. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that emotions play a crucial role in brand meaning creation (Batey, 2008). It is argued that as consumers are highly thankful towards the brand and praise it, they are emotionally moved. The resulting brand meaning is thus influenced by these emotions and it is supposed that the consumer's relationship with the brand is marked by emotions and affection.

It is surprising that consumers describe the brand as "thoughtful", "brave" and "humanistic". These adjectives can be classified as human features. Therefore, the authors of this thesis

argue that the brand is addressed as a person the consumers relate to. This is in line with Fournier (1998), who argues that people relate to brands in a similar way as they relate to humans. In this case, it seems that the moral message evokes these positive human characteristic traits. Moreover, consumers appreciate that the brand is communicating moral values. These values could arguably also be told to them by a human being, for example parents or friends. The one consumer saying she would "bow" to Edeka additionally depicts that she relates to the brand as to a human being. This further shows the striking finding that the brand meaning is considerably influenced by this humanisation of the brand.

The conclusion drawn from the observation that consumers show a deep appreciation towards the brand, is that the use of moral messages seems to have a positive influence on the strength of the relationship between brands and consumers (Fournier, 1998). The reasons for this are grounded in the empirical data: Consumers describe the brand with human traits and therefore, the brand becomes more humanised and ultimately more relatable for consumers.

5.1.4   Brand is Different Due to Moral Message

The empirical data shows that consumers do not only show positive reactions to Edeka's moral communication, but they also recognize this communication to be different from other brands. Furthermore, many consumers are aware of Edeka's past moral messages and recall them actively.

According to Batey's concept (2008), when being exposed to a brand stimulus, consumers create brand meaning by additionally drawing on their past experiences with the brand. In the case of Edeka, brand meaning is shaped not only by the specific message they are exposed to, but also by past moral messages the consumers had seen from Edeka. According to the data, consumers actively refer to this past moral advertising and perceive it as a part of the Edeka brand. Therefore, the authors of this thesis argue that the moral facet has become a part of Edeka's brand meaning.

Moreover, brand meaning resulting from exposure to a brand stimulus is affected by the consumer's schemas, thus his or her individual beliefs and knowledge about certain factors of the world (Batey, 2008). Concerning the case at hand, it is assumed that consumers evaluate the brand's advertising with reference to their general knowledge of advertising by other brands. When comparing Edeka's moral communication to advertising by other brands, consumers derive the brand meaning that Edeka's commercials are different from what they are used to. This lies in the fact that consumers perceive Edeka's moral communication as more relevant and valuable to them than other 'generic' messages.

Building on the illustrations above, it is argued that Edeka achieved differentiation from other brands because of its communication of moral messages. This is because consumers compare Edeka to other brands and find Edeka to be standing out from the mass of generic advertising. Relating to Bertilsson (2014), who states that ethics can serve as a feasible factor to differentiate the brand, the authors of this thesis suggest that the same claim holds true for the use of morals in communication. This is supported by the finding that the moral message is recognised as special, hence as the differentiating element in comparison to other brands. In

addition, consumers perceive the moral message as highly relevant. Thereby, it fulfils the requirement by Keller, Sternthal and Tybout (2002) who claim that a desirable point of difference is required to be seen as relevant by consumers. Additionally, the fact that consumers see the moral messages as a differentiating element is supported by their description of the moral messages as a good "strategy" or "format". This labelling indicates that moral communication is perceived as distinct from "generic" advertising and is hence beneficial for brand differentiation.

To conclude, it is summarized that the empirical data of this thesis support Morsing's (2006) argument that focusing on morals in branding leads to favourable and positive brand associations by consumers. Based on the findings, the authors of this thesis argue that many consumer reactions even exceed Morsing's (2006) description, as they are strongly positive, or even highly enthusiastic. Furthermore, the authors of this thesis aim to emphasise that the moral messages serve as a differentiating factor for the brand and in the case of Edeka the moral facet has become a part of brand meaning.

5.1.5   Brand is Altruistic

By communicating moral messages and focusing on the message rather than putting the products in the foreground, consumers perceive the action of the brand as "selfless".

Drawing on Batey's concept (2008) and building on the first theme, "brand is acting like a citizen in society", it can be deduced that consumers attach a philanthropic brand meaning to Edeka. Due to the socio-cultural context, which influences brand meaning (Batey, 2008), consumers feel that the brand is addressing a relevant issue in today's society and contributes to the improvement of this problem. As they know that the commercial containing a moral message precedes an investment from the brand's side, consumers in fact refer to this as an altruistic act.

It is therefore interesting to link this brand meaning to the managerial concept of corporate philanthropy, which is often defined as charitable giving (Porter & Kramer, 2002; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). However, in the case at hand, some consumers argue that the moral message can have an even higher effect than charity. This is because they evaluate the impact of the moral for affected individuals and society as higher and more valuable than mere donations.

The above opinion can be attributed to scholars who argue that philanthropy not only encompasses charitable giving, but also more activities than charity only (Pearce & Doh, 2005, Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). However, these scholars mention activities which are in fact related to the company, for example the donation of goods. In the case of this thesis, consumers perceive the act of communicating a moral message, which is arguably not related to the company's activities, as an additional philanthropic act. The brand meaning resulting from this is one of a brand that acts socially responsibly, as it makes people reflect about these matters.

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Relating this to branding literature, the findings show patterns which are in line with the arguments of scholars claiming that consumers expect more and more from brands, which goes beyond pure economic goals (Hilton, 2003; Palazzo & Basu, 2007). Palazzo and Basu (2007) state that showing responsible behaviour will become an important driver for a brand's success in the future. The authors argue for this because consumers look for brands which offer value beyond consumption, including concerns of social dimensions. This argument can be supported by the empirical data of this thesis showing that ultimately consumers perceive Edeka as caring about social issues and that they express their favourable attitudes towards this.

Conversely, other consumers declare that they see through Edeka's money-making motive. This situation has been proposed by Holt (2002) who predicts that consumers increasingly understand brands as commercial entities. Nevertheless, those consumers do not seem to mind the profit purpose, as they acknowledge the responsibilities of a profit-driven company. They place a high emphasis on Edeka's moral message and consequently see it as a "service to humanity". This demonstrates their view of Edeka being an altruistic brand with an interest to improve people's lives. What is striking in this context is that some consumers think that it is no paradox to combine this "service to humanity" with a profit-oriented goal. Parallels can be drawn to CSR literature where Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) label this situation a 'win-win' logic, namely the company and the consumer both benefit. The same 'win-win' logic is used by consumers when evaluating the case of Edeka, as expressed by one consumer: „... *Who says that humanity and the goal to sell products are not compatible?"(Anonymous, Eatkarus, YouTube)*

Based on these evaluations, it is concluded that consumers perceive the brand's communication of morals as an "altruistic" act of showing responsibility. They further evaluate this act as more impactful than mere donations. Lastly, it is interesting that consumers do not see a paradox between the profit goals of a brand and its genuine interest in doing good for society.

5.1.6   Brand is Misusing Morals for its Own End

While the previous theme reveals that consumers neglect the brand's money-making motive, this theme encompasses the finding that consumers see through this purpose and derive negative views. This is because many consumers identify the moral message as an instrument for advertising.

