

A Master Thesis in International Business Communication (English)

Did H&M get Lost in the Outrage Jungle?

A Case Study of Crisis Communication in an Outrage Culture



A Master Thesis written by Anne Noa Madsen McLeman
Supervised by Jesper Bonderup Frederiksen

Aalborg University

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Resumé

Den vestlige verden er konstrueret af samfund bestående af krænkede individer, der som enkeltpersoner i samspil med hinanden, ikke står tilbage for at ytre sig om en stigende utilfredshed til samfundet, dets individer og institutioner. Sådan ser billedet i hvert fald ud, hvis man bevæger sig i nærheden af hvilket som helst medie, der dag efter dag kan rapportere om individers og grupper utilfredshed rettet mod alverdens genstande. Fænomenet har i folkemunde fået tildelt navnet krænkelseskultur, og bruges i flæng om den kultur, der danner rammen for de vredesudbrud, der som oftest udspiller sig på de sociale medier. Vredesudbrud rettet mod virksomheder, personer eller tredje, der på den ene eller anden facon har formået at krænke mennesket i en sådan grad at det skal projekteres for skue til alle.

Medierne bevidner i stigende grad om sager hvor større virksomheder grundet en sådan krænkelseskultur, tilsyneladende har set sig nødsaget til at tilbagetrække markedsføring og produkter grundet en gruppe menneskers følelse af at være blevet krænket. Undersøges de pågældende virksomheders efterfølgende kommunikation omkring hændelsen, står det klart, at disse i mere end ét tilfælde har benyttet en form for krisekommunikation, hvor der gives en absolut undskyldning for hændelsen, målrettet de individer, der skulle være blevet krænket over den enkelte sag. En undskyldning, der ikke blot lover om tilbagetrækning af de krænkende produkter eller markedsføring, men også lader virksomheden påtage sig fuld skyld og ansvar for den krænkende hændelse. Denne undskyldning er et resultat af et bevidst valg af krisekommunikation, og undersøgelsesområdet for dette speciale opstår dermed i krydsfeltet mellem krænkelseskultur og krisekommunikation. Herudfra dannes problemformuleringen *"Hvorfor ser vi en stigende udvikling af krænkelseskulturen i den vestlige verden, og hvordan påvirker virksomheders valg af krisekommunikation denne kultur?"* Formålet med specialet er således en undersøgelse af fænomenet 'krænkelseskultur' og dermed et forsøg på at bidrage til det begrænsede felt af litteratur, der findes om dette højst aktuelle og tilsyneladende nyopståede fænomen.

Som en del af et større fænomen, tager dette speciale udgangspunkt i et casestudie, og nærmere specifikt Hennes & Mauritzs sag fra 2018, hvor den globale tøjvirksomhed blev udsat for tiltaler om racistiske tendenser i deres markedsføring, da de benyttede en mørk børnemodel til markedsføringen af en sweatshirt med teksten "Coolest monkey in the jungle". Hennes og Mauritz undskyldte for episoden og pådrog sig al skylden for de krænkedes beskyldninger. Produktet blev i samme ombæring fjernet fra virksomhedens kollektion.

For at kunne besvare specialets problemformulering, tages der udgangspunkt i tre områder for undersøgelse: 1) en undersøgelse af Hennes & Mauritz identitet, 2) en undersøgelse af baggrunden for kränkelseskulturen og 3) en undersøgelse af Hennes & Mauritz benyttede strategi af krisekommunikation, dennes effekt og alternativer.

Specialets videnskabelige ramme er socialkonstruktivismen, hvor der tænkes ud fra ideen om, at alle fænomener skabes i menneskets bevidsthed og udvikles i sociale relationer. Sådanne fænomener kan i specialet findes i udviklingen af en bestemt kultur og dannelsen af meninger, der skabes gennem mellemmenneskelig interaktion og refleksion. Der tages desuden udgangspunkt i hermeneutikken da der argumenteres for forskellige aspekter af meningsdannelse som resultat af afsættet for forståelse. Hermeneutikken benyttes desuden som arbejdsværktøj gennem hele specialet, da der arbejdes ud fra en proces, der bevæger sig frem og tilbage mellem forståelsen af enkeltele og helhed.

Med afsæt i ovenstående undersøgelser konkluderes det, at kränkelseskulturen er et produkt af vores vestlige verdens postmodernistiske tendenser til at vende blikket indad, og dermed retfærdiggøre alt omkring os med udgangspunkt i dannelsen af vores egen livsstil gennem et selvfortalt narrativ. Virksomhedernes 'falden på knæ' igennem en krisekommunikation, der giver den krænkede forbruger ret, resulterer ikke blot i, at den enkelte virksomhed går på kompromis med dennes identitet, men også giver forbrugeren en magt til at bestemme hvad der er rigtig og forkert. En magt der skævvrider den gensidige afhængighed der bør eksistere for kontinuerligheden af et postmoderne samfund.

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1. Introduction

‘Anger is not a new phenomenon. But there are elements of the human emotional journey that are novel and are driven by modern conditions’ (Williams 2018).

Above quote is taken from the article ‘Why are we living in an age of anger – is it because of the 50 year rage cycle?’ brought in The Guardian in May 2018. The article questions the reasons to the Western world’s sudden outburst of fury and aggression pointed towards every aspect of society that we feel the slightest degree of disapproval towards. When this age of anger becomes a way of life in one part of the world in a specific time, the contours of a culture is starting to take shape (Cambridge Dictionary 2019, Culture). A culture of anger mentioned in the media almost daily and seems to be constantly increasing in force; The outrage culture.

As a term, outrage culture is used more and more on social media and in newspaper articles in the last decade. We read of people being outraged about everything from wrongdoings in governments to an outrage towards companies and people who do not act as we think right. In 2014 the online newspaper Slates.com brought the article ‘The Year of Outrage’ in which it presented the results of a tracking of the Americans’ outrage in the year of 2014 (Turner 2014) It seemed, according the tracking that Americans had been outraged towards something or someone every single day of the year 2014. The article evaluated the findings and concluded that the immense number of outrages is caused by a default mode of being outraged over everything which contradicts our perceptions of what is right. A default mode heavily supported by our constant ability to utter our beliefs, feelings and opinions via Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms which we can hide behind when things get too personal (Turner 2014).

Albeit the term is in effect and used daily by the media, it is difficult if not impossible to find a single clear definition of the term. However, when reviewing articles on this new phenomenon of a culture, most of them seem to define the outrage culture as people’s increasing tendency to voice an opinion about someone or something which has offended them (Rommelmann 2019), (Turner 2014). The Urban Dictionary even goes as far as to defining the term as people’s playing of the victim card with the hope ‘[...] to gain power and public recognition for their brave act of justice as well as a sense of control over their meaningless existence (Urban Dictionary 2019, Outrage culture). A definition which highlights the act of outraging as a way of being noticed and even as creating one’s identity.

‘This is the current pitch of outrage culture, where voicing an opinion someone says she sees as a threat qualifies you for instant annihilation, no questions asked. Why ask questions, when it’s more expedient, maybe more kickass, to turn anything you might disagree with into an emergency?’ (Rommelmann 2019). Above quote is found in an article brought in the Los Angeles Times in 2019 with the title ‘Outrage culture is out of control’, in which the writer Nancy Rommelmann questions the tendency of raising our voices in disgrace instead of asking questions to gain understanding (Rommelmann 2019). Rommelmann’s take on the outrage culture initiated the wonder of the present master thesis and lead to the investigation of recent cases of outrage as primal reaction towards institutions or people which have done wrong in the eyes of the outraged beholder. Cases of outrage which sometimes last no longer than 24 hours, while at other times seem to attract immense attention from public masses and media, and eventually turn into what would be referred to as a crisis (Coombs 2015, 3)

In January 2018, the Swedish multinational clothing retail Hennes & Mauritz (hereinafter referred to as H&M) was the centre of such explosion of outrage. An outrage which came to its full power via social media platforms where people shared their outrage towards the company and its actions. The focal point of the outrage was an advertisement reflecting a young dark-skinned boy, wearing a hoodie with the text print ‘Coolest monkey in the jungle’ (appendix 1, image 1). ‘The advertisement was displayed on H&M’s British website primo January 2018, and soon after, the anger towards it unfolded on various social media platforms. A prominent platform for the outburst of anger was the social media platform Twitter, where people seized the opportunity to share their opinions of H&M and its, in the outraged Twitter users’ opinion, controversial advertisement. The three days between the 7th and 9th January seemed to be the eye of the storm for the outrageous comments which turned into a downright shitstorm and hence crisis for H&M (Coombs 2015, 3). People were furious with the company and did not hesitate to share their feelings of outrage on the online platform. In the early morning hours of the 9th of January, H&M posted a response to the situation on its Twitter profile (appendix 5). A response seemingly filled with remorse and regret, taking on full responsibility of the situation.

In the slipstream of the H&M case in 2018, similar cases have appeared more than once. In February 2019, Gucci was accused of racism and so-called blackfacing, when launching a black turtleneck sweater designed to cover the bottom half of the face and fitted with what appears to be a set of big red lips (appendix 1, image 2). Gucci was quick to respond to the accusations with a full apology, and an instant removal of the product from all shops (Chiu 2019). Just a few months earlier, the fashion

house Prada had removed a keychain in the shape of what seemed to be a red-lipped monkey from its range (appendix 1, image 3), as accusations of racism and blackfacing had been directed towards the company. The instant removal of the product was followed by an apology (Lang 2018). These are just a fraction of the recent cases against companies accused of acting controversially, and it seems as if a pattern is being created. A pattern of resorting to utilise a strategy of crisis communication to fully apologise when being accused of racist acts.

Combining the increase of the outrage culture with these global companies' choices of taking on full responsibility when being accused of acting controversially created an initial wonder forming the foundation for the present thesis. Why are we seeing this increase in outrage culture in today's Western world, and what happens with the development of the culture when companies are so quick to apologise and take on responsibility for a group of people's accusations against them? Hence, the research question is set in the cross field between the outrage culture and crisis communication.

The thesis will take its point of departure in the case of H&M as presented in this introduction. However, the research question is fitted to investigate similar cases as reviewed above. The research question is moreover supplied with three defining sub-questions which are fitted to the specific case of H&M.

1.1 Research question

Why do we see an increasing outrage culture in the Western world and how do company's choice of crisis communication affect this culture?

1.1.1 Defining Sub-questions

- How does H&M define its corporate identity?
- Why are the consumers on Twitter outraged by H&M's advertisement?
- How did H&M's chosen crisis strategy comply with the crisis and its corporate identity respectively and which other strategies might have been applied?

1.2 Clarification of Terms and Limitations

This chapter is included to give the reader an understanding of how the author is applying selected terms in the present thesis. A clarification of these terms is included due to their ambiguous uses and definitions in literature.

1.2.1 Culture

The thesis will not be concentrated on the aspect of national culture, and hence will not investigate how one national culture reacts to a crisis in contrast to the reactions of another national culture. However, the aspect of a postmodern society is brought into play, which suggest a culture prevalent in the Western world, which in the present thesis covers Europe the Americas (Your Dictionary 2019, Western world). The thesis is concentrated on analysing empirical data collected from Twitter users from the UK and US and this this selection of geographical areas is further clarified in the methodological chapter.

In addition to its geographical relevance as part of a Western world, the comments collected from American Twitter users have been applied as these can be put into a historic context relevant for the themes of the empirical data. This historic context is centred around the American history of slaves. A history of slaves which can be traced back to around 1526, where the first African slaves were shipped to America (Mintz, n.d). This history of slaves is relevant for the use of the term “monkey” as a degrading nickname used to describe Afro-Americans post-Civil War, in the US (Wall 2008, 1044). The history of slaves and racism in the US will not be further analyses in the present thesis but applied as basis for the understanding of the consumers’ responses to H&M’s advertisement. Furthermore, the Twitter comments are selected from users who live in a Western world and therefore contribute to the reflection of a tendency among individuals in a postmodern society. Hence, their skin-tone, civil-status, economic status, age, sexuality, gender etc. is subordinate.

1.2.2 Narrative

The term ‘narrative’ is applied in several theories throughout the thesis. It is applied to describe a corporation’s definition of its identity as well as to describe a consumer’s utilisation of a product to tell a story about the self (Kapferer 2004, 111). Furthermore, it is applied as the individuals’ definition of the self in relation to the choices made to create a certain lifestyle (Giddens, 1991, 81), and lastly it is applied as an advertisement tool, applied to create a story which the consumer may or may not desire to be part of (Wall 2008, 1041). Common for all definitions of the term is the storytelling about the self, reflected in someone or something externally.

1.2.3 Consumer

The term consumer is applied to the thesis as a person who purchase goods and services for own use but is not necessarily limited to consumers of H&M’s product. The term is hence applied to define

the person who H&M target's its products at, as well as the person who has an opinion about the company, and thus, is not necessarily applied to define H&M's actual customers.

1.3 Structure of Thesis: Reader's Guide

This chapter is included to guide the reader through the present thesis. The reader will be presented with an introduction which includes relevant background information on the case of the thesis and leads to an overall research question and three defining sub-questions. The reader will subsequently be presented with a chapter of classification of terms. The chapter is included to give the reader an understanding of how the author has chosen to define and apply a set of terms throughout the thesis.

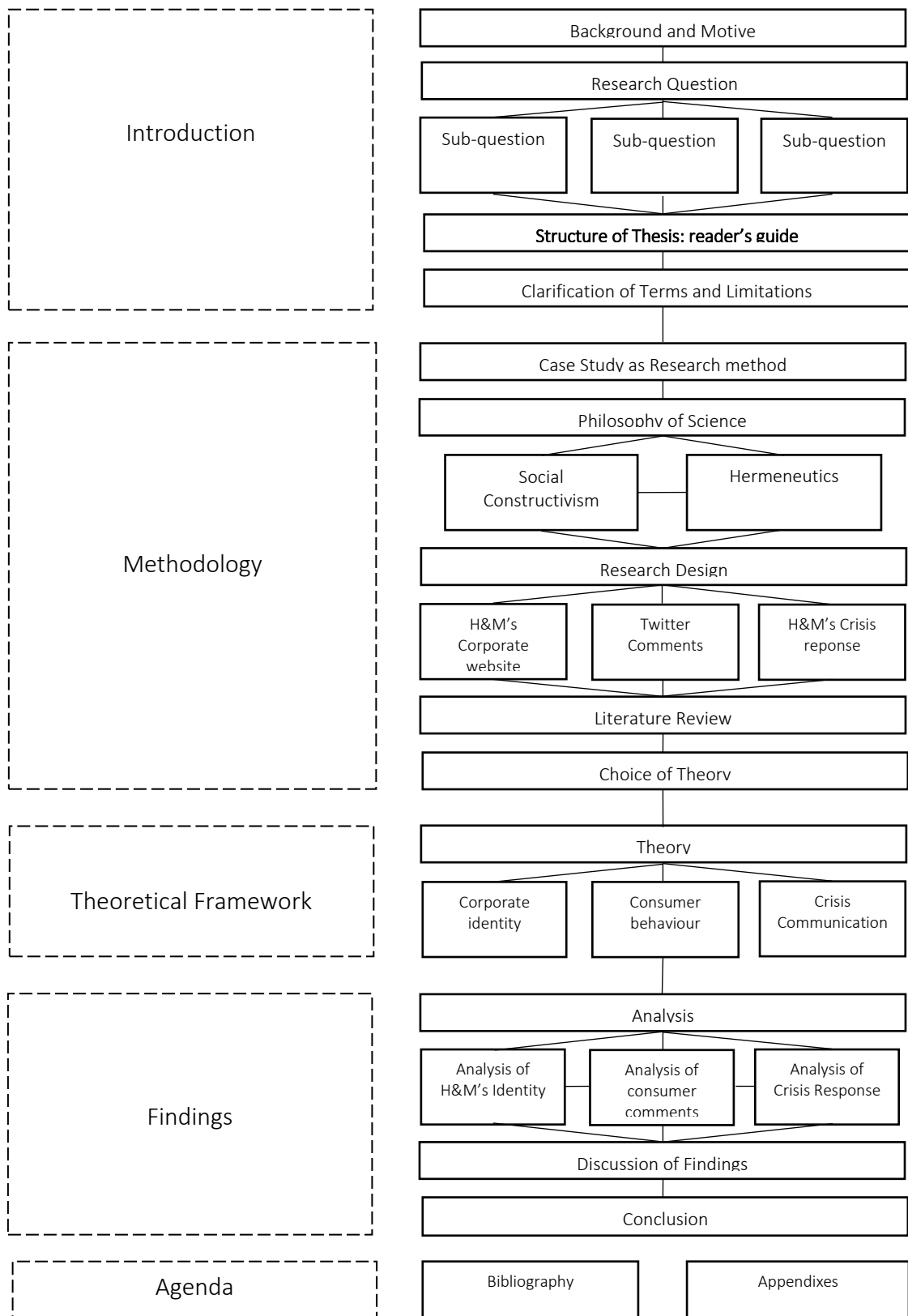
Moving on to the methodological chapter, the reader will find a definition of the research method, and the philosophy of science which the thesis is set within. In the methodological chapter, the reader will furthermore find the thesis' research design, which is parted in three separate research methods. Each part includes a presentation of the research method, a process of data collection, a description of data processing and a criticism of the collected empirical data. Each of the three research designs are constructed in such way that it, with the application of relevant theory, answers each of the three defining sub-questions through an analysis, and combined answer the research question. The last part of the methodological chapter is dedicated to the literature and theoretical framework of the thesis. This includes a literature review, in which the reader will find an acknowledgement of a selection of the most prominent published literature in the field of the topic of the present thesis. The literature review will be followed by the choice of literature creating the theoretical framework for the thesis, and hence completes the methodological chapter.

The reader will notice that the empirical data is presented in advance of the presentation of the theoretical framework. This order of elements is based on the choice of method applied to the thesis. Since all but the identity analysis is led by an inductive approach, and hence takes its point of departure in empirical data, the reader is presented to the empirical data before moving on to the choice of theoretical framework.

Having been presented with the choice and purpose of the theory, the reader will be presented with the applied theory. The theory is applied as singled out elements of the given theorist's or author's larger works, whilst staying respectful to the context which each part of the theory is written within.

With the presentation of the methods, empirical data and a theoretical framework, the reader will be entering the chapter of findings. This chapter includes a three-parted analysis where each analysis is

reciprocally contributing with findings to one another, with the larger and initial purpose of answering the overall research question. The first part of the analysis is set out to investigate how H&M defines its own identity. A definition needed to be able to analyse and understand the empirical data of the second and third part of the analysis. The second part of the analysis is concentrated with a comprehension of the consumers' reactions towards H&M's advertisement, while the third part is an analysis of H&M's subsequent choice of crisis communication. The findings of the three analyses will be discussed before a conclusion can be made. Below the reader will find a model structured in accordance to above guide, applied to help the reader through the different elements of the thesis.



Model 1. Reader's guide

2. Methodological Chapter

This chapter includes a presentation of the method applied throughout the thesis. The chapter is initialised with a definition of the present thesis as a product of a case study research and continues with a manifestation of the thesis' applied philosophies of science. The chapter will proceed with an introduction to applied research designs and collected empirical data. Finally, the chapter includes a literature review and a clarification of choice of theoretical framework. Each section of this chapter of the methodological approach, demonstrates the choices applied to answer each of the defining sub-questions and finally the overall research question.

