NHH

CSR in the Time of Coronavirus

A Qualitative Study on the Perception of Coronavirus Cause Marketing Relief Responses from the Perspective of Consumers

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Executive Summary

For years, companies have been acting to provide relief when disasters strike in order to build a competitive advantage, as this is something consumers are demanding more and more. It is no longer seen as acceptable for companies to stand on the side-lines when disasters strike; they must act. Despite these growing expectations, relief responses are not always seen as being altruistic. Instead, during the Coronavirus pandemic, consumers have been critical judges of disaster relief responses taken by companies, and these newly affected disaster victims are not shy about voicing their displeasure when they find a company's response unsuitable. Throughout this study, I took a deep dive into the determining factors of cause marketing relief response perceptions to answer the question:

Which factors influence consumer perception of cause marketing relief responses during the Covid-19 pandemic?

To answer this question, an exploratory and descriptive qualitative study was conducted with an abductive approach: past theory of CSR perception acted as the theoretical foundation for the study, while new emerging factors specific to the pandemic were allowed to emerge. To do so, a series of interviews was conducted and examples of specifically relevant relief responses from the beginning of the pandemic were shown to respondents.

From the findings, a mixture of pre-existing factors was contextualised in this new setting and new ones were discovered. Ultimately, Covid-19 cause marketing relief response perception depend on a multitude of factors. First, consumers will perceive a relief response and the firm behind it more positively when they attribute values-driven (intrinsic) motives to the firm, and negatively when they attribute egoistic (extrinsic) motives. Attribution of motives and perception will be influenced by various moderating factors. These include relief response characteristics (effectiveness, fit with the company); company characteristics (size and reputation); external factors (Media and WOM); contextual factors (corporate hypocrisy, timing), consumer characteristics (trust, ethics). These factors will influence the attribution of motives behind a company's actions and perception of the relief response and the company.

Relief response perception can affect the attitudes that a consumer holds towards a company. In an uncontrollable disaster setting, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, managers should offer tangible help in the form of product donations which are in high demand.

Acknowledgements

This thesis represents the end of my degree at the Norwegian School of Economics, where I pursued a Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration, with a specialisation in International Business.

I have always had an interest in CSR and the importance for businesses to meet the expectations of consumers when it comes to acting in a responsible manner. While the Covid-19 pandemic has brought hardship to all of us in a way or another, it gave me the opportunity to delve into a new aspect of CSR – disaster relief – which I felt required a deeper understanding than existed at the time.

This thesis was a challenging but rewarding process. I feel like I have learned an incredible amount not only about doing research but also regarding the CSR topics that were of interest to me. This thesis was a challenging but rewarding process.

I am incredibly grateful to everyone who took part in this journey alongside me. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Magne Supphellen, for sticking with me, encouraging me, and supporting me throughout this entire process all the way from Norway while I was in Italy. Your words of advice and feedback helped me finish this monumental undertaking.

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1. Introduction

SARS-CoV-2, a novel coronavirus which first appeared in 2019, is the current cause of a global pandemic which is still very much affecting the world at large. With the majority of countries going into lockdown, both global and local economies are affected as well as consumers' spending power.

In my thesis I will not focus so much the details of Covid-19 as a health care crisis as much as I will focus on its effect on consumer perception of brands and their attitude changes depending on companies' response to the crisis.

According to the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A), 56% of consumers like hearing about brands making charitable contributions in the form of donations of good and services, while 40% want to know what actions brands are taking in response to the pandemic (Research Services, 2020a).

From a multinational survey encompassing 30 markets and 25.000 consumers, the Covid-19 barometer report developed by Kantar in March (Hawkins et al., 2020), results show 78% of consumers think companies should be open about how they can be of assistance in the new normal, 75% believe companies should keep the public informed about their attempts to deal with the situation, while 74% believe brands should not take advantage of the situation to promote themselves (Hawkins et al., 2020; Vizard, 2020).

According to the *Harvard Business Review* (Balis, 2020, para. 6) "Brands that use this time to be commercially exploitative will not fare well" and "people will remember brands for their acts of good in a time of crisis, particularly if done with true heart and generosity."

A survey executed by Edelman (2020) on brand trust and consumer behaviour during the Coronavirus pandemic with 12.000 respondents from 12 countries has shown that 62% of those surveyed believe that brands must get involved in order for their country to face the crisis successfully. 33% of consumers have persuaded others to stop using products from brands that are not responding correctly, while 37% have begun using new brands as a result of their good response to the pandemic. 65% said that how a brand reacts to the pandemic will have a considerable influence on their decision to purchase from said brand in the future, and firms that are placing profit over people will permanently lose consumer trust, according to 71% of respondents (Edelman, 2020).

It can be useful to look into the Fukushima disaster of 2011, in which an earthquake and resulting tsunami damaged one of the reactors at the Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant, resulting in considerable fallout of radioactive particles into the ocean and the atmosphere. According to a piece written by *The Guardian* in 2012 (Rodríguez and Sanchez, 2012), the Japanese people had high expectations of national companies, with 60% of the population surveyed expecting companies to contribute to the recovery of Japan. While this could be contextualised due to Japanese culture, similar expectations were present 8 years ago in Japan with the Fukushima disaster as they are today, globally, with the Coronavirus response.

Furthermore, the article gives examples of brands that made great strides in helping the population at large in response to the Fukushima crisis. These incudes Toyota, Uniqlo and Sony. These brands can be categorised as Meaningful Brands (Rodríguez and Sanchez, 2012). Four years later, these brands appeared to outperform the stock market. Once more, it is clear that there is a tangible benefit in making a difference.

According to a study assessing the market reaction to the relief responses from 79 U.S. firms who provided aid after the 2004 tsunami that hit Southeast Asia, companies experienced noticeable positive market return following their donations (Patten, 2008).

> "Contributions to disaster relief are virtually de rigueur today for both global and local companies." (Hildebrand et al., 2017, p.43).

There are many examples of companies reacting to Covid-19. Preliminarily, some of these can be divided in awareness campaigns, donations – of money or goods-, credit relief, employee protection and incentives, positive messaging, etc. For instance, with its "Play inside, play for the world" campaign, Nike is encouraging people to exercise at home and protect others in the process. Ford, with its "Built for right now" campaign, is giving assistance to people who are leasing or have a loan with Ford credit. The fashion giant Giorgio Armani has donated $1,43 million dollars to four hospitals in Rome and Milan, as well as to the Civil Protection Agency in Italy (Morgan, 2020). Louis Vuitton announced it would start making hand sanitiser for health authorities, and McDonald's split the arches of its logo to show it supported social distancing.

However, companies must take into consideration how consumers might perceive their actions when doing their part in the Covid-19 response (Hawkins et al., 2020). BrewDog, a multinational brewing company and pub chain, faced criticism when it advertised its own

initiative to produce their own "punk" hand sanitiser. Some consumers online thought of it as "shameless marketing" (Mathers, 2020). Later on, BrewDog clarified that the hand sanitiser would not be sold to the public but would be donated to the NHS. Similarly, McDonald's' awareness campaign to spread awareness on the importance of social distancing was heavily criticised by the public.

A survey devised by McKinsey (Bonini, McKillop, and Mendonca, 2007, as cited in Jordan et al., 2012) found that over than 70% of global consumers expect not only governments but also corporations to intervene in helping society. More importantly, "half of American consumers report that they would stop purchasing products from companies that they believe are not living up to their social responsibilities" (Bonini, McKillop, and Mendonca, 2007, as cited in Jordan et al., 2012, p. 622). Therefore, it is paramount for companies to make the right steps in ensuring their relief responses are adequate from a consumer's perspective.

It is clear that, according to consumers, companies are expected to take action and respond appropriately to the Coronavirus crisis. While there are a plethora of different ways in which a company can react, there is little evidence showing what might appear to be best practices according to consumers. For instance, Nike has not faced criticism for making an awareness campaign, while McDonald's has, the action is the same, but it was marketed and perceived in different ways. It is thus clear that there is a lot of nuance as to how consumers may perceive brand's relief responses to Covid-19.

Patten (2008) validates the assertion from Godfrey (2005), also remarked on by Manuel and Herron (2020), that in order to increase firm value, philanthropic giving must be perceived as a genuine manifestation of the firm's motives behind their social responsiveness. Indeed, firms have to be careful to exude felt social interest towards their shareholders in order to garner favourable reputation returns, which Godfrey (2005) defines as "reputational capital". When a company's CSR action is felt by consumers to be driven by extrinsic motives (Ginder, Kwon and Byun, 2021), or when a company acts as a "strategic Samaritan", falling short in delivering on what it has promised (Jordan, Diermeier, Galinsky, 2012), consumers' image of the brand will suffer.

Studies have shown that philanthropic giving has been increasing over the years (Muller and Whiteman, 2009; van der Vegt et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016; Hildebrand et al., 2017; Manuel

and Herron, 2020). However, studies on consumer perception of relief responses in the face of a crisis of this magnitude are sorely lacking.

Furthermore, while studies on both disaster relief and perception of CSR have been done, literature is sparse in the context of disaster relief perception from a consumer perspective and no studies have been conducted in the context of the pandemic. In order to reduce this gap in the literature, I hope to study the perception of relief responses to Covid-19 with a CSR attribution theory lens.

Relief responses are de facto CSR activities from a company (Manuel and Herron, 2020), and research on attribution of CSR has been proposed by scholars as a method of understanding the perception of CSR activities of a company by consumers (Ellen, 2006; Marín, Cuestas and Roman, 2015; Ginder et al., 2021). As it will be shown in the literature review, there are a plethora of factors affecting consumer's perception and motives attribution. However, these theoretical concepts have never been applied to CSR in a disaster setting of the kind Covid-19 relief responses are. Furthermore, there may be other factors that affect relief response perception that are unique to the pandemic that need to be discovered. Therefore, in order to truly understand how consumers perceive relief responses one must clarify which factors affect their perception from a consumer's point of view.

Due to the sheer magnitude of relief responses and in order to refine the scope of the research, the focus will be put on cause marketing relief responses, as cause marketing campaigns received a lot more attention from media and consumers alike, and the literature on cause marketing perception is more readily available. Therefore, my research question is:

Which factors influence consumer perception of cause marketing relief responses during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.1 Motivation for the Study

It is hard to say when the Covid-19 pandemic will end, and there has not been any study on the perception of consumers towards brands' reactions to the pandemic. Despite the relevance of consumers' expectations, nobody has yet studied the effectiveness of different Coronavirus-related relief campaigns and thus, how consumers are perceiving brand actions is not clear. Covid-19 relief responses are expected to have a long-term effect on brand attitudes and trust,

so it is important to understand how consumers perceive these responses. Furthermore, while there have been studies on the effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand attitudes and consumer perception, none have been done within the context of a crisis like the Coronavirus pandemic. Relief responses seem to be perceived differently, and some are deemed to be good while others received criticism. Whether a CSR action is perceived in a negative or positive light can make or break the CSR goals for the company, especially in a situation as delicate as that of Covid-19. Therefore, it is important to find out how relief responses are perceived and to clarify which factors affect consumer's perception, so that companies can better understand and do what consumers actually want.

The insights from this study could lead to further future studies that can uncover more on corporate social responsibility and its positive effect on brand equity in the larger context of disaster relief. Furthermore, Covid-19 perception factors could contribute to the study of CSR perception in the larger context of disaster relief and help managers understand how to better respond to future disasters.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into 7 chapters. In Chapter 1, a general introduction on the topic, the research question and the motivation for the study have been introduced.

In Chapter 2, background information on the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the concept of relief responses is provided.

In Chapter 3, relevant literature on CSR perception is presented. First, CSR is defined. Then, what type of CSR relief responses belong to is clarified. The rest of the chapter focuses on CSR perception via attribution theory, motives, and by defining the moderating factors affecting perception as well as motives attribution. A final summary of literature review can be found at the end of section 3.8.

In Chapter 4, the research design, methodological choices, sampling and primary and secondary data collection techniques and data analysis. This chapter also introduces the four relief responses campaigns which have been selected as a means to conduct the study.

In Chapter 5, the results from the 8 interviews conducted are presented. These are divided into four subsections where the perception of each relief response is conveyed in detail. Lastly, the chapter offers further findings in section 5.5.

In Chapter 6, the findings are discussed and interpreted by contrasting and relating them with the literature presented in Chapter 3 as well as CSR literature at large. This chapter also provides theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations and future research.

Lastly, in Chapter 7, an overall conclusion is provided.

2. Background

2.1 Covid-19

To better understand the context of the disaster which is Covid-19, it is important to know what, specifically, Covid-19 is. Put simply, Covid-19, which in the course of this thesis will be also interchangeably referred to as 'Corona' or 'Coronavirus', is a shortening of 'coronavirus disease-19' which is caused by the virus **severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2** (SARS-CoV-2), a highly infectious coronavirus which originated in 2019 and whose rapid spread led to the global pandemic we all have come to witness (WHO, 2021a).

While the precise origins of Covid-19 remain open to speculation, what is certain is that a global event of this magnitude has not occurred in over one hundred years, when the Spanish Flu struck the world. Undoubtedly, Covid-19 could be classified as a disaster. As stated by Coombs (2015), a disaster is a sudden and seriously disruptive event that threatens public health and safety. What differentiates a disaster from an organisational crisis is the degree of controllability: disasters are usually not controllable or caused by firms or governmental institutions, who also tend to be affected, but may still lead to an organisational crisis. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Hildebrand et al. (2017), some disasters could be deemed to be controllable, such as in the case of the Shenzhen Landslide disaster of 2015, where the landslide that killed dozens was the result of illegal dumping of construction waste (Buckley and Ramzy, 2015).

What sets the Covid-19 pandemic apart from other disasters, natural or otherwise, is its scale. Some of the largest disasters of the past decade, like Southeast Asia being hit by Typhoon Haiyan or the forest fires which hit Australia and California in early 2020, were localised. Covid-19 is a global disaster, affecting all countries simultaneously (Jones, Palumbo and Brown, 2021).