As has been evaluated in the literature review, the context in which a specific brand message is interpreted by the consumer influences the resulting brand meaning (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008; Batey, 2008). According to Allen Fournier and Miller (2008), one of these contextual factors is the marketing-savviness of today's consumers. This implies that a message interpreted by a consumer who possesses marketing knowledge may evoke a different effect than when interpreted by another consumer. The authors state that consumers increasingly possess insider's knowledge about marketing techniques which shape their frames used when interpreting brand messages (Allen, Fournier & Miller, 2008). Referring to this, it is argued that consumers exposed to Edeka's moral message interpret it relying on their

frame of marketing knowledge. Consequently, they arrive at the conclusion that what they see is advertising and hence the moral serves an advertising purpose. Evaluating further, consumers detect that advertising ultimately serves a sales goal and therefore they infer that Edeka uses these morals to increase sales. Based on this information, consumers do not believe in Edeka's genuine socially responsible intention. This contextual interpretation of the moral influences brand meaning, implying that Edeka is not credible because the brand only applies the moral to make profits, without a true interest in people's well-being.

It is furthermore interesting that many consumers who think they see through Edeka and reveal its money-making motive, use cynicism and irony to express their opinions. This observation is in line with the statement by Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) who mention cynicism as one of the reactions marketing-savvy consumers show when evaluating brand communication and brand meaning.

Finally, Holt (2002) predicts in the evaluation of his post-postmodern paradigm that consumers will comprehend all brands as commercial entities in the future because brands will no longer be able to conceal their commercial motivation. The empirical data of this thesis display facets in line with Holt's (2002) argument. Thus, the authors of this thesis argue that the current situation reflected by this theme constitutes a move towards this predicted state, as a considerable number of consumers already understand the specific brand investigated as a commercial entity.

5.1.7 Brand is Hypocritical

As described in the findings in chapter 4.2.7 some consumers perceive a mismatch between the moral message Edeka is transmitting and the company's actions, and therefore derive unfavourable brand meaning.

Drawing on Batey's (2008) concept, it is noteworthy that the brand meaning consumers derive is influenced by past experiences they have had with the brand. Therefore, when being exposed to Edeka's moral messages they evaluate the message based on past experiences and the knowledge they hold regarding the brand. For example, when interpreting the message "eat healthy" in "Eatkarus" consumers refer to their knowledge that Edeka is a full range grocery store, selling a broad variety of food. Hence, they conclude that there is a mismatch between the message "eat healthy" on the one hand, and the behaviour of offering all kinds of food on the other hand.

The brand meaning many consumers derive based on their perception of a mismatch between the brand's moral message and its actual behaviour can be described by the term "hypocrisy", which is in fact explicitly used by some consumers. In the field of CSR, Wagner, Lutz and Weitz (2009) coined the term "corporate hypocrisy" and define it as "the belief that a firm claims to be something that it is not" (p. 79). The scholars draw on Aaker (1997) to argue that consumers perceive organisations in a similar way as they perceive humans and hence attribute human characteristics to them (Wagner, Lutz & Weitz, 2009). Hence, they state a consumer may perceive an organisation as hypocritical when he or she sees an inconsistency between the firm's claims and its observed behaviour (Wagner, Lutz & Weitz, 2009). The

perceived inconsistency results from the consumer's assessment, based on information and experience with the company (Marín, Cuestas & Román, 2016). In their study, Wagner, Lutz and Weitz (2009) have found that a perception of corporate hypocrisy negatively influences the consumer's attitude towards the organisation. The authors of this thesis argue that this concept is suitable to describe consumers' perceptions of Edeka, as they think the brand articulates morals, while it does not act according to these moral standards. The data further indicate that this perception results in unfavourable brand meaning, which is in line with the findings of Wagner, Lutz and Weitz (2009) who have proven a negative effect on the attitude towards the firm.

A key finding the authors of this thesis aim to highlight is that consumers refer to different information and arguments to arrive at the perception of a mismatch and to criticise the brand. Crane's (2001) concept of the ethical product, which has been evaluated in the literature review, is deemed suitable to illustrate this situation. Crane (2001) states a product can be augmented by ethical claims at four levels: The product, marketing, corporate and country level. Further, he suggests that it is also at these levels where critique concerning ethical claims can occur and hence an ethical product may be scrutinised referring to other layers than the one where augmentation takes place. Applied to the data of this thesis, Crane's (2001) ethical augmentation can be substituted by the moral message Edeka communicates. The message is classified into the marketing level, as the brand uses morals to augment its communication. However, the empirical data show that consumers criticise the brand's moral communication with reference to other levels, namely the product and the company level. In the case of "Eatkarus" consumers connect the moral to Edeka's product offering and scrutinise the brand because they think its product assortment stands in contrast to the message of eating healthy. Regarding the other two commercials, consumers link the message "take time and care for your loved ones" to the company's treatment of its employees and conclude this "inhuman" company behaviour does not live up to the "human" moral standards expressed in the commercials. Thus, it is concluded that consumers adduce factors concerning the product and the company level to criticise Edeka's morals used in marketing. Interestingly, Crane's (2001) view of ethical augmentation comprising certain risks, as criticism can be drawn from multiple sources, is hence also visible in the data of this thesis with regards to the moral message. Resulting from this criticism, consumers derive brand meaning of Edeka being "hypocritical" or having "double standards".

A further finding can be related to Fan (2005) who warns of a potential threat resulting from a brand's communication of social issues. He states, a brand taking a stand on social problems which show little similarities with the company's core business or are contentious, runs at risk of alienating its customers (Fan, 2005). The findings of this thesis demonstrate that consumers are showing this alienation expressed by Fan (2005): On the one hand, by adopting unfavourable brand meaning, on the other hand by claiming they would take action and refrain from shopping at Edeka in the future. However, from the findings it can be interpreted that the negative consequences are most present for reactions towards "Eatkarus", being the commercial where the moral shows the highest similarities with the company's core business. This is presumably due to the fact that the moral of "healthy nutrition" displays a stronger connection to the business activities of a grocery store, whilst the family values emphasised in the other commercials exhibit no obvious relation. Therefore, the assumption of an alienation being mainly a result of a weak relationship between issue and core business (Fan, 2005) is

not supported by the data of this thesis. The authors of this thesis suggest an explanation might lie in the fact that consumers find it easier to relate a moral to the company's operations and find incongruous aspects to criticise when both exhibit a logical connection ("Eatkarus"), than when moral and operations do not show any logical relationship ("Heimkommen", "Zeitschenken"). Hence, supposedly in the former case consumers might arrive more quickly at conclusions of a mismatch between moral and brand, resulting in impressions of double standards or hypocrisy.

To sum up, the authors of this thesis aim to highlight that consumers refer to multiple factors associated with the brand and company to criticise the brand's action of communicating moral messages. Furthermore, it is interesting that consumers perceive the brand as hypocritical.

5.1.8   Brand is Presumptuous

The empirical data reveal that consumers feel Edeka tells them how to live their lives and is entering their personal space by doing this. They think Edeka is educating them about moral values, however they do not want this education from Edeka, which is why they interpret the brand's actions as presumptuous.