2.1 Case Study Research Method

The present thesis is carried out as a case study research. I have chosen to investigate a social phenomenon by focusing on one specific case. The research question guiding this thesis is based on a social phenomenon which is not only relevant for the chosen case but can be transferred to any case implicated as part of the social phenomenon. In the present thesis, three defining sub-questions are defining the research question further, while relating it to the specific case. The case of this thesis evolves around H&M's choice of crisis communication based on its corporate identity and reactions from its stakeholders in a time of increasing focus on a growing outrage culture. The thesis is set out to discover why and how H&M decided to communicate in response to a crisis based on a certain topic of controversial perception of the company's product and advertisement of it. A topic which is not only relevant for H&M but has been seen in relation to several other companies in recent years, as presented in the introduction.

American scholar of mass communication Wilbur Schramm defines a case study research as follows: 'The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result' (Schramm 1971). Schramm's definition of the case study research reasons my choice of applying the method to the present thesis, as all three questions of decisions will be answered through my research question. I have chosen to apply the case study research method from a variety of other research methods as the thesis matches the conditions necessary for case studies. According to American social scientist Robert K. Yin, a case study research is the preferred method compared to others, in situations where '(1) the main research questions are "how" and "why" questions, (2), a researcher has little or no control over behavioural events, and (3) the focus of the case study is a contemporary (as opposed to an entirely historical) phenomenon.' (Yin 2014, 2). The present thesis

matches these three conditions for using a case study research as method. The research question framing the present thesis is asking *why* the outrage culture increases and *how* companies' choice of crisis communication affect this increase. Applying empirical data based on Twitter comments, I have as a researcher minimum control over the behavioural events. I have chosen which empirical data to include, but have not conducted interviews of any kind, which due to factors as leading questions and non-verbal communication could have affected the responses in my empirical data. Lastly, my thesis is written with the aim to investigate the increase of an outrage culture, and how a company such as H&M chose to adapt to the contemporary phenomenon which the outrage culture constitutes.

A further explanation of how the case study research has been carried out will be given in the following sections of the methodology chapter.

2.2 Philosophy of Science

The choice of scientific approaches establishes the framework in which the research question, the research design and the methodological approach is grounded. It surrounds the thesis and runs within every aspect of the investigations and conclusion made throughout the process. The scientific approaches framing the thesis are the one of social constructivism and hermeneutics. These approaches and their relevance for the thesis will be presented below.

2.2.1 Social Constructivism

The thesis has been set within the field of constructivism, and more specifically social constructivism. "Virtually everybody is a constructivist about *some* things. It's almost, universally believed that certain social facts – facts about social institutions, languages, social classes, governments, legal systems, economic systems and kinship systems – are what they are by virtue of our own actions beliefs and intuitions." (Kukla 2000, 24).

According to professor of psychology and philosophy André Kukla, the constructivist view believes that reality and all knowledge is subjective and created within the individual. Hence nothing is true, false or fixed reality. It is through our own individual beliefs, understanding, perspective and interpretation that everything is created. The difference and variation in our background, values, beliefs and norms, eventually generates different realities, depending on the individual who invents it (Kukla 2000, 1-4).

As the constructivist approach, the social constructivist approach reasons that the world is constructed by human perceptions and hence carries traces of its human derivation. Thus, the constructivist and

the social constructivist approach agree that no reality is more real or false, better or worse than any other, since it all depends on the eye of the beholder. However, the social constructivist approach differs from the constructivist, as it reasons that these perceptions from which our understanding of our world takes shape has been created by social inventions, constructed by humans to fit into our reality (Collin, Kjøppe 2014, 419).

One of the most prominent spokesmen of social constructivism, the American professor and psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen argues that the truth varies depending on who we are and how we understand, interpret and conceive the universe in which we live (1985, 266-275). By looking at the world from a social constructivist point of view, it is acknowledged that everything in the world is created by humans and thus not inherent in nature. Since everything is socially constructed by groups of individuals in a specific place and at a specific time, the constructions are never static. The social constructions that we as human create, are very much dynamic and continuously evaluated. This results in the idea that we must, can and shall, take a critical standpoint in the decision of whether the shape of the construction should be continued, changed or terminated (Collin, Kjøppe 2014, 420).

Both constructivist approaches are accepted and widely applied in the faculties of arts and social science. Yet, the approaches are criticised by some, especially practitioners of physics and social sciences who believe the approach to be too homocentric and argue that some things in the universe exist independent and detached from human interpretation (Sokal, Bricmont 1999). This argumentation suggests that laws of nature, and natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers and air are not phenomena constructed by human, but exist without human interaction. The application of the social constructivist approach to the present thesis is done with the realisation that universe and its natural phenomena continues to exist without human interference and social interpretations. However, the approach is applied with a realisation that the definitions, value and descriptions of these natural phenomena are constructed by human in social interactions, and thus its definitions are socially constructed and differentiated, dependant on its social context.

The social constructivist approach contains a historical element which unfolds in the realisation that all phenomena are contingent and reliant on the specific period in which they unfold (Collin, Kjøppe 2014, 421). An example of a socially constructed phenomena relevant for the present thesis is the development of a culture. A culture is collectively and socially constructed by the people who live it and is continuously developed and changed through time. A culture might be defined in a certain way

at one point in time but might be defined differently in another point in time. This development is collectively performed by the people who practice the culture by negotiating and agreeing on how the given culture might be defined, reconstructed and modified. Hence, time has a significant part in the way phenomena are shaped, and these phenomena's development correspond to the different ways that humans act, react and interact through time (Collin, K ppe 2014, 421). Another example of a social construction related to present thesis, is how opinions are created. Opinions about a given topic are created by human and are developed and redeveloped by groups of people and adjusted to a given time and space. These opinions are socially constructed through time, to fit into the reality each group of individuals finds themselves in. This construction does not apply to all groups but is correct and relevant to a given group of people.

A social constructivist approach is applied to the thesis as its focus is directed towards the creation of a so-called outrage culture as a socially created phenomenon. The thesis will be analysing themes as 'opinions', 'culture', 'perceptions', 'values' and 'strategies'. All themes which are but a few instances of socially constructed phenomena in the thesis.

The idea of the rising of a so-called outrage culture is, through a pair of social constructivist glasses, seen as a social construction of the time and space we find ourselves in. It is the social construction created by a group of people, defined, developed, redeveloped and eventually terminated or substituted through time. How we define right from wrong, what offends us, triggers us, or maybe does not influence us at all, depends on the settings we find ourselves in, our values, cultural background, history and upbringing, just to name a few relevant factors.

Furthermore, the social constructivist approach is seen in the applied method of this thesis and the collection of empirical data. The method applied to collect empirical data, is affected by the authors beliefs and views of the situation, her interest for the field and an understanding of the phenomena of this thesis. Hence, the selection of empirical data is influenced by the authors understanding of the world which the thesis is written within.

2.2.2 Hermeneutics

As grounded in the research question, the aim of this master thesis is to investigate the acts, opinions, behaviour and perspectives that creates an outrage culture, and moreover how companies react accordingly, and how this reaction affects the culture. To investigate the events surrounding an

outrage culture, it becomes evident to investigate the question of perspectives and interpretation of phenomena.

The essence of the hermeneutics is the interpretation of meaning, and hence the two central concepts of the approach are interpretation and meaning (Collin, K ppe 2014, 225).

In contrast to natural science and nature phenomena, meaning is found in the actions of human and the products of their activities. Meaning is hence found in human intentions and their expression of these through words and actions. According to the hermeneutic approach, all human activities are pointed toward a so-called “something”. To have an opinion is to have an opinion about “something”, to feel a certain way, is to feel a certain way about “something”, to talk is to talk about “something” to someone and to act is to do “something” to someone or something. Hence every activity performed by human has to do with this “something” (Collin, K ppe 2014, 226).

The other central concept of the hermeneutics is the interpretation and more specifically, the interpretation of meaning. The interpretation concept has in the hermeneutics a dual character. On the one hand, the interpretation can take its point of departure in the actual and situational message grounded in the messenger’s intentions, emotions, thoughts and feelings. The so-called “something as defined above. It is the interpretation of the single unit of the message or action, the “something” expressed by the individual, without context but only based on the situational perception of the action. On the other hand, the interpretation can take its point of departure in the context and the established background which the message or action is grounded in (Collin, K ppe 2014, 231). When trying to understand human messages and actions, we must according to the hermeneutic approach, be able to differ between these two forms of interpretation.

The hermeneutics are applied to the present thesis as an approach to reason the consequences of how a message is interpreted, be it as a single unit, or as part of the context which it is set within. More specifically, H&M’s advertisement can in the thesis be seen as the single unit of a message, while traces of history, H&M’s identity and the postmodern society can be seen as the message’s context which the message may be interpreted within. The thesis is hence concerned with the differences of interpretation and perceptions of the message as a unity and part of an entity and hence context.

Moreover, the hermeneutics are applied as a working method when conducting the thesis. The hermeneutics is characterised by the hermeneutic circle which symbolises the movement of understanding between single units of a message and the message in its entity (Collin, K ppe 2014,

232). The thesis is characterised by an empirical driven work process, and hence was initiated by an understanding of single units of empirical data, without much context for understanding the units as part of an entity. Coding the single units and collecting them in themes added context to the interpretation. A context which functioned as point of departure when more units were collected. Hence, the collection of empirical data, the coding of it and the application of a theoretical framework is characterised by a hermeneutic working process, as the author moves back and forth through an understanding of the single unit of the message, and a broader contextual understanding of the phenomenon of an outrage culture.

2.3 Research Design

The empirical data consists of images, quotes, statements and responses from websites and social media platforms, which analysed respectively and in connection to each other with relevant theory, will enable the answering of the research question. The analysis is parted in three and includes two methods of analysing the collected empirical data. The methods and the empirical data will be presented in this section of the methodological chapter.

2.3.1 Qualitative Data

The empirical data collected is determined as qualitative data (Saunders et al. 2016, 568). The data is collected and deselected by the author with the central aim to answer the research question and defining sub-questions.

To make sense of the choice of applying qualitative data, an introduction to this specific type of data is included. ‘Qualitative research is often associated with an interpretivist philosophy because researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed by those who take part in research about the phenomenon being studied.’ (Saunders et al. 2016, 568). In accordance with above quote by Saunders et al., the deliberate choice of including qualitative empirical data the research has been made, as the research question and social constructivist approach requires an analysis of people’s opinions and the socially constructed meanings formed by those involved in the case. The meanings, opinions and utterances applied as empirical data in the thesis is developed from social interaction on social media, influenced by events taking place in a specific time and place. Hence the qualitative data is affected by variety, flexibility and complexity (Saunders et al. 2016, 568).

In contrast to quantitative data which is based on numbers, qualitative data is based on words and images. These words and images are laden with meaning which differ and change depending on the

viewer, reader or interpreter (Saunders et al. 2016, 569). The research of the thesis is dependent on the utterances, opinions and views of a selection of people, from a specific culture, in a specific time and uttered on a specific platform.

As a researcher the I recognise my role as an interpreter. The interpretation of the qualitative data is affected by my attitude towards and opinion on my research topic. As an academic researcher, I must consider a reflexive objectivity and be aware and uttermost attentive not to include my own opinions and views in my research. However, my role as a human being, present in a given time and place will inevitably affect my collection of empirical data and my choice of coding and thematising. I must realise that other researchers may have chosen other sets of data or coding depending on his or her attitude and opinion on the given topic (Saunders et al. 2016, 586).

Since qualitative data is often collected in large, complex and non-standardised masses, it is necessary to apply a methodological research design to the analysis of the data. The research methods applied in present thesis will be introduced in the following section. Following, the applied methods of collecting and processing the empirical data will be explained, reasoned and applied.

2.3.2 Identity Analysis

The analysis of H&M's corporate identity is included to understand how H&M identifies itself. This understanding of H&M's identity will function as a basis for the analysis of the consumers' reactions to H&M's advertisement, as well as for the analysis of H&M's selected strategy of crisis communication.

The analysis is theory-driven as it is conducted by applying Jean-Nöel Kapferer's model of brand identity to H&M's website and its vision, values, culture and target group. Using a model to define H&M's identity functions as a guide to the collection of the empirical data and subsequently the conduction of the analysis.

2.3.2.1 Process of Data Collection

The data applied to define H&M's identity is collected from both its global corporate website; H&M Group and its American and British webshops. These platforms for data collection to define H&M's identity are chosen as the data is unmanipulated by other sources. Had other stakeholders' definition of the company's identity been applied, it might have been rephrased or paraphrased in a way that could have tangled with the understanding of H&M's identity.

The collection of the empirical data applied to analyse H&M's corporate identity is affected by a deductive approach, as it is led by the applied theory when collecting the empirical data for the research of H&M's identity. H&M's website and webshops are laden with information, and the theoretical framework hence functions as a guide to which information to collect when defining the company's corporate identity. When identifying a company's identity, it is according to the applied theory, essential to view the company's visions, values and business ideas. These elements are often found on the company's website. The website contains a great deal of information and communication about the H&M group, and at first glance, might seem confusing and overwhelming to extract a clear definition of the company's identity from. However, the theoretical framework led the collection of the data from which the identity was defined. Furthermore, parts of H&M's American and British webshops are applied. These two countries' webshops are chosen specifically, as parts of the analysis takes its point of departure in Twitter users from these two countries' reactions to H&M's advertisement. Hence, it was found relevant to focus on the webshops directed at this specific audience. The webshops do not hold much verbal communication about H&M's identity as the corporate website does, but it has been included due to its visual content which reflects the company's corporate personality (Kapferer 2004, 108). Furthermore, it is found relevant to include the two webshops, as these to a greater extent function as direct communication between H&M and its consumers than the companies corporate website. The American and British webshops are in many ways very similar to each other as they hold many of the same images, and the visual presentation is very much alike on the two pages. Hence, the two websites are not differed between when referred to but appear as one collected reference.

2.3.2.2 The Data

All the data collected from H&M's corporate website (H&M Group, n.d.) and its and US webshops British (H&M GB, n.d.), (H&M US, n.d.), are enclosed in appendix 2 and 3.

2.3.2.3 Data Processing

The data collected from H&M's corporate website and two webshops was inserted Kapferer's brand identity prism. The prism consists of six aspects, which together creates the company's identity. The collected data was fitted into these six aspects respectively with the aim to get a clear definition of H&M's corporate identity. This definition will be applied in the analysis of the consumers' response to H&M's advertisement as applied as case in this thesis, and in a later analysis of H&M's crisis response.

2.3.2.4 Criticism and Limitation of Applied Empirical Data

H&M's identity is defined from what could be found on its corporate website and two webshops and hence it is the exterior definition of the identity that has been applied to the analysis of the company. To further define the company's identity, an interview with H&M's marketing department could have been conducted. However, H&M's identity as the company's external definition of itself and how it desires to be perceived by the consumers was preferred, as this is the definition which is available to the consumers and not only the author of the thesis (Kapferer 2004, 98-99). An identification of H&M's corporate image has been left out, as the image is created by the receiver in accordance with his or her decoding of the signals send out by the brand through its identity, and hence is dependent on the decoder's perception (Kapferer 2004, 98-99).

2.3.3 Thematic Analysis

The purpose of a thematic analysis is to categorise the empirical data into a set of themes. The method can be applied to a wide array of qualitative data, including interviews, documents, websites, observations, speeches, articles etc. and is reliant on the researcher's coding of the qualitative data. The thematic analysis can be applied to both small and large amounts of qualitative data and can be used to identify key themes in an often widely varied and complex dataset. When having created the themes, it becomes possible to further explore the different thematizations with the application of relevant theory (Saunders et. al 2016, 580). The process of thematization will be explained below in the section 'Data Processing'.

2.3.3.1 Data Collection

Social media and the web 2.0 have increased immensely in recent years (Cornelissen 2014, 257), and the amount of social media platforms are multiplying and becoming a varied and multifaceted territory used by millions worldwide. The statistic portal 'Statista.com', shows the 20 most popular mobile social networking apps in the United States as of October 2018. According to the list, Facebook is the most popular app, followed by Instagram, Facebook Messenger and Twitter (Statista 2019).

When collecting empirical data from social media platforms, it is vital to choose a popular platform, used by a great number of people to ensure greater representation and variety in opinions, utterances and perspectives.

Had responses from a social media platform used only by a certain group of people in a certain community been applied, the empirical data would have been affected by a lack of variety, and hence

would lack representation and validity. Comments from the social media platform 'Twitter' has been applied. Twitter ranks number four on Statista's list of most popular social media platforms in the United States, and thus is not the most popular platform. However, Twitter was relevant to apply as it, out of the four (Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and Twitter), is the platform with the largest focus on written words. Facebook, which is the most popular social media app according to Statista's list, is defined as: '[...] a social networking website where users can post comments, share photographs and post links to news or other interesting content on the web, chat live, and watch short-form video.' (Lifewire 2019, Facebook). Instagram, which ranks number two, profiles itself as '[...] a free photo and video sharing app available on Apple iOS, Android and Windows Phone. People can upload photos or videos to our service and share them with their followers or with a select group of friends. They can also view, comment and like posts shared by their friends on Instagram' (Instagram. n.d.). Facebook Messenger ranks number three on the list. It is defined as '[...] a texting app for both one-on-one and group messaging, but it can also send images and video' (Lifewire 2019, Facebook Messenger). However, the contents on Facebook Messenger is not visible to users who do not take part in the chat, and hence is not possible, nor relevant to apply in the research.

From above it can be deduced that the two most popular platforms, Facebook and Instagram, are defined as platforms where users can share messages, images and videos. In contrary to these two, Twitter which is the fourth most popular app in the United States according to Statista's list is defined as '[...] an online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets. Tweeting is posting short messages for anyone who follows you on Twitter, with the hope that your messages are useful and interesting to someone in your audience' (Lifewire 2019, Twitter). From above definitions of the four social media platforms, it becomes clear that Twitter is the one of the three platforms which primarily focuses on the written word. As the research question and defining sub-questions focus on people's reactions towards H&M through social media, it is found more accessible to focus on the written words, compared to images or videos. Nevertheless, the author is aware of the possibility of including images and videos in the analysis and as part of the empirical data. Yet, the choice to exclude such process has been made, as it would have been a complex and time-consuming procedure, and an unnecessary element to answering the research question.

The empirical data which takes shape of Twitter comments is collected from American and British Twitter profiles. The choice to collect data from these two countries has been made for several reasons. The firsts of these are the language aspects. The present thesis is written within the academic

studies of the English language and international business communication. Hence, the focus of the studies is the English language in communication. Secondly, H&M initially advertised the hoodie on its British website (Grafton-Green 2018), and thus it is found relevant to analyse the specific target audience's responses to the advertisement. The author is aware that H&M's British webshop is far from limited to the British audience. However, one must realise that the British webshop is targeted at a British audience and thus the choice of partly focusing the analysis on Twitter responses and comments from this specific target group has been made. Thirdly, responses from Twitter users from the United States is included. One could argue that responses from this country are not relevant to analyse since the hoodie was not advertised in an American webshop. However, the hermeneutical approach framing the present thesis initialised an understanding of the problematics surrounding the issue. Reading articles and Twitter comments concerning the advertisement, presented an initial indication that the issue of racism had much to do with people's reaction towards H&M. Racism is found everywhere around the globe, suggesting that the research did not have to be limited to one specific country. However, racism against dark-skinned individuals, and the usage of the word "monkey" to describe people of a darker skin-tone has a particular history in the US pointed towards Afro-Americans (cf. the present thesis' definition of culture). Directed by the empirical data, the research question and research questions could only be answered if the research was directed towards the Western world's development of an outrage culture. In combination with focus on racism it was evident to focus on responses from a Western world with a pervasive slave and racist culture, namely The United States.