Covid-19 is a new kind of disaster, one which combines aspects of past crises and applies them more broadly, affecting the entire world. The ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic have developed into a healthcare crisis, a financial crisis, a social crisis. While healthcare systems reached critical capacity due to sick patients, stay-at-home orders caused a slowdown of global supply chains which in turn led to an economic slowdown, a kind of crisis reminiscent of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also changed how consumers think about companies and their responsibilities to stakeholders. While very few consumers expect companies to stop advertising all together (Hawkins et al., 2020), 84% want to see companies show in their advertisements how they are helping society through the pandemic (Edelman, 2020). 62% of the respondents felt that brands needed to step in, or their country would not make it (Edelman, 2020). Furthermore, 71% respondents from Edelman and 74% from Kantar said they do not want companies to take advantage of the pandemic for their own benefit. Instead, 85% said that they wanted brands to use their broad reach to educate and raise awareness (Edelman, 2020; Hawkins et al., 2020). Furthermore, in a survey from 4A's, 25% of consumers said companies should donate goods or services as a form of support (Research Services, 2020b). Thus, how a company reacts to the pandemic is of utmost importance, as this will heavily impact consumer's purchase decisions in the future (Edelman, 2020).

Throughout the pandemic, companies have stepped in in a multitude of ways. For example, relief responses included donating hand sanitiser, face masks, money, ventilators, and by spreading information about social distancing, hand washing, etc. However, very little is known about how consumers see these relief responses. While we do have some understanding from preliminary surveys, what makes consumers like or dislike a relief response is not abundantly clear.

At the time of writing this thesis, studies on the Covid-19 pandemic have mostly focused on medicine, healthcare, psychology, economics, or marketing trends. However, none have tried to unveil how consumers perceive relief responses more specifically and in an in-depth manner.

2.2 Relief Responses

In regard to literature on disaster relief, there is a lack of a clear definition of what a relief response is. According to Kuo and Means (2012), a disaster relief response is when an organisation devotes substantial resources, not only economic but also logistical capacity and operational expertise, to make a difference and support those in need after disaster hit.

Nowadays, relief responses are considered a must when disaster strikes (Hildebrand et al., 2017). As governments lack the ability to handle disasters on their own, companies can be said to have a moral responsibility to assist in times of crisis (van der Vegt et al., 2015, as cited in

Manuel and Herron, 2020). Furthermore, companies who participate can experience noticeable positive market returns following their contributions (Patten, 2008).

Undoubtedly, disaster relief from companies towards disaster victims is not a new occurrence (Patten, 2008; Muller and Whiteman, 2009; Gao, 2011; Hildebrand et al. 2017). Companies have become major aid providers following disaster (Muller and Whiteman, 2009). In an article from the *Harvard Business Review*, Burke (2019) asserted that as the cost of natural disasters increased, corporations have stepped in to help. If, in the beginning of the 21st century, less than one-third of the world's largest companies donated towards disaster relief, the share of contributors surpassed 90% by 2015 (Burke, 2019).

In the past, companies have devoted billions of dollars in donations of supplies and money to various causes, such as hurricanes (Katrina), tsunamis (Fukushima), terrorist attacks (9/11) and forest fires just in the 21st century. For instance, as a response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, American corporations pledged $580 million dollars towards relief efforts (Muller, Whiteman and van der Voort, 2006, as cited in Muller and Whiteman, 2009). Private corporations such as UPS and FedEx have donated $1 million in cash and helped by providing transportation logistics expertise during the Fukushima disaster that hit Japan in 2011 (Hildebrand, 2017). Following Katrina, Wal-Mart distributed relief supplies to coast residents affected by the hurricane, even outpacing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (Chandra, Moen, and Sellers, 2016), and corporate donations surpassed $500 million in 2005 (CNN, 2005).

In the aftermath of 9/11, examples of relief responses were also present and, thus, are worth mentioning. Following the event, corporations donated approximately $750m (CNN, 2005) and companies such as Starbucks, Pfizer, Sensa and Toys'r'Us donated millions in the form of money and goods donations through cause marketing campaigns (Marconi, 2002).

In this thesis, a relief response in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as actions taken by the company in order to help those hit by the crisis. These can range from monetary donations, awareness campaigns, donations of goods to hospitals, governments, communities, consumers or to the cause at large. For example, companies have repurposed their manufacturing capabilities in order to produce face masks, ventilators, face shields, hand sanitiser, or, in case the company was already producing these, they ramped up production to meet demands (Marom and Lussier, 2020). Other companies have carried out awareness

campaigns to try to provide information about what the populace can do to protect themselves and others during the pandemic. For example, these includes positive messaging about hand washing, staying at home and social distancing. It could be argued that the majority of relief responses fall into two main types of CSR: corporate philanthropy and cause marketing. In the next section, I will give an overview of what CSR is.

3. Literature Review

In this section of the thesis, CSR (3.1), relief response categorisation in a CSR context (3.2), and CSR perception and its determinants (3.3 to 3.7) are presented in detail by drawing on the relevant literature. Finally, the research gap that the study hopes to fill is stated (3.8).

3.1 CSR

There are multiple definitions of CSR in the literature, however, they tend to vary, and little consensus has been reached among scholars, politicians and industry participants (Sheehy, 2015). For the purpose of this thesis, CSR will be defined as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 1953, p. 6)

The responsibility of organisations in the pursuit of the betterment of society has been a topic of debate by academics. Most notably, Friedman (1970) asserted how the only social responsibility of businesses is to make a profit. In a similar way, Collins (1994) asserted that business' ultimate goal is pursuing self-interest. However, scholars such as Mintzberg (1983) have disagreed with Friedman, stating that social responsibility is necessary, as economic and societal goals cannot be separated. Handy (2002) claims that putting profit before all else is a mistake; rather, profit is what gives the business the ability to do something for society, which justifies the existence of the business.

Ultimately, CSR has proven to be beneficial to firms worldwide, bringing competitive advantage in the form of improved brand image and purchase intention (Ellen et al., 2006). Mohr, Webb, & Harris (2001) argue that corporate social responsibility entails bringing as much good as possible to society. Furthermore, in their study they found that consumers will boycott irresponsible companies, which reenforces the importance of companies practicing CSR. Most importantly, while consumers' beliefs about the profitability and importance of social responsibility are inconsistent, companies that do good through CSR will experience increased purchase intention from consumers when the CSR issue is judged to be of importance. Because the Covid-19 pandemic is deeply impacting on everyone's life, it can be inferred that participating in responsible CSR is of the utmost importance in these difficult times. But what responsibilities do companies hold when doing CSR?

According to Carroll (1991), a corporation has four main areas of responsibility to which it should abide to when doing CSR: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. Companies have the responsibility to be profitable, of course, and maintain a strong competitive position. While doing so, companies have to obey the law and fulfil their legal obligations. Ethical responsibilities are those which go beyond laws and regulations, and society expects businesses to act consistently with expectations of ethical and moral norms, which should not be compromised in order to achieve corporate goals. Lastly, philanthropic responsibilities include fulfilling people's need for corporations to act like good citizens, to do what is right and give back to society even when firms are not expected to do so from a legal or ethical standpoint. Nevertheless, Carroll (2016) points out that some businesses do indeed give back motivated by an ethical obligation. Examples of philanthropic giving include monetary donations, product donations, as well as volunteerism and in general any contribution towards a company's stakeholders. Philanthropy is one of the most important elements of CSR to this day (Carroll, 2016), and philanthropic giving is the focus, the essence of relief responses throughout the pandemic.

Scholars have criticised Carroll's model for putting economic responsibilities as the most important in the pyramid. Kang and Wood (1995) asserted that by prioritising profit, social contributions risk being sacrificed.

Aguilera et al. (2007, as cited in Manuel and Herron, 2020) argue that there are three main motivations for a company to engage in CSR. First, the reasons to partake in CSR stem from self-interested motives, through which the company uses CSR to promote itself in order to gain competitive advantage on the market (instrumental motives) (Manuel and Herron, 2020). Second are relational motives, which relate to how CSR can improve relationships between the firm and its stakeholders, which can also lead to financial gains (Manuel and Herron, 2020). Third, moral motives, which entail helping society because it is the right thing to do (Manuel and Herron, 2020). The authors assert that it is perfectly acceptable for a company to act based on one or more of the motivators, with a different hierarchy of importance depending on the situational context in which the CSR activity takes place (Aguilera et al., 2007, as cited in Manuel and Herron, 2020). Manuel and Herron (2020) expand on the concept by adding that it is possible for a company to satisfy multiple motivations through a single action. However, a company has to be wary not to appear self-interested, especially in a situation of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. As we will see in section 3.6, when consumers perceive

that a company is doing CSR for egoistic motives, the CSR action can actually backfire and hurt a company's reputation (Coombs and Holladay, 2015).

A large majority of relief responses done by companies would either fall into the CSR subcategories of corporate philanthropy or cause marketing, which will be discussed in the next section. However, more information will be given about cause marketing as this type of relief response is the main focus of this study.

3.2 What Type of CSR are Relief Responses?

3.2.1 Corporate Philanthropy

Disaster relief, such as relief responses during the pandemic, can be related to the subsection of CSR defined as corporate philanthropy (Patten, 2008; Muller and Whiteman, 2009; Gao, 2011). But what is philanthropy?

First, it is important to clarify what philanthropy is in general. Philanthropy can be defined as the "love of mankind; good nature" (Johnson, 1979). In a business context, corporate philanthropy can be defined as "the private giving of time or valuables (money, security, property) for public purposes." (Salamon, 1992, p.5-6). Thus, corporate philanthropy encompasses a subsection of CSR in which a company will use their expertise or capital in order to help address a specific issue. As an example, a company donating masks during the pandemic or money to hospitals can be seen as doing corporate philanthropy.

According to Godfrey (2005), good deeds not only benefit society, but also firms. Corporate philanthropy can increase the perceived moral capital of a firm in the eyes of consumers, as they will see the company as being more caring, which can positively contribute to shareholder wealth through direct and indirect means (Godfrey, 2005; Gardberg and Fombrun, 2006). Corporate philanthropy has evolved over time, and strategic corporate philanthropy has risen as the more de-facto type of giving from corporations since the 1980s (Gautier and Pache, 2015). Strategic corporate philanthropy, also simply referred to as strategic philanthropy, entails the giving of resources which not only benefit the cause being addressed but also the firm itself (Post and Waddock, 1995, as cited in Gautier and Pache, 2015). In other words, the philanthropic giving aligns with the business goals of the corporation.

3.2.2 **Cause Marketing**

Cause marketing has been dubbed "the new face of corporate philanthropy" (Caesar, 1986, as cited in Gautier and Pache, 2015, p.348). Initially, cause marketing, referred to as cause-related marketing, stemmed from a partnership between a non-profit and a corporation, which would donate a percentage of its profit gained from selling specific products towards a cause in partnership with said non-profit (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). However, the term has evolved over time and more broadly encompasses marketing efforts whose intention is to benefit society as well as the corporation's bottom line (Marconi, 2002; Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Cause-related marketing is how the term seems to have started, but it has evolved, and cause marketing has a wider meaning which encompasses different types of marketing and philanthropic activities, of which cause-related marketing is now a subsection.

According to Marconi (2002, p.3) cause marketing can be defined as "the action through which a company, a non-profit organization, or a similar entity markets an image, a product, a service, or a message for mutual benefit". Cause marketing follows the motto of "doing well by doing good" (Marconi 2002; Kotler and Lee, 2005), by which both the cause and the company will receive mutual benefit from the initiative. In the context of Covid-19, cause marketing can be related to marketing activities that have a goal of helping communities or spreading awareness in order to combat the spread or helping to deal with the Coronavirus pandemic.

The distinction between strategic philanthropy and cause marketing can, at times, be blurry, and overlaps have been pointed out in the literature (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988; Marconi, 2002; Gauter and Pache, 2015; Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). While strategic philanthropy and cause marketing may appear similar, they are different: strategic philanthropy does not necessarily entail marketing. According to Varadarajan and Menon (1988), cause marketing is an evolution of strategic philanthropy, where philanthropic and marketing activities are combined. Cause marketing is not necessarily tied to the donation of money or goods, but rather usually takes the form of awareness campaigns and messaging (Marconi, 2002). Nevertheless, philanthropic giving, when marketed and branded, can be seen as falling under the umbrella of cause marketing (Marconi, 2002).

According to Kotler, Hessekiel, and Lee (2012), cause marketing activities can be seen as marketing driven initiatives, whose goal is not just to help society, but also to grow sales and

engage customers. Cause marketing can enhance brand reputation and customer relations (Marconi, 2002), build customer loyalty (Kotler and Lee, 2005), and increase patronage (Kotler and Lee, 2005). Consumers greatly prefer doing business with socially responsible companies (Marconi, 2002). Therefore, it is in the best interest of corporations to participate in cause marketing.

There are three main types of cause marketing campaigns: cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing and cause promotion (Kotler and Lee, 2005). Cause-related marketing follows the aforementioned definition. Corporate social marketing on the other hand, as defined by Kotler and Lee (2005), comprises those marketing endeavours whose main goal is to help promote a behavioural change within society in order to improve public health, the environment, or a community's well-being. Lastly, cause promotion entails contributing towards a cause by making use of corporate funds, marketing resources, donations or volunteering efforts to increase awareness around a specific social issue. According to Marconi (2002), strategic philanthropy combined with marketing efforts can also be placed under the umbrella of cause marketing.

The motivation consumers ascribe to a company that does a cause marketing campaign will determine their intention to support said campaign (Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor, 2000). Furthermore, consumers are more likely to support a cause marketing campaign when they feel they have high involvement in the issue (Jeong and Kim, 2020). It can be argued that because Coronavirus is an issue which affects all of us deeply, consumers will be more likely to support companies and their campaigns.

Nevertheless, cause marketing can backfire. Companies can be accused of acting out of pure self-interest rather than having genuine concern for the cause they are supporting (Marconi, 2002). Some academics have also proposed criticisms of cause marketing; according to Gurin (1987, as cited in Baylin et al., 1994), cause marketing diminishes philanthropy due to the expectation of returns by the corporation. Thus, authors such as Gurin; Schiller; and Varadarajan and Menon propose that cause marketing is not as ethical as traditional philanthropy (as cited in Baylin et al., 1994).

The use of cause marketing after disasters is not a new occurrence; in the aftermath of 9/11, various companies took the initiative to help those affected. For instance, Starbucks began a campaign called "No Gift Reaches So Far and Wide as a Helping Hand", through which the

company raised a total of 2.5 million dollars towards the United Way September 11th Fund, alongside the provision of 750.000 cups of coffees towards those participating in the relief efforts (Marconi, 2002). Following Hurricane Katrina, P&G developed the campaign "Tide, loads of hope", in which the company provided mobile laundromats for the affected families to wash their clothes for free, as well as collecting donations of clothes from the population (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Since 2005, more than 50.000 people have been served, and the campaign is still active to this day, helping first responders of the pandemic (Tide, 2020).