In his brand meaning concept, Batey (2008) highlights that consumers interpret the brand's stimulus by utilising their schemas. These schemas refer to the individual consumer's own system of feelings and beliefs which reflect the consumer's knowledge and opinions about certain aspects of the world (Batey, 2008). Based on this, consumers are influenced by their schemas when interpreting Edeka's message. These schemas presumably include certain knowledge and standpoints about which roles and responsibilities a brand may have and should take on in the individual consumer's opinion. For the consumers whose opinions are encompassed by this theme, a brand's role does supposedly not include two functions and competencies which will be explained in the following.

First, some consumers' schemas presumably encompass a certain conception of their private affairs. It is interpreted that in their opinion, these private matters are of no concern for a brand. Based on this frame of reference, these consumers perceive Edeka's moral as an interference into their private affairs, which is, according to them, "none of Edeka's business". Therefore, the impression of Edeka being presumptuous influences brand meaning.

Second, another function a brand does not possess in the consumers' opinion is the one of moral education. Taking this thought into account, consumers perceive Edeka's spreading of the moral message as an educational act, which they do not believe to be a brand's responsibility. Thus, they think Edeka feels morally superior and is "patronising" them and this impression becomes a part of their subjective brand meaning.

5.1.9   Brand is Using Unethical Methods

In the empirical material, some consumers express their individual perception of Edeka using ethically dubious methods in the commercials to communicate the moral. The derivation of

this particular brand meaning is not based on the moral message, but rather on the way the message is conveyed. It is important to note that evaluating unethical advertising is not the focus of this study. Nevertheless, the authors of this thesis find it relevant to consider this theme in order to answer the research question. As visible in the findings, the perceived unethical methods are discussed harshly by a considerable number of consumers and are the reason for substantial negative brand meaning regarding Edeka.

In order to discuss the consumers' perceptions, the authors of this thesis suggest literature about ethics in advertising. The consumer reactions can be related to literature which highlights an apparent absence of societal responsibility in advertising (Treise et al. 1994). This is because advertising has a profound influence on society due to, for example, its persuasive and manipulative nature or the use of fear appeals (Pollay, 1986; LaTour & Zahra, 1989, cited in Treise et al. 1994). It is inferred that in the case of Edeka consumers scrutinise the brand because they perceive this lack of responsibility in all three commercials. For example, they refer to perceived discrimination in using balloon-like people. Furthermore, consumers criticise that the brand addresses their bad conscience and that it is playing with their emotions.

The reason that consumers scrutinise the brand based on the way the message is conveyed can be explained applying the brand meaning concept. Consumers interpret the same stimulus individually and based on their own experiences and knowledge (Batey, 2008). Those who perceive Edeka to play with their emotions see this as unethical because they draw on their own experiences. This becomes obvious when they refer to a recently deceased loved person, or by drawing on their knowledge that being obese can also be caused by an illness. What should be highlighted in this context is the finding that some consumers do understand the relevance of the message and embrace it. Nevertheless, they interpret the brand's actions as negative due to the perceived use of unethical methods. Thus, it can be inferred that they are triggered by more than one stimulus. However, one resulting impression outweighs the other one, resulting in the meaning that the brand uses unethical methods.

The above finding that the perceived use of unethical methods exceeds consumers' positive evaluations of the message and leads to an overall unfavourable brand meaning can be associated with findings by Brunk and Blümelhuber (2011). The scholars have found that the impact of a brand's behaviour on consumer's ethicality perceptions is asymmetrical. This means that one incident which is perceived as unethical can severely damage the overall consumer perception of the brand (Brunk & Blümelhuber, 2011). This insight is visible in the empirical data of this thesis: Even if the message is perceived positively, consumers scrutinise the brand because they perceive it as unethical, thus damaging the overall brand meaning.

5.1.10 The Role of the Social Media Context

As the theoretical framework depicts, social media is the specific context where the phenomenon takes place and thus is given a particular focus for investigation. The empirical material reveals how people on the Edeka brand pages are actively communicating with each other. Therefore, this theme can serve as an indicator of the role the social media context plays in the creation of brand meaning.

The consumers' negative and positive opinions can be understood as eWOM, which refers to either positive or negative comments about a brand, company or product. As argued in chapter 2.5, these statements are found to have an influence on other consumers (Lee, Rodgers & Kim, 2009). The authors of this thesis acknowledge that they have no direct access to the consumers by asking them whether they were influenced by contrary opinions. However, it is noticeable that consumers often join the discussion to react to another comment. As these comments are publicly available, it can be argued that other consumers and the community can hence influence the creation of the individual's brand meaning. This is supported by social media literature, where it is claimed that people can unintentionally influence others through their postings (Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012).

Consequently, the implication is that brand meaning is influenced not only by the brand, but also by members of the community. This finding supports Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) inferences in their study about brand communities, depicting brands as social objects and therefore seated in a "consumer-brand-consumer triad" rather than the traditional "consumer-brand dyad" (p.427).

Another interesting finding in the social media context is that not only does the brand Edeka try to moderate ongoing discussions, but some consumers seem to actively defend the brand against negative voices. Reviewing the literature, this phenomenon has already been addressed by Colliander and Wien (2013) who claim that consumers often act as a safeguard against negative eWOM on social networks. This is obvious in the consumers' comments supporting the brand and the message. Further, Colliander and Wien (2013) have found that this act of defence can reduce the spread of negative eWOM. The authors of this thesis are not able to measure this; however, it is an interesting thought that the community might be able to moderate some of the negative brand meaning outcomes.

Based on the negative brand meaning themes, the authors of this thesis suggest that they perceive the "Age of Criticism" proposed by Fournier and Avery (2011) as present. Building on the defending behaviour, consumers express petulance towards other consumers' criticism. It can be argued that consumers also perceive the existence of this "Age of Criticism" and are highly annoyed by this behaviour. Through some people criticizing the brand and the message, the data shows that consumers fear the brand and the message could be harmed. These results are consistent with Fournier and Avery (2011) claiming that brands can easily be damaged on social media due to the "rating, ranking (and) scrutinizing" (p. 200) culture. Considering again Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) thoughts, it can therefore be argued that consumers perceive others as destructive in the creation of brand meaning on social media.

5.1.11 Comprehensive Analysis of the Themes

Following a detailed analysis and discussion of each particular theme in the previous sub-chapter, the empirical data is discussed across the themes in this chapter. The aforementioned approach is applied to provide a more general discussion of the data.

A comprehensive consideration of the themes exposes a rough division into those comprising rather "positive" elements of brand meaning and others encompassing rather "negative"

meaning. The first five themes belong to the former group, while the following four are classified into the latter one. The authors of this thesis draw this distinction based on the individual consumer's general attitude and sentiment conveyed in their comments. These attitudes become clear through the usage of language, as well as the content expressed in each specific comment.