Because the initial wonder and later research question is very much led by empirical data in contrast to a theoretical framework, the collection of empirical data initialised the process of writing the present thesis. In practise, the collection was carried out by entering Twitter and searching for Tweets which had to do with an outrage towards H&M and the specific case of the thesis. Searching for Tweets on Twitter is done by searching for specific hashtags. To get a general collection of empirical data which had not been too affected by any preceding understanding of the case, basic and case-specific hashtags were applied initially. These hashtags are the following:

#coolestmonkeyinthejungle

#CoolestMonkey

#H&M

#Hm

#hoodie

#hmhoodie

These hashtags led to a collection of Tweets, which then included further hashtags. The new hashtags found in the collected Tweets reflected more emotion towards the case, than the hashtags listed above, implying that words as “racism”, “racist” and “boycott” was included in the new set of hashtags. The new hashtags were applied in the search for more Tweets about the case. Doing so, directed the empirical data collection through a hermeneutic work process, and hence presented different perceptions of the case which later directed the coding and thematization of the collected data.

The second group of hashtags, drawn from the initial application of hashtags, are the following:

#boycotthm

#H&Mracism

#hmracism

#hmracist

The application of all the above hashtags resulted in a collection of Twitter comments which functions as a set of empirical data, relevant for answering the research question. The above reasons behind the data collection support the choice of empirical data which will be presented in following section.

2.3.3.2 The Data

All the data collected from the social media platform Twitter, is enclosed in appendix 4.

2.3.3.4 Data Processing

The data is processed by conducting a coding which subsequently is thematised. The purpose of this process is to organise the data and make it accessible for further analysis. Thematising the applied empirical data, makes it much more comprehensible when theory is to be applied in an analysis of the data (Saunders et. al 2016, 580).

It is important to note that the process of performing a thematic analysis is not a linear and chronological process but a hermeneutic working process which takes the researcher back and forth through collected data, new data, themes, codes and connections. Once a dataset is collected and coded, new data can easily be collected, and new codes allotted accordingly. Hence, the process is

characterised by the hermeneutics where interpretation and understanding are obtained in the process of going back and forth from unity to entirety (Collin, K ppe 2014, 232).

Having collected a set of empirical data, the data must be coded to categorise parts of the data which has comparable meanings. The codes are allotted to the individual units of the data and can be small phrases or single words, describing the essence of the individual unit. The units can be made of everything from a few words, one or several sentences, longer paragraphs as well as images or parts of videoclips (Saunders et. al 2016, 580). When coding the units, it is allowed to both overlap more units as well as use more than one code for each unit (Saunders et. al 2016, 580). When two units seem to have the same meaning, they should both be marked with the same code. If data has a meaning which has not yet been used as a code, a new code for this specific meaning must be invented (Saunders et al 2016, 580).

The amount of data which should be coded, depends on the research questions and the research approach, and whether an inductive or deductive method is applied. When applying an entirely inductive approach, it is natural that all included data is coded. It is the data which leads the researcher's search for meaning and guide her in the direction of a theory. When applying an entirely deductive method, it is the applied theory and resent studies that guides the researcher in which codes to apply (Saunders et. al 2016, 582). According to Saunders et al., using strictly one or the other of these two approaches may cause trouble and difficulties, and be waste of valuable time. Hence, a mixed approach may be preferred (2016, 582). As the thematic analysis is set out to analyse how the Twitter users react towards H&M in the specific case, the analysis will be characterised as led by the empirical data. Hence, a deductive method is the main approach in the thematic analysis and thus all the collected data has been coded. Meanwhile, the thesis in its entity is characterised by the use of mixed approaches.

When choosing which codes to allot to the different units of data, the method of coding 'in Vivo' has been applied, as the data is coded from actual terms used by the writers of the applied comments (Saunders et al. 2016, 582). The choice of coding in vivo has been made, as the purpose of the research question is to investigate and research how H&M fitted its crisis communication strategy as a response to the comments on Twitter. Hence it was important for the ability to answer the research question, that the analysis was data-driven and thus not led by applied theory. To grasp the situation and be able to understand and analyse the reasons behind the outrage, an investigation of the Twitter user's own perception of the situations and utterance about it had to be conducted. Had the data been

coded from predetermined theory, it might not have been possible to pinpoint the reasons behind the outrage as the author would solely have been looking for utterances matching the applied theory. When coding, it was made clear that many of the comments held more than one code. Hence, some of the comments have been allotted two codes. This results in situations where one comment which is coded with two or more codes, appears as material for two or more different themes. As the coding is carried out by the author alone it was evident to search validation of the choice of coding, from outside sources (Kvale, Brinkmann 200, 50-52) Hence, a fellow student was confronted to validate the choice of the codes allotted to the data. As soon as the coding was externally validated, the process could continue. The list of comments with applied codes is enclosed in appendix 4 and can furthermore be reviewed in below model of codes and themes (model 2).

2.3.3.5 Applied Codes and Themes

Having conducted the coding, the data was thematised. The themes were created by reviewing the codes and searching for patterns and relationships between these. According to Saunders et al, each theme is often made from several codes which in one way or the other relates to each other (2016, 585). This created a condensed list of themes ready to be analysed with adequate theory (Saunders et al. 2016, 584). The themes were created by grouping the codes by their meaning. An example of such grouping would be the codes “They knew it was wrong”, “Someone at H&M’s idea” and “They let it happen”. These codes have a meaning in common, suggesting that H&M made the advertisement as an act to intentionally cause stir, harm or provoke a group of people. The codes have been collected under the common theme “Intentional Act” as the codes derive from users who think that H&M has acted intentionally to harm someone, opposed to the advertisement as being a mistake. Below, the reader will find a model of the five themes made from the condensed codes. The left side of the model presents the themes, while the right side of the model presents the codes which make up each of the five themes.

Racism and Division

- Racism (1, 3, 8, 17, 19, 28, 29, 32)
- Black against white (19,)
- H&M is against one race (24)

Boycott H&M

- Everyone should boycott H&M (3, 29)
- Will stop working with H&M (6)

Intentional Act

- They knew it was wrong (4, 32)
- Teamed up with racist designers (8)
- Someone at H&M's idea (10)
- They let it happen (12)
- Not a mistake (13)
- Why did noone question it in the process/realise that it was wrong? (16, 20, 21)

An Unintentional Act

- Did not think it through (7)
- Inappropriate but not intentional (14)
- unintentional but stupid (27)
- Missed the mark (30)

H&M is innocent

- Just a hoodie (2, 18)
- H&M had no harming intention (5, 11)
- Monkey is not a bad word (15, 22, 25, 31)
- The problem is created by those who thinks it is racist (9, 22, 23, 25)

Model 2. The five themes and their respective codes.

2.3.3.6 Criticism and Limitation of Applied Empirical Data

It is relevant for the research design and the criticism of it that it is conducted within the social constructivist approach. It is the author as a researcher who has chosen which data to analyse, which codes to apply to the chosen data and which themes to draw from the applied codes. Hence, the author must take on a reflexive objectivity and realise that a certain understanding of the phenomenon, in this case H&M's crisis communication in an outrage culture, is affecting the selection of research question, coding, thematising and theoretical framework. Any other researcher might have chosen other units of data than the ones applied in the present thesis and might have coded them in a different way. Furthermore, another researcher might have created more, less or different themes resulting in a different analysis.

The empirical data in the present research design is limited to only consist of data collected through Twitter, and only focus on American and British responses. Empirical data from more than these two countries could have been added to conduct a cultural comparative analysis of the answers from different countries. Such initiative would have been suitable for another research question than the one guiding this thesis.

2.3.4 Analysis of H&M's Crisis Communication

The final part of the analytic chapter is conducted as an analysis of H&M's applied strategy of crisis communication. This analysis will be carried out by analysing the crisis response which H&M posted on its Twitter profile on the 9th January 2018. The response will be analysed with relevant theory to understand which strategy H&M applied in the crisis, and why it might have chosen the specific strategy. An analysis of other relevant strategies for H&M to apply, and which effect this might have had will be conducted by including the findings from above analyses of H&M's identity and the consumers' responses to the advertisement. The analysis is concluded with a discussion of how H&M's crisis communication strategy might affect and be affected by society and the ongoing outrage culture.

2.3.4.1 Process of Data Collection

The collection of the empirical data applied to analyse H&M's crisis response is affected by an inductive approach, and hence guided by the specific situation of the case. The empirical data consisting of the crisis response is thus collected and subsequently subjected to the application of relevant theory.

The data for the present research design consists of H&M's response to the crisis as posted on Twitter on the 9th January 2018. From several articles read in preparation for the writing of the thesis (Stack 2018) it was discovered that H&M had been responding to the crisis on several social media platforms, including Twitter. The apology was found on Twitter and is included as part of the thesis' empirical data.

2.3.4.2 The Data

H&M's response as posted on its Twitter profile on the 8th January 2018¹, is enclosed in appendix 5, and can be found in its original form on H&M's Twitter profile (Twitter 9th, January 2018).

2.3.4.3 Data Processing

The response was analysed by applying theory selected to deduce which strategy the company had applied when constructing its response. Coombs' theory on crisis communication and a definition of different strategies was applied to the empirical data. Different aspects of the crisis response were investigated in accordance with Coombs' different aspects of crisis communication. This analysis supplied an indication of which strategy H&M had chosen to apply and why H&M might have chosen to apply this exact strategy. Furthermore, it created a base for investigating the use of other possible strategies, which will be applied in a subsequent discussion of the findings throughout the analyses.

2.3.4.4 Criticism and Limitation of Applied Empirical Data

H&M send out more than one response on several different media platforms. However, the deliberate choice of only focusing on its response on Twitter has been made, as it corresponds with the collection of consumers' responses from Twitter. Hence, Twitter is the focal platform of the analysis and the Twitter users are the target group for the response. Therefore, it is only relevant to apply the response targeted towards them.

2.4 Literature Review

The theme of the present master thesis is set in the cross-field of outrage culture and crisis communication, and hence the literary field can be viewed as parted in two. On one side the field of crisis communication is found, while a cultural dimension is added as the arena in which the crisis communication takes place. A cultural dimension which, in this thesis, is grounded in the phenomenon of a developing outrage culture in a Western world. The following literature review will

¹ Please notice that due to cross-Atlantic time difference, the Twitter comment is dated as having been posted on the 9th January 2019.

follow the structure of the thesis, and thus, it will be initiated by a review of literature in the field of outrage culture followed by a review of the field of crisis communication.

2.4.1 Outrage Culture

When reviewing the field of literature on the phenomenon of outrage culture, it becomes clear that this is a field of studies which has not been investigated much. The literature on the subject mainly consists on online articles and YouTube videos defining the expression and discussing the rise of it in the last decade. In 2014, the daily online magazine Slate.com brought the article “The Year of Outrage” which included a calendar showing all the times Americans had been outraged in the media in 2014. The article made points on how the endless number of outrages towards one thing after the other has affected our capability to focus on the problems and is causing what the author refers to as a “numbing effect” (Turner 2014). In line with Slate’s article, the American online newspaper Los Angeles Times, brought an article on the 22th of February 2019 titled “Outrage culture is out of control” (Rommelmann 2019). The article suggest that the outrage culture is rising ‘[...] because we need that next hit, we need it right now. Being in a constant state of emergency — a condition in which people notoriously make terrible decisions — is like having a fire raging inside the body, one that needs to be fed. It needs new fuel, and so we seek new enemies’ (Rommelmann 2019). Since the field of literature of outrage culture is still a narrow one, and theory has yet to be written on the phenomenon, one must look towards neighbouring fields to be able to investigate the theme. From the definition of the outrage culture as constructed by authors of mentioned articles and applied in the introduction of the present thesis, it is made clear that it is concerned with individuals’ disposal of their anger towards other individuals, groups and institutions. Furthermore, as presented in the introduction, it is often seen in connection with individuals’ outrage towards companies who in the outraged individual’s opinion have acted in a wrong manner. From the definition, it is furthermore made clear that the outrage culture as a term is a rather new phenomenon having its rising period in the last five to ten years, and that much of the outrage culture takes its point of departure on social media platforms. Defining the phenomena of an outrage culture makes it possible to review literature which can be applied to investigate the reasons to this rising of a culture which is yet to subjected to a theoretical framework. Giddens’ theory of the individual in a postmodern society (1991) has therefore been applied to the thesis, as a tool to investigate the consumers’ reason to direct such vast and constant amounts of anger towards the larger institutions, namely companies as seen in the present thesis. Furthermore, with his works “Risk Society towards a New Modernity”, first published in 1986, Ulrich Beck presents an earlier focus on the individualisation of a modern society where

topics as boycott's, consumer behaviour and an immense increase in the individuals' choices are focal points in Beck's works. Focal points which can be put into perspective with the present society's development of an outrage culture, and the individuals' encounter with the institutions.

The definition of the outrage culture focuses on the effect of social media, and how the online platforms create a safe and shielded forum for the individual to express opinions on every aspect of the society which it finds outrageous in one way or the other. A vast amount of literature on the effect which social media has on interpersonal communication has been written. Danish associate Professor of digital design, culture and communication Lisbeth Klastrup writes about our increasing communication via social media platforms, and how our presence on these platforms affect our identity and social lives. Klastrup writes about our ability to "hide" behind our digital screens, and the effect this has on our social performance (Klastrup 2016). Our social performance and the absence of a face-to-face encounter in interpersonal communication plays a major part in Erving Goffman's works 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (Goffman 2008), first published in 1956. Although written in a time without traces of social media, Goffman's works are still relevant in a social media landscape where our face-to-face communication is replaced by social media-based communication. This thesis acknowledges the social media-based communication's relevance for an outrage culture but deselected it as main focus.

2.4.2 Crisis Communication

The literary field of crisis communication is vast and varied, and different theories reflect the ambiguous ways of understanding the field. This ambiguousness becomes obvious when looking for a clear definition of the term, and thus the many perceptions is reflected in the great amount of theory on the subject. However, four main scholars stand out when reviewing its literary sources. American scholar in political communication William Benoit developed the Image repair theory (IRT) which views crisis communication as the art of protecting the company's image throughout a crisis (Benoit 2015). In his theory, Benoit introduces a set of five main crisis response strategies that the companies could apply during a crisis, all with the core aim to protect and repair the corporate image (Benoit 2015). Recent time's increased focus on social mediated communication has brought focus on the online landscape's communication when it comes to crises evolving in different online arenas. In their work 'Social Media and Crisis Communication', Lucinda Austin and Yan Jin present the Social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model, which demonstrates how crises occur on social media, and supply a selection of strategies which the company in crisis may benefit from applying

(Austin & Jin 2018). The third major scholar of crisis communication is the trio Jin, Pang and Cameron. The trio developed the integrated crisis mapping (ICM); a crisis communication model which put great focus on the stakeholder's emotional journey in crises (Yin, Pang & Cameron 2012). One of the most prominent scholars of crisis communication theory is however, professor of communications Timothy Coombs, who, with his situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), theorises on crises as a matter of perception rather than reality (Coombs's 2015). In contrast to IRT, which is very much focused on the company's image and how it copes during a crisis, SCCT focuses on the stakeholders' perception of the crisis and how to communicate with the stakeholders according to their perceptions. In his theory, Coombs offers a selection of crisis management strategies and how to apply these according to the situational crisis (2015). This focus on perceptions makes Coomb's theory relevant to apply in the present thesis, as stakeholder perceptions is one of the main foci of the thesis' research question.

Having reviewed the literary fields of the themes of the thesis, the choice of applied theory will be presented in the following section.

2.5 Choice of Theory

This section of the methodological chapter is developed with the intention of giving the reader a comprehension of the theoretical choices in this thesis. The chapter will give the reader a brief presentation of each theory applied, succeeded by an explanation of how the given theory contributes to answering the overall research question.

The analytical chapter is initiated with an analysis of H&M's brand identity, including an analysis of the brand's values, culture and target group. To comprehend how H&M defines its identity Jean-Nöel Kapferer's theory on brand identity, and more specifically, his brand identity prism, will be applied to the collected data. Kapferer's brand identity prism will guide the analysis of H&M's identity, when reviewing the company's values, culture and target group. Analysing H&M's identity and how it positions itself will function as foundation for the analysis of the reactions towards H&M's advertisement, and H&M's subsequent choice of crisis communication.

The second part of the analytical chapter is an analysis of the reactions towards H&M's advertisement on its British website. The reactions constituting of Twitter comments were coded is themed. Subsequently, each theme is analysed individually with relevant theory, enabling a comprehension of the problems and complexity each theme. British sociologist Anthony Giddens' theory on identity and the reflexive self in a modern society has been applied to the analysis of the themes. His theory

is applied to enable an analysis of why the consumers who commented on Twitter might react in the way they did, and how their reactions may be part of the increasing outrage culture. Giddens' theory has been chosen and applied as part of a selective process. Hence, only those parts of his theory which could be applied to analyse consumer behaviour and individualism in a postmodern society have been applied. The analysis is focused on the outrage culture in a Western world, and Giddens' theory on the postmodern individual and more specifically the postmodern consumer, supplies an analytical tool to investigate the reasons to the consumers' outrage with H&M. Questions as; "does H&M limit the postmodern individuals' choices?" and "how does H&M's identity fit or misfit with a postmodern consumer's creation of the self-narrative?" can be posed and tried answered with the application of Giddens' theory.

David Wall's theory on advertising and stereotyping has been applied, as presented in his article 'It Is and It Isn't: Stereotypes, Advertising and Narrative', as published in the journal 'Popular culture' in 2012. Wall's theory on the use of intentional and unintentional stereotyping in advertising will be applied to the analysis of the reactions to the advertisement. Wall writes about the process of creating advertisements and how stereotypes are applied to create narratives. He writes about the numerous, albeit limited ways of interpreting an advertisement depending on cultural background and perspective and argues that no image or advertisement is neutral. Wall's theory is applied to gain an understanding of the reactions collected from the outraged consumers. His theory will be used solely to analyse the consumers' reactions to H&M's behaviour, thus not to analyse H&M's thoughts behind the image.

The last part of the analytical chapter is an analysis of H&M's response to the outrage through its choice of applied crisis communication. H&M's crisis communication will be analysed by applying Timothy Coombs' SCCT.

This last part of the analysis includes the findings of the two above analyses. Hence, it analyses H&M's chosen strategy of crisis communication based on its brand identity and the consumers' reactions to the crisis. Coombs' theory will work as an analytical tool to comprehend why H&M applied the specific strategy in the given situation and suggest which other strategies the company might have applied. The three-parted analysis will be joined in a discussion leading to a conclusion and a final answer of the overall research question.

3. Applied Theory

The chapter of applied theory presents the theory applied to conduct the respective analyses. The theory is applied as parts of greater works, while remaining respectful to the contexts which it is taken from.