In the context of Covid-19, helping the cause can mean helping consumers in many different ways, one common example is corporate social marketing campaigns: several companies have developed awareness campaigns in order to reduce the spread of Coronavirus by stressing the importance of social distancing as well as hand washing. Other examples present are those of strategic philanthropy, where companies have donated or sold branded hand sanitiser and facemasks.

3.3 CSR Perception

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has proven to be a formidable asset for firms to improve consumer attitudes, patronage, brand loyalty and brand image.

Indeed, consumers tend to have a positive view of CSR which will spill over and improve their brand attitudes towards a company (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Kim and Lee, 2019). As per Keller (1993, p.4), brand attitudes are "consumer's overall evaluations of a brand" and "they often form the basis for consumer behaviour." CSR can also increase sales (Du et al., 2007); improve brand loyalty (Rivera, Bigne and Curras-Perez, 2019); and brand trust (Vlachos et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, CSR outcomes are not always positive, and CSR can hurt a company's standing in the eyes of its consumers (Coombs and Holladay, 2015). Several researchers have pointed out that CSR outcomes towards a firm can be positive or negative and will depend on a variety of factors.

According to many researchers, the motives that a consumer ascribes behind a company's CSR actions will influence their perception of the CSR activity and the firm itself (Foreh and Grier, 2003; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Ellen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2007; Du et al., 2010;

Marín et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2016; Ginder et al., 2021, etc.). Particularly in the case of cause marketing, consumers will make a judgement of the CSR activity depending on whether they feel it is exploiting the cause it is trying to support or is actually beneficial (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988).

Sen and Bhattacharya (2004) introduced a framework on how consumers respond to CSR. In their framework, they explain how a consumer response is based on the characteristics of a firm, the CSR activity in question and the consumer themselves. They found that these criteria will affect the internal perception a consumer has of a company and its CSR activity, which will result in the external outcomes the consumer will partake in, such as word of mouth (WOM) and purchase intentions. They were also one of the first to theorise that "attributions determine the extent to which consumers are likely to react positively to a company's CSR activities" (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2004, p. 14).

There are multiple factors that will affect motives attribution and perception (Du et al., 2010; Marín et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2016; Ginder et al., 2021). The fit between a firm and the cause supported has been found to mediate perception and motives attribution: when the fit is perceived to be low, the consumer will question the company's intentions and be more critical of the CSR activity (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Ellen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010). Additionally, the reputation of a firm also has an impact on consumers: a firm with a generally poor reputation will have a harder time having its CSR activities appreciated compared to one with good reputation (Yoon et al., 2006; Sen et al., 2016). Perception of corporate hypocrisy by consumers will lead to a negative perception of the CSR activity and the company (Wagner et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015). Furthermore, negative word of mouth and media coverage, rather than positive, will heavily affect consumer perception (Laczniak et al., 2001; DeCarlo, 2007; Mark-Herbert and von Schantz, 2007). Perceived effectiveness of the CSR action could also be a factor considered (Jordan, Diermeier, and Galinsky, 2012). Lastly, even the perceived trust held by consumers towards a firm will mediate the perception of their CSR activity (Vlachos et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015; Zasuwa, 2018).

It is clear that CSR perception is a complex matter, with many different aspects affecting it. It could be argued that the perception of relief responses in the context of the pandemic may also be tied to these same elements.

In the past, academics have used attribution theory applied to a CSR context in order to better understand consumer perception of CSR (Foreh and Grier, 2003; Ellen et al., 2006; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015; Zasuwa, 2018; Ginder et al., 2021, etc). And, as pointed out above, studies that used attribution theory to uncover CSR perception are not completely new in the literature.

Consumer perceptions of the motivations for undertaking CSR are a vital aspect of any study of consumer perceptions of CSR, as motivation colours the entire response. Because, as mentioned above, relief responses fall within the realm of CSR, I feel that attribution theory may be applicable in helping us understand which factor affects relief response perception.

3.4 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, originally introduced by psychologist Fritz Heider in 1958, proposes that people tend to try to work out the causes of outcomes for themselves and others. Later developed by Weiner (1986), attribution theory proposes that an individual will try to understand the causes behind a particular behaviour from themselves or others, that is, an individual will try to determine why people act a certain way when assessing a behaviour. Attribution theory is guided by a general consensus that events are attributed meaning from their origins, which can come from either external, situational, or internal, dispositional, causes (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1986)

As stated by Ngamassi, Ramakrishnan and Rahman (2016) there is a lack of research when it comes to attribution theory related to the area of disaster management. According to Coombs (2007), two key characteristics of a crisis is that they have negative consequences for the sufferers and that they are unexpected, that is, the public is not expecting nor prepared to handle the crisis. He goes on to argue that the same characteristics drive people to try and identify the cause of the event that occurred (Weiner, 1986). Thus, "it is logical to connect crises and Attribution Theory" (Coombs, 2007, p. 136).

While Coombs (2007) correlates attribution theory to the study of a crisis when a company could be deemed responsible for the crisis itself, I would argue that when studying the perception of relief responses, it would be fitting to utilise attribution theory under the guise of CSR perception by consumers, as the nature of Covid-19 as a crisis will push consumers to attribution thinking.

In addition, as seen above, Covid-19 relief responses fall under the domain of CSR, as they are de-facto a CSR activity devised by corporations. As a result, attribution theory of CSR perception can be used to study the perception of the Covid-19 relief responses from the perspective of the consumer.

3.5 Attribution Theory and CSR

According to the literature on attribution theory and CSR, stakeholders will interpret and judge a CSR activity based on the motives they attribute as reasons explaining why a company is doing CSR (Du et al., 2010, Sen et al., 2016). Whether a CSR action taken by a company is well-received or not by consumers depends on the perceived motivation of the company for taking the action in the first place (Ellen et al., 2006; Marín et al., 2015; Ginder et al., 2021).

When perceiving a CSR activity, a consumer will ask themselves whether the company is acting out of moral duty or genuine interest to help, or, to put it another way, whether it is guided by self-interest in the form of chasing profit (Du et al., 2010). The attribution of these motives will inform and lead the reaction of the consumer towards the CSR activity. When answering these questions, the consumer will either react positively or negatively to the CSR initiative (Ellen et al., 2006; Marín et al., 2015; Ginder et al., 2021).

Just like attributors can derive that an action stems from dispositional, intrinsic motives or situational, extrinsic motives, CSR activities can be ascribed as being motivated by dispositional and intrinsic or situational and extrinsic motives. Dispositional motives reflect the genuine willingness to help society and fulfilling ethical obligations. Conversely, situational motives are present when the consumer perceives the CSR response to stem from factors affecting the company from the outside, such as pressure to increase profits or to gain a competitive advantage (Ginder et al., 2021)

In the CSR literature, several researchers have attempted to define the kind of motives a consumer may attribute to a firm. While, as stated above, attribution states that a behaviour may stem from dispositional or situational causes, when applied to a CSR context, scholars shy away from this simplistic classification and more nuanced perspectives are present (Misani, 2017). Dispositional, also called intrinsic, and situational, also called extrinsic, motives have, for example, been referred to as firm-serving or public-serving (Foreh and Grier, 2003), profit-motivated or socially-motivated (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006); self-serving or

other-serving (Zasuwa, 2018); self-centred or other-centred (Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009; Misani, 2017; Jeon and An, 2019).

For the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen Ellen, Webb and Mohr's (2006) classification of attributional motives as they offer a more complex and nuanced view among the CSR attribution theory literature.

3.6 CSR Motives

There are a number of reasons a business could choose to undertake a CSR campaign, but at its core their motivation must be either intrinsic or extrinsic. (Du et al., 2010). As defined by Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2007, p. 226) "Extrinsic or self-interested motives have the ultimate goal of increasing the brand's own welfare... whereas intrinsic or selfless motives have the ultimate goal of doing good and/or fulfilling one's obligations to society." According to the literature, consumers will generally react more positively to CSR when attributing intrinsic rather than extrinsic motives, which instead lead to a more negative reaction (Du et al., 2010). According to Alhouti et al. (2015), perception of intrinsic motives has been linked to positive evaluation of the CSR activity as well as the firm, as the consumer will judge the company's CSR as authentic. On the other hand, perception of extrinsic motives results in negative evaluation of the firm as the company's CSR activity is seen as inauthentic.

Ellen et al. (2006) contributes to the literature by further clarifying 4 main perceived motives that consumers can attribute to corporations taking part in CSR: self-centred motives, which are strategic and egoistic, and other-centred motives, which are values-driven and stakeholder-driven. Based on the aforementioned definition, strategic and egoistic motives can be seen as extrinsic, while values-driven and stakeholder-driven are intrinsic (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2007; Ginder et al., 2021). The study shows that, in the context of purchase intentions, consumers will be more positive towards CSR activities which they deem to be fuelled by strategic or values-driven motives and they will respond more negatively when the motivation attributed to the CSR action is perceived to stem from stakeholder-driven or egoistic motives (Ellen et al., 2006).

Egoistic motives: a CSR action with underlying egoistic motives is one where consumers perceive the company to be acting in its own self-interest, exploiting the cause in

order to gain profit or competitive advantage instead of supporting it (Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015; Misani, 2017; Jeon and An, 2019).

Strategic motives: when strategic motives are attributed, consumers perceive the company as wanting to fulfil economic objectives, such as increased sales, market share, visibility, or positive impressions, while also benefitting the cause (Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015; Misani, 2017; Jeon and An, 2019).

Values-driven motives: when values-driven motives are attributed, consumers perceive the company to be acting due to a genuine desire to help, fulfilling their moral obligation. In this case, the company is perceived to care about the cause, that it has an authentic desire to give something back to the community, and that the firm's giving is benevolence motivated. (Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015; Misani, 2017; Jeon and An, 2019).

Stakeholder-driven motives: when stakeholder-driven motives are attributed, consumers perceive the company to be acting due to stakeholder pressure. The company feels that engaging in CSR is expected by its consumers, employees, and other stakeholders. (Ellen et al., 2006, Vlachos et al., 2009; Marín et al., 2015; Misani, 2017; Jeon and An, 2019).

Ellen et al.'s (2006) study contributed to the literature of CSR perception by being one of the first showing that consumers' perception of CSR is not simplistically relatable to whether the CSR action was self-centred or other centred. According to Ellen et al. (2006), attribution of CSR is a complex matter, and the views consumers hold towards companies doing CSR is not black and white. Previously, scholars theorised consumers' beliefs to be simplistic in nature; that a company would either genuinely serve social causes or do CSR for pure economic benefit. However, consumers' perception of CSR is not strictly negative or positive but lies on a spectrum. In fact, a CSR action can be perceived as stemming from both intrinsic and extrinsic motives; nevertheless, consumers can make sense of the fact that CSR can both benefit a cause and help a company at the same time and they will have a sophisticated view on the matter (Ellen et al., 2006).

While egoistic and values-driven motives appear to unilaterally affect perception negatively and positively, the response to stakeholder-driven and strategic motives is contested in the literature (Ellen et al., 2006, Vlachos et al., 2009; Jeon and An, 2019). According to Ellen et al. (2006), strategic motives, while being extrinsic, are perceived positively by consumers while stakeholder-driven motives, despite being intrinsic, are perceived negatively.

Conversely, Vlachos et al. (2009) found that stakeholder and strategic motives both diminished patronage intentions from consumers. Interestingly, Jeon and An (2019) found that strategic motives will actually weaken perception of CSR authenticity, while stakeholder-driven motives will positively influence it.

This shows that consumer perception is complex and nuanced, especially when it comes to strategic and stakeholder-driven motives; some consumers may find it completely acceptable for a company to care about its bottom line while helping a cause (Ellen, 2016, Ginder et al., 2021), while others may not (Vlachos et al., 2009). Additionally, some consumers may find stakeholder-driven motives ungenuine, while others may consider the fulfilment of a company's societal obligations as simple due diligence, without attaching a negative connotation to them (Jeon and An, 2019).

3.7 Moderating Factors

In this section I will present the factors affecting CSR perception as well as attribution of motives. These factors have been based on those proposed by the researchers Du and Sen (2004); Du, Sen and Bhattacharya (2007; 2010; 2016); and Marín et al., (2015). Media and WOM were also considered as they may be contextually relevant in answering the research question.

These are:

- Relief response characteristics: company- relief response fit and effectiveness

- Company characteristics: reputation

- Contextual factors: corporate hypocrisy

- External factors: media and word of mouth

- Consumer characteristics: trust

3.7.1 **Relief Response Characteristics**

Company – Relief Response Fit

According to Ellen et al. (2006) company-cause fit is a moderator of the attribution of motives when looking into consumer perception of CSR. Company-cause fit is a well-studied concept by academics. In a broad sense, CSR fit is defined by academics as "the perceived congruence between a social issue and a company's business" (Du et al. 2010, p. 12).

According to Varadarajan and Menon (1988) and Ellen et al., (2000), fit, in a cause marketing context, refers to the closeness, or link, between the social cause supported by the CSR initiative and the company's product line, brand image, positioning or target market.

Ellen et al., (2006) expanded on the matter by revealing how company cause-fit can act as a moderating factor when consumers ascribe motivational attributions of a CSR activity to a firm; a high fit between a company's business and the CSR cause appeared to result in attribution of intrinsic motives rather than extrinsic. While higher fit between cause and company could raise suspicion of opportunism, in truth, it appears to be perceived by consumers as a genuine intent to help by a firm while conducting its day-to-day business (Ellen et al., 2006). In fact, a company with a high company-cause fit appears to be more genuinely caring about helping the cause, as they integrate CSR within their business practices (Marín et al., 2015).

On the other hand, a company deviating from its main business to undertake CSR will tend to be perceived negatively, as consumers see the departure from core business areas as self-serving and overly focused on consumer perception (Marín et al., 2015). This is also the case with companies who are perceived as neglecting their core businesses to focus on CSR. This, again, will lead to a perception of extrinsic motivation and hurt the company (Marín et al., 2015). Furthermore, low fit can lead to higher attribution of extrinsic motives due to the lower cognitive connection between the cause and the company, thereby resulting in lower positive perception of the CSR activity (Du et al., 2010). Company-cause fit acting as a moderator of attributions has also been studied by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill (2006). Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) found that low-fit initiatives negatively impacted consumer's perception of a CSR initiative regardless of motivation.