In the problem formulation and literature review it has been exposed that the usage of moral messages by a brand does not only entail considerable benefits (Minár, 2016; Morsing, 2006), but also involves certain risks (Crane, 2001; Fan, 2005). The findings and analysis reveal that both factors hold true. This is because the data comprises a broad spectrum of diverse consumer reactions to the brand's moral message, resulting in highly differentiated nuances of brand meaning. For this reason, certain nuances of brand meaning visible in the themes are opposing, and consequently statements from literature displaying contrasting views are reflected in the data. The data shows patterns of positive and negative brand meaning which are thus in line with advantages as well as risks previously articulated by academics: The majority of consumers display favourable reactions towards the brand and its moral message. Therefore, Morsing's (2006) statement implying a brand's focus on morals leads to positive consumer reactions and brand associations is supported by the data of this thesis. Furthermore, the findings support Palazzo and Basu's (2007) claim stating consumers value brands demonstrating responsible behaviour and concerns of social dimensions.

In opposition to this, a group of consumers criticises the brand, thus representing the risks indicated by scholars (Crane, 2001; Fan, 2005). The results suggest that consumers' criticism of a brand occurs at various levels, thereby reflecting Crane's (2001) standpoint. Moreover, Fan's (2005) indication that taking a stand on social issues bears the risk for the brand to alienate its consumers becomes apparent in the results.

To conclude, the empirical data of this thesis reveal positive consequences, as well as risks associated with the communication of morals. This observation indicates that the threat for a brand to be criticised is omnipresent. Particularly when using morals whose interpretation is highly subjective (Holmes, 1986) a prediction of consumer reactions is difficult.

5.2   Discussion and Contributions

5.2.1   Expansion of Theoretical Framework

As indicated in chapter 1, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

"How is a brand communicating moral messages on social media perceived by consumers?"

From the empirical data, ten themes encompassing brand meaning have emerged and therefore provide an answer to the research question. The themes mark one of the contributions of this thesis to existing knowledge (Fan, 2005; Morsing, 2006). They encompass a broad and diverse range of brand meaning resulting from consumers' exposure to the moral message. As outlined above, the themes are grouped into five themes describing

positive, and four themes encompassing rather negative brand meaning. The tenth theme represents the context of social media. Figure 5 presents the themes indicated in the theoretical model that was previously introduced in chapter 2.
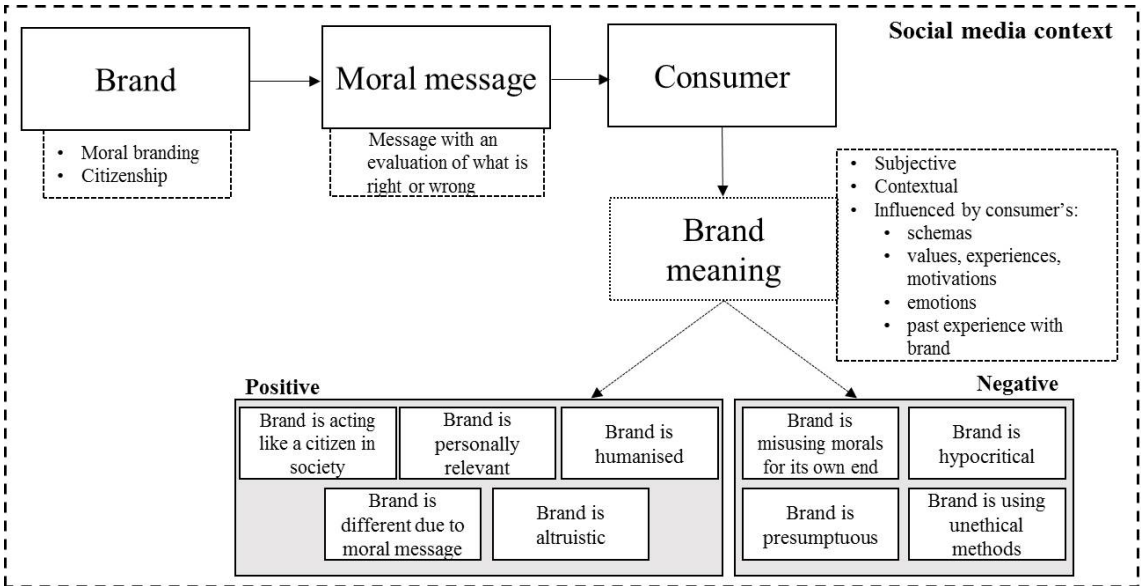

Figure 5 Extended Theoretical Framework

In the following, the themes are summarised briefly. An in-depth description, analysis and discussion of the themes can be found in chapter 4 and 5.

The positive themes of brand meaning include "brand is acting like a citizen in society" which implies that consumers see the societal issues the brand addresses as important and, in fact, present in society. By approaching these issues and communicating morals contributing to their resolution, the brand acts comparably to a citizen in society. The meaningfulness of the moral message to the individual consumer is expressed in the theme "brand is personally relevant". The consumers see the brand as an entity which raises awareness and triggers behavioural change. The theme "brand is humanised" depicts consumers' thankfulness, praise and respect towards the brand because of its communication of the moral message. Consequently, the brand is humanised as consumers attribute human characteristics such as being thoughtful or human to the brand. "Brand is different due to moral message" embraces the consumers' perception of the brand's differentiating aspects and its uniqueness due to its communication of the moral message. Finally, "brand is altruistic" entails consumers' characteristics of the brand being selfless and philanthropic. Here, the brand is perceived to focus on society's well-being, rather than placing its own interest in the foreground

The themes illustrating negative brand meaning include "brand is misusing morals for its own ends" which reveals that consumers detect the marketing purpose behind the moral message. Hence, they discern the brand as unbelievable as they think it uses the moral to achieve its profit goals. "Brand is hypocritical" implies brand meaning derived from consumers' impression of a mismatch between the brand's moral message and its actual behaviour. The theme "brand is presumptuous" describes the consumers' feeling of the brand patronising

them and intervening into their personal affairs by telling them morals. Finally, "brand is using unethical methods", refers to consumers' perceptions about the brand engaging in unethical practices to illustrate the societal issue and the moral message.

A striking result to emerge from the data is that consumers display many contrasting views concerning the brand's actions. In the following, these opposing views are briefly outlined because they provide valuable insights to answer the research question. The authors of this thesis aim to highlight the finding that consumers often apply the same argument to argue for and arrive at different kinds of brand meaning: Some consumers detect the profit motive underlying the commercials and therefore criticise the brand for misusing the morals for its own benefits. Hence, consumers question the brand's genuine interest in society. In contrast, to this, other consumers do not see this motive and accordingly perceive the moral communication as an altruistic and humanitarian act. In addition, another group of consumers comprehends the profit motive. However, they emphasise the importance of the message and its benefits, meaning that they are not bothered by the brand's commercial intentions.

Furthermore, some consumers scrutinise the brand for being hypocritical because they think its actions do not reflect its moral stand, whereas others focus on the relevance of the moral message and do not yield critical thoughts.

In addition, some consumers heavily criticise the brand as they think the brand employs unethical practices, such as playing with consumers' emotions to transmit the message. Other consumers recognise the methods as unethical, however they emphasise the significance of the moral message and claim the end justifies the means. For example, they mention the use of death in "Heimkommen" is a means to an end to make viewers aware of the large societal deficiency and the moral. However, it should be noted that the majority of consumers does not perceive these methods as ethically incorrect.