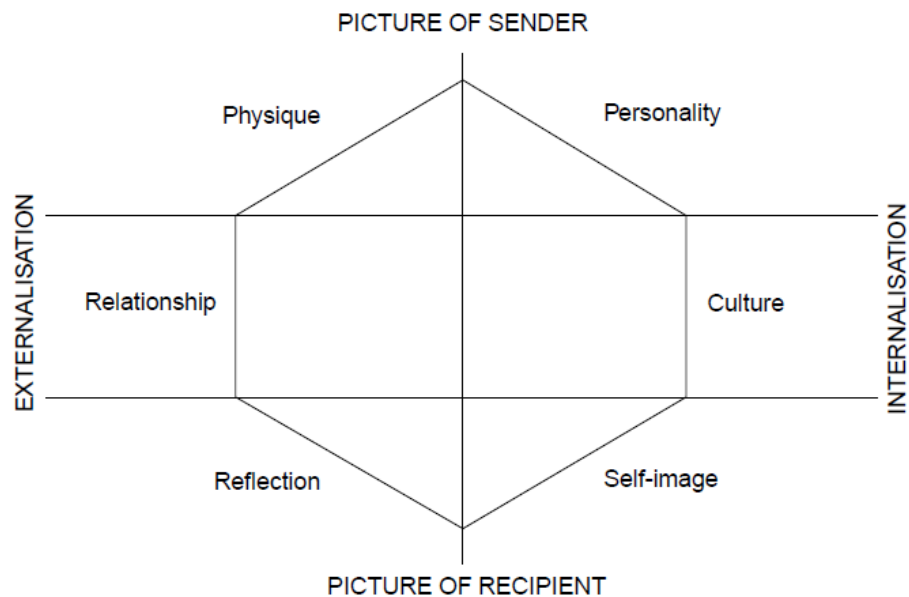
3.1 Jean-Nöel Kapferer's Brand Identity

'Defining what a brand is made of helps answer many questions that are asked every day, such as: [...] Does the advertising campaign suit the brand? [...] how can the brand change its communication style, yet remain true to itself?'. Kapferer argues that above questions and questions like them, must be answered in accordance with the brand's identity to stay true to what it is and what it stands for (Kapferer 2004, 95).

Kapferer points out that brand identity must be distinguished from brand image (2004, 98). Where brand identity is the company's own definition of itself, the brand image is created on the receiver's side and is made from the way a certain group of people views the brand. It is created from the recipients' decoding of the signals send out by the brand. Identity on the other hand, is on the sender's side, and is created from the specification of the brand's meaning, purpose and self-image (Kapferer 2004, 98-99). With its identity, a brand emits a certain image, but the identity is also made from external factors, which Kapferer refers to as noises. One of these noises can stem from a company's obsession to be like its competitors and completely neglecting or forgetting about its own identity, and instead does as its competitors do, because they seem to be "doing something right". Furthermore, noise can come from a company's desirability to please each existing target group. Hence, the company puts immense focus on coming off as appealing as possible to meet all consumers' expectations without exception (Kapferer 2004, 99). Kapferer argues that this behaviour, almost always ends up with the brand getting caught in a habit of always having to please the consumer (2004, 99). Because consumer preferences are such a mixed and varied territory, which never stagnates but evolves and changes constantly, the brand will have difficulties resting in one core identity. Everything it does, suddenly seems affected and unreal 'It becomes a mere façade, a meaningless cosmetic camouflage.' (Kapferer 2004, 99).

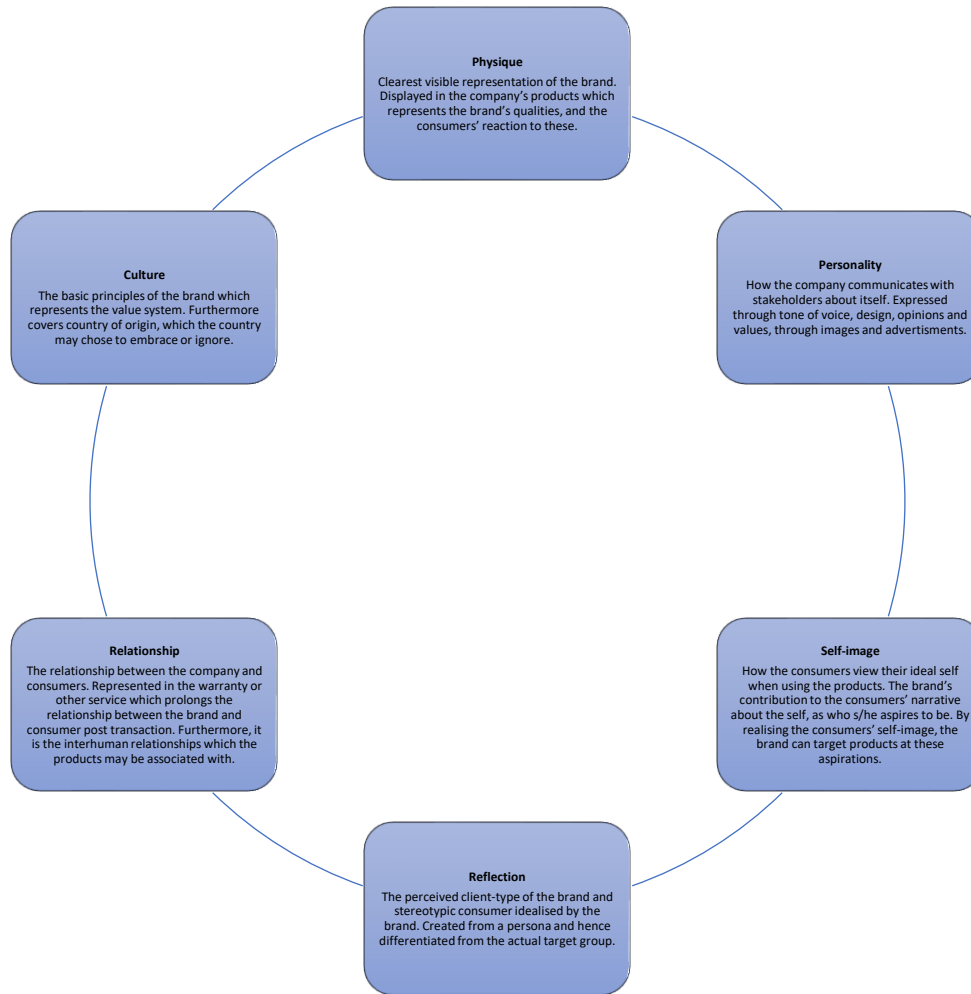
To avoid this noise from affecting the brand's identity and perceived image, it is according to Kapferer vital that the brand defines its own identity and sticks to it in every aspects of its doings (2004, 106). In 1992, Kapferer introduced his Brand Identity Prism; a tool to help brands determine

their identities and stick to it in any given situation. The model takes shape of a hexagonal prism with six different aspects of the brand's identity.



Model 3: Kapferer's Brand Identity prism (2004, 107)

On the left side of the prism, Kapferer places a brand's physical dimension, including products, actual consumers and target groups, and the relationship between a brand and its consumers. On the right side of the prism, Kapferer places the brand's emotional dimension, representing a brand's and its consumers perceived idea of the brand and its culture (2004, 111). Each part of the prism is further clarified in below model (model 4).



Model 4. Clarification of Kapferer's Brand identity Prism

When defined and applied in connection with each other, the six dimensions of Kapferer's prism, create a strong and clear brand identity. The prism defines the boundaries which, according to Kapferer, are free to change and develop to fit the brand's own development and the society and culture which surrounds it (2004, 111). All parts of the prism are interrelated to create the brand identity and is very much developed from the mindset that all brands only exist if they communicate, both internally and externally. The brand identity prism facilitates this communication by creating a visual sender and receiver. The sender represented by the brand, its key products, culture and values, and the receiver represented by the target group and its self-image. Having defined the sender and receiver of the brand's communication, the brand is able to use its identity as communication channel to create its desired image in its consumers' perception (Kapferer 2004, 111).

3.2 Anthony Giddens and the Postmodern Consumer

In his piece 'Modern Society and Self-identity' Giddens titles the recent time as 'Late-modernity' and not 'Postmodernity' as the more popularly used name. He does so, with the argument that we have not moved away from modernity, but just developed within it (Gauntlett 2008, 104). When applying the terms modern and late modern society, it is necessary for the comprehension to examine the definition of these terms and where they stem from.

3.2.1 The Development of a Modern Society

Giddens refers to the time before modernity as a pre-modern society, a traditional society or a traditional and pre-modern culture (Gauntlett 2008, 104). "The idea that each person has a unique character and special potentialities that may or may not be fulfilled is alien to pre-modern culture" (Giddens 1991, 74). Giddens suggests that in pre-modern culture, the individual's path through life was relatively fixed and predestined, dependant on the traditions and norms set out by institutional processes (1991, 74-75). This left the individual relatively passive when it came to evaluating and considering options in life. Customs, norms, traditions and habits carried out by institutional systems were to determine the path of the individual's life. Imitating the processes and choices of the ones that walked the paths before, made it irrelevant to consider other actions, paths or choices (Gauntlett 2008, 104). According to Giddens, the modern society is characterised by a society where people are much less concerned with traditions, lifepaths and customs of earlier generations (Gauntlett 2008, 104).

3.2.2 The Reflexive Individual in Modern Society

'[...] The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the globe, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options' (Giddens 1991, 5).

Moving from the traditional to a post-traditional or modern culture, Giddens argues that the individual has started to negotiate its own lifestyle among a wide array of choices and options of who to be and how to act (1991, 70). The individual has been "set free" from earlier traditions, and now has an option to choose as it likes, according to a desired lifestyle.

One of Giddens' major centres of attention in his theory on modernity and self-identity is the self-identity and the individual's reflexive awareness in a post-modern society. This topic is of particularly

great relevance to the thesis, when it comes to analysing consumer behaviour and possible reasons to our actions and reactions in an outrage culture.

'In the settings of what I call 'high' or 'late' modernity – our present day world – the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities' (Giddens 1991, 3). Above quote reflects Giddens' argument that the individual's self and personality is made reflexively. In a post-modern society, the individual's life path is no longer predestined to be carried out in a certain way. Hence, it is the individual itself who must make all the choices of who it wants to be and how it wants to act in everyday situations as well as in a grander scheme. This reflexivity is very contrary to the former traditional society, where copying traditional trails of what had been, eliminated the individual's own choosing. Now, instead of looking to previous lifepaths, the individual is looking inward, when creating the self, more than letting previous traditions rule how it should be done. As Giddens states, this choosing of lifestyle and everything within it, is to be done from a complex and extremely wide selection of possibilities and options. By this quote, one can sense that it might not be an easy task to choose one's own lifestyle between such vivid and varied choices.

Furthermore, in above quote, Giddens clarifies that while the individual must be reflexively made, so must the broader institutional contexts in which the individual exists (1991, 3). This broader institutional context which Giddens refer to, covers everything from the government, laws, companies, the state, globalisation etc. Giddens argues that the individual and the institutional contexts must not be seen as two separate independent sections but is realised as upholding mutual dependence when it comes to a reflexive making (1991, 16). Albeit, the individual has gained much more independence in the creation of its own lifestyle, it is succumbed to a set of laws, rules and regulations set out by the institutions which it finds itself in. Likewise, the society, state and institutions within, must reflexively create and recreate itself, in line with the demands set out by the groups of individuals living in it. Hence, the relationship between the individual and the institutional contexts which it finds itself in, is dependent and succumbed to fit each other's laws, rules, expectations and needs. Only when every aspect of a society is reconsidered, and its construction re-evaluated, then it can be referred to as truly post-modern. (Giddens 1991, 3).

3.2.3 A Dynamic Process

“One of the most obvious characteristics separating the modern era from any other period preceding it is modernity’s extreme dynamism’ (Giddens 1991, 16).

According to Giddens, the creation of the self and the individual’s preferred lifestyle is characterised by dynamism. The job of creating the self, both when it comes to the individual and the institutions of the state, is a never-ending ongoing process. Neither is it ever fully completed or finished, as new things to consider, evaluate, chose, or deselect always will occur (Giddens 1991, 16). The flow of new initiatives, discoveries, life views, perceptions and realisations never seize, thus neither does our reflecting upon them. The process of reflecting upon and evaluating how all these new initiatives fit into our lifestyle becomes a dynamic and never-ending process.

‘What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (Giddens 1991, 70).

In above quote, Giddens clarifies that this reflection upon our self is not limited to grander questions of life but is an implemented part of our day-to-day life and the minor decisions within this. The reflectivity is not only applied to major decisions, concerning moral and etic approaches to life, where to live and who to marry. Decisions on how to act in daily situations, where to shop and how to react to different scenarios in the daily life are also a part of this creation of the self.

What to do, how to act and who to be, are questions which we in our day-to-day life answer over and over again, and the ‘correct’ answers to these questions are chosen to fit the lifestyle, we as individuals see ourselves living.

Giddens makes sure to clarify that no culture, traditional or not, is completely without choices in day-to-day affairs (1991, 80), but in pre-modern cultures and societies, the set of options are relatively limited within fixed frames. In contrary, modern and post-modern societies provide an extensive and complex set of choices with not much foundation or help of what to choose (Giddens 1991, 80).

When choosing, Giddens argues that we as individuals have an idea of which direction we want our life to go in, and to create this certain aspired to lifestyle, we have no choice but to choose. ‘A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embrace, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ (Giddens 1991, 81).

When choosing, we do so to create a certain narrative about our own lives. The purpose of our choosing is not only to fulfil daily needs (as to dress in the morning to avoid going to work naked, or eat when we are hungry), but also to tell certain stories about ourselves. We are the narrators of our own life, and everything we do must be given material form to comply with this narrative.

Giddens argues that the lifestyle chosen are made from routinised practises. We do not necessarily make a deliberate and well-considered choice each time we go to the supermarket and grab an organic bottle of milk over a non-organic one, but these minor options are made into everyday routines. Routines which fit into our aspired lifestyle and the narrative we wish to create. However, Giddens states that these routines are never fixed or static but are always '[...] open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self-identity' (1991, 81). Because new possibilities, options, viewpoints, discoveries, development in science, brands and products etc. are constantly emerging, we can never be set in our routines, but are forced to dynamically consider and reconsider our routines and choices (Giddens 1991, 81). Hence, Giddens' theory is very much in line with the application of a social constructive perspective and the realisation that nothing is set or given, right or wrong, and everything we know must be eternally evaluated to fit into our perspectives and lifestyles.

Giddens' theory on post-modernity and self-identity supplies the thesis with a theoretical foundation when analysing the responses which H&M received from its advertisement.

3.3 David Wall on Stereotyping, Advertising and Narratives

“Part of the powerful dynamic of the visual image – especially within the context of advertising and political campaigning – is its amenability to multivalent readings” (Wall 2008, 1034).

In his piece “It Is and It Isn't: Stereotypes, Advertising and Narrative” David Wall writes about the interpretation of advertisements and argues that visual images and advertisements are unique in their ability to be comprehended and read in multiple ways. Wall argues that we must look beyond the understanding that an image can only mean either one thing or another, and that only one interpretation of a given advertisement or image is the “correct” one. In contrary, images can be understood in a multiple set of ways, and often it has more than one meaning at the same time (Wall 2008, 1035). Wall argues that the comprehension of an image or advertisement is very much affected by the receiver's personal background based on factors including but not limited to race, nationality, gender and age (2008, 1035). However, Wall argues that just because there are various ways of understanding an image and because the interpretation of the image depends on the readers

background, we must not conclude that all interpretations of an image are equally valid (Wall 2008, 1035).

According to Wall, there are indeed always several ways in which an image can be interpreted, and the interpretation depends on the reader and his or her background. However, the amount of ways in which the image can be interpreted are not unlimited and endless. There are only a limited set of ways of which an interpretation makes sense. An example linked to present thesis could be an interpretation H&M's advertisement, as an anti-vaccine campaign. Such reading would not make sense, no matter which cultural, social or historical context the reader would interpret the image within.

In his theory, Wall argues that because there are only a limited set of ways in which an image can be interpreted, advertisers should most likely have been aware of the different ways of reading the given image (2008, 1043).

“It seems almost inconceivable that, as the poster was going through its various committees and boardrooms and onto mock-up stages and final approvals, no one made the connection. Or maybe the connection was made. Perhaps questions were asked and then dismissed” (Wall 2008, 1034). In above quote, Wall refers to a campaign poster from the 2005 British general election, causing heaps of outrage for its controversial display of two political candidates. Wall argues that it is highly unlikely that, when creating the posters, the different possible interpretations of it were overlooked. Had there not been a limited set of ways of which the poster could have been interpreted, it would make sense to argue that it would be impossible for advertisers to consider all ways of interpretation. However, because the number of possible interpretations is limited, it would be strange if these were not thought of at some point in the process of creating the poster (Wall 2008, 1034).

Furthermore, Wall writes that just because an advertisement or image might only have been meant as a joke, or meant to be interpreted in one specific way, the fact that it can be interpreted or understood in other ways cannot be excluded. In fact, this only adds to the idea that the interpretation of the image or advertisement has more than one valid way of reading it, intentional or not (Wall 2008, 1036).

Wall writes on the use of stereotypes in advertising. He argues that in advertising, stereotypes are applied to create a response from its receivers, driven only by the most elemental human emotions and emptied for all intellectual and critical sensibility. ‘Stereotypes work [...] as the reified symbolic embodiments of a whole set of feelings that routinely target the basic elements of primal human

response' (Wall 2008, 1041). He argues that stereotypes are used in advertising to create a narrative which the receiver of the image or advertisement in which the stereotype is used, can either associate or dissociate with. It is the positive or negative reflections of a narrative which consumers either avoid or desire to be included in (Wall 2008, 1041).

Wall mentions a series of stereotypes (the French are arrogant, the Germans are humourless while the Scots are cheap), and argues that although many sociology textbooks claim so, these stereotypes have nothing to do with reality (Wall 2008, 1041). The application of stereotypes functions solely as the creation of a narrative about the self. 'Stereotypes are not an issue of reality but representation and concerned not with difference itself but with the narrativizing of differences' (Wall 2008, 1042).

Wall disagrees with all implications of stereotypes having a grain of truth to them. He points out that such implication indicates that originally, the image was nothing but a neutral descriptor, which later has been distorted by the viewers of it. Wall suggests that there is no such thing as a neutral image. He argues that '[...] even the "innocent" family snapshot is inevitably striated by the micropolitics of everyday life' (Wall 2009, 1042).

In Wall's opinion, we must always ask the question of what purpose the applied stereotypes serve, and he suggests that through time "whites" have been using "blacks" in advertising to 'legitimize the institution of slavery and structure their own racial and social identity'. (Wall 2008, 1043). He argues that the use of stereotypes changes with the Civil war. From being pictured as independent and childlike in need of their slave-owners to guide them and keep them safe, to wild and uncontrollable creatures who needed to be held down by the "whites". Wall argues that this change in the use of stereotypes has nothing to do with the change in the black's behaviour, but a change in the social, cultural and political area (Wall 2008, 1044).

In sum, Wall argues that stereotypes have been applied to create higher meaning with history, society and religion. It is the '[...] cultural, racial, and ideological construction of social reality and social relationships that is being articulated through stereotypes' (Wall 2008, 1044). By creating and applying stereotypes, we find it easier to reason and comprehend why power in society is not distributed "fairly", and the stereotypes facilitate a narrative which distinctives "us" from "them". Like advertising, these stereotypes speak to our primal drives, manipulating us to forget about our intellect and ability to distinguish.