Through the process of developing this thesis, it became clear that the concept of company-cause fit as it was used by the studies of attribution theory and CSR is not applicable. The

cause, in this case the pandemic, is contextually the same for all companies. Furthermore, de Jong and van der Meer (2015) argue that offering support towards a major disaster would be an example of a low company-cause fit.

Nevertheless, the concept of company-CSR issue fit has been broadening. For instance, in their study of the perception of CSR contribution types in disaster relief, Hildebrand et al., (2017) expanded the concept by looking at CSR fit not between company and cause, but between felt emotions and perceived controllability of the issue. Similarly, I would argue that it would be wise to study the concept of fit through a new lens.

As defined by Lunenberg et al. (2016) fit can be thought of as "any degree of consistency between an organization's CSR activities and its core business" (p. 2). For the context of this thesis, fit will thus be seen as the consistency between the firms' core business practices and the type of relief response they offered.

Therefore, if the relief response undertaken by a company relies on their competencies or is closely related to their business activities, such as their marketing, there will be a high fit. A factor mediating the felt fit of CSR relief responses will also depend on the contribution put forward by a company. For instance, the donations of hospital gowns by a clothing company should be perceived as a high fit between the company and the relief response, thus causing a more positive perception of the relief response by consumers.

On the other hand, Zasuwa (2017) found that monetary donations have a lower influence on positive consumer responses despite company-cause fit. Similarly, I would argue that monetary donations on their own as a relief response do not count as a high relief-response company fit, as monetary donations are not part of the core competencies of a company. Furthermore, Hildebrand et al. (2017) found that in an uncontrollable disaster setting, CSR contribution is perceived more positively when it is in the form of in-kind contributions (goods) rather than monetary.

Effectiveness

According to Jordan, Diermeier and Galinsky (2012) a consumer's perception of a firm will change depending on the ethicality that they ascribe to a company's relief action. When an individual perceives that a company is doing good by helping victims and giving back to the community in a selfless manner, they will also judge the company in a more positive light. Conversely, when a company is perceived to act for selfish reasons, consumers will make less

favourable judgements. As we saw in section 3.6, these perceptions will be based on what kind of attributions consumers attach to a company's relief response (Ellen, et al., 2006).

According to Jordan et al. (2012), there is a main consumer-centric factor that will affect how relief responses are perceived: Magnitude of effectiveness. They go on to say that while interpersonal proximity does not seem to affect positive perception, magnitude of effectiveness does. Magnitude of effectiveness refers to the extent to which a corporation is providing help through its actions to the affected victims, without harming them. The higher the magnitude of effectiveness perceived, the more favourable the perception the consumer will hold towards a corporation. When a corporation tries to appear as a good Samaritan while falling short on delivering, or how Jordan et al., (2012) define it a "strategic Samaritan", it garners negative attributions as the consumer feels that the company lacks benevolence and genuine concern, and as such consumers consider this modus operandi as coming from self-interest, or extrinsic motives, where the corporation's main interest is to benefit itself rather than help the victims.

3.7.2 Company Characteristics

Reputation

Corporate reputation, also simply referred to as reputation or company reputation, can be defined as the integrative perspective of a firm by its stakeholders (Pruzan, 2001). According to Fombrun, Gardberg, and Barnett (2000, p.87), "corporate reputation is a cognitive representation of a company's actions and results that crystallizes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to its stakeholders". Corporate reputation can also be defined as "consumers' accumulated opinions, perceptions, and attitudes towards the company" (Jung and Seock, 2016, p.1). Thus, corporate reputation can be seen as the sum of all perceptions of the company held by the public.

While it is true that CSR can enhance corporate reputation (Stanaland et al., 2011; Hur, Kim, and Woo, 2014), scholars argue that the perceived reputation of a company will also affect the perception and consumer reaction to CSR. According to Fombrun and Shanley (1990, as cited in Du et al., 2010), reputation acts as a moderating factor because it is a pre-existing inference held by stakeholders, which they will rely on when interpreting ambiguous information about the company.

For instance, a company's bad reputation can give the impression that their interest in pursuing a CSR activity is to improve it (Yoon et al., 2006). Furthermore, when a company possesses a bad reputation, if the CSR activity undertaken has high-benefit salience for the company, consumers will attribute the CSR contribution to what Yoon et al. (2006) call "ulterior motives", which could be referred to as extrinsic motives, and discount its sincerity (Yoon et al., 2006). In this case, the CSR activity will backfire, further worsening the reputation of the company (Yoon et al., 2006). Companies working in industries which have a negative impact on society's wellbeing are particularly suspectable to consumer criticism of their CSR action (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2004; Yoon et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010).

Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) and Sen et al. (2016) found that consumers respond more positively to CSR when a company holds a good reputation. Companies with good reputations, perceived to have high source credibility, will probably find the positive effects of their CSR communications to be amplified (Du et al., 2010). Furthermore, Du et al. (2010), highlighted how a company's past CSR actions - also referred to as CSR History in this thesis - is an aspect of firms' reputation that consumers will also take into consideration when recalling whether a firm possesses a good or bad reputation.

To conclude, when a company has a good reputation their CSR endeavours will be more likely to be received better and attributed to intrinsic motives (Du et al., 2010; Sen et al., 2016), because the consumer sees the CSR action as being in line with the company's core values. On the other hand, if a company has a bad reputation, this will increase scepticism from the consumer, who in turn will judge the company more harshly, putting more emphasis on the benefits the company will gain from the CSR activity (Yoon et al., 2006).

3.7.3 Contextual Factors

Corporate Hypocrisy

Corporate hypocrisy is the belief that a company "claims to be something that it is not" (Wagner, Lutz and Weiz, 2009, p. 79), and is perceived as such by consumers when there is a gap between what a company says and what it actually does. Attributions of corporate hypocrisy can negatively affect CSR beliefs, corporate reputation (Wagner et al., 2009; Arli et al., 2017), attitudes towards a firm from the perspective of the consumer as well as purchase intentions (Guèvremont and Grohmann, 2018). Applied to the context of CSR, corporate

hypocrisy stems from consumers' ethical judgements of the CSR activities of a firm (Marín et al., 2015).

According to Wagner et al. (2009) inconsistent CSR information by a company increases the perception of corporate hypocrisy and elicits negative attitudes from a consumer's perspective. Such inconsistencies can be exemplified, for instance, when a company says they would do something but actually behave in a different manner. According to Marín et al. (2015), this will increase attributions of egoistic and stakeholder-driven motives. Furthermore, it can be related to the "washing" position brought forward by Ginder et al., (2021), which consumers tend to see negatively.

Zhigang and Haoming (2020) further expanded the concept of corporate hypocrisy in a CSR context by clarifying the mechanisms by which corporate hypocrisy results in negative perception of a firm. According to Zhigang and Haoming (2020), the perception that a company is taking part in irresponsible behaviour, which the authors define as "moral transgressions", under the guise of CSR activities, will lead consumers to feel that a company is immoral, resulting in negative emotions. As consumers will experience these negative emotions when perceiving corporate hypocrisy (Wang and Wang, 2014, as cited in Zhigang and Haoming, 2020), said negative emotions will manifest themselves as negative feelings towards the company, resulting in negative perception of the firm itself.

A study by Zhigang et al. (2020) also found that negative emotions of consumers act as an intermediary between consumers' perception of CSR and their responses. Furthermore, CSR expectations and perceptions of performance affect perceived hypocrisy: the higher the expectation, the higher the hypocrisy perception when performance perception is comparatively low. Interestingly, the authors highlight how corporate resources and severity of the cause mediate the expectation of performance held by consumers.

In conclusion, if the consumer is faced with inconsistent information between a company's action and messaging, they will be more likely to attribute corporate hypocrisy to a corporation, which, in turn, will lead to attribution of extrinsic motives and a negative perception of the CSR response and the company (Marín et al., 2015).

3.7.4 **External Factors**

Media

According to Cahan et al. (2015), media coverage can have a positive impact on the perception of CSR. According to Khan and Sukhotu (2020), being portrayed in a good light by the media will also affect consumers' attitudes towards the firm in a positive manner. However, the media could also negatively affect CSR perception when the CSR action is presented in a negative light. According to Mark-Herbert and von Schantz, (2007), negative media portrayal can heavily undermine a firm's CSR, and stakeholders, such as consumers, will be heavily influenced by it. Furthermore, the media will gladly expose instances of "greenwashing" (Mark-Herbert and von Schantz, 2007). In fact, CSR portrayal by the media cannot be considered to be devoid of partiality, rather, Kölbel et al. (2017), in harmony with Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007), assert that the media will have a preference in reporting instances of CSR misconduct, as these generate more attention from consumers. Also, negative media coverage appears to affect consumers' perception more heavily compared to positive (Mark-Herbert and von Schantz, 2007).

In conclusion, media coverage will also influence perception. Positive media coverage could have a positive effect on consumers' perception of CSR. However, due to the nature of media reporting, consumers will be more likely to be exposed to, and thus affected by, negative media portrayal of firm's CSR which, in turn, may increase attribution of corporate hypocrisy.

Word of Mouth

Traditional word of mouth (WOM) can be defined as communicating information about a brand or product from one person to another by voice (Ghosh, 2014). With the world becoming more and more digitalised, WOM has also been taking place online (also referred to as electronic word of mouth, or eWOM), where consumers share opinions through social media and web services (Ghosh, 2014). WOM has been found to influence consumers' perceptions of a brand, particularly when the WOM comes from a trusted source (Laczniak et al., 2001). However, WOM is generally considered to be effective on consumers, as it is seen as an unbiased form of information (DeCarlo, 2007). According to researchers, negative, rather than positive WOM is a lot more impactful on consumers' perception (Laczniak et al., 2001; DeCarlo et al., 2007).

The effect of WOM on consumers' perceptions can further be influenced by a number of factors, one of which is their initial thoughts regarding a particular brand, as well as their overall awareness of it (DeCarlo et al., 2007). For instance, a consumer with a particularly negative view of a certain brand will be more inclined to believe negative WOM than a consumer with a positive view of the same brand. Furthermore, a story that is both believable and credible will have a stronger impact than a less credible anecdote, which may even have a positive rather than negative effect on the WOM recipient's perception (Laczniak et al., 2001). Finally, the message shared by the WOM providers should be something WOM recipients can agree with, and relatable to the brand in question, in order for the negative WOM to have the full effect (DeCarlo et al., 2007). Conflicting messages from a number of sources, or inconsistent WOM will tend to have a lower effect on consumer's perceptions. In the context of this thesis, WOM will refer to social media comments made by users in relation to a relief response.

3.7.5 Consumer Characteristics

Trust

Trust has been defined as the" willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).

According to the organizational model of trust by Mayer et al., (1995) trust depends on three factors of perceived trustworthiness, which are affected by the trustor's propensity to trust the other person or corporation.

These 3 factors are ability, benevolence, and integrity. Combined, they represent the perceived trustworthiness a consumer, the trustor, will have of the company, the trustee, and moderate consumers' trust.

FIGURE 1
Proposed Model of Trust
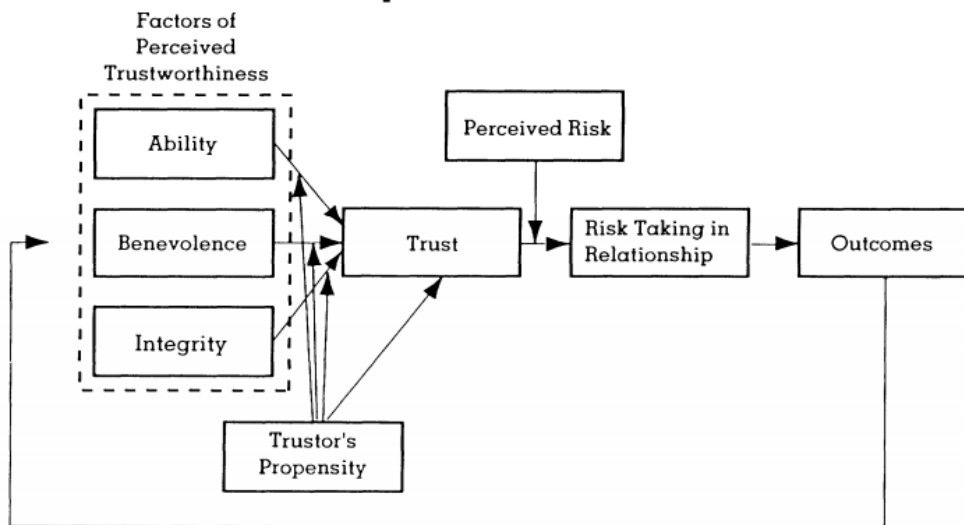
Figure 1: Model of Trust (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 715)

Ability: also referred to as competence, ability represents the perceived competencies of the trustor in a particular setting (Mayer et al., 1995; Colquitt and Salam, 2012). Thus, if the perceived ability is high, the consumer would feel that the company is capable of completing the action important to them.

Benevolence: this antecedent of trust refers to the extent to which the trustor believes the trustee has the trustor's best interest in mind (Mayer et al., 1995; Colquitt and Salam, 2012). Benevolence can be thus seen as the perceived level of concern of a company for the well-being of its consumers, or society at large.

Integrity: in order to be seen as having integrity, the trustee has to show themselves to be acting following ethical and moral standards which the trustor is satisfied with (Mayer et al., 1995). More specifically, integrity can be seen as the perceived consistency between the trustor's words and actions (Colquitt and Salam, 2012). According to Colquitt and Salam (2012, p. 390), "doing what they say they will do" is how one can assess whether the trustee, the company in our case, has integrity.

According to Marín et al., (2015), when high, trust will lead a consumer to place more confidence in a firm, and attribute values-driven or strategic motives, which the authors link to positive perception akin to Ellen et al. (2006)'s attribution theory categories. If trust levels are low, the consumer will instead attribute egoistic and stakeholder-driven motives, and their

perception will be negative. On the other hand, Zasuwa (2018) found that when trust is low, the consumer will scrutinise the firm's intentions more closely, and the attribution of self-serving motives will have a bigger negative effect on perception. Similarly, Zasuwa (2018) argues, attribution of other-serving motives will have a stronger positive impact on perception if consumer trust is low.