Summarising the aforementioned views, it is stated that the brand meaning derived from the interpretation of the moral message is highly individual and varies greatly across consumers. This leads to the conclusion that the overall consumer reactions are diverse and polarised. The converse opinions underline Batey's (2008) explanation that brand meaning is highly subjective. Contributing to Batey (2008), the polarised consumer views furthermore indicate that the same stimulus evokes various interpretations by different consumers and results in many diverse types of brand meaning. Building on this, as consumers often react to similar triggers, but interpret them in different ways to obtain different types of brand meaning, it is concluded that consumers' reactions to the moral communication are difficult to predict.

The tenth theme "role of social media context" sheds light on the importance of the context of the study for resulting brand meaning. In their call for research Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz (2017) request an investigation specifically in social media. They suggest this will aid the generation of more consumer-centred insights (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017). Therefore, this thesis adopts social media as a context for investigation and it appeared to be beneficial, as the authors suppose that the broad variety of themes could be revealed due to this context. Furthermore, the findings and analysis indicate that the context of social media may play a role for brand meaning creation. This is because consumers actively discuss not only the moral message, but also the brand as its sender. They debate about their individual

brand meaning and speculate about the brand's intentions by reacting to other consumers' viewpoints. Moreover, consumers form alliances leading to the behaviour of criticising or praising the brand collectively. This results in the striking finding that those in favour of the brand's moral message actively defend the brand against those who criticise it. This behaviour is an indication of the relevance these consumers attach to the moral message and the strongly favourable brand meaning they inherit. Concerning the polarising consumer reactions revealed in this study, the authors of this thesis suggest that they might mirror a general development towards extreme opinions and discussions which can be observed on social media. One domain where this development is similarly visible is, for example, the political one, implying that political discussions and opinions observed on social media are similarly polarised.

Relating the themes to literature, it should be emphasised that they mirror diverse approaches taken and topics studied in business research. Thus, the consumers' perceptions of the brand communicating moral messages relate to several research fields. As apparent in the analysis presented previously in this chapter, these areas include brand management, consumer culture theory (CCT), social media marketing and branding, and within CSR mainly corporate citizenship and corporate philanthropy. Therefore, the authors of this thesis suggest that a more interdisciplinary approach combining management and consumer research is valuable. This should be beneficial to understand brands and how they resonate with consumers in order to draw implications for brand management.

In conclusion, the ten themes illustrated above provide an answer to the research question and constitute the contribution of this thesis. This contribution is threefold: First, this thesis extends existing knowledge in the field of moral and ethical branding (Fan, 2005; Jeanes, 2013; Morsing, 2006). In this area, scholars mainly focus on the brand management perspective. The thesis at hand contributes to the understanding of moral branding by specifically adding insights and implications regarding the consumer perspective of the phenomenon. This comprises the second contribution: To the best of the authors' knowledge, there is very little research treating the consumer side of the phenomenon of brands criticising society and using morals for communication. Therefore, the findings of this thesis add knowledge to this under-researched topic by illuminating the consumers' perceptions of brands using moral messages. Third, this thesis enhances existing knowledge on brand meaning, specifically the elaborations by Batey (2008). The findings of this thesis support Batey's (2008) view that brand meaning is subjective to the individual consumer. This is reflected in the great variety of brand meaning emerging from the empirical data. Further, it is especially interesting that the brand meaning resulting from the same stimulus is very polarized. Thereby, this thesis adds to Batey's (2008) elaborations by demonstrating that the same stimulus is interpreted differently by several consumers and hence leads to many different and contrasting types of brand meaning.

5.2.2 The Brand's Right to Communicate Morals

This chapter aims to illustrate the contribution of this thesis to Fan's (2005) "philosophical question" (p. 348) outlined in the first chapter. He asks whether a brand should yield public good for society by communicating basic moral values, or whether this goes too far. The

authors of this thesis suggest that, based on the themes, certain conclusions can be drawn which present insights to Fan's (2005) question from a consumer perspective.

On the one hand, four of the positive themes adhere to the notion that consumers perceive Edeka as a brand with an important role in a society. The altruistic perception reveals that the brand is doing something 'good', or even offers a 'service to humanity', without (or only with a small) self-interest. This results in the consumer's belief that the brand holds an interest in society's well-being. The aforementioned thought is supported by the fact that the consumers perceive the societal issue the brand is addressing as in fact present and worth improving. Moreover, they evaluate the moral as personally relevant for themselves. Finally, as consumers appreciate and thank the brand for addressing moral values, it is argued that they perceive the brand to have the right to communicate moral values.

On the other hand, three negative themes encompass the idea that consumers do not perceive the brand as possessing the right to communicate morals. Many consumers feel the brand intervenes in their private affairs, which they consider inappropriate and in fact presumptuous. Consumers express they would rather rely on their own judgment of what is 'good' for them, and consequently they do not want such 'education' from a brand. Additionally, they see through the money-making motive, which makes the brand non-credible. As Fan (2005) puts it, it can be concluded that for these consumers the brand's action to communicate moral beliefs is "too much" (p.345). For this reason, it is suggested that these consumers do not see the right of the brand to communicate moral values because they do not attach this activity to the role a brand should take on.

The aforementioned arguments are presented in an expanded model illustrated in figure 6. It illustrates the different opinions on whether or not a brand should communicate basic moral values to consumers in order to improve society (Fan, 2005). Thereby, this thesis contributes to Fan's (2005) call for future research regarding the question above. The answer to Fan's (2005) question is given by exposing the consumer perspective: One group of consumers is in favour of a brand communicating moral values, while another group rejects this action. However, considering the overall findings, the authors of this thesis state that the first group of consumers represents the majority and the positive reactions to the moral communication are considerable. Therefore, the authors of this thesis infer that consumers appreciate it if a brand communicates moral values. Some in fact perceive this action as a contribution to the improvement of society.
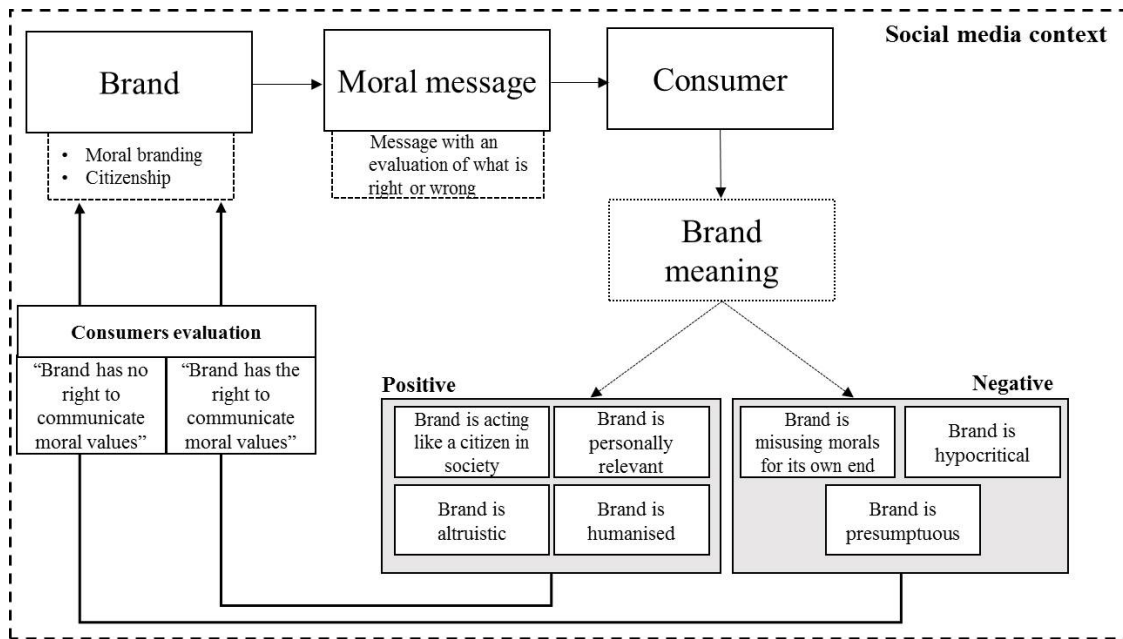
Figure 6 The Brand's Right to Communicate Morals