3.4 Crisis Management and Crisis Communication

Every company should be prepared and have a plan sorted out in case of the strike of a crisis. When creating a comprehensive crisis management program (CCMP), companies must require a substantial

amount of knowledge on decision-making, PR, crisis communication, crisis plan development, disaster sociology and reputation management etc, to be able to cover every stage of the crisis management process (Coombs 2015, 1).

3.4.1 Crisis Defined

Coombs underlines that there is no single accepted definition of a crisis but argues that it is necessary to define the crisis to know how to approach it. Hence, he composes a definition based on other writers' definition of the term; "A crisis is the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues, and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs 2015, 3).

According to Coombs, a crisis is perceptual and hence a crisis is typically defined by the given organisations' stakeholders. If a stakeholder group perceive something as a crisis, then there is a crisis, and the stakeholders will treat the organisation accordingly (Coombs 2015, 3). A crisis can be unpredictable when it comes to where and when it will strike, but according to Coombs, all wise organisations know that it will strike at some point, and hence must have worked out a plan of managing the crisis when it does (Coombs 2015, 3).

A crisis has the power of interfering with the stakeholders' image of the organisation. "Crises disturb some stakeholder expectations, resulting in people becoming upset and angry, which threatens the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders [...]. When expectations are breached, stakeholders perceive the organization less positively: the reputation is harmed." (Coombs 2015, 4).

Coombs state that in some cases of an organisational crisis, it is not only the one organisation which is affected by the crisis, but an entire industry. Furthermore, there is a risk that stakeholders interpret a local crisis in per example a local McDonald's as a crisis relating to McDonald's on a global scale (Coombs 2015, 4).

3.4.2 Crisis Response

Crisis management is a set of steps created to minimize the negative outcome of a crisis to protect the organisation. It stems from emergency preparedness and hence is constructed around the four factors, prevention, preparation, response and revision (Coombs 2015, 5). In present thesis, focus will be on the part of the crisis management which constitutes the crisis response.

Taking a closer look at the crisis response, Coombs argues that this phase is filled with challenges when it comes to communicating to stakeholders. Internally, the organisation must collect the right information to make an adequate decision of which communication strategy to apply. Externally, stakeholders must be informed about the crisis, and must be presented with the steps which the organisation plans to take towards a crisis recovery (Coombs 2015, 129).

When creating the crisis response, the organisation must consider how to communicate. Crisis communication includes the first public statement which the organisation utters about the crisis and is typically displayed through mass media or the internet including social media. The initial statement should be well considered as it shapes the stakeholders' perception of the crisis and the communication of this (Coombs 2015, 130). Coombs states that it is recommended by many that crisis communication should happen fast, and that it should be consistent and open (2015, 130). He furthermore argues that because crisis communication is carried out in a time of stress, stakeholders are often not willing to listen to the organisation and comprehend what it has to say. Hence, the organisation must carry out its crisis communication in an easy-to-understand manner (Coombs 2015, 130).

3.4.3 Quick Response

When speaking about crisis communication, the term "quick" is highly relevant and is becoming even more relevant in times of the development and rapidness of social media. Crises are discovered, reported and shared with an intense speed on social media platforms, not only by journalists but to a large degree also by private people sharing and commenting through social media. The quicker the stakeholders learn about the crisis, the quicker the organisation must respond, and experts on the area talk about a "golden hour" when it comes to responding when crises strike (Coombs 2015, 131).

Coombs argues that the need to communicate quickly can be quite stressful, which in worst case scenarios can result in mistakes being made in connection with the crisis communication. The crisis communicators will not have enough time to consider their options and might make the wrong choices, which in the end might result in a worsening of the entire situation. However, Coombs argues that the benefits of responding quickly, exceeds the few mistakes being made due to rapid action.

3.4.4 Who is the Response Aimed at?

When forming a strategy, the organisation must consider who it is aiming its communication at. Coombs argues that two groups of target audiences can be identified when it comes to crisis communication; the victims and the nonvictims (Coombs 2015, 138). Coombs defines the victims as

the primary stakeholders fundamental for the continuation of the organisation, who in some way has been injured by the crisis, be it physical or psychological harm, damage of property, or financial loss (Coombs 2015, 138). Coombs argues that the public crisis communication is often more directed at the nonvictims than the victims, as victims often will be communicated with through direct contact (2015, 138). When communicating to the victims of the crisis, the organisation might show compassion and concern to make the victims feel better. However, the concern that the organisation is displaying does not necessarily indicate that the organisation admits its responsibility (Coombs 2015, 143).

The nonvictims can be divided into two groups; the potential victims and the voyeurs. The potential victims were not harmed by the crisis but could have been because they par example used the same product as the victims but did not get harmed. The voyeurs are the group of people who are following the crisis and the organisation's communication about the response but are not harmed or at the risk of being harmed by the crisis themselves. The voyeurs can include par example activists who are interested in collecting information about how the organisation acts, as part of their evaluation of the organisation (Coombs 2015, 138). Coombs argues that even though they have not been harmed, nonvictims are an important group to be concerned with in the organisation's communication strategy. It is beneficial to be able to convince this group that the organisation is behaving appropriately in a time of crisis and is treating the victims right (Coombs 2015, 138).

3.4.5 The content of the response

Coombs writes about the significance of choosing the right content to the response and divide crisis response into three categories:

1. Instructing information
2. Adjusting information
3. Reputation management

According to Coombs, the first message distributed by the organisation must include instructing information, which should be followed by adjusting information (2015, 139). Coombs furthermore argues that if the organisation applies these two steps, the third step, the reputation management becomes of less importance and crisis can in many cases be solved without this last step (2015, 139). Instructing information is carried out if the crisis might be of physical harm to its stakeholders and is carried out to instruct stakeholders how to act around the product causing the crisis. Adjusting information on the other hand, is carried out to ease the stress that victims might experience in relation

to the crisis. The aim of the adjusting information is to explain to the stakeholders what has happened, and to reassure them that the organisation is working to prevent a future repetition of the crisis (Coombs 2015, 142). The communication about how the company plans to prevent future crises is called “corrective action” and is created to reflect control of the situation. The corrective action should be communicated as early as possible post crisis (Coombs 2015, 142).

3.4.6 Strategies of Crisis Communication

Coombs lists the 10 most common crisis communication strategies. These strategies are included in the table below.

	Denial Posture
Attacking the accuser	The crisis manager confronts the people who suggests a crisis. May include threat to prosecute.
Denial	The crisis manager denies the crisis. May include communication of why it is not a crisis.
Scapegoating	Blaming of another person or group outside the organisation for having caused the crisis.
	Diminishment Posture
Excusing	The crisis manager seeks to diminish the organisation’s responsibility. The response may include a denial of intention to hurt anyone. Manager can claim that the organisation had no control of the situation leading to the crisis.
Justification	The crisis manager seeks to diminish the damage of the crisis, by ex. stating that no serious harm was done, or claiming that the victims got what they deserved.
	Rebuilding Posture
Compensation	The organisation offers money or gifts to the victims.

Apology	The crisis manager apologises by making the organisation take full responsibility for the crisis and asks for forgiveness.
	Bolstering Posture
Reminding	The organisation reminds the stakeholders of past good deeds.
Ingratiation	The organisation extols stakeholders.
Victimage	The organisation takes the position as also being a victim of the crisis.

Table 1. Coombs' collection of 10 response strategies (Coombs 2015, 145).

Coombs argues that the organisation's choice of strategy depends on whether it wishes to change the stakeholder's perceptions of the crisis, or their perception of the organisation in crisis (2015, 146).

Below table shows Coombs' advice on how and when to utilise the different strategies.

Crisis Response Strategy	Asset for Crisis Communication	Liability for Crisis Communication	Most appropriate situation
Attacking the accuser	Refutes claims that a crisis exists	Builds sympathy for attacker Offends victims	Rumour crisis
Denial	Refutes claims that a crisis exists	Offends victims	Rumour crisis
Scapegoating	Eliminates responsibility for a crisis	Angers victims and nonvictims	Should be avoided
Excusing	Reinforces minimal responsibility for the crisis	Angers victims and nonvictims	Crises with low levels of crisis responsibility
Justification	Reinforces minimal damage from the crisis	Angers victims and nonvictims	Crises with low levels of crisis responsibility

Compensation	Indicates organisation is taking responsibility for the crisis	Increases expense for the organisation	Any crisis with visible victims
Apology	Organisation accepts responsibility for the crisis	Increases expense for the organisation	Any crisis where there is evidence that the organisation is the primary actor responsible for the crisis
Reminding	Adds positive information about the organisation	Victims and nonvictims may view it as an attempt to distract from the crisis	When an organisation has a favourable prior reputation
Ingratiation	Adds positive information about the organisation	Victims and nonvictims may view it as an attempt to distract from the crisis	Any crisis that involves help from outside actors
Victimage	Builds sympathy for the organisation	Victims and nonvictims may view it as an attempt to distract from the crisis	Product tampering, hacking, workplace violence, and natural disaster crises

Table 2. Coombs' table of utility of crisis response strategies (2015, 147-8)

3.4.7 The "Easy" Choice

Organisations may find that giving a full apology is appreciated by stakeholders because the organisation then acknowledges that it has broken a set of social rules, while paying respect to the victims. However, the apology indicates that the organisation does in fact hold responsibility. A confession which can draw negative feelings to the organisation. From his review of previous studies, Coombs argues that organisations should not automatically jump to using apologies as the solution to every crisis but reconsider its options and consequences of such (2015, 148).

Instead of giving a full apology, organisations can choose the so-called non-apology, which, in contrary to the apology, does not reflect responsibility of the crisis but only an indication of sympathy

for the victims. It is thus apologising for the emotional harm and the offend that the crisis might have caused, but not the actual act. Often stakeholders take the non-apology for an actual apology and make peace with the given organisation (Coombs 2015, 149).

4. Analysis

The analytical chapter is parted in three, and each part corresponds to one of the defining sub-questions. The first part of the analysis is thus an analysis of H&M's identity based on its corporate website and webshops. The second part is a thematic analysis of Twitter users' reactions to H&M's advertisement. The third and final part is an analysis of H&M's applied crisis communication as respond to the Twitter comments. This last part of the analysis is joining the findings of the two above analyses and incorporates them in a discussion of H&M's applied crisis communication as affecting an increasing outrage culture.

4.1 Analysis of H&M's Identity

This part of the analysis is set out to answer the first defining sub-question 'How does H&M define its corporate identity? The analysis is included to gain an understanding of how H&M identifies itself. To identify H&M's corporate identity, Jean-Nöel Kapferer's brand identity prism will be applied to selected units of H&M's corporate website and webshops. Kapferer's prism is made of six aspects which in connection define a brand's corporate identity. Hence, conducting an analysis of H&M's identity by conveying the empirical data to each of Kapferer's identity aspects respectively, will create a definition of H&M's identity.

4.1.1 Physique

The physique of H&M is, according to Kapferer, the clearest visible representation of the brand, displayed in the company's products (2004, 107). According to H&M's corporate website, what it sells is '[...] the latest styles and inspiration for all — always. Customers will find everything from fashion pieces and unique designer collaborations to affordable wardrobe essentials, complete-the-look accessories and motivational workout wear. All seasons, all styles, all welcome!' (H&M Group, 'H&M' n.d), (appendix 2, image 1). Considering above quote from H&M's website, it is evident that the company does not have a single key product, but a whole range of products including everything from clothes to makeup and accessories. However, the following quote from its website, indicates that one of the key foci in H&M's physique is that its products should be available to everyone; 'The H&M group is a family of unique brands, united by common passions: to make great design

accessible to everybody and to lead the way towards a more inclusive and sustainable world.’ (H&M group ‘H&M’ n.d) (appendix 2, image 2). Thus, H&M’s key products and hereby its physique is the affordable clothing and accessories.

4.1.2 Personality

According to Kapferer, a brand’s personality is represented in the way the brand communicates with its stakeholders about products through images, spokespersons, tone of voice and advertisement (2004, 107). When looking at H&M’s webshops, a vast amount of focus has been placed on using a variety of colours in the images. The images reflect people wearing H&M outfits, and a lot of focus has clearly been put into representing diversity in the images. The images reflect people of different ethnicity, skin-tones, genders, age, height and weight (appendix 2, image 3-8), (H&M GB/US, n.d.). This diversity is furthermore supported by H&M’s communication about its vast focus on sustainability and diversity on its corporate website. On the subpage ‘H&M group ‘At a Glance’ readers are met with the quote ‘The H&M group is a family of unique brands, united by common passions: to make great design accessible to everybody and to lead the way towards a more inclusive and sustainable world.’ (appendix 2, image 2) (H&M Group ‘At a Glance’, n.d.) Furthermore, the corporate website has an entire subpage dedicated to inclusion and diversity. This subpage is headlined by the quote ‘H&M Group is a value-driven company, and we want to lead the way to a more inclusive and sustainable world. To us, Inclusion and Diversity is about who we are and who we want to be — now, and in the future. It’s about how we stay successful and relevant to customers, colleagues and the world.’ (H&M group, ‘Inclusion and Diversity n.d.) (appendix 2, image 9). With this quote, H&M lets consumers know that the company includes everyone and embraces diversity. Applying Kapferer’s model to the images on the webshop and the subpage ‘Inclusion and Diversity’ it can be argued that H&M has a personality which speaks to everyone, no matter skin-tone, gender, size and age.

According to Kapferer, the brand’s personality is furthermore reflected in its corporate values, which can be compared to how the brand would be and act, had it been a human being. H&M’s values are listed on its corporate website, on the subpage ‘Our values’ (H&M Group, Our Values, n.d.). The values are listed below and includes a few keywords from each value. The values in their entirety can be found in appendix 3.

- **We are one team**
- **We believe in people**
- **Entrepreneurial spirit**
- **Constant improvement**
- **Cost-conscious**
- **Straightforward and open minded**
- **Keep it simple**

Reviewing the values, one is left with an image of H&M's personality. The personality of H&M is one which values teamwork and diversity, with both customers and company's best interest in mind (appendix 3, value 1). It trusts and respects people (appendix 3, value 2), and acts as entrepreneurs who value creativity, innovation and immediate impact (appendix 3, value 3). It is a personality which never settles, but always try to move forward (appendix 3, value 4). It values making smart sustainable choices and avoid careless spending (appendix 3, value 5), and diversity and inclusiveness is by the company believed to give positive energy (appendix 3 value 6). Finally, the company has a personality which values common sense and good judgement, that does not over-analyse, as over-analysing is believed to slow down the speed (appendix 3, value 7).

4.1.3 Culture

The brand's culture is according to Kapferer an important aspect of a brand's identity and every brand has a culture from which its products arise from. It is the basic of the brand and is represented in its value system and hence its actions. As Kapferer mentions values in both the brand's personality as seen above, and in its culture, these two aspects seem very much alike. However, another aspect of the brand's culture has to do with the brand's country of origin, and hence the culture of the country which the brand origins from. Kapferer argues that this can be emphasised in some brands' identities, while it is ignored completely in others' (Kapferer 2004, 109).

When looking at H&M's corporate website, its Swedish heritage is not omnipresent. When visiting the website's subpage 'The History of H&M Group', the company's history, including its initial start-up in Västerås, Sweden is told (H&M group, 'The history of H&M Group, n.d) (appendix 2, 10). Furthermore, the visitor is met with the option of choosing between Swedish and English as website language (appendix 2, image 11). Applying Kapferer's prism of brand identity to analyse H&M's culture, it does not appear as if the company wishes to put remarkable focus on its Swedish heritage.

However, it is not ignored completely, as it can be found in parts of the website, but it seems to be a minor part of the company's culture. In contrary, it can be argued that the culture and thus its values is much more focused on addressing a broad and international audience, and not letting cultural differences limit this value.

4.1.4 Relationship

The relationship can, according to Kapferer, be found in what the consumers expect to receive in addition to the purchased product. It is the relationship which is built on something more than just the physical product, which in H&M's case might be a T-shirt, a pair of jeans or a necklace. Kapferer argues that retailers can give their customers the idea that the company's products add certain relationships to its consumers' life. These relationships can according to Kapferer be anything from mother-daughter relationship, romantic relationships, friendships etc. When looking at H&M's corporate website and webshops, it is filled with people in different situations and imagined and presumed relationships (Appendix 2, image 3-8). One image reflects a family, while another reflects what might be a friendship, while a vast number of images reflects young happy people, together in different settings. Hence, H&M creates a series of relationships with other people which the consumer can expect to experience when purchasing the company's products (Kapferer 2004, 110). It is however worth noticing that the reflection of obtained relationship through purchase, in H&M's case is not limited to one single type of relationship but several. Hence, a degree of diversity can be seen in the types of relationships H&M's products create, as it addresses not only one type of people, but several.

4.1.5 Reflection

The fifth aspect of Kapferer's prism concerns the reflection, and more specifically, the reflected consumer. According to Kapferer, this reflection concerns the brand's idea of who its consumers are, and how these consumers aspire to feel when using the product. It is the brand's drafted persona of who its products are aimed at. Looking at H&M's British and American webshops, and the images displayed on each of them, it is a great variety of people of different gender, skin-tone and to some extent size which are presented (appendix, image 3-8), and H&M seems to be creating a variety of reflected consumers. As seen in above analysis of H&M's personality, the company puts much focus on inclusion and diversity (appendix 2, image 9), (H&M Group, Inclusion and Diversity n.d.), which is relevant when speaking of H&M's reflected consumer. The company does not have just one stereotypical consumer, but several, which has been clearly expressed on its corporate website.

However, most of the models used in the images are either children or adults of the maximum ages of what appears to be around 40 (H&M US/GB), (appendix x, image 3-8). Hence, H&M does not seem to put much focus on the older generation as a reflected consumer group. The not much focus has been granted the older generation can indicate the shaping of a stereotypical consumer. It might be argued that H&M, to some extent, realises its reflected consumer as being of a younger generation, because of the price of the company's products. On its corporate website, on the subpage "Brands, H&M", the company writes the following about H&M's brand:

'H&M is a fashion brand, offering the latest styles and inspiration for all — always. Customers will find everything from fashion pieces and unique designer collaborations to affordable wardrobe essentials, complete-the-look accessories and motivational workout wear. All seasons, all styles, all welcome! But H&M is more than just fashion. With price, quality and sustainability deeply rooted in its DNA, H&M is not only a possibility for everyone to explore their personal style, but it also offers a chance to create a more sustainable fashion future.' (H&M group, 'H&M', n.d.) (appendix 2, image 1).

In above quote, some focus has been put on the idea that everyone should have the possibility of exploring their own style, and that the brand sells affordable wardrobe essentials. Hence, it can be argued that H&M builds its identity around being an affordable clothing company. In connection with a great focus on the young generation, it can be concluded that H&M has more than one stereotypical reflected consumer, but that one of these are more significant than other. The younger generation that prefers cheaper clothes due to financial limitations, or preference to change wardrobe frequently can be argued as to being H&M's main reflected consumer.