To conclude, the trustworthiness of a corporation is composed of three factors: ability, integrity and benevolence. Based on these three factors, the consumer will have a different level of trust towards a firm. It can be inferred that trust of a consumer towards a firm can have a positive or negative effect on the perception of CSR and moderate the consumer attribution of intrinsic or extrinsic motives depending on whether it is high or low.

3.8 Research Gap

CSR perception literature shows that there are myriad factors which will lead to different perception outcomes of CSR propositions from companies. Attribution of motives, together with other mediating factors affecting CSR perception are well documented in the literature (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Ellen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2007; Du et al., 2010, etc). However, at the time of writing this thesis, no study has ever applied these theoretical concepts to the type of CSR Covid-19 cause marketing relief responses belong to. Indeed, the Coronavirus pandemic is a global, unprecedent crisis which the world has not witnessed in 100 years. Furthermore, the current Covid-19 research available has focused on other aspects of the pandemic, never on the perception of relief responses from a consumer perspective.

Therefore, my thesis will try to fill in this gap by providing more in-depth insight on CSR attribution theory of motives and their moderating factors by considering them in a cause marketing relief response disaster setting. Thus, the contribution will be twofold: towards CSR literature as well as Covid-19 literature.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Review

Factors	Effects on CSR Perception
Company Motives	According to Ellen et al., (2006) there are four main motives attribution categories: values-driven and stakeholder-driven, which can be seen as intrinsic, and strategic and egoistic, which can be seen as extrinsic (Du et al., 2007). Ascribed motives to the company behind the CSR action will affect consumer's perception of the CSR action and the company. Intrinsic (extrinsic) motives will have a positive (negative) effect on perception (Du et al., 2010). However, strategic motives may have a positive effect on perception, while stakeholder-driven motives may have a negative effect. (Ellen et al., 2006).
Reputation	Corporate reputation moderates perception and attribution of motives. A good (bad) reputation will lead to a better (worse) perception and attribution of intrinsic (extrinsic) motives. (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Yoon et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010; Sen et al., 2016)
Media and Word of Mouth	Media and WOM will impact consumer's perception of relief responses, and negative Media and WOM, rather than positive, will have the biggest impact on perception (Laczniak et al., 2001; DeCarlo, 2007; Mark-Herbert and von Schantz, 2007; Kölbel et al., 2017)
Corporate Hypocrisy	Inconsistency of information and action from a company will increase the likelihood of corporate hypocrisy perception, which in turn will lead to extrinsic motives attribution and negative perception. (Wagner et al., 2009; Zhigang and Haoming, 2020) The discrepancy between the CSR action outcome and consumers' expectations will mediate the gravity of corporate hypocrisy perception (Zhigang et al., 2020)
Company-Relief Response Fit	Fit in this context can be seen as the closeness between a company's main business practices (marketing, manufacturing, etc) and the relief

	response (Lunenberg et al., 2016). Company-relief response fit may moderate perception and motives attribution. A high fit will have a more positive effect on perception compared to low fit (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Ellen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010; Marín et al., 2015).
Trust	Ability, benevolence and integrity are the three factors affecting trust (Mayer et al., 1995). The overall corporate trust of consumers towards a company will moderate their perception and motives attribution: high (low) trust has a positive (negative) effect on perception and attribution of intrinsic (extrinsic) motives (Marín et al., 2015; Zasuwa, 2018).
Effectiveness	The perceived effectiveness of the CSR action can mediate motives attribution and perception. Higher perceived effectiveness will have a more positive effect on perception (Jordan et al., 2012).

4.   Methodology

In this section of the thesis, all the methodological choices undertaken in order to conduct this study and answer the research question are explained in detail. The research design (4.1), secondary data collection and relief response examples (4.2 to 4.3), primary data collection (4.4), the data analysis (4.5), and quality of the research (4.6) are presented.

4.1 Research Design

The research design is the general plan of how a researcher will answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2019). In this section, the reader will find the purpose of the research, as well as the strategy, approach and the methodological instruments used in order to answer the research question.

4.1.1 Purpose of the Research

Understanding the perception of CSR from a consumer perspective is not a completely new subject, as shown in the literature review. However, there is a gap in the literature due to the novelty of the Coronavirus pandemic, and CSR perception in a disaster context has not been sufficiently covered in the past. Particularly not within the context of a disaster of this magnitude. Throughout the pandemic, companies have done different types of relief responses in order to help, however these received mixed reactions from consumers: some have been liked, while others have been criticised. Thus, it is important to find out the possible reasons behind these discrepancies in consumer perception, as CSR outcomes from relief responses will have a lasting effect on consumer attitudes towards companies. The literature proposes that there are multiple determining factors that will affect perception outcomes of consumers in terms of CSR. Therefore, as Covid-19 relief responses are part of CSR, it felt natural to consider these theorised factors. Nevertheless, because Covid-19 is a unique event, as well as its relief responses, the factors proposed in the literature review may not apply in the same way, or at all, and there may be also other factors affecting relief response perception that require clarification.

The goal of this study is thus to find out:

Which factors influence consumer perception of cause marketing relief responses during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Academics define three possible types of research purposes: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders et al., 2019). Exploratory research serves the purpose of shedding light on a new phenomenon of inquiry, to seek insights and finding out what is happening (Robson, 2002). Descriptive research on the other hand has the purpose of accurately describing certain phenomena, individuals' experiences or events. Lastly, explanatory research seeks to establish causal relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2019).

The main objective of this thesis is to shed light on how consumers perceive relief responses in the Coronavirus pandemic by clarifying which are the determining factors influencing said perception. Because this specific CSR context has never before been covered in the literature, this study is exploratory in nature, as a more in-depth understanding of this specific event and related CSR activities is required. Furthermore, since accounts of these perceptions will be presented, this study has a secondary, descriptive, purpose, as it will also provide a description of how respondents feel about relief responses.

4.1.2 Research Approach

The research approach shows how best to conduct the research in order to answer the question(s) posed in the research purpose. In other words, depending on the goals of the researcher, different research approaches will be more suited to answer said questions (Saunders et al., 2019). To begin, because the goal of this study is to learn about the perception of relief responses from a consumer perspective with an exploratory and descriptive purpose, a qualitative approach best allows me to gather in-depth data. Qualitative research relies on data which is gathered in the form of words, rather than numbers, and is indeed best suited when a crucial part of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of peoples' opinions, thoughts or attitudes. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher can obtain complex, rich, data from the respondents through, for instance, the use of in-depth interviews or focus groups (Saunders et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a research approach can be deductive, inductive, or abductive (Saunders et al., 2019). In simple terms, the deductive approach implies the development of hypotheses from theory, which are then meticulously tested with the purpose of establishing causal relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2019). On the other hand, the inductive approach usually

denotes the building of a theory from the ground up, developed from the analysis of data which will be used to formulate said theory (Saunders et al., 2019). Lastly, an abductive approach starts with the observation of a "surprising fact" and implies the combination of both deductive and inductive approaches, where the researcher goes back and forth from theory to data to theory (Gehman et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). In this thesis, the research approach is mixed in nature, as it has both deductive and inductive elements. Thus, the approach used is abductive. This study began with a surprising fact: looking preliminarily at relief responses online, I noticed that they received either positive or negative reactions from consumers. This posed the interesting dilemma of trying to figure out why some were liked while others were criticised.

Following, a deductive approach was undertaken, in which I tried to find possible relevant theories to explain this discrepancy. Because the perception of CSR through an attribution theory lens and its moderating factors is a topic that has been proposed by academics, it felt natural to take it into consideration during the development of this study. Therefore, the study continued from a deductive position: relevant literature on attribution theory and the possible moderating factors were gathered in order to best direct the research on perception of relief responses. The literature proposed in the theory section informed the development of the interview design for this study as well as the data analysis of the information collected and the interpretation of the findings.

According to Creswell (2008), the use of theoretical lenses or perspectives in qualitative research has gained increasing popularity over the past few decades. Moreover, as seen in this thesis, said attribution theory lens will influence the type of questions asked during the interviews, inform data collection and analysis, and allow the researcher to contribute further to the development of the original theory. Some critics of using a deductive approach claim that past theory can influence or limit the researcher in an unfavourable way compared to a purely inductive approach (Bryman, 1988, as cited in Saunders et al., 2007 p., 488). However, when relevant literature does exist, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stress that being aware of existing literature is important, as it will inform the research in order to avoid bringing forward unoriginal ideas and instead make a valuable contribution to the field. Lastly, Merriam (2009, as cited in Collin and Stockton, 2018) asserts that it is not possible for a researcher to conduct research with a completely open mind or without preconceived theoretical notions, both of which will ultimately affect them throughout their study.

As stated above, this thesis also uses elements of an inductive approach. The existing literature was never applied to a context such as that of a pandemic, thus, one of the main purposes of this study is to get an in-depth understanding of the consumers' perceptions of relief responses. While the literature proposes that there are multiple determining factors that will affect perception outcomes of consumers, these have never been considered in a context such as the Coronavirus pandemic, and there may be other, context-bound, factors which need to be uncovered. Accordingly, the data that is gathered and analysed has the potential to bring to light new facets of CSR perception which are contextually relevant to the Coronavirus pandemic and how companies are responding to it. From these findings, new theoretical propositions or paradigms could be developed in combination with the theory. I approached the topic with an open mind, and a willingness and interest to discover new information which is not covered in or explained by the past theory. Furthermore, the subjects of the study include a relatively small number of participants, which is more typical of inductive research.

Ultimately, the goal of this research follows that of an abductive approach: it is not to test past theories, but to use them as guidance for the data collection, analysis, and interpretation with the possible development of a new theory, or to extend or modify existing theory (Saunders et al., 2019), in the context of relief responses perception. In the discussion section of this study, the findings were not only contrasted with the theory proposed in the literature review, but also the new insights were connected with new relevant theory in order to truly understand the meaning of relief response perception in the Covid-19 context.

4.1.3 **Research Strategy**

As its main data collection method, this study made use of in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to assess the perception of relief responses. Four different examples of relief responses were selected and shown in the interviews in order to elicit responses from the participants. A more thorough explanation of the interview style, sampling and development is provided in section 4.4.

First, based on sampling techniques explained in section 4.2.1, examples of relief responses were selected in order to provide suitable examples for the interviews. The selected cases were shown throughout the interviews in order to gather the necessary data to understand what factors may be affecting the perception of relief responses.

The decision to show examples during the interviews arose for a few reasons. Most importantly, previous studies on attribution of CSR also used examples when gathering data from respondents (Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et la., 2009; Marín et al., 2015, Ginder et al., 2021). Furthermore, providing examples of relief responses makes it easier to elicit responses from the interview participants in regard to their perception of the same. Lastly, showing the same relief responses examples to all participants increases the dependability of the study.

4.1.4 **Time Horizon**

There are two possible time horizons when doing research: cross-sectional and longitudinal (Saunders et al., 2019). A longitudinal study is one in which research happens over a period of time while a cross-sectional study is more of akin to studying a phenomenon in a specific point in time. Due to time and budget constraints, the time horizon of this thesis is thus cross-sectional, and the perception of relief responses will be collected over a short span of time.

4.2 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data is existing data that has been already collected and analysed by someone else and that the researcher can use in their study (Saunders et al., 2019).

For the thesis, the secondary data are the relief responses examples sourced from the internet which will be displayed during the interviews. In this section the sampling for the examples as well as the cases themselves will be presented.

4.2.1 **Sampling for the Relief Responses Examples**

The number of relief responses throughout this pandemic has been staggering, hundreds of companies have decided to contribute in one way or another. While this is objectively a good thing, for the purpose of this research some simplifications had to be made in order to select the samples for the study, and not every single relief response typology could be presented.

In order to select suitable cases for the interview stage, purposive, non-probability sampling was used when deciding which relief response example to include. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research, as it will best allow the researcher to understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2008). Furthermore, purposive sampling is often used when working with very small samples (Saunders et al., 2019), and it allows the researcher to select

cases which can be most informative (Saunders et al., 2019). Because of the small number of samples and specificity by which cases were selected, purposive sampling is most appropriate for this study.

In function of this, critical case sampling was deemed best suited for the purpose of the research. Critical case sampling implies the selection of cases which can be considered of particular importance, and that can "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2014, p. 276). Critical sampling is also well suited for when funds are limited, such as in the case of a master thesis (Patton, 2014). Nevertheless, when doing critical case sampling it is paramount for the researcher to clearly define what makes a case critical when selecting the sample.

In this thesis, the main criterion to select the critical cases was based on CSR awareness. According to the literature, CSR mainly has a tangible effect on companies when consumers are aware of it (Du et al., 2010). Servaes and Tamayo (2013) further assert that CSR activities seem to only add value to a corporation when customers have high awareness. Therefore, it can be argued that the relief responses which received a lot of attention online would also be the ones most affecting companies, either positively or negatively, due to the amount of exposure they received. The fact that these particular cases received such exposure could also signify that they possess certain characteristics that made them more likely to catch people's attention, which again is another factor to consider.

Indeed, perhaps people feel most strongly about these relief responses because of some particular characteristic of the cases, therefore it can be assumed that respondents will have more to say about these cases compared to others which were not selected. The online reactions gathered will also be instrumental when probing for further insights, such as the possible surfacing of attributions of corporate hypocrisy and to see how they play as a potential factor in affecting the relief response perception.

The research began by looking for how brands were helping during the pandemic, with the intention of finding comparatively good and bad relief responses based on the reaction of consumers on social medial, such as on Twitter or Facebook posts as well as the type of press they received on media outlets.

From preliminary research, 10 cases were considered, shortlisted to 5 because some of the cases did not have enough information available online. One company, Adidas, was discarded as the original video of their ad was not available online anymore. Finally, 4 cases were picked.

Presenting 10 cases for this study would have been difficult due to lack of resources, therefore downsizing seemed like the most pragmatic approach.

The final cases were selected based on the following heterogenous criteria:

- Each case would reflect a different industry

- Each case should be fairly unique compared to the others

- Have a mix of examples that were well received and poorly received online

In the end, the 4 following cases were selected: Nike, BrewDog, McDonald's, and Dove.

While gathering data, I observed that pure philanthropic giving did not gather as much media attention to a single company, this gives the impression that pure philanthropic giving may either be a point of parity, expected, or just not raise enough interest on its own. Thus, cause marketing campaigns were the natural option since awareness was my main criteria for selection.