Finally, the authors of this thesis contend that these insights and learnings present a good starting point for further investigation into the brand's communication of moral messages.

5.2.3 The Brand Prompts Behaviour Change

The authors of this thesis would like to highlight one specific unanticipated finding. This thesis set out to expose brand meaning, however also a behavioural consumer reaction to the moral message emerged from the data. The theme "brand is personally relevant" (chapter 5.1.2) reveals that some consumers report an actual behaviour change triggered by the moral message. While some indicate that they will change their behaviour in the future, others state that they have already adjusted their behaviour for the 'good'. Consumers who watched the videos mention that they feel prompted to modify their manners, such as spending more time with their children, visiting their relatives or starting a healthier lifestyle. These consumers evidently agree with the moral and find it highly relevant for themselves. This indicates that they share a common moral understanding with Edeka. Consequently, it can be argued that this way of communication has an impact on some consumers' lives. It is interpreted that some consumers' behaviour change results in a slight improvement of society. This is interesting, as the same notion is reflected within corporate citizenship and corporate philanthropy literature: Contributing to the welfare of society (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Aßländer & Curbach, 2014; Matten & Crane, 2005). However, it is important to note that Edeka does not act as a brand which, for example, donates money to charity or improves political stability. Rather, the brand acts as an entity which seems to "inject" important moral values into people. As a result, the consumers themselves decide to take on responsibility for themselves and their fellow men. The findings further reveal that this can result in favourable brand meaning: Consumers actively communicate that the brand acts as an 'eye-opener' which ultimately is the pivotal entity that helps them to change their behaviour for the better.

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The above insights and discussion enable the researchers to draw conclusions to contribute to Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz' (2017) call for research. The scholars ask for an exploration of the role of the brand which contributes to the enhancement of society (Biraghi, Gambetti & Schultz, 2017). As stated above, it is suggested that the brand contributes to the improvement of society in two ways: First, by raising consumer awareness of current issues and by relaying moral values, second, by triggering actual behaviour changes of people. Therefore, it can be inferred that the brand under investigation managed to contribute to an (at least slight) improvement of society by the mere communication of basic moral values. Responding to the aforementioned scholars it is suggested that the brand plays an active role which constitutes in moral communication.

6   Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate the phenomenon of brands communicating moral messages. Hence, the following research question was asked to shed light on the consumer perspective:

How is a brand communicating moral messages on social media perceived by consumers?

Based on this research question, this thesis has identified themes resulting in an extended theoretical framework that provides knowledge about consumers' perceptions of the brand. These insights constitute ten themes which emerged from the empirical data and encompass consumers' brand meaning: (1) brand is acting like a citizen in society, (2) brand is personally relevant, (3) brand is humanised, (4) brand is different due to moral message, (5) brand is altruistic, (6) brand is misusing morals for its own end, (7) brand is hypocritical, (8) brand is presumptuous, (9) brand is using unethical methods and (10) the social media context.

The themes show the variety of brand meaning consumers derive from the brand's moral messages. It is noteworthy that the themes reveal contrasting and differentiated consumer views. This finding shows that brand meaning is highly dependent on the individual consumer's interpretation and hence difficult to predict. Nevertheless, it is found that by communicating morals the brand provides meaningful content to consumers and hence plays a relevant role in their lives. Due to this, morals provide a means for the brand to achieve differentiation. However, it is important to note that the use of morals bears certain risks. This is because consumers criticise the brand by drawing on various arguments related to the moral. The brand therefore risks being scrutinised because of its profit-making motive or being perceived as hypocritical or not credible.

Drawing on these themes and developing the theoretical framework further, an important insight to highlight concerns the question of whether consumers grant the right to brands to communicate moral messages. Whereas some themes reveal that consumers perceive that the brand possesses this right, another group of consumers shows a reluctant attitude towards this activity.

Finally, the unanticipated finding that the brand's moral message in fact achieves a behaviour change of consumers illustrates the potential impact of morals communicated by brands.

6.1   Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this thesis are explained in the following.

First, the thesis makes noteworthy contributions to existing knowledge on moral and ethical branding (Fan, 2005; Jeanes, 2013; Morsing, 2006) by offering an exploration of the consumer side. Specifically, this thesis provides knowledge about consumers' perceptions of

brands communicating moral messages in the context of social media. It therefore makes a relevant contribution to the consumer side of the phenomenon which is an under-researched field in need of more investigation. The developed theoretical framework highlights the diverse and contrasting nuances of brand meaning, thus revealing valuable insights into the consumer perspective.

Second, this thesis enhances existing knowledge on brand meaning, thereby specifically contributing to Batey (2008). This study strengthens the author's view that brand meaning is subjective to the individual consumer because it results from subjective interpretation of the stimulus. In fact, this thesis found that the brand meaning different consumers derive from the same stimulus is very diverse and polarized.

Third, this study contributes insights to Fan's (2005) call for research dealing with the question of whether a brand should yield public good for society by communicating basic moral values, or whether this goes too far. By answering this question from a consumer perspective, this thesis concludes that consumers have favourable perceptions towards this behaviour. Hence, a brand is embraced to contribute to the improvement of society by communicating moral values.

Fourth, this thesis marks a contribution to Biraghi, Gambetti and Schultz' (2017) call for investigation regarding an exploration of the role of the brand as a contributor to the enhancement of society. In this study, the brand plays an active role by conveying morals which raises consumers' awareness regarding important values. Furthermore, the brand causes actual behaviour changes of consumers and thereby makes a contribution to the improvement of society.

6.2   Managerial Contributions

The findings and knowledge generated within this thesis have several practical implications.

The themes elucidated in chapter 5 offer brand managers an encompassing overview of a variety of potential brand meaning consumers derive from a brand's communication of moral values. The contrasting themes of brand meaning highlight the benefits as well as the dangers associated with the usage of morals in branding, which will subsequently be evaluated.