4.1.6 Self-image

The sixth aspect of Kapferer's prism is focused on the self-image of the brand. Kapferer distinguishes the self-image aspect from the reflection aspect, as the self-image aspect has to do with how the brand's consumers view their ideal selves. On its webshops and website, a vast number of young people in different settings can be seen. Some of the images reflect groups of young people who look like they might be friends and having a good time (H&M group, n.d.) (H&M US/GB, n.d.), (appendix 2 image 3-8). Hence, a self-image of being happy and surrounded by friends, can be categorised as

how H&M sees its consumers self-image. However, such self-image is not very specific, and might in fact apply to most people worldwide. On its corporate website, H&M writes; ‘With price, quality and sustainability deeply rooted in its DNA, H&M is not only a possibility for everyone to explore their personal style, but it also offers a chance to create a more sustainable fashion future.’ (H&M group H&M- n.d.), (appendix 2 image 1). With that quote, it becomes clear that H&M does not only focus on one type of self-image among consumers. As it states that it wants everyone to explore their personal style, it is evident that not one specific self-image is preferred, favoured or focused on more than another. In contrary, focus is put upon the individual’s opportunity to find its own personal style, applying H&M’s clothes to the process.

4.1.7 H&M’s brand Identity According to Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism

To identify H&M’s identity, all six aspects of the prism should be combined and viewed as one unity. When looking at the six aspects, the company’s identity can be summed up as a clothing company which key products are affordable clothing and accessories. Its personality represents sustainability, inclusion and diversity, targeting a wide audience with different needs and wishes of how to use the products. The only group of people H&M might be excluding, according to its images on its webshops and corporate website, is the elder generation, but otherwise it seems to focus a vast amount on including all skin-tones, ethnicities, genders and cultures. H&M is of Swedish heritage, which is not highlighted much on its webshop or corporate website but is not completely ignored. However, it seems that H&M wished to reflect a culture of being “everyone’s”, regardless of cultural differences. According to Kapferer, this identity is what H&M must constantly work from to stay true to itself and all that the brand stands for (Kapferer 2004, 95).

One of the reasons to why the brand must stay true to its defined identity is, according to Kapferer, that it otherwise might be at risk of being affected by external noises. One of these noises may be the company’s desirability to please a vast number of target groups, where much focus is being put on pleasing as many stakeholders and different types of target groups as possible. It can be argued that since it is part of H&M’s identity to include everyone and aim its products towards a very large array of target groups, this does not apply as an external noise, and perhaps does not apply as an actual risk. However, it might be worth considering how this identity of striving to please everyone, might affect and be affected by the outrage culture.

According to Kapferer, such behaviour of wishing to please everyone, can easily come off as affected and unreal. It ‘[...] becomes a mere façade, a meaningless cosmetic camouflage.’ (Kapferer 2004, 99). Because society, cultures and consumer preferences evolve and change in a constantly dynamic

process, trying to please everyone regardless, might in fact reflect an identity, and hence image, which seems almost vague. If H&M's identity is always targeted everyone, everywhere, it might be perceived as shallow and almost superficial. The findings of above analysis of H&M's identity supplies a basis for understanding the consumers' outrage towards the company and its advertisement, and subsequently a basis for analysing its crisis communication.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Reactions

The following analysis is set out to research the reactions to H&M's advertisement as presented in this case study. The analysis is structured from a set of themes which are constructed from the consumers' twitter reactions towards H&M's advertisement. The themes which constitutes this analysis can be reviewed in the methodological chapter.

Each theme will be analysed with the application of relevant theory. The analysis will furthermore include the findings from above analysis of H&M's identity, which creates a foundation for the understanding of the Twitter users' perception of H&M and the advertisement. The themes are listed and analysed in no specific order.

4.2.1 Racism and Division

The theme "Racism and Division" is created from the Twitter comments which suggest that H&M's advertisement is of racist character. Furthermore, comments which implicate a division between the so-called whites and blacks are included in this theme. I have chosen to join the codes of racism and the codes of division, as these two types of codes represent a similar problem. They both represent a division between people, caused by a belief of superiority and differences in culture, skin-tone, nationality etc. The codes could have created two separate themes but analysing these separately would eventually have led to very similar findings.

When collecting the comments from Twitter, the word 'racism' came up several times. One user Tweeted on the 8th January 'THIS IS RACIST [...]' (appendix 4, comment 1), while another user Tweeted 'All decent people against racism, should be boycotting that store' (appendix 4, comment 3). A third user listed a set of characteristics describing people who do not see anything wrong with the advertisement. The user suggests that these people are likely 'white, racist, ignorant of history, someone who doesn't think about things before saying them, oblivious to the fact that calling a black person a "monkey" is highly offensive [and/or] white' (appendix 4, comment 19). Why the user has included being "white" twice on the list, might either be by mistake or an intentional act to highlight

his point. Furthermore, a user tweets: ‘A white clothing company labels a little black boy a “monkey” and millions of black people see nothing wrong with it.’ (appendix 4, comment 28).

The comments create a theme suggesting that H&M may have had racist intentions when creating the advertisement and one Twitter user comments ‘H&M teamed up with [...] racist designers to create the #coolestmonkey’ (appendix 4, comment 8). The Twitter users seem to suggest that H&M refers to people with a dark skin-tone as monkeys and is doing so on purpose with a racist agenda. The monkey reference, which is causing this accusation of racism, is a reference which trace back to the Post-Civil War in the US where slaves were referred to as wild animals and monkeys (Wall 2008, 1044).

Furthermore, the theme covers a diversion between the so called “black” and “white” where it may be assumed that the term “black” represents people of a darker skin-tone, and “white” represents people of a lighter skin-tone. This division or differentiation between black and white takes its point of departure in comment 20, which suggests that “white people” do not see anything wrong in the advertisement (appendix 4, comment 20), and in comment 30, which refers to H&M as “a white clothing company” (appendix 4, comment 30).

To analyse these reactions to the advertisement, David Wall’s theory on stereotyping in advertisement is applied. According to Wall, the visual image in an advertisement is a powerful and dynamic form of communication, because of its function of being read and interpreted in multiple ways (2008, 1034). The way humans interpret images in e.g. advertising is, according to wall, very much affected by our personal background, culture, nationality, gender and age (2008, 1035). A history of slavery, and a background echoing of degrading nicknames, where “monkey” was in fact one of them, may according to Wall be constructing a perspective, from which the advertisement can be perceived as discriminating and racist (2008, 1034).

Wall argues that using stereotypes in advertisement, is meant to create a response from its receivers which is driven by nothing but primal human emotions and emptied of all intellectual and critical sensibility (2008, 1041). He argues that this use of stereotypes in advertisement is used as a narrative, which the receiver may either associate or disassociate with, and either desires to be included in, or avoid completely. Looking at the comments suggesting that H&M’s advertisement is an act of racism, due to its use of a dark-skinned child with the word “monkey” typed on his hoodie, it may be suggested that the users who have made these comments, see the creation of a stereotype. The users who claim that H&M is acting in a racist manner, might actually perceive the advertisement as the

stereotype which through history has been used to differentiate the “blacks” from the “whites” (Wall 2008, 1043).

According to Wall, since no image is neutral, but always loaded with some form of meaning or intention, one must always question the use of stereotypes in advertisements. He suggests that through time “whites” have been using “blacks” in advertisement to ‘legitimize the institution of slavery and to structure their own racial and social identity and hence created a childlike stereotype which needed its slaveowner for safe-keep’ (Wall 2008, 1043). A stereotype which changed Post-Civil War in the US. The use of “black” stereotypes in advertisement had changed to now represent a wild creature, who had to be controlled by the “whites” (Wall 2008, 1044).

This historical reference to the use of dark-skinned stereotypes as wild creatures or animal applied by “whites”, provides a framework for the understanding of above comments on racism and a division between “blacks” and “whites”. Applying Wall’s theory to the comments, one may argue that the advertisement might be perceived as “white” people’s creation of a stereotype of the wild creature which must be controlled. Hence, when one Twitter user comments ‘What universe do you live in that makes it okay to flaunt your racist ways in such an epic portion’ (appendix 4, comment 29), it is her belief that H&M has created the advertisement with this exact stereotype in mind. She may believe that what H&M does, is to apply this creation of a narrative, a much-applied remedy in advertisement which one would either associate with, or completely distinguish itself from (Wall 2008, 1041). Hence, acting in a racist manner, and thus create the division between “blacks” and “whites” as commented by another one Twitter-user.

Applying above analysis of H&M’s identity to this perception of the advertisement clarifies the perception and interpretation of the advertisement further. The above analysis of H&M’s identity suggested that H&M reflects an identity, which has an intention to reach as many people as possible. Its appreciation of diversity and inclusion is outspoken in its values, and images on both its corporate website and respective webshops, reflects a clear representation of models of different ethnicities and skin-tones. Hence, placing H&M’s identity opposite the Twitter comments suggesting acts of racism and divisions creates a mismatch, and perhaps an understanding of H&M’s image, different from the one H&M wishes to reflect through its identity.

To further understand the reactions based on a perception of racism, Giddens theory on the postmodern consumer and the reflexive individual will be applied to the analysis of the theme. This

application will aide to clarify why the Twitter users, as individuals and consumers in a postmodern society, might have commented as they did, in response to H&M's advertisement.

According to Giddens, the postmodern individual has been set free of the traditional society's tradition and norms and can now choose a preferred lifestyle from a wide array of options (1991, 70). Instead of being led and limited by traditions, the individual is now looking inwards when creating its lifestyle, which is to be done from a very complex and wide selection of options and choices (Giddens 1991, 3). When creating a lifestyle, the individual does so by adding to a narrative, which tells the story of the self. Everything we choose adds to this narrative and shapes it in a constant dynamic process (Giddens 1991, 81).

Adding Giddens' theory to the analysis of the reactions, it may be argued that the consumers who perceive the product display as an act of racism and division from H&M, might be experiencing a limitation in their options. H&M's identity is partially created from values of inclusion and diversity and is very much including different ethnicities and skin-tones in its images on its website and webshop. By doing so, H&M is trying to address a majority and not just focusing on one specific target group. Hence it is representing an array of options, which are available to everyone, and everyone has access to utilise H&M's products as part of a narrative and aspired lifestyle. However, when H&M, which otherwise represents itself as being available to everyone, presents what might be perceived as a negative stereotype represented by a person with a darker skin-tone, a limitation in options occurs. When the option which, according to H&M's identity, should have been available to everyone and ready for anyone to choose as part of a constructed narrative suddenly is perceived as a negative stereotype, the consumer might sense a limitation of choices, and perhaps a feeling of being excluded. A sense of exclusion which might be intensified in the light of H&M's otherwise very including identity, creating a very sharp contrast to a perceived limitation of one group of people.

The comments included in this theme demonstrate a perception that a division is created between "blacks" and "whites", and an understanding that "white people" do not see the wrong aspect of the advertisement (appendix 4, comment 19). Furthermore, it is suggested that H&M is a "white clothing company" (appendix 4, comment 28) and one Twitter user comments 'Yet another blatantly telling a particular race that they don't want their money' (appendix 4, comment 24).

The comments provide an impression of a division between two major groups of people; the "blacks" and the "whites" and holds a perception of an encounter between these two groups of people. Including a historical perspective, such division has very much been a relevant issue, and especially

within the US. A culture of slaves and discrimination of African Americans is a major part of the American history and hence its culture. With such aspect in mind, the interpretation of a division between “blacks” and “whites” gains substance and opens for an understanding of this given perception. However, it is interesting to gain a more time and place relevant insight into this perception, with the application of Giddens’ theory on the postmodern consumer.

In our postmodern society, focus has been moved from traditionbound societies where choices of those who had been, where followed without reflection and evaluation, to more individual-focused societies. Focus has been moved inward and is placed on a constant evaluation of the self’s lifestyle (Giddens 1991, 70). Creating a narrative is not just about what to buy, eat and wear, but also covers who to be and how to tell a certain story about ourselves (Giddens 1991, 81). Hence, being part of a group may also be argued to be part of such storytelling about the self. Choosing which group to belong to, regardless of which type of group this is, may add to the narrative the given individual wishes to create. However, when choosing one group, the individual deselects another group and by doing so, might distance itself from the deselected group, because it does not fit with the individual’s chosen narrative. The Twitter users may experience a division created by “The white clothing company” H&M, and thus, the creation of a group which not everyone belongs in. When the Twitter users express their opinions on H&M, they can be argued to form a resistance group. A resistance group which becomes part of a narrative of being outraged with H&M.

In sum, the analysis of the theme of racism and division supplies and understanding of the Twitter users outrage towards H&M as pointed toward a racist and dividing act. Applying Wall’s theory to the analysis, it was suggested that the users see the use of the word “monkey” on a dark child’s hoodie as the creation of a stereotype, applied to the advertisement to create a stereotype. Furthermore, the Twitter users who have written of racism and division between “blacks” and “whites”, may see H&M as part of a “white” group, led by “white” people, to please “white” people’s preferences. In such case, H&M’s identity as a global company, detaching itself from its Swedish heritage and targeting everyone regardless of skin-tone, ethnicity, culture and so on, is read and received in another way than intended. The Twitter users might to a larger degree see the Scandinavian and more specifically, the Swedish culture of the company and hence perceive the company as being part of a group, which is unfitting with a desired narrative. This perception suggests that the Twitter users may interpret H&M’s actions as excluding one group of people. An exclusion which is depriving the group from its option of making the company and its products a part of the individual’s narrative.

4.2.2 Boycott H&M

The theme “Boycott H&M” is constructed from the comments by Twitter users who believe that H&M needs to be boycotted for its act. The Twitter users’ reasons to want to boycott the company can be found in both above and below themes. Hence, the theme is not so much concentrating on the reasons behind a boycott, but more the users’ intentions to perform such act, and an analysis of the consumers reactions to the situation. This analysis is relevant in the later analysis of H&M’s strategy of crisis communication.

One user Tweets “[...] It would seem to me NOBODY should shop at a store who could do what they did! All decent people against racism, should be boycotting that store!” (appendix 4, comment 3), while another user Tweets “BOYCOTT @hm! Whose with me? (appendix 4, comment 29). Furthermore, the artist The Weeknd tweets “woke up this morning shocked and embarrassed by this photo. i’m deeply offended and will not be working with @hm anymore” (appendix 4, comment 6). From these comments, it is made clear that what H&M did, is by some people perceived to be so wrong that the company should be boycotted. To further understand these statements and what might be the reasons why the Twitter users turn to the act, or at least threat, of boycotting, it is interesting to take a closer look at the society in which this boycotting would take place, as a consequence of the postmodern consumers’ reactions towards large companies like H&M.

According to Giddens, the postmodern society is characterised by much less concern about traditions, norms and habits prescribed by previous generations. This termination of the traditional society forces the individual to think reflexively and make choices which fit with the individual’s preferred lifestyle and narrative about the self. The postmodern society in which this individual find itself forces the individual to choose among a wide and varied array of options, and the individual must constantly make evaluated choices which best fit its desired lifestyle (Giddens 1991, 3). However, as Giddens argues, it is not just the individual which has to make such reflexive and evaluated choices, but institutional systems must do so as well. These institutional systems cover everything from the government and laws, to globalisation and companies (Giddens 1991, 16), the latter being of much relevance for present analysis. Companies must reflexively create and recreate itself to meet the commands set out by consumers, whilst at the same time, consumers are limited by the regulations and systems created by the companies. Such mutual regulations to each other’s demands and wishes, create an interdependent and succumbed relationship between the two parts (Giddens 1991, 3).

Applying Giddens' theory on the interdependent relationship between individuals and institutions in a postmodern society to the Twitter user's comments on boycotting H&M, opens for an understanding of the reactions of wishing to boycott the company. According to Giddens' theory, H&M is merely one option out of many to the consumers in a postmodern society. Even as a company which targets "the many", H&M will never have monopoly power over any consumer, because consumers may just choose to shop elsewhere. Boycotting, or threatening to boycott H&M, might be the Twitter users' way of showing their power as consumers. It may be the way of showing H&M that if it does not follow the consumers' demands, it must either change its ways and start doing so or remain unchanged with the result that the consumers will choose between other options. Since the Western world is characterised by postmodern societies no longer bound by traditions, norms and a limitation of choices, consumers are much freer to act according to beliefs, wishes and the narrative which creates the desired lifestyle. Being able to choose, also means being able to opt-out and turning to other places which fits the consumer's preferred lifestyle better. The individual is thus not only choosing which elements it wants to include to its' narrative, but also making a deselection of elements which it wishes to outdistance itself from. This outdistancing from a certain company or product, is also a part of the individual's creation of a narrative. The Twitter users who threaten to boycott H&M might hence do so to tell a story about the self; a story which includes a deselection of H&M due to its actions, and a desire not to be associated with the company.

The possibility of opting out and boycotting a company, thus gives the consumers power. According to Giddens, companies must as well as individuals, constantly develop and rethink its ways to fit the consumers' demands. When H&M's presumed consumers proclaim that they want to boycott the company, H&M might need to evaluate some of its procedures triggering such threat. Being reliant on consumers, creates a necessity of adjusting to their needs, and hence gives the consumers a level of power in a postmodern society where choices are rarely limited to just one option. Hence, a company must make itself relevant for the consumers, and since H&M has, with its evaluation of its own identity, decided not to target just one specific group of consumers, it must make itself available to everyone.

However, it is relevant to highlight that the relationship between the consumer and the companies, according to Giddens, is interdependent, and hence, it is not just the company that needs to regulate according to the consumers' demands. Although consumers have the power to turn elsewhere when a company like H&M does not fit with the consumer's lifestyle, the consumers might not be able to find another company which has a similar product range and prices as H&M has. Hence, the consumer

must evaluate if s/he wishes to succumb to the identity and hence regulations of the company, while hoping for a change in the company's behaviour, or find others, albeit different options elsewhere.

The theme shows a reaction towards H&M, laden with the consumers' show of power over a large company like H&M. Applying Giddens' theory revealed the action of boycotting as part of the postmodern consumers' way of letting companies know that they cannot get away with anything. However, Giddens' theory also reflected a dual interdependence between, in this case, H&M and the consumers. Even though consumers are free to choose between a wide array of options and at any point might turn away from H&M and shop elsewhere, H&M is to some extent unique. When applying its crisis response, such interdependence must be considered.

4.2.3 An Intentional Act

When examining the empirical data collected from Twitter users, many of the comments were created around the impression that H&M acted to intentional harm a specific audience. Nine out of the total 32 comments carried implications of H&M acting intentionally, and hence knew that what it did was going to offend someone. Thus, the outrage in the given theme is pointed towards H&M's actions and its way of handling cases in the company's marketing department.

The theme 'An Intentional act' is constructed from Twitter users who claim that H&M displayed the product to intentionally cause stir. One user tweeted '@h&m you knew it was wrong at first...yet you uploaded it [...]' (appendix 4, comment 4), while another user tweeted 'H&M teamed up with [...] racist designers to create the #coolestmonkey' (appendix 4, comment 8). Comment 10 suggests that it was "someone's idea" (appendix 4, comment 10), while comment 13 is followed by the hashtag '#thisWasntAMistake' (appendix 4, comment 13). Comments 16, 20 and 21 all question why nobody at H&M realised it was wrong, while a user has commented 'These companies spend millions on advertising, research & marketing, and this is what they come up with? @h&m knew exactly what they were doing. [...]' (appendix 4, comment 32).

The above comments create a theme which represents the perception that H&M advertised the product display, well-aware of what it was doing, and thus knew that it might cause negative reactions. In this theme, the outrage among the users on Twitter is created from an understanding that H&M was in fact aware of the consequences the product display would have. Hence, the comments claim that what H&M did was intentional, and the intentions was of racist or discrimination character. When analysing the outrage against H&M, the focus is not to investigate the company's intentions, but to analyse the consumers' perception of the situation and the company behind.