No cases of cause-related marketing showed up either, an educated guess as to why this was would be that they were not popular or overly common at the beginning of the pandemic; perhaps due to the fact that cause-related marketing ties corporate giving with revenue from sales or consumer donations, which may have seemed like a hazardous approach, due to the seriousness of the situation.

Lastly, all the ads are from the beginning of the pandemic, this is also crucial because as "first responders" they are more likely to be unique and not come from copying other companies; these companies were pioneers. Because they were from the beginning it is likely that they caught the most attention. Also, it is important to note that the examples presented do not represent the only relief response each company has done. On the contrary, each company has done multiple relief responses; however, it would have been too complex to show multiple examples for each company, thus, only the relief response which attracted the most attention from each company was selected.

4.3 The Four Examples

From the secondary data collection, the following relief response examples were selected: Nike, BrewDog, McDonald's and Dove. In this section of the paper, I will introduce the examples. All the pictures and video of the examples can be found in Appendix C.

4.3.1 **Nike**

The first example chosen is a campaign which Nike released on their social media accounts and website in March 2020. Nike is an American multinational company which designs, manufactures, and sells footwear, apparel and accessories with a strong focus on sportswear.

Nike's relief response consists of a picture with the message "If you ever dreamed of playing for millions around the world, now is your chance. Play inside, play for the world." (Nike, 2020a). The campaign's main goal was to raise awareness of how important it is to exercise at home and practice safe social distancing for the health of everyone. To strengthen the message, Nike's affiliated sport stars shared the picture, with some adding their own examples of playing inside. These included well-known athletes such as Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Cristiano Ronaldo, and more (Young, 2020). This campaign can be classified as a corporate social marketing campaign, where the company's main goal is to urge consumers to change their behaviour for the betterment of society (Kotler and Lee, 2005).

This campaign was very well received online by consumers for its important message, presented in a clever, Nike-flared way, and received 735.000 likes on Instagram (Nike, 2020a) and 126.000 likes on Twitter (Nike, 2020b).

4.3.2 **BrewDog**

The second example chosen is a strategic philanthropy cause marketing campaign (Marconi, 2002) done by BrewDog at the beginning of the pandemic, in March 2020. BrewDog is a brewery and pub-chain which mainly produces and sells beer. Due to the shortages of hand sanitiser, BrewDog decided to make their own by repurposing some of their production capabilities, as well as using their experience with alcoholic products. The result was a branded hand sanitiser which the company named "Brewgel Punk Sanitiser" (BrewDog, 2020a).

BrewDog is not the only company which made hand sanitiser; however, this example is particularly interesting due to the amount of attention it received online. Ultimately, the relief response received criticism around its inception.

When the company announced the hand sanitiser on March 18th on their Twitter account (BrewDog, 2020b), consumers were confused, as the company did not clarify whether the product would be sold nor at what cost. Some even accused the company of doing "shameless marketing" (Mathers, 2020) as the company was giving an appearance of trying to exploit the shortage of hand sanitiser by making it, branding it, and selling it for its own benefit. Following the accusations, the company clarified that the hand sanitiser was not going to be sold but would be donated to the National Health Service (NHS) (Mathers, 2020), which raises the question of whether they made this decision due to the backlash or whether it was their intention from the beginning.

4.3.3 McDdonald's

The third example chosen is a campaign which McDonald's did in Brazil at the beginning of the pandemic, in March 2020. McDonald's is an American multinational fast-food chains company which owns hundreds of restaurants all around the world.

To promote social distancing, McDonald's split the golden arches of its iconic "M" and used this new logo on both a tv ad and on its social media accounts (Valinsky, 2020). McDonald's was not the only company to modify their logo to spread awareness on social distancing, other examples include Audi, Coca Cola and Mastercard (Valinsky, 2020). Just like Nike, this campaign can be classified as a corporate social marketing campaign, where the company's main goal is to urge consumers to change their behaviour for the betterment of society (Kotler and Lee, 2005)

Ultimately, the campaign was not received well, and was heavily criticised on social media and even by US Senator Bernie Sanders, who urged the company to give its workers paid sick leave (Valinsky, 2020). For some, the logo change was too gimmicky to be taken seriously (Steinmetz, 2020). Furthermore, people felt that McDonald's' logo change felt disingenuous and exploitative of the situation, by banking on solidarity like many other brands. Users on Twitter urged the company to provide more tangible help than a simple logo change, such as providing free meals to those in need, or to turn their drive throughs into safe testing sites

(Piper, 2021). Following the backlash, McDonald's discontinued the campaign and issued an apology (Diaz, 2020; Piper, 2021).

4.3.4 **Dove**

The fourth and final example is a campaign which the company Dove rolled out at the beginning of the pandemic, in April 2020, in collaboration with the marketing agency Ogilvy (Schild, 2020). Dove is a multinational corporation which manufactures and sells personal care products, such as skincare, haircare, body lotions, soaps and deodorants.

With their "Courage is Beautiful" campaign, Dove put emphasis on thanking healthcare workers for their efforts by raising awareness on all that they do for us in battling the virus. The campaign was released both as a 30 second video ad on its social media accounts and as still images strategically placed in the neighbourhoods around hospitals, showing pictures of healthcare workers, and their names, with bruises on their faces due to wearing masks for long hours with the message "Courage is Beautiful" (Dove, 2020; Eurobest, 2020; Gardner, 2020). At the end of the video message, Dove explained how they were also donating care products to healthcare workers on the frontline. This type of cause marketing campaign falls within the realm of cause promotion. A cause promotion campaign has the main goal of raising awareness about an important social cause which it tries to support with appropriate messaging and even donations (Kotler and Lee, 2005).

The campaign was very successful. From its initial release in Canada, the campaign's positive reception led Dove and Ogilvy to expand "Courage is Beautiful" to 15 countries, adapting it every time to show local healthcare workers (Kenny and Ogilvy Toronto, 2021). The campaign generated over 2 billion PR impressions globally, 360.000 hashtag mentions in just one day and received an overall 99% positive sentiment on social media (Eurobest, 2020). Various web media outlets also praised the campaign, calling the video "inspiring", "striking" and "powerful" (Callahan, 2020; Schild, 2020).

4.4 Primary Data Collection

Primary data can be defined as data collected directly from the source by the researcher for the purpose of his study (Saunders et al., 2019). For this thesis, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main primary data collection method.

4.4.1 **Semi-structured Interviews**

For the purpose of conducting this study, semi-structure interviews were deemed to be the most suitable type of qualitative primary data collection. According to Saunders et al., (2016) an interview can be defined as a conversation between a researcher and the subjects of the study, in which the researcher asks questions in order to uncover the information they require for the study. Interviews can be divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Saunders et al., 2019). While structured interviews strictly follow a questionnaire with predetermined questions and unstructured interviews use no predetermined question list, semi-structured interviews can be seen as a middle ground between the two approaches (Saunders et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility while keeping a certain amount of structure and are particularly suitable when the researcher can interview a person only once (Bernard, 2006). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews entail the use of an interview guide (see Appendix B) which will be used throughout the interview. The interview guide will be based on certain factors and key questions the researcher wants to receive answers to (Saunders et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the approach is flexible, allowing for the re-arranging, omission, or probing of further questions depending on the interviewee's answers.

This type of interview felt to be the most appropriate to answer the research question: through semi-structured interviews I was able to ask specific questions and cover factors generated deductively from the literature review, but also for the emerging of unexpected data, which I could dig deeper into with probing questions when new information would arise from the respondents (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are particularly suited for exploratory qualitative research, where the data will be analysed qualitatively (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.4.2 **Interview Guide**

As mentioned in the previous section, semi-structured interviews will come with an interview guide the researcher will refer to when asking questions (Bernard, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019). In function of this, I have prepared an interview guide which I followed for all interviews (see Appendix B). To support it, I have also developed an information paper in which I included: pictures of the relief responses which I used as reference for myself, together with picture or video links of the relief responses which I could share with the respondents; information about the relief response; and extra information on the reception they received online (see Appendix

C). These steps were taken in order to ensure the information respondents received remained consistent throughout the research.

At the beginning, as seen in Appendix B, the interview guide had an introductory section through which I could present myself to the respondents; clarify the goals of the study; remind them of the duration of the interview as well as their right to withdraw; and re-affirm confidentiality of the respondents' identities.

The majority of the questions were developed based on the literature review presented in Chapter 3, as well as on factors I considered relevant or wanted to know more about and was revised during a meeting I had with my academic supervisor. Due to the complexity of the theoretical concepts the interview guide was based on, and the limited amount of people I could interview (Saunders et al., 2019), a preliminary pilot interview was scheduled to increase the credibility and dependability of the study.

The interview guide was predominantly composed of open questions with some specific closed questions (Saunders et al., 2019). The interview guide began with a grand tour question, through which I could ask respondents if they could think of any relief response from the pandemic in that moment. Grand tour questions are good ice-breakers and can allow respondents to immerse themselves within the topic before they have to answer more specific questions (Bernard, 2006). The interview guide was then followed with "what" and "how" questions, then "why" probing questions, then back to more descriptive questions (Bernard, 2006).

For example, to gauge their initial reaction towards a relief response example, respondents were asked "What is your opinion of this relief response?"; to find out about attribution of a company's motives respondents were asked: "Can you give me any reasons why you think the company did this relief response?". Questions went from narrow and specific to broader at the end of the interview, so that the final conclusions would not affect initial answers. Specific care was used in order to ensure the questions were open-ended and not leading to a specific answer (Saunders et al., 2019), and only probing questions were used to remove vagueness from the respondent's answers.

Questions 3 to 11, which are related to the relief response examples, appear only once in the interview guide but were asked for each of the four examples in the study. The order in which the questions were asked was purposely chosen, trying to ensure that each question would not

induce specific associations about the company that may affect all the consequent answers. For example, respondents were first asked about their opinion of the relief response, and only after about the motivation they ascribed to the company and the perceived effectiveness of the relief response.

After each question, probing techniques were applied and probing questions were asked. Therefore, in order to easily recall crucial probing questions to ask and increase consistency between interviews, some of the probing questions were written down in the interview guide under the main questions. Probing is a very important factor in semi-structured as well as unstructured interviews as it allows the researcher to get a more exhaustive and in-depth recount of an interviewee thoughts and feelings via further elaboration (Bernard, 2006; Creswell, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019). More detail on probing techniques which do not specifically appear in the interview guide are present in section 4.4.4.

After the pilot interview, some questions were simplified for clarity, while some others were removed or only kept as probing questions to reduce redundancy so the respondents would not have to repeat the same concepts over and over. Similarly, as I noticed the first two respondents both talked about their opinion of the company behind each relief response, I developed questions to gauge consumer attitudes of the company: "What is your opinion of company X?" and whether the relief responses had any impact on them "From your perspective, has this relief response affected your opinion of company X?". While this is not strictly related to the research question, I thought it could potentially add further insight into the perception of relief responses. These questions were asked towards the end of each example in order to avoid affecting the perception of the relief response in those cases in which the respondent did not share a company opinion on their own. These questions emerged from the first two respondents organically, therefore I felt asking them to all remaining respondents would not skew the results, but rather would make them more consistent. From the pilot interview, it became clear that separating WOM and media factors was difficult and confusing for the respondent, as they both portrayed similar information. Therefore, these factors were combined and asked about together throughout the whole study.

In order to more easily understand and quantify how consumers felt about the concepts of trust towards a company and effectiveness of the relief responses, questions about these two concepts were supported with a scoring from 1 to 5, 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very much" (see Appendix B). Similarly, to better understand which relief response was the most

liked the most or found most effective, respondents were asked to rank them from the most like/effective (1st) to least liked/effective (4th) (see Appendix B).

Trust was divided into three components: ability, benevolence and integrity, following Mayers et al. (1995) trust model. Initially, effectiveness was asked about in an open way, in order to let the respondents decide what made a relief response effective. From the pilot interview, effectiveness of a relief response was seen in two ways: as a marketing campaign and towards helping during the pandemic. These two aspects of effectiveness were corroborated during the first interview. Therefore, effectiveness was divided into effectiveness towards helping during the pandemic (helping the cause) and effectiveness as a marketing campaign (marketing) throughout the whole study.

4.4.3 Sampling for the Interviews

In order to select suitable candidates for the interviews, non-probability sampling was, once again, chosen as the main sampling method in the forms of convenience and purposive sampling. One of the main goals in selecting participants was to choose interviewees who shared similar characteristics while also coming from different walks of life in order to have a holistic understanding of how relief responses may be perceived among the group. Nevertheless, due to the limitations that come with conducting research for a master thesis, the choice was based on time and budget constraints, as well as those that come with living through a pandemic.

The first approach to sampling for suitable respondents was based on convenience sampling (Saunders et al., 2019). In this context, convenience sampling meant approaching potential interview candidates on the basis that they are easy to get in contact with (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, I looked for suitable candidates from within my network (friends, course mates, acquaintances, etc). Interviewing people that I had already established rapport in the past with proved to be beneficial for the data collection, as it kept the atmosphere relaxed, increasing the willingness of the interviewee to be probed for more data as well as allowing for conversation to flow in an interactive and engaging manner.

In order to be more selective, I adopted stratified purposive sampling when selecting participants from within my network (Saunders et al., 2019). All participants selected are millennials, thus between the age of 24 and 40, who, at the bare minimum, hold a bachelors degree at the time of conducting the interview. The choice to focus on a homogenous age

group and education level was based on an intent to increase the transferability of the study, as well as more easily reach data saturation from the interviews.

Nevertheless, in order to ensure heterogeneity within the group, I selected the sample with the goal of having participants of both sexes, as well as different fields of education and nationality.

There is no hard rule for how many interviews should be conducted in a qualitative study, this will depend on the type of research question as well as the goals of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2019). A common rule is to continue to collect data until data saturation is reached (Guest et al., 2016). According to Guest et al. (2006), data saturation is reached when further data collection produces little to no new information and no new themes, or factors in this case, seem to emerge.

From the literature (Guest et al., 2006; Francis et al., 2010; Namey et al., 2016), in qualitative studies, most themes seem to emerge within the first 6 interviews. In this specific study, clear reactions to possible different factors had also emerged by the 6th interview. Ultimately, not including the pilot, 8 interviews were conducted in order to ensure that data saturation was reached.