First, one of the benefits for brands is that consumers perceive moral values as relevant for themselves and others. Therefore, the communication of moral messages provides one means for brands to add value for consumers and to take a role in their lives. Second, the communication of moral messages is a suitable way to differentiate a brand from competition. Ultimately, this strategy can add to the uniqueness of a brand. Third, communicating moral values and thereby showing interest in public good contributes to a brand's facet of humanity. Hence, it helps consumers to relate to the brand. Finally, raising awareness for moral values and societal issues is appreciated by consumers as an act of responsibility. Consequently, it serves as an appropriate means for a brand to demonstrate its interest in the promotion of public good.

However, this thesis reveals certain dangers brand managers should be aware of: First, the findings and the themes of brand meaning expose the various arguments consumers apply to criticise the brand's action. This knowledge contributes to an increase in brand managers' awareness of such risks and their understanding of the way and the reasons consumers use to criticise the brand. Specifically, managers should be aware that consumers compare the moral message to various brand- and company-related factors and articulate criticism if they perceive a mismatch between the two. Additionally, it should be remarked that consumers relate the moral message to the brand's underlying purpose to make profits and due to this scrutinise the brand. The implications of these learnings are twofold: On the one hand, it is recommended to managers to evaluate factors which potentially offer risks for criticism and to minimize them. On the other hand, the researchers aim to clarify that critical consumer responses cannot fully be prevented. And, as revealed in this thesis, consumers presumably almost always find something related to the brand's moral message they can scrutinise, even if this means they need to draw on preposterous arguments. Moreover, it has been found that consumers scrutinise the brand due to a perceived use of unethical methods in the design of the advertisements. Therefore, it is recommended to brand managers to ensure brand communication does not contain any practices which could possibly be interpreted as unethical. Especially when the brand emphasises moral values, using unethical means to communicate these values seems paradoxical.

Lastly, this thesis holds managerial implications regarding the social media environment in which the brand's moral message is communicated. Concerning its benefits, it is stated that the communication of moral values is perceived as important by consumers. As personal relevance is a crucial factor for successful social media communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), moral values are recommended for a social media environment. This suitability is further supported by the finding that consumers watch these videos voluntarily and share them with family and friends. Finally, the communication is perceived as disruptive, unique and meaningful as it was found that many consumers prefer the personally valuable moral messages to what they refer to as 'generic advertising'. Regarding potential risks, this thesis confirms that the criticism consumers articulate on social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011) is present also as a reaction to the communication of moral values. Due to this, the authors of this thesis aim to emphasise that brand and social media managers should be aware of the fact that fierce and controversial discussions are likely to arise on social media brand pages as a result of communicating moral values. It is recommended for managers to be prepared for such discussions and ensure capacities for a sufficient moderation on the social media brand pages in order to reply to consumer's critique and preferably curb its negative impacts.

6.3   Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study provided a theoretical framework which can serve as a starting point for future investigation. However, this framework results from an investigation using a single case study approach. The study considered only one retail brand in the German market. Additionally, it revealed the perceptions of consumers in a social media environment. For these reasons, it is suggested that more research is required to improve and expand the

theoretical framework in the future. An investigation into other brand types, like product brands, or brands with a different level of awareness or involvement than Edeka, might validate the proposed themes, reveal different themes or provide an assimilation of them. Additionally, it would be interesting to assess the influence of different moral messages, such as more controversial ones or more niche ones, on consumers' perceptions. An investigation into the aforementioned factors could enable a broader understanding of brands communicating moral messages. Moreover, a further study could employ other methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to explore whether different perceptions emerge under this condition. To give an example, one interesting finding is the perception of the brand as being 'altruistic'. The authors of this thesis consider it worthwhile to investigate whether such brand actions are also perceived as altruistic when consumers are interrogated using different methods, for example, interviews or focus groups. Under these circumstances, consumers might be more reflective about the brand's actions. This may increase their perception of profit-driven motives and might evoke less enthusiastic reactions.

Further, although the authors of this thesis can make a contribution to the perceived role of a brand in society, the results of this thesis are of an explorative nature and are therefore not generalisable. Moreover, the findings mirror a specific context and time. Therefore, this thesis opens a path for further research into consumers' perceptions of the societal role of a brand. As the findings reveal, consumers show appreciation of the brand because of its communication of moral messages. Relating to this, it will be fruitful to investigate whether consumers' expectations towards brands taking a role in society by promoting public good will increase in the future.

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Appendix A: Examples of Comments

Sehr schöner Spot. Ich bin so begeistert von der Umsetzung. Eine künstlerisch märchenhafte Stimmung. Mal was ganz anderes, das ist einfach gelungene Werbung. Alles toll eingefangen. Die vielen kleinen Details, schöne Musik.... Erinnert mich fast ein wenig an die alten Filme aus Tchechien (der fliegende Ferdinand usw), die sind auch so klasse und immer noch ein Hingucker.

Super gemacht!!!!
Like · Reply · 15 · 27 February at 09:26

EDEKA ✓ Wir freuen uns über dein Feedback 💛
Like · Reply · 1 · 27 February at 11:00

Tolle Werbung, für mich ist die Botschaft, das man alles schaffen kann und nicht immer mit dem Strom schwimmen sollte.Jeder kann es schaffen,man muß nur anfangen.
Like · Reply · 180 · 16 February at 12:46

EDEKA ✓ Genau 🤩
Like · Reply · 12 · 16 February at 13:16

↳ View more replies

Edeka hebt sich jetzt von den anderen Lebensmittelläden ab und verkauft kein ungesundes Zeug mehr? Keine Chips und Süßigkeiten? Keine Nahrungsmittel mit "versteckten" ungesundem Zucker und Fetten? Das wäre ja mal wirklich eine Revolution!
Like · Reply · 58 · 17 February at 08:37

EDEKA ✓ Hi Selma, es lebe die Vielfalt! Jeder sollte selbst entscheiden - ganz nach dem Motto: Iss wie der, der du sein willst. Wir möchten mit dem Clip inspirieren, auf eine bewusste Ernährung zu achten.
Like · Reply · 31 · 17 February at 10:35

↳ View more replies

nur beeren essen ist aber auch nicht gesund oder, ist sehr einseitig zu wenig und unrealistisch
Like · Reply · 28 · 16 February at 10:41

EDEKA ✓ Wir möchten keineswegs den Eindruck erwecken, dass eine ausschließliche Ernährung von Beeren erstrebenswert ist. Im Video möchten wir aufzeigen, dass Beeren beispielsweise als Snack für Zwischendurch zu einer gesünderen Ernährung beitragen können. Natürlich sind gesunde Hauptmahlzeiten, auch wenn diese im Video nicht konkret gezeigt werden, ebenso entscheidend für eine bewusste Ernährung.
Like · Reply · 56 · 16 February at 10:49

↳ View more replies

Echt ne tolle Werbung.... Generell die Werbung von EDEKA ist genial... Ich fand die Werbung zu Weihnachten mit dem älteren Mann echt emotional und doch so real.
Macht weiter so
Like · Reply · 64 · 16 February at 12:32

EDEKA ✓ So soll es sein🤩

Source: Edeka (2017a)

Wenn man vergisst, das Edeka diesen Spot unterschwellig dafür nutzt, das Essen für Weihnachten l bei Ihnen zu kaufen, ist er sehr herzergreifend.