To do so, Wall's theory on advertising can be applied. According to Wall, the comprehension of an image, which also applies for images in advertisement, is much affected by the perceivers' cultural background (2008, 1035). Hence, the ways in which an image can be interpreted is not limited to just one but is dependent on the individual who sees and perceives the image. However, Wall argues that not all interpretations are equally valid and that there are ways of interpretation which simply does not make sense. One of Wall's points in his theory is that just because the quantity of interpretations is multiple, it is not endless, and there are only so many ways in which an image can be interpreted and still make sense. Because of this varied, albeit limited set of interpretations, Wall argues that advertisers most likely will, or at least should have thought of all the different ways of reading the given advertisement or image, before distributing it (2008, 1043).

Adding such argument to the Twitter users' comments claiming that what H&M did, was an intentional act, opens for an understanding of such accusations. A Twitter user comments 'How does a brand like @HM let something like this happen??? Beyond wrong!' (Appendix 4, comment 12), where the phrase '[...] a brand like @HM [...]' seems to indicate that H&M has some sort of quality, which should have defrayed it from acting as it did. The comment does not further indicate what makes H&M special but based on above analysis of H&M's identity, the company's very including identity might be the focal point of this Twitter user's comment. Furthermore, H&M is a large global company which may be assumed to have some experience in marketing on a global scale, which might also have some influence on the Twitter user's comment.

In his theory, Wall refers to an election poster causing great outrage for its controversial display of a political campaign's two candidates and writes "It seems almost inconceivable that as the poster was going through its various committees and boardrooms and onto mock-up stages and final approvals no one made the connection. Or maybe the connection was made. Perhaps questions were asked and then dismissed" (Wall 2008, 1034). Because there is only a limited set of ways in which an image can be interpreted, Wall argues that someone should have realised that it could have been interpreted as it did, causing controversy.

Being a large global company, it may very well be assumed that H&M's has an extensive marketing department, consisting of various stages of approval and committees in which everything that is ever displayed in connection with the company's marketing will have to pass. That no one in H&M's marketing department in the process of approving the hoodie and its print, stopped to wonder if the image could be interpreted in a certain way, might seem strange, and according to Wall, almost unlikely (2008, 1034).

Then the question of valid interpretations of the advertisement can be posed. Since Wall argues that there are only a certain set of ways in which an advertisement can be perceived and interpreted and still make sense, it is relevant to consider the racist perception as a valid interpretation. Looking at the advertisement with a historical perspective in mind, a culture of slavery and degrading nicknames with references to wild animal and more specifically monkeys, is relevant for such validation of the perception. It can be argued that the interpretation implying that H&M referred to the boy wearing the hoodie as a monkey, to some extent is valid as history includes a connection between people with dark skin-tones and the word “monkey”. Wall does not speak much of *when* the given interpretation is valid or not, and how large a group of people it takes to validate a certain perception, but a historical connection as posed above, gives at least some reason to understand the way of interpreting the advertisement.

However, the question of perceptions may not be accepted by the Twitter users whose comments create the theme of ‘An Intentional Act. The users all seem to believe that H&M knew what it was doing when creating the advertisement and still chose to go through with it. They seem to believe that H&M created the image with a racist intent, or at least knew that the image by some, would be perceived as racist. According to Wall, there is no such thing as a neutral image. He argues that ‘[...] even the “innocent” family snapshot is inevitably striated by the micropolitics of everyday life’ (Wall 2009, 1042). Thus, implications suggesting that originally any given image or advertisement was nothing but a neutral descriptor, which later has been distorted by the viewers of it, is according to Wall not a valid interpretation. This argument can be applied to understand the Twitter users’ idea of the advertisement as an intentional act of racism. The image in the advertisement has, according the Twitter users, never been of neutral character, but has from its production been laden with an intentional racist stereotype, and thus, it is not only a matter of receiver perception, but an intentional act by H&M.

The theme revolves around a group of Twitter users who seem to believe that H&M has acted with the intention to harm a specific group of people. Applying Wall’s theory on the multiple, albeit limited sets of interpretations of an image in advertising, opens for an understanding of how the Twitter users perceive H&M’s considerations before displaying the advertisement on its British website. Being convinced that H&M knew that the advertisement might be perceived in the way it has been by the Twitter users in this theme, opens for and understanding of the reasons behind the outrage towards

H&M. Such understanding of H&M's acts must be considered when analysing H&M's crisis response.

4.2.4 An Unintentional Act

In contrast to above theme, the theme 'An Unintentional Act' is created from Twitter comments posted by users who seem to believe that H&M did not act to intentionally harm anyone. However, the comments suggest that H&M should have thought about how the advertisement could have been perceived by some, before posting it in its webshop. As with the above theme, the Twitter comments collected in this theme are not reflecting an anger towards the actual message, as much as they are reflecting an anger towards the way H&M acted prior to advertising the image.

One Twitter user comments: 'the sentiment is cute (cutest monkey in the jungle, but given the racial history of blacks being referred to as monkeys), it's clear that @hm didn't fully think this one through.' (appendix 4, comment 7), while another user seems to agree and comments 'I feel like this was unintentional as many people refer to their children as monkey. But the oversight is stupid.' (appendix 4, comment 27). The two Twitter users seem to agree on the fact that being called a monkey might be cute and even something some people call their children. Hence, these two Twitter users signify that they understand what H&M may have wanted to reflect with the advertisement, and that H&M might have had no intentions to harm anyone. However, the two Twitter users seem to believe that H&M did not think the advertisement through, resulting in a "stupid oversight". Another user questions how H&M could have gotten it so wrong. Her comment reads '[...] Representation matters but you clearly missed the mark with this!' (appendix 4, comment 30), suggesting that H&M has tried to act in a diverse and including manner, but failed to achieve the intended result.

The comments all seem to suggest that H&M has had good intentions when creating the advertisement, but failed to see that it was, according to the Twitter users, wrong and harmful to some people. Applying Wall's theory to these reasons to be outraged by H&M's advertisement, it can be argued that the Twitter users believe that H&M should have seen the connection but failed to. Failing to see the connection is according to the Twitter users a result of ignorance and stupidity of simply letting the advertisement pass along different stages of approvals in the marketing department. According to Wall, there are indeed always several ways in which an image can be interpreted. The amount of ways in which the image can be interpreted are not unlimited and endless, but the interpretation depends on the reader and his or her cultural, historical or social background which creates a foundation for understanding and interpretation (Wall 2008, 1035). With Wall's theory, it

might be suggested that the reason why the advertisement passed the approvals in the marketing department without anyone questioning its controversial ways of being interpreted, might be because of a lack of diversity in the marketing department. According to Wall, the interpretation of an image depends on the reader's background (2008, 1035). Thus, the fact that no one in H&M's marketing department questioned the advertisement and its' presumed controversiality, might be interpreted as a case of misrepresentation in the marketing department. Having an identity as being both including and diverse may to the Twitter users contradict with the ignorance which presumably caused the overseeing of the controversiality of the image. Hence, according to Wall's theory of interpretations, it may be suggested that the Twitter users are outraged at H&M because it lacks diversity and historical insight in its marketing department. This lack of insight might be what the Twitter users refer to as "stupid" and even out of line with H&M's identity.

This analysis of the Twitter users' outrages as based on H&M's ignorance towards a certain perception of the advertisement, can be further analysed by adding Giddens' theory on the postmodern consumer. According to Giddens, our postmodern society is realised by the creation of the self and the individual's preferred lifestyle (1991, 16). Giddens suggests that this narration of a lifestyle is told by posing questions on who to be and how to act. It is the reflexive making of the self (1991, 3) which instead of being monitored by traditions, has become a project which the individual most actively and dynamically implements to create an aspired lifestyle.

Relating this theory on the postmodern individual to the postmodern consumers and more specifically for this case, the outraged Twitter users, it can be argued that their outrage stems from a feeling of being overlooked, neglected or ignored. The Twitter users reflect an outrage towards H&M because the company has failed to see the fault in its behaviour when creating the advertisement. Thus, when a Twitter user comments 'I feel like this was unintentional as many people refer to their children as monkey. But the oversight is stupid.' (appendix 4, comment 27), s/he suggest that what H&M "overlooked", should not have been ignored, but taken seriously. With Giddens' theory, it can to some extent be argued that we as individuals in a postmodern society have become much centred around the self and the creation of it. Although the making of the self is reflexive and therefore dependent on outside factors, focus is always resting on the making of the self to create our aspired lifestyle. The postmodern individual is always presented with choices on which outside factors to select and deselect in the process (Giddens 1991, 81). When the Twitter users write about H&M overlooking a given interpretation of the advertisement, a feeling of being overseen and even

neglected as a relevant consumer might appear. Because the individual in a postmodern society has become more aware of its choices due to the disappearance of the traditional societies' pre-set frames, a sense of limitless options might occur with what Giddens refer to as an extensive and complex set of choices (1991, 80). In a postmodern society where individuals are free to choose from a wide and complex array of options, companies must, according to Giddens, live up to the demands set out by the individuals (1991, 16). Hence, companies might feel the need to appeal to as many consumers as possible to become a part of the consumer's choice between a great selection of others. The result of this may be that the consumers are constantly bombarded with choices and options set out by the different companies to gain the consumers' attention. When a company like H&M, which from above analysis of its identity can be characterised as targeting as wide an audience as possible, oversees what the Twitter users think of as a valid interpretation of the image, a sense of limitation of the consumers' choice might occur. Even though H&M did not act to harm anyone intentionally, the Twitter users seem to believe that a company like H&M, defining its identity as being including and diverse, should have thought it through when advertising the hoodie as it did. That the company failed to recognise the controversiality of the image, may create an outrage amongst the consumers and a feeling of being overseen and forgotten.

The theme "An Unintentional Act" was applied to analyse the Twitter consumers' outrage based on a belief that H&M did not act with the intention to harm anyone but should have realised that it would. Applying Wall's theory to the comments presented in the theme opened for an understanding of the outrage as based on a neglect of a certain group of people's perspectives and interpretations of the image in the advertisement. This oversight of the controversiality of the image may be explained by a lack of representation in the marketing department. With Wall's theory, we saw that interpretation is based on the individuals' background, and an oversight of a way of interpreting the image may suggest a misrepresentation in the marketing department. A misrepresentation which contradicts with H&M's identity. Adding Giddens' theory on the postmodern consumer's varied and complex array of options to the analysis of the theme, seems to suggest that the Twitter users might feel a limitation in their options in a society where focus is very much pointed towards the individual and the self. A limitation caused by the oversight of a specific way of interpreting the image, which in the end may lead to a feeling of exclusion. Hence, the outrage in the present theme seem to be caused, not by a deliberate intention to harm, but an oversight and ignorance performed by H&M which may be seen as contradicting with the company's identity as analysed above.

4.2.5 H&M is Innocent

The above themes are constructed from comments displaying outrage towards H&M. Present theme is constructed from comments which cannot be characterised as angry with H&M, but rather a protection of the company and its actions. The theme is included to demonstrate that not all the comments aimed at H&M in this case were negative. The analysis of this theme is vital to include in the analysis of H&M's applied crisis communication, as it supplies a different perspective to the crisis, which may be of relevance when analysing H&M's chosen crisis communication strategy. The theme is constructed from codes which stems from a common understanding that H&M is innocent. Furthermore, the writers of the comments seem to be of the common understanding that thinking differently, is a matter of perception and interpretation.

One Twitter user comments '[...]. I *understand* why it's caused controversy, but surely we shouldn't tell a black child they can't wear a hoodie that says monkey because of his skin colour?' (appendix 4, comment 2), while another user comments 'You're just interpreting it as something racist when it's just modelling, this is what's wrong with people like you, take offence when something is done with no harming intention' (appendix 4, comment 5). Another user suggests that being called a cool monkey should be taken as a compliment (appendix 4, comment 15).

The comments reflect opinions suggesting that H&M's advertisement should not be interpreted as racist. According to the Twitter users, H&M is not to blame for the racist understanding of the advertisement, as children are regularly referred to as monkeys. They suggest that it in fact are those who perceive the advertisement as racist, who makes it so, and that H&M did not have any harming intentions with the advertisement, and hence should not be blamed for racism.

According to Wall, it is highly relevant to remember that among a great variety of interpretations, it would be wrong to conclude that only one of the interpretations of the advertisement is correct. He argues that companies must remember that their intentions and desired ways of interpreting an advertisement, might not be received as such by the target group. Hence, it is according to Wall relevant for marketers and advertisers to consider as many perceptions as possible when creating its advertisements (2008, 1043). These many perceptions may be what the Twitter users protecting H&M are referring to. Representing racism and division is, according to these Twitter users, only one out of many ways of interpreting the advertisement, and hence, it must not automatically be approved as valid. One Twitter user comments: 'If – the mother condoned it – This wasn't a publicity stunt – The intentions of the people involved weren't racist – the people involved aren't racist Then I've got no

issues with the advertisement' (appendix 4, comment 11). The Twitter user suggests that he does not see a problem with the advertisement if the intentions of it has not been racist. This argument can be analysed further with Wall's theory of interpretations. The findings of the analysis of H&M's identity showed an identity with much focus on reaching out to everyone, and the terms inclusions and diversity is very much a part of the company's DNA. According to Wall, the interpretation of an image depends on the readers' background (2008, 1035). Wall furthermore suggest that no image is neutral as it will always be affected by both the creator and the reader's background for understanding (2008, 1042). The Twitter users' comment suggesting that he sees nothing wrong with the advertisement if the intentions of the people involved in making it were not racist, can be put in relation to Walls' theory which suggests that H&M's background for creating the advertisement is what structures it. Thus, if the advertisement is affected by H&M's background, and in this case an identity characterised by inclusiveness and diversity, then the intentions of the company will not have been of racist character. Thus, according to the Twitter comments creating this theme, it should not be necessary for H&M to apologise since it in accordance with its identity, was never H&M's intention to be racist when creating the advertisement. It seems as if the Twitter users seem to believe that just because an advertisement is perceived one way by one group of people, the company should not be required to go as far as to discontinue the advertisement. Thus, with Wall's theory applied to this distinction between the differences in background for understanding, it seems that the Twitter users believe that if the intentions of H&M were not racist, then the company did nothing wrong, and therefore should not have to act on other perceptions than the one intended by the company and its marketing department.

While some of the Twitter comments shaping the present theme suggest that H&M's advertisement is not of a racist character, other comments suggest that the racism is created by those who see the advertisement as such. One Twitter user comments 'Do you know that they're not calling him a monkey? It's just a jumper with the name 'monkey' on it, you're making it racist' (appendix 4, comment 9). Another user commented: [...] You have to be looking for this to be racist to see it as racist.' (appendix 4 comment 22). The above comments suggest that the advertisement was innocent until those who accused it of being racist, made it so by allotting it an interpretation which was never intended. To research this question of perceptions and interpretations further, it is relevant to apply Giddens' theory of the postmodern consumer and its choices, to the analysis of the reactions. This will be done to analyse the postmodern consumers' understanding of perceptions and the self in a postmodern society. According to Giddens, the postmodern individual creates a narrative which is

constantly supported by the different choices made in everyday life. The choices we take are part of the narrative we construct ourselves by (Giddens 1991, 81).

The wide and varied catalogue of choices of the consumer becomes relevant when analysing the postmodern consumers' behaviour and perceptions. When a company like H&M creates an identity with focus on including everyone, regardless of gender, class, culture and skin-tone, it is not directing its marketing to anyone specific. Hence it is making itself available for anyone to select, and thus providing itself as an option in anyone's narrative. When targeting everyone, H&M is communicating to everyone and this is what might create a certain understanding of the message. When consumers perceive H&M's actions as racist, it might be because this group of consumers, like all other groups of consumers, sees H&M as speaking to them, or speaking about them. Even though H&M's communication is targeted at everyone, or in fact maybe to no one specific at all, everyone evaluates H&M's actions according to his or her own perspective. Questions as 'how does this fit with my lifestyle and construction of my narrative' are being posed and evaluated to create the lifestyle. By posing this question, H&M's actions are being evaluated according to the individual's lifestyle and how this fit with who the individual wants to be. The individual is thus pointing H&M's actions towards the individual itself to perform this evaluation, and this is where the outrage might have its source.

From the analysis of the previous themes it is argued that different cultures, perspectives and opinions causes different sets of interpretations of an advertisement. One group of people perceived H&M's advertisement as racist, while the Twitter users creating the above theme think differently. The idea of having different perceptions and worldviews is not a new phenomenon, or something which is only relevant in a postmodern society. However, according to Giddens' theory of a postmodern society, the individuals' reflexive making of the self, is relatively new and different from the more traditional societies. Such idea causes reason to believe that a relevant source to the increasing outrage culture, might be found in the individual's making of the self. Because the individual's choices are being increased in tact with companies like H&M's increasing focus on targeting everyone, it seems that the individual might be putting more and more focus on the self. Questions of how things in society fit the individual's lifestyle indicates an increased focus on the individual's self and the creation of a certain lifestyle. Hence, when the group of Twitter users is outraged by an advertisement, it might be because this group of people is putting much focus on evaluating the advertisement in relation to a desired lifestyle. When the advertisement then does not fit with such lifestyle, because of perceived

racist intentions, the individual becomes limited in its choices from a company which otherwise targets everyone. A limitation which may cause anger and outrage.

The findings of the above analysis of the five themes provides an understanding of the development of an outrage culture in a postmodern society. Applying Giddens's theory to the perceptions of H&M's advertisement derived an understanding of the rising of the outrage culture as a product of the individual's intensified focus on the self. Adding Wall's theory of perceptions as depending on our cultural, historic and ethnic backgrounds, made it clear that the numbers of perceptions are numerous, albeit limited. This combination of an intensified focus on the self and a vast amount of different perceptions depending on the interpreter's background, is relevant for the following analysis of H&M's choice of crisis communication. The relevance is grounded in the understanding that everyone is evaluating everything in society in accordance with its self, led by a background-controlled perception of what is right and what is wrong.

4.3 Analysis of H&M's Crisis Communication

This third and last part of the analysis is set out to research how H&M responded to the outraged comments on Twitter, and subsequently how this respond may affect the intensification of an outrage culture. The analysis will include the findings of the above two analyses. Such inclusions will supply a basis to understanding why H&M communicated as it did during the crisis, based both on the company's identity, and the comments it received on Twitter. Furthermore, the chapter will include an analysis of how H&M could have communicated differently.

On the 8th of January 2018, H&M responded to the comments on Twitter related to the company's advertisement showing a dark-skinned boy in a hoodie reading "Coolest monkey in the jungle" (appendix 1, image 1). The response read as follows:

'We understand that many people are upset about the image of the children's hoodie. We who work at H&M, can only agree. We're deeply sorry that the picture was taken, and we also regret the actual print. Therefore, we've not only removed the image from our channels, but also the garment from our product offering. It's obvious that our routines haven't been followed properly. This is without any doubt. We'll thoroughly investigate why this happened to prevent this type of mistake from happening again' (Appendix 5) (Twitter response n.d.)

To analyse H&M's response to the Twitter users' comments as crisis communication, it is relevant to first and foremost be able to define the incident leading towards it, as an actual crisis. Coombs defines a crisis as an unpredictable event which threatens stakeholders' expectations of the company and generate negative outcomes (2015, 3), and argues that a crisis and the existence and relevance of it is defined in the eyes of the perceiver, and hence typically defined by the company's stakeholders. Hence, we must look towards the previous analysis of the stakeholders, in this case the Twitter users, definition of the event.