Table 2: Interview Sample

Respondent	Nationality	Gender	Age	Education	Duration
Pilot	Austrian	Female	24-40	Business	1:22 hours
1	Italian	Female	24-40	Translation	2:02 hours
2	American	Male	24-40	Business	1:31 hours
3	Swedish	Male	24-40	HR	1:29 hours
4	Norwegian	Male	24-40	Finance	1:28 hours
5	Swedish	Male	24-40	Business	1:32 hours
6	British	Female	24-40	Linguistics	1:30 hours
7	Italian	Female	24-40	Economics	2:12 hours
8	British	Female	24-40	Nursing	1:27 hours

4.4.4 Conducting the interviews

To begin, each respondent was contacted privately and informed about the aim of the study, the duration of the interviews, and asked for permission for the interview to be recorded and transcribed (see Appendix A). Identity confidentiality through anonymisation of the respondents was assured, and every respondent participated willingly.

Semi-structured interviews can be conducted in person, online or over the phone (Saunders et al., 2019). Due to the ongoing pandemic and the fact that each respondent resides in a different country, all the interviews took place online in audio format, using the call-function of the apps Discord or WhatsApp. As mentioned in section 4.4.2, the same interview guide was used for each of the interviews.

During the interview, all the same information given during first contact with the respondents was reiterated in case any respondent had changed their mind. All the respondents were shown the 4 relief response examples presented in the secondary data section in the same exact order. Some questions were skipped, if already answered, or moved around based on the respondent's

answers, but the same baseline information was gathered from each interview based on the interview guide, and only probing questions differed. At the beginning of each example, after gathering the respondent's very first impression, baseline information was given about the relief response in case the respondent did not know about it (see Appendix C).

The interviews took place in the month of March, between the 18th and the 26th. Each interview lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes. Every interview was done on a one-on-one basis. Because relief responses would be normally seen in context and not by themselves in a natural setting, I felt that providing information regarding how each was perceived by the media or by consumers online could give a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the respondents' perception when affected by external factors. Therefore, after the initial assessment of each relief response example, all respondents were provided the same extra information about the type of reaction each example received online (see Appendix C).

Despite the topic revolving around the Covid-19 pandemic, every respondent was engaged and open in sharing their thoughts throughout all the interviews.

Alongside asking "why" probing questions, various other probing techniques were applied. Some examples include silent probing, where the interviewer gives positive reinforcement through "uh-huh" to the respondent (Bernard, 2006) and "tell-me-more" probing, where the interviewer asks for clarification or further information regarding a specific answer (Bernard, 2006). Whenever there was the possibility for misunderstanding, I made sure to summarise what I understood the respondent meant and double-checked with them if my interpretation was correct (Bernard, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019).

Together with recording the respondents, notes were taken throughout the interviews in order to have a further baseline of data I could use when doing the analysis.

4.5 Data Analysis

In this section, the various step followed in analysing the data are laid out.

4.5.1 Data Preparation

In order to prepare all the data from the interviews for analysis, all the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019).

The scores from the 1 to 5 ratings for effectiveness (*cause and marketing*) and trust *(ability, benevolence, integrity)* were put in an Excel spreadsheet and averaged out to get a final scoring for each relief response. Rankings of the relief responses (*like*) as well as of perceived effectiveness were also calculated in Excel (see Appendix D), by assigning a score of 4 when the relief response was ranked first, 3 when second, 2 when third and 1 when last. Scores were added together to achieve the final rankings: the relief response with the highest score was first, the one with the second highest score was second, and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, notes were taken throughout each interview. These notes played a pivotal role in forming an initial idea of the respondent's feelings and thoughts towards the relief responses as well as a general understanding of their views. Moreover, notes allowed me to point out when respondents felt particularly strongly about a specific answer or statement, giving more nuance to the transcribed data when reading throughout the transcriptions (Creswell, 2008).

4.5.2 **Coding and Analysis**

Codes were developed to better analyse the transcripts (Saunders et al., 2019). Coding qualitative data means labelling a word, sentence, or part of a paragraph within the transcript with a term, the code, that represents the meaning behind the aforementioned transcript piece (Saunders et al., 2019). This process allows the researcher to make sense of qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Each interview was coded one at time through the first round of coding. Afterwards, a second round was done for each example of relief response to double-check the data and identify patterns, develop themes, or in this case, address the different factors. Different coding types were used. Because this study relies on existing literature, *a priori coding* was used when respondents used terms or phrases that could be related to the literature presented in the literature review (theory driven) (Saunders et al., 2019). For example, when respondents' answers could be related to the four motives categorised by Ellen et al. (2006), words and phrases similar to *"I think they are doing it for branding /for marketing/ for visibility"* was coded as *"strategic motives"*; *"I think they have to do it / society expects them to / they are expected to do it"* was coded as "stakeholder-driven motives"; *"they are taking advantage of / they are exploiting the situation"* was coded as *"egoistic motives"*; and, finally, *"I think they do care / it's part of their values / it's who they are"* and similar assertions were coded as "values-driven motives". However, it is important to clarify that the coding for motives

attribution was flexible, and I also took into consideration the general meaning of the respondents' answers.

Because the goal of the study is to also discover new angles, *emergent coding* (Elliot, 2018) was used when respondents said things that were not relatable to the literature review (data driven) (Saunders et al., 2019). For example, an important emergent code was "tangible", when respondents referred to one of the most important aspects that makes a relief response effective.

In vivo (terms used by the respondents) (Saunders et al., 2019) and *descriptive* (anecdotes and descriptions for quotes) codes were used together with the aforementioned coding techniques to have a more detailed understanding of the data.

Due to the descriptive nature of my research, and in order to ensure understandability of the findings and keep consistency throughout the thesis, the findings were presented for each company's relief responses, with the relating perception information under them. Lastly, other data generated from the final questions of the interview stage or that were not related to a specific relief response example were presented separately in section 5.5. The findings were presented in an unbiased form and without personal interpretation or evaluation in order to maintain credibility and confirmability. The choice to present the findings in this manner stemmed from the intention of presenting the findings in an unbiased and readable way which would allow for greater flow. It was important to me to enable the reader to understand in detail how each relief response was perceived organically and to maintain a narrative that was clear to the reader.

In Chapter 6, themes, or in my case the factors, generated from the further coding and data analysis of the transcripts are presented. Here, the findings are also further interpreted and discussed. For this purpose, theoretical concepts from the literature review, as well as new relevant literature are considered in order to give an in-depth holistic interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2008). Here, as befits an abductive approach, how the findings answer the research question will also be clarified in detail, as this was not possible without relying on the literature, interpretation, and consideration of how the perception, ascribed motives, and moderating factors affect each other.

4.6 Quality of the Research

Quality of the research design and of findings is a very important aspect which a researcher should take into consideration (Saunders et al., 2019). In this section, I will present and discuss the quality of the research. While this usually takes the form of discussing the validity and reliability of the research, the applicability of these criteria in a qualitative study has been viewed as limited by researchers and are instead seen more suitable for quantitative research. This is due to the fact that qualitative research tends to be less strict and more interpretative, such as in the case of this thesis, while reliability and validity tend to be applied rigidly (Saunders et al., 2019). While some researchers adapt the constructs of validity and reliability to their qualitative research, there are other criteria that have been proposed to be more suitable when assessing for the quality of qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Korstjens and Moser, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). Lincoln and Guba (1985) define four criteria to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These are dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Due to the qualitative nature of my research design, I have concluded that these criteria would be the most fitting in ensuring the quality of my research.

4.6.1 Credibility

Credibility, which mirrors internal validity, refers to the truthful presentation of the findings and their analysis in correspondence to the original meaning of the information shared by the respondents (Guba, 1981). Thus, a study will have credibility if it represents the respondents' thoughts and opinions truthfully (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Multiple techniques were used to ensure the credibility of the findings.

First, a pilot interview was conducted in order to improve the interview guide and to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. The data from the interviews was not only recorded and transcribed, but notes were taken to record emotional and verbal cues arising from respondents' answers. During the interviews, a summarisation of the respondents' answers was given to ensure proper understanding of their thoughts and feelings alongside probing and clarifying questions (Saunders et al., 2019). To strengthen this factor, a series of member checks (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) with the respondents was used after the interviews to further ensure the correct interpretation of their thoughts and feelings whenever clarification was required to gain an in-depth understanding of the interview data. During the analysis, the

findings were analysed and coded once and then double-checked and triple-checked to ensure the right type of coding was applied to the intended meaning of the interview data (Saunders et al., 2019). This thoroughness was particularly important for the proper application of a priori codes, as I had to keep previous theoretical concepts in mind and connect them properly with the respondents' words.

Outliers, also referable to as negative cases (Saunders et al., 2019), were included in the findings and aided the development of the discussion section. The inclusion of negative cases allowed for a more nuanced and trustworthy presentation and interpretation of the findings. Moreover, the data from the interviews was also contrasted with data from the media articles in order to give a more holistic interpretation.

4.6.2 **Transferability**

Transferability, which is akin to external validity or generalisability, represents the extent to which the findings are applicable in other contexts or with other respondents (Guba, 1981). Unlike its quantitative counterpart, qualitative research tends to be more particularistic (Yin, 2003), as it focuses on a few cases or respondents to garner in-depth understanding of specific cases or people. Nevertheless, qualitative research whose findings possess broader applicability can bring higher value (Yin, 2003). Therefore, the transferability of one's research findings is an important point to consider. Despite the qualitative nature of this thesis, the findings have a degree of transferability.

As the goal of the study was to find which factors affect perception of relief responses in an exploratory and descriptive manner, it can be argued that the factors discovered are applicable to the perception of cause marketing relief responses in a broader sense when considering the Covid-19 context, due to the presence of multiple relief responses examples. The sampling techniques chosen had this specific goal in mind. Critical sampling, for instance, allows for greater generalisation from the data collected (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, each relief response case was fairly unique in terms of industry, online reception, cause marketing campaign, and type of contribution. Due to the stratified purposive sampling of the interview subjects, it could also be argued that the findings potentially relate to the larger group of millennials. Nevertheless, as this is a qualitative study with few participants, no statistical generalisation can be made (Saunders et al., 2019).

This study was conducted following an abductive approach, through which the generation, framing, analysis, and interpretation of the data was supported by existing theory. This methodological choice further strengthens the transferability of the findings, as they are connected to existing theoretical concepts which have been thoroughly tested and proposed by previous scholars in the larger CSR perception context (Saunders et al., 2019). Nevertheless, as the Coronavirus pandemic is a very unique type of disaster, some of the findings may be potentially bound to this specific overarching context. For further information about the transferability of the findings, please refer to section 6.8.1.

Lastly, I have provided a thorough description of my research purpose, methodological choices, sampling, interview guide, findings, and their interpretation (Saunders et al., 2019). As a result, the reader will be able to assess the transferability of my study for the purpose of their own research, a process which is called transferability judgement (Korstjens and Moser, 2017).

4.6.3 **Dependability**

Dependability, which is relatable to reliability, can be defined as the stability of the findings, if the study in question were to be replicated (Guba, 1981). In order to possess dependability, a study's processes should be thoroughly recorded, allowing it to be audited by others (Guba, 1981; Saunders et al., 2019). One weakness of semi-structured interviews, and qualitative research in general, in relation to dependability, is the uniqueness of the context as well as the depth of inquiry they deal with (Saunders et al., 2019). Due to their complexity, as well as the necessity for flexibility, replicating the findings could be challenging. Nevertheless, a researcher can account for these complexities by providing an audit trail of all the steps taken throughout the research, and documenting them in detail (Korstjens and Moser, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). In function of this, I have described in detail all the decisions made in correspondence to the research design, sampling, methodological choices, the interview guide and conduct, and data analysis. The interview guide, available in Appendix B, and its supporting information sheet (see Appendix C) were followed closely throughout all interviews and are provided at the end of this thesis report. Furthermore, all pertinent changes to the interview guide have been documented.

Lastly, a dependability audit from an external researcher is an important aspect for establishing dependability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The study was developed with the feedback of my

thesis supervisor, which helped me ensure the right choices were made to meet proper research quality standards and increase the dependability of the research.

4.6.4 **Confirmability**

Confirmability can be related to the concept of objectivity (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). In order to achieve high confirmability, the researcher has to show that the findings come from the data itself and are not affected by his personal biases or perspectives (Guba, 1981).

First, all the information shared with the respondents in relation to the study were portrayed in a neutral manner, and all respondents were assured both before and during the interviews that their identity was protected. Familiarity between the researcher and the interviewees proved to be beneficial, as it created an atmosphere of trust which allowed respondents to be open about their opinions. Nevertheless, to further reduce interviewee bias (Saunders et al., 2019), during the interviews I clarified that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions, and that I just wanted to hear the respondents' honest thoughts and opinions. Moreover, to reduce interviewer bias (Saunders et al., 2019), I made sure to avoid leading questions and kept a neutral tone so as to not give indirect cues that may have impacted the respondents' answers. In addition, my supervisor's feedback helped me produce an interview guide that was devoid of bias.

Throughout the research, I practiced what can be referred to as reflexivity (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). Reflexivity relates to the idea that the researcher should be aware of how his own background and personal characteristics may influence the way they conduct the study (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). By practicing reflexivity, I could distance myself from my own preconceptions and remember to be open minded when conducting the research and analysing the data. As mentioned in the credibility section, interview transcripts were checked multiple times to guarantee their right interpretation without the hindrance of personal biases.

Nevertheless, a potential limitation to confirmability comes from the need to further interpret the data in order to establish how the factors found seemed to influence perception.

4.6.5 **Ethics of the Research**

Research ethics is a very important factor, which all researchers should consider when planning and conducting their studies (Saunders et al., 2019). Research should be devised with

integrity and fairness; respecting all participants and not causing harm to anyone involved (Saunders et al., 2019). Research ethics was particularly important for this thesis, due to its overarching context: the Coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic has caused great turmoil to all of us, and I felt considering this aspect was of utmost importance. Thus, various steps were taken in order to achieve good ethical standards.

To begin, participation in this study was absolutely voluntary and the participants were not only informed about the goal of the study beforehand, but also the right of withdrawal at any time was clearly stated. Furthermore, consent for recording and transcription was gained, with confirmation that all the data would be discarded once the study was completed. Respondents' right to confidentiality and anonymity was also thoroughly respected and no personally identifying information is present in this thesis; pseudonyms have been used instead.