Und erinnert mich auch daran, wie schwer es werden wird, zu sehen wie unsere Maus mit großen Augen den Weihnachtsbaum anschauen wird und das 1 Person nicht mehr bei uns ist....
Like · Reply · 17 · 28 November 2015 at 20:11 · Edited

↳ 1 Reply

Don't like it! Ist mir zu zynisch. Ist das Zeitgeist? Einfach nur traurig! Jedem einzelnen Gast an dieser Tafel sollte ein Geflügel-Knochen im Hals stecken bleiben. Und sollten meine Eltern jemals denken, dass sie mir nicht wichtig sind, egal zu welcher Jahreszeit, möchte ich, dass jemand mich ganz fest schüttelt!
Like · Reply · 18 · 29 November 2015 at 00:19 · Edited

↳ 5 Replies

Die Werbung ist wunderbar gemacht! Hoffentlich denken viele jetzt über die eigene Familie nach und wie man es schaffen kann, sich in regelmäßig-unregelmäßigen Abeständen zu treffen. Ich bin dankbar dafür, dass ich in einer Familie lebe, in der Liebe un... See more
Like · Reply · 25 · 28 November 2015 at 21:50

↳ 1 Reply

Soooo traurig ... denke aber das es bei manchen Familien nicht nur an Weihnachten so ist ... 😞😠😟
Like · Reply · 20 · 28 November 2015 at 14:13

↳ 1 Reply

Schöner Werbefilm. Doch gibt es so viele Menschen, die nicht mal das Geld haben ihre Verwandten zu besuchen, geschweige denn Geschenke zu kaufen. Und Edeka setzt Menschen kurz vor Weihnachten auf die Straße, weil diese aus dem Erziehungsurlaub zurück kommen, obwohl sie 3 kleine Kinder zu Hause haben. Nach außen an die Menschlichkeit appellieren und nach innen Unmenschlichkeit praktizieren. 😕
Like · Reply · 16 December 2015 at 08:51

Wie kann man nur ? Ich hoffe es werden jetzt nicht sämtliche Rentner dazu animiert ihre Familie zu schocken!! Man macht keine Scherze mit dem Tod!! Selbst wenn die meisten Leute animiert werden mehr Zeit mit der Familie zu verbringen, wer garantiert euch dass die nicht trotzdem zu Aldi und co gehen?? Ein bisschen Mundpropaganda vor Weihnachten 👎
Like · Reply · 30 November 2015 at 14:25

In einer Zeit in der die Sucht nach Geld Viele dermaßen verblendet das Sie nicht mehr merken was wirklich wichtig im Leben ist, stehen einige die noch an alten Werten festhalten schnell allein da. Heutzutage erreicht man niemanden mehr mit einer einfac... See more
Like · Reply · 100 · 29 November 2015 at 20:01 · Edited

↳ 5 Replies

Source: Edeka (2015a)

WOW! das ist der beste werbeclip, den ich seit langer zeit gesehen habe! sehr grossen respekt und danke dafür! es fahren alte renault (dacia) 12 und 16 herum... wurde in rumänien gedreht? wer singt den song? einfach nur genial! :-)

Reply · 12 👍 👎

EDEKA 3 months ago

Vielen Dank für deine netten Worte! Schau mal in die Videobeschreibung, da findest du den Song :-)

Reply · 5 👍 👎

3 months ago

liebe edeka! erst mal vielen dank für die antwort! leider kam ich da nicht weiter! es war bestimmt romania, ein integraler teil unseres (von mir so sehr geliebten) europas! egal! das video ist bestens und da bin ich stolz auf meine deutsche sektion in europa, auch auf edeka! es war rumänien, oder? :-), aber es würde die

Read more

Reply · 2 👍 👎

3 months ago

Wie die ganzen Speckpanzer jetzt heulen weil sie das Video nicht verstehen....und ja man sollte sich eigentlich schon schämen wenn man nicht wegen einer Krankheit sondern aus eigener Schuld Fett ist. so ist es halt bis man dann später zum specktransformer wird xD .

Reply · 11 👍 👎

1 month ago

FaTBeAr Bin ganz deiner Meinung😂

Reply · 1 👍 👎

3 months ago

SJW sind getriggerd worden :D war eine coole werbung

Reply · 10 👍 👎

Source: Edeka (2017b)

Appendix B: Overview of Comments

Facebook (Edeka, n.d.-a)	**Total views**	**Total likes**	**Total comments**	**Comments read by researchers**	**Collected & analysed comments**
"Heimkommen" (2015)	22 132 873	335 000	31 422	900	204
"Zeitschenken" (2016)	9 400 000	125 000	6 500	500	87
"Eatkarus" (2017)	42 400 000	247 000	18 794	950	275

YouTube (Edeka, n.d.-b)	**Total views**	**Total likes**	**Total comments**	**Comments read by researchers**	**Collected & analysed comments**
"Heimkommen" (2015)	55 591 762	292 444	12 196	300	56
"Zeitschenken" (2016)	10 456 307	12 685	1 142	120	40
"Eatkarus" (2017)	3 810 530	16 558	1 547	300	57

Appendix C: Codebook

Themes	Codes
Brand is acting like a citizen in society	Consumers say that the brand's message is relevant in todays society Consumers claim that the brand reminds them of relevant values Links to politics and state institutions are drawn Consumers say the message will make other people think and change Consumers feel that the message needs to be spread even further Consumers enhance the relevance of the message with own arguments
Brand is personally relevant	Consumers relate the brand's message to themselves Consumers claim to change their behaviour in the future Consumers state they have already changed their behaviour Consumers perceive the brand's message as inspirational/motivational
Brand is humanised	Appreciation and praise of the brand/strong positive emotions Consumers show their thankfulness towards the brand Consumers use human character traits to describe the brand Consumers express their respect towards the brand
Brand is different	Comparison to communication by other brands The brand is claimed to stand out from the mass Consumers congratule the brand Relation to past advertising Consumers claim they watch the videos voluntarily Consumers say the brand is revolutionary
Brand is altruistic	Commercial interest is claimed to be in the background Consumers understand money making motive but claim that the good intention counts Brand is serving humanity with its commercials Consumers feel that the brand can improve the society
Brand is misusing morals for own end	Consumers claim the brand has no right to communicate morals Brand is claimed to have no genuine interest in the well-being of society Consumers claim they see through money-making motive Consumers express they will stop to buy at the grocer Consumers say that brand should feel ashamed
Brand is hypocritical	Comparison with brand's business: no fit is perceived Consumers say that the brand has double standards The brand needs to show actions The brand's actions are perceived as non-credible Brand is perceived as "liar" Cynical/ironic comments
Brand is presumptuos	Consumers dislike the brand entering in their 'private life' Consumers comment that they have a different moral understanding The brand is claimed to address the bad conscience Consumers dislike 'being educated' by the brand Consumers say that moral education is not the role of the brand
Brand is using unethical methods	Relating to 'fat shaming' and the use of death Consumers claim that the brand plays with their emotions Consumers perceive a lack of empathy of the brand
The role of the social media context	Consumers defend the brand and the message Consumers discuss their opposing opinions with each other Consumers are annoyed by the criticism of others