Above analysis reflected an outrage towards H&M based on a single event, which took the shape of an advertisement on the company's British website. The outrage was displayed on Twitter, where stakeholders spoke of a racist act, and a division of skin-tones and cultures. The commenters questioned H&M's intentions with the advertisement, and some threatened to boycott the company for its actions (appendix 4, comment 1-35). The stakeholders' anger, outrage and threatening to boycott H&M is centred around one single event; the advertisement and can according to the stakeholder's reactions and Coomb's definition be defined as crisis.

According to Coombs, a crisis disturbs the stakeholder's expectations and image of the company. Therefore, the company must be prepared to respond to the crisis (Coombs 2015, 3). The response posted on Twitter by H&M on the 8th of January 2018, can be referred to as response to the crisis. Most of the Twitter comments are dated from around the 7th to the 9th of January 2018 and since the message contains a response to the outraged Twitter comments, the message can be referred to as a form of crisis communication functioning as response to these comments (Coombs 2015, 5).

Having defined the event as a crisis and having defined H&M's post on Twitter as crisis communication and a response to the outraged Twitter users, H&M's strategy of crisis communication can be analysed.

4.3.1 Analysis of H&M's Choice of Strategy

When selecting a crisis communication strategy, it is according to Coombs most important that the company collects the right information to decide which strategy to apply. Furthermore, the company must decide how, where and when the crisis communication should be displayed (2015, 129).

According to Coombs, there are lots of different definitions of a crisis, and many different types of crises. When Coombs speak about the preceding collection of information, such information could e.g. refer to dangers of chemicals which the company would have to warn the public about in

connection with a crisis. In the case of H&M, the crisis does not involve any sort of physical harming, and hence the collection of information is of other character. When H&M formulated its response to the crisis, it can be assumed that the company formulated it as a response to the many comments on Twitter, as well as on other platforms. Hence, these comments function as pieces of what Coombs refer to as collected information, which H&M has shaped its response to. By researching the Twitter comments, H&M will have gathered information on what to apologise for and how serious the crisis is. By doing so, H&M is through collected information fitting its response to the stakeholders' expectations and perception of the crisis (Coombs 2015, 130).

The response was posted on Twitter on the 8th of January 2018. The collected Twitter comments applied in the present thesis are dated as posted from the 7th of January 2018 and forward, where most of them have been posted on the 8th of January 2018. According to Coombs, the quickness of a response is highly relevant, and in times where social media makes everything happen faster, the term becomes even more relevant in crisis communication. Coombs does not define how quick a quick response is, but it may be argued that H&M's response was distributed relatively quickly. Since most of the Twitter comments were posted on the 7th and 8th of January and the response was posted on the 8th of January, it is fair to say that H&M responded within 24 hours of the peak of the crisis.

The fact that H&M chose to post its response on Twitter, is of much relevance to how and where the crisis took place. This thesis is focused on the social platform Twitter because of reasons mentioned in the methodological chapter. However, it is worth noticing that both the outrage towards H&M and crisis responses from H&M can be found on other platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as well. Common for all platforms is the social media aspect and hence the rapidness of the crisis plays an important role when H&M was to prepare its response. According to Coombs, crises are discovered, reported and shared with an intense speed on social media platforms, and this is done by not only journalists, but to a great extent by private people as well who share and comment aspects of the crisis through social media. The quicker the stakeholders learn about the crisis, the quicker the company must reply (2015, 131). H&M made a choice of posting its response on Twitter within 24 hours of the strike of the crisis, presumably to avoid the spreading of rumours and an intensification of the crisis.

According to Coombs, when forming a crisis communication strategy, the organisation must choose a target audience to aim its response at. Looking at H&M's response, it can be argued that the response is not directed at one specific type of victims. H&M writes 'We understand that many people are

upset about the image of the children's hoodie.' (appendix 5) (Twitter 'Response' n.d.). Such statement includes both what Coombs refers to as the victims, defined as the primary stakeholders, who in some way have been injured by the crisis (2015, 138), and the nonvictims. The nonvictims are defined as the group of people who are not directly harmed but are following the crisis and the communication about it (Coombs 2015, 138). One reason to why H&M is not clearly defining its audience of the response, might be that it can be difficult to define the victims of the crisis. Had the crisis concerned toxic ingredients in children's toys, the target audience would have been easier to define. Such crisis could be defined as a crisis of physical character and the children and their parents would have been the obvious target group.

In the case of H&M, it must be presumed that no physical harm has been done to anyone, and hence it may be more difficult to define the target group. According to Coombs, victims of a crisis may also suffer from psychological harm, and this may be suggested as the type of harm which comes closest to the type of injury the victims of H&M's crisis might have felt. Many of the Twitter comments applied in the present thesis are written by users who express a feeling of anger and being upset or hurt in some way or the other, and thus can be characterised as victims who has suffered from psychological harm. However, the line between victims and nonvictims become slightly blurry when speaking of psychological harm, and some consumers might not even be upset on their own behalf but on others. Such blur between groups of victims, might be one reason to why H&M have made the choice of targeting its response to a wide audience, with seemingly no specific target group in focus.

4.3.2 The Response

'[...] Therefore, we've not only removed the image from our channels, but also the garment from our product offering. It's obvious that our routines haven't been followed properly. This is without any doubt. We'll thoroughly investigate why this happened to prevent this type of mistake from happening again' (appendix 5) (Twitter 'Response', n.d.). H&M's response contains what Coombs refers to as adjusting information (2015, 139). According to Coombs, the response should contain at least one of the three categories, instructing information, adjusting information and reputation management. Instructing information is, according to Coombs, applied in cases of physical harm and is set out to instruct victims in how to act around the product causing the harm (2015, 142). Adjusting information is either succeeding the instructing information or can stand alone as part of the initial response. The aim of the adjusting information is to explain to the stakeholders what has happened, and to reassure the victims and nonvictims that actions are being taken to avoid a repetition of the crisis in the future

(Coombs 2015, 142). The reputation management may or may not be carried out in the aftermaths of the crisis. A vast part of the message thus contains of adjusting information, and it is evident that the message is set out to explain to everyone involved in the crisis in one way or the other that H&M are aware of the crisis and is taking steps towards both mending the crisis and making sure that it will not happen again.

‘[...] We who work at H&M, can only agree. We’re deeply sorry that the picture was taken, and we also regret the actual print. [...]’ (appendix 5), (Twitter, ‘response’ n.d.).

Above quote from H&M’s response shows which response strategy the company chose to apply. H&M writes that it agrees with the people who are upset about the image, indicating that it agrees that there is something to be upset about. H&M then continues and writes that it is “deeply sorry” that the picture was taken, and that it regrets the actual print on the hoodie (appendix 5), (Twitter ‘response’, n.d.). To further identify which response strategy H&M has applied, Coombs’ list of the 10 most common crisis communication strategies can be applied. When looking at H&M’s response it is evident that H&M takes responsibility for the crisis. It states that it agrees with the people who are upset about the image, and hence agrees that the company has acted in a way and done something to be upset about. Furthermore, it writes that it is sorry that the picture was taken, and that it regrets the print. Such statement indicates that H&M takes full responsibility for the crisis. Looking at Coombs’ table of the 10 most common response strategies, H&M’s response resembles the strategy in Coombs’ table referred to as the “apology” placed in the category “Rebuilding Posture” (table 1). The apology strategy is according to Coombs one in which ‘The crisis manager apologises by making the organisation take full responsibility for the crisis and asks for forgiveness’ (2015, 145). Furthermore, as seen in model 2, Coombs suggest that this type of response should be applied in cases where there is evidence that the organisation is the primary actor responsible for the crisis (2015, 147-8). Thus, by applying Coombs’ definition of responses, it becomes evident that H&M has chosen to take on the full responsibility for the crisis and apologises for both shooting the picture and making a hoodie. The response does not directly ask for forgiveness, as an apology according to Coombs should, but everything else in the response resembles the apology strategy, and thus this can be defined as H&M’s applied response strategy in the crisis.

Having defined H&M’s applied response strategy as being an apology, Coomb’s theory on such choice of strategy can be applied to investigate the reasons behind such choice. In addition to the table defining the 10 most common response strategies, Coombs has defined a table of advice on how

and when to apply the different strategies. According to Coombs, the company should apply the apology strategy if the company accepts the responsibility of the crisis, in the case where there is evidence that the organisation is the primary actor (2015 147-8). By apologising, H&M acknowledges the crisis, accepts its responsibility and promises its stakeholders that it will do what it takes to prevent a repetition of the crisis.

4.3.3 Analysis of Alternative Strategies

According to Coombs, an apology is often appreciated by stakeholders, as such response reflects an acknowledgement that the company has acted wrong and takes full responsibility for any harm the victims and nonvictims might have experienced (2015, 148). However, Coombs suggests that even though the strategy of apologising might work well as a rebuilding posture, the company should think twice before applying the strategy. Because apologising is admitting that the company has broken a set of social rules, it might draw negative feelings towards the company (Coombs 2015, 148). Hence when H&M responds to the crisis by giving a full apology, it admits that it acted against the social rules of behaviour, and in this case its own identity, which might cause its stakeholders to associate H&M with a set of negative feelings in future references. Coombs suggests that the company should always consider its other options when forming its crisis response, and not just jump directly to applying to the apology strategy. He suggests that the company should consider applying a so-called non-apology, which in contrary to the apology does not reflect responsibility of the crisis, but merely an indication of sympathy for the victims (Coombs 2015, 149). Reviewing Coombs' table of response strategies, this strategy of a non-apology could be constructed from taking a, what Coombs refer to as, a diminishment posture, and more specifically an excusing strategy. By applying an excusing strategy, H&M could according to Coomb's definition, acknowledge the crisis and hence acknowledge that consumers have been affected by it. However, in contrast to the apology strategy, the excusing strategy would enable H&M to reassure the consumers that the company had no intention to harm anyone and suggest that the crisis was out of H&M's control (Coombs 2015, 145). By applying the excusing strategy, H&M would unlike with the apology strategy, not have to admit to having acted against its identity, which according to Coombs' could result in negative feelings towards the company (Coombs 2015, 148).

The findings of the chapter analysing the applied crisis communication, shows that the case can be defined as a crisis, as it according to Coombs is the stakeholders who are the main actors in such definition. Having defined the case as a crisis, H&M's response on Twitter could then be defined as

a crisis response. The crisis response was presumably developed as response to Twitter comments from outraged users and was shared on H&M's Twitter account relatively quickly. Applying Coombs' table of response strategies to H&M's response, it was evident that H&M has chosen to apply the strategy of apologising to its stakeholders. Doing so, the company took on full responsibility of the crisis and the acts behind. Finally, H&M's options of alternative strategies were analysed, showing that H&M might have chosen to apply an excusing strategy, rather than an apology strategy. Applying an excusing strategy would have moved the responsibility away from H&M, while still accepting the existence of the crisis and the consumers' reaction towards it.

Having analysed H&M's corporate identity, the stakeholders' reasons to be outraged, H&M's response to the outrage and alternatives strategies to the one applied, a discussion of the company's choice of crisis communication as affected by and affecting the outrage culture can be initiated. The following chapter will discuss the findings from the above analyses.

5. Discussion

The chapter presents a discussion of how H&M's chosen strategy of crisis communication may be affecting the increase of an outrage culture. The discussion will collect the findings from all of the above analyses which subsequently will derive a final conclusion.

The findings of above analysis of H&M's choice of crisis strategy, show that H&M chose to apply a strategy of apologising. An apology which was aimed at a wide target group and included a confession that the company were indeed to blame for having gotten the situation wrong. In accordance with Coombs' SCCT, H&M adjusted its response to fit the Twitter users' perception of the advertisement. However, from above analysis of the Twitter comments, the findings reflect a conflicting perception of the advertisement and more specifically the image which caused the crisis. It is made evident that the conception of the situation is ambiguous. Moreover, the findings of the thematic analysis of the Twitter responses showed a relevance of perceptions and interpretations. The results reflected the social constructivist approach of the present thesis, as it showed that a certain perception of a phenomena differs according to social background for understanding, and that no perception is truer than others. The results furthermore showed that our postmodern Western world is increasing its focus on the individual and the importance of creating a desired self from a reflexive choosing, performed among an immense set of choice and options. Such increase in an inward-centred focus creates a larger emphasis on the availability of the choices and puts a demand on companies to be careful not to exclude, diminish or oversee groups of people as this would limit their choices.

When H&M chooses to apologise, it justifies one target groups' perception as being the right one, and hence, seems to neglect both its own identity as well as other perceptions of the situation defined as a crisis. By doing so, the company adjusts to one specific perception of the situation and admits that it has acted wrong. A confession which can be argued to indicate that the accusations of racism and division as analysed above, were in fact relevant. Giddens argues that institutions, which in this case qualifies as companies such as H&M, are in an interdependent relationship with the consumers. As much as the consumers must adjust to the regulations and customs of the company, as much must the company adjust to the consumers' demands and wishes. Only then can we speak of a postmodern society which is in constant evaluating development (Giddens 1991, 16). By apologising, H&M is adjusting to a specific group of consumers' demands. A set of demands grounded in the belief that H&M has acted in a controversial and racist manner, causing a sense of division between groups of people. It is accused of being a 'white clothing company' which 'labels a black boy a "monkey"' (appendix 4, comment 28). From the analysis of H&M's identity it was concluded to be a company which prides itself by offering its products to everyone. According to the company, all that it ever wants to be and to be known as, is based on inclusion and diversity (appendix inclusion and diversity). It minimises its origin as a Swedish company and instead focuses on having a global corporate culture, targeting every culture the same way worldwide. When admitting its fault in the crisis, and is taking all the responsibility for the situation, H&M does not suggest that it is a matter of perceptions of how to interpret the image in the advertisement, but acknowledges that the mistake was indeed made, and for that it apologises. This apology and acknowledgement of its own wrongdoing can be suggested to create a misalignment with the company's identity. Applying Coomb's SCCT, H&M chose to adjust its communication to the group of people who accused it of having acted in a racist and controversial manner, and by doing so, neglects its own discernment as rooted in its identity and its value of using "common sense" without over-analysing (appendix 3, value 7). Such neglect of its identity and its ability to apply common sense, due to a desire to please everyone to come off as appealing as possible, may with Kapferer's theory in mind (2014, 99) be argued to weaken the company's identity as the company admits to having behaved inappropriately.

With this argumentation in mind, it is relevant for the conclusion of the thesis to reflect upon how H&M could have responded differently. H&M chose to take full responsibility for the crisis and applied an apology strategy. Instead of taking full responsibility, H&M might have chosen to view the different perceptions as reflected on Twitter and taken the question of perceptions and interpretations into consideration when forming the crisis response. Acknowledging the different

perspectives could have led to a different strategy, where the company might only take on some of the responsibility and letting the consumers know that it never intended to harm anyone with the advertisement. The “excuse strategy” is relevant to mention in line with such suggestion. As seen in above analysis, the excuse strategy works to let the consumers know that the company acknowledges the crisis but deny having responsibility for the cause of it. Choosing the excuse strategy, H&M would have the possibility to indicate that a perception of the advertisement as being racist, would be a misinterpretation of it, as this was never the intention of the advertisement when it was created. H&M would have the opportunity to utilise its defined identity as basis for its intentions when creating the advertisement. It would give the company a chance to indicate that whoever perceives the advertisement in a harmful way, has perceived it very differently from how H&M meant for it to be perceived, since such perception is out of line with H&M’s identity. However, with an excuse, the company would accept the different perceptions and hence interpretations of the advertisement. The excuse would then be given to those who understood the advertisement in a different way from how it was meant, more than it would apologise for the actual image. By applying an excuse strategy, H&M would thus be able to accept the differences in perceptions but make those consumers who perceive it as racist, aware that such perception is out of line with H&M’s identity and hence intentions.

6. Conclusion

The chapter of analyses was carried out by an initial analysis of H&M’s identity as one which is including and seeks to embrace diversity, with an aim to target as wide an audience as possible. The company’s desire to be “everyone’s” regardless of cultural differences was striking. The analysis furthermore applied an understanding of the necessity for companies like H&M to stay true to its identity, because it otherwise might be at risk of being affected by external noises. An external noise which per example in H&M’s case could be the desire to please as large a target group as possible, which might consequently blur the company’s identity.

The analysis of H&M’s identity supplied the rest of the analysis with a foundation on which the analysis of the consumer’s reasons to be outraged towards H&M could be carried out. The thematic analysis of the Twitter users’ reactions towards H&M’s advertisement was conducted to enable an understanding of why we see such an immense increase of an outrage culture in our Western world. The findings of the analysis showed an outrage based on several reasons, and hence reflected various perceptions of the advertisement and the development of it. The analysis showed an understanding of

H&M's advertisement as the intentional creation of a stereotype to distinguish "blacks" from "whites", and it showed the demonstration of consumer-power as a result of anger towards a large company who "should know better". It reflected the outrage as a presumption of the intentional creation of a stereotype echoing of racism. A presumption of racism caused by the use of the word "monkey" which in American history has been used as a degrading nickname given to African-Americans. Moreover, the findings reflected a division between a group of people who seemed to think that H&M had acted intentionally to cause outrage and harm, while another group of people believed the act to be unintentional, but stupid and indicating a degree of ignorance and lack of diversity in H&M's marketing department. Finally, the findings include the opinion that H&M did not do anything wrong, and hence should not be blamed for something which in fact is created by those who think differently.

The final analysis was carried out to understand how H&M had chosen to respond to the outrage shown by its consumers and how the company could have communicated differently. The findings showed that H&M had chosen to fully apologise and took full responsibility.

The above analysis of H&M's identity, the consumers reactions to the advertisement and H&M's subsequent response to the crisis, shows a great relevance of differences in perceptions. Different perceptions which particularly come to show in a Western postmodern society where a rising of a fast-growing outrage culture is infiltrating different aspects of society, companies and how we communicate with each other. This poses a vast amount of questions, amongst which the question of the present thesis is structured. Why are we so outraged, how should companies react to our outrage caused by a matter of perceptions and can a company include all, while still staying truthful and resting in its identity? Questions which initiated the process of the present master thesis and created its overall research question.

The fact that H&M chose to fully apologise for the advertisement can be argued to give the consumers an indication of being right about their perception of the advertisement, even though such perception is so vastly out of line with H&M's identity and how the company seems to otherwise work. This indication may give the consumers a power which can be seen in relevance to Giddens' theory on the interdependence between individuals and institutions. An interdependence which creates the constant dynamic development that is the foundation of a postmodern society. Instantly apologising may contradict with this development of a postmodern society, as it gives a power to the consumer; a power to decide what is right and what is wrong. Succumbing to the consumers' accusations and

directions of how to act, eliminates the institutions', and in this case the companies', regulations and rules which the consumers otherwise would have to follow. An elimination which causes distortion of the postmodern society's interdependence between institutions and individuals. Other cases like the one researched in the present thesis show a similarity in crisis communication strategy, where the companies accused of creating controversial advertisements have apologised without much hesitation. Perceptions which are out of line with the company's intentions are being accepted as valid, leading to a drawback of the products in question, and are followed by a full apology. Hence, a tendency of succumbing to accusations based on perceptions is showing, and this might very well be a tendency which has a certain amount of effect on the ongoing outrage culture.

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