Respondents were given this information in written form when asked to participate in the interviews, and once more at the beginning of each interview, to remind them of all the details and in case any of them had changed their mind.

No personal questions regarding the pandemic or its effect on the subjects of this study was asked. Rather, respondents shared information willingly and of their own accord, without prying or seeking specific information. All questions asked are strictly related to the perception of relief responses. When respondents shared how the pandemic impacted them, they did so of their own accord and without any type of solicitation.

Ultimately, every respondent took part in this research project voluntarily, fully acknowledging that the research revolved around the Coronavirus pandemic.

5. Findings

In this section of the thesis, the findings from the interviews are presented. For readability of the findings, they have been divided into sections related to each relief response (section 5.1 to 5.4). In the final section, further findings and observations, findings resulting from the end of the interviews or not related to a specific example, are presented (section 5.5).

5.1 Nike

To begin, as seen in Table 3, Nike was considered the third most liked relief response, coming in a close second to BrewDog and Dove.

Seven of the eight respondents had never seen the example before, apart from Respondent Four who had.

5.1.1 First Impressions

All respondents understood the underlying message of the relief response, that is, to practice social distancing and stay home. The overall first impression of the campaign was mostly positive; respondents felt the message portrayed by Nike to be potentially helpful. Respondents One, Two, Three, and Eight said they were neutral towards the relief response, while the other four respondents (Four, Five, Six, Seven) liked it. For example, Respondent Six felt that this was an important message to share, and Respondent Five found the campaign to be "smart" and "cool". However, the four respondents who were neutral towards the campaign stated that they were not personally impacted by the message of the relief response, because they are not into sports. Furthermore, Respondent Two stated that he was neutral towards the message because he does not expect companies to share this type of awareness, but rather thinks it to be governments' responsibility.

Respondent Four, who had previously seen the campaign, stated that he was very neutral towards it when it got released, as the message was meaningless to him because he was already in lockdown. Nevertheless, when seeing it again during the interview he explained that because he was now less affected mentally by the pandemic, he could see that the message could be impactful.

Like, it depends, really. At the time, the way I looked at it... everything was already closed anyway, and, like, I couldn't feel anything um... I felt, like, more closed up and stressed in general, I was not so receptive. (Respondent Four)

Respondents One, Three and Eight commented on the language of the message, stating that it was too wordy, or too long, thus something they would lose interest in or ignore if they had seen while browsing the internet.

Like this I have to read through the whole thing before I get to the actual point and, I don't know, I think it kind of loses interest in a way, like you lose interest reading it. (Respondent Three)

I wouldn't even stop to read it, but maybe because it's the end of the, like, I mean it's not the end of the pandemic, but it's been a year so all these messages if they're too long I just don't — I already imagine that it's about staying home and, I just — it's too much text. (Respondent One)

Respondent One felt that the message was a bit patronising, as it tries to affect the behaviour of people, by twisting dreams into a command to stay home.

It really, it tugs at your heart string and, like, your feelings in a way right, and your hopes. It's trying to tell you about your dreams, and these are your dreams, and I'm twisting them: they're trying to twist them into "listen you know, I know about your dreams, but your dreams need to be sized down, and they need to be converted into you staying home, and you have to do it for the whole world. I even find it a bit patronizing. (Respondent One)

5.1.2 **Nike's Perceived Motives**

In terms of motives, all eight respondents attributed strategic motives to the campaign, stating that the company was doing the relief response to advertise their brand while also providing some help. The majority of respondents saw it as a win-win situation for the company and the cause. Another prevalent attribution was stakeholder-driven (Respondent One, Two, Six, Eight). These respondents felt that another reason Nike did the relief response was to meet the expectations people have of large corporations. As stated by Respondent Eight:

It was a time of pressure towards companies to do something and to show that they were proactive in fighting Corona and so, I think that a lot of companies felt like they had to do something; send a message out there to promote social distancing. Obviously, it's always good publicity to do these kinds of things. There's probably someone who started doing these kinds of things and then everyone probably felt like they had to follow their footsteps because, otherwise, they would be seen as, you know, companies that don't really care. Obviously, it's also visibility for them, and it's still a kind of publicity when you can't actually advertise what they would usually advertise, like going running or group sports. (Respondent Eight)

I also think that they're too big a company to not say or to not do something. (Respondent One)

Respondent Three became more critical towards Nike as the interview progressed, stating the company was also driven to do the relief response by more egoistic motives:

They're capitalizing on that fact that we will think that they're doing it for our good and our well-being; but I don't think that's the case and I think they're just capitalizing on us thinking like that. (Respondent Three)

Nevertheless, he was still positive towards the message:

They're kind of like capitalizing on a really severe and dangerous situation which I don't like, but at the end of the day this message is nice and it's, you know, if anyone sees this and follows this then they did something good still. (Respondent Three)

On the opposite end of the scale, Respondent Five was more positive towards Nike, and asserted that the company was also doing the relief response because it is part of its value as a corporation (values-driven motives).

For example, the whole Black Lives Matter, where they continued sponsoring the athlete who started the whole movement so... not the movement but taking a knee. He was the first guy who did it in the American football league in the US, NFL, and this was really looked upon negatively by a lot of teams and the league overall, and he was fired from his team and Nike was his sponsor. However, Nike continued sponsoring him and continued being associated with him, and I think that's kind of like a good example of this sort of mindset they have towards these types of questions where, you

know, corporations are involved: that they don't just limit themselves to clothes or sports stuff. So, in a way, I think it goes hand in hand with their brand, it's not just that it's a PR standpoint: that it's kind of what I associate the company with, and I do believe it's what they believe in. (Respondent Five)

While ascribing strategic motives, Respondents Four and Seven said they felt Nike probably cared even if just a little, stating that you have to care in some way by default in order to do initiatives like this.

5.1.3 **Percieved Effectiveness**

In terms of effectiveness of the relief response towards helping the cause, Nike's campaign scored a 2,88 out of 5, as seen in Table 3.

People felt that Nike is a big company with a strong reach, amplified by the athletes sharing it on their social media, but that a simple message is not particularly effective:

It does get the point across, but I think they could have done it in a better way or in a way that maybe captivates more people or in a way that's more obvious. I think the only, like, major selling point is that it's Nike and it's a big brand and they have a lot of impact. (Respondent Three)

I think it gives the company more than what it gives the people, it doesn't do that much for the consumers it's more about the company's image. So, in that way it's not a good relief response. I think even though it's important to spread information and stuff like that I guess but as far as relief response it's not like, great. (Respondent One).

Respondent Seven, who gave Nike a 3 on effectiveness towards helping the cause:

I believe that it can have some power in terms of awareness but then, as I am a cynical person, I believe that in in terms of what you can do as a very strong company regarding a pandemic there are things that can be concretely more and more effective and more powerful. Let's say, like, you can be producing uh thousands of masks or can be donating a lot of money. Doing awareness — obviously, you as a company have the power to do that so it's good to do, but I believe it's not enough. (Respondent Seven)

Others asserted that a message by itself lacks impact because it can simply be ignored.

In terms of marketing, the campaign was felt to be very effective, scoring a 4,38 out of 5. Seven of the eight respondents felt that the campaign cast Nike in a good light (all but Respondent Six). Some said that sharing a positive message will have a positive impact on the brand, and that the campaign would be especially effective towards their target segment: sporty people. All respondents recognised that the type of messaging was very akin to how Nike does its advertising, and Respondent Two, Three, Five, and Seven pointed out that this campaign is typical of Nike's marketing style. Others said that it was a good way to remind people about Nike's products despite the pandemic, as it was not possible to be sporty since there were lockdowns all over the world, and gyms were closed.

5.1.4 Effect of Media and WOM

The extra information related to media and WOM given to the respondents did not have an impact on the respondent's opinion of the campaign. They were not surprised that the campaign was successful online, which they ascribed to the fact that the campaign was a good marketing move, and that people who saw it almost certainly follow Nike on social media already.

5.1.5 Mentions of Nike's Past

Interestingly, three respondents mentioned Nike's past negative history with sweatshops. While Respondent Seven said she looked past it and thinks Nike redeemed themselves over the years, Respondents Two and Six were more critical. Specifically, Respondent Six cited Nike's past as motivation for which the relief response was probably not a genuine gesture towards society but centred around financial gain.

> *I think they had some bad history of like, sweatshops and stuff, right? Like, using them in the way they made their products. I can't remember if it was them specifically but any big corporation that sells a lot of sports clothing, they most likely have a really dark history and don't do things in the best way, which is maybe why I have this feeling of it being disingenuous and more about money and how they want to promote their brand, as opposed to actually caring about people's lives.* (Respondent Six)

Nevertheless, her opinion of the campaign remained positive, as it still had a positive impact.

Another respondent who cited Nike's past is number Five. Respondent Five recalled a situation in which the company supported Black Lives Matter advocate and athlete Colin Kaepernick, despite the fact that he had been kicked out of the NFL for kneeling during the American national anthem as a form of protest. As mentioned above, Respondent Five used this anecdote as to why he believes Nike is a company who stands for what it believes in despite possible negative financial impact. As a result, his opinion of Nike was particularly positive, and he perceived the relief response to be more genuine than other respondents.

5.1.6 Opinion of Nike and Attitude Shift

The overall opinion of Nike as a brand was positive for five out of eight respondents, with the remaining three being neutral towards the brand (Respondent One, Six, and Eight). Those who had positive attitudes towards the brand cited the quality of their products, the capabilities of the brand and its values as reasons for liking it, as Nike has a strong reputation as an innovative and inspiring company. Those feeling neutral asserted that they do not buy from Nike, nor do they do sports. Respondent Three said that despite not being into doing sports he stilled liked Nike as a brand.

Overall, the relief response itself did not have a major impact on the respondents' opinions of the company. Those who had an already a positive opinion of Nike stated that the relief response either did not affect or had only a slight positive effect on their attitudes towards the brand. For those who were neutral, there was no stated shift in attitudes.

5.1.7 Trust towards Nike

In terms of trust, being a long-standing multinational company, respondents scored Nike highly on ability (4,5) and integrity (4,13). On the other hand, the benevolence aspect was comparatively low (2.38), due to it being a large corporation that is not particularly well known for its altruism, and the low effectiveness of the relief response towards helping society. Nevertheless, Respondent Five was the outlier, giving the company a 4 out of 5, citing the aforementioned anecdote as the main reason.

5.2 BrewDog

BrewDog was the most liked relief response out of the four (Table 3).

Out of the eight respondents, five had never seen it before; one, Respondent One, had seen it in the news at the beginning of the pandemic, and Respondents Four and Five recalled seeing similar examples in the past.

5.2.1 **First Impressions**

At first glance, all respondents recognised that it was hand sanitizer, but only half recognised the brand (Two, Five, Six, Seven). The overall first impression was positive to very positive, as all respondents said that they liked the relief response at first glance. The respondents liked the fact that a company had made a tangible product which was very needed at the beginning of the pandemic. Interestingly, all assumed that the product was probably sold, and their opinion became even more positive when they were told that it was not sold but rather donated to the NHS.

Respondent Two remarked how BrewDog was fulfilling a need at a difficult time, which he regarded highly, and this sentiment was echoed by other respondents (One, Three, Six, Eight). Respondent Six, for instance, who was not overly enthusiastic at first, became extremely positive when she learned that BrewDog was donating the hand sanitizer.

> *They gave it away for free? That's brilliant! And again, it's kind of like a way of promoting their brand so yeah, I can't.... there's still this feeling like, well you know, they do just want to give out their brand to everybody. But this is actually, like, a tangible helpful object for people!* (Respondent Six)

Three respondents (One, Four, Five) found the move clever, as BrewDog probably had to shut down its pubs, and this was a good way to keep the brand relevant.

Respondent One, who had seen the hand sanitizer in March 2020 recalled how she did not like it at the time. She recalled reading that the hand sanitizer was not received well, and stated:

> *During the first part of the pandemic all my responses to anything — I don't think they were reliable because I was in a heightened state, like, you know, nervousness and then, you know, I think that changes your logic, like, it shuts down on your logical brain. So, I thought BrewDog was exploiting the pandemic, but now I can see it in a different light.* (Respondent One)

Multiple respondents remarked how BrewDog's relief response felt more tangible and impactful, even comparing it to Nike's campaign. For example:

> *I think it's really good because, like, it's a nice tangible thing, um, and I think it really helps in a crisis because there was a big shortage and, then, they stepped up and, like, they did what they could basically.* (Respondent Two)

> *I like that, that's kind of cool. They made hand sanitizer, yeah, I'm a fan... because it's actually like doing something, you know, it's actually putting a product out there that's going to help people which I think is a lot more caring than the Nike one, which is just words put on a screen, and this requires a lot more effort. I like it.* (Respondent Three)

> *I do appreciate the fact that they are doing something like this rather than just, you know, like Nike just making a slogan somewhere that doesn't actually cost them anything. Because obviously they have invested like resources into actually making the hand sanitizer and to give it to the NHS which I think is an admirable effort.* (Respondent Eight)

All respondents, apart from Respondent Three, recognised the fit between the relief response and the company, making the connection between producing alcoholic beverages and hand sanitizer. Interestingly, Respondent Three did not make the connection between being an alcohol producer and making hand sanitizer, for him it seemed unusual that BrewDog would make a completely new product.

> *Respondent Three: They make alcohol, right? So, I'm kind of confused, but okay.*

> *Interviewer: So, you think it's not very fitting?*

> *Respondent Three: No, but it gets the job done, I guess.* (Respondent Three)

On the other hand, Respondent Two said he was glad they made hand sanitizer rather than other products:

> *If BrewDog made, um, face masks, like, I would be a bit sceptical of them because I don't know them to have experience in sewing and, like, making things out of cloth. I know them to have experience in making things out of alcohol.* (Respondent Two)

5.2.2 **BrewDog's Perceived Motives**

In terms of motives, just like Nike, attribution of strategic motives was prevalent for all respondents. Respondents recognised the response as being good marketing move for the company. Furthermore, Respondent Two said that it made sense to produce hand sanitizer, because they have the manufacturing capabilities to do it. However, compared to Nike more respondents also attributed values-driven motives to BrewDog. To be exact, seven out of the eight respondents (all but Respondent Two) felt that BrewDog cared and was genuinely concerned about helping during the pandemic.

Thus, while they thought BrewDog was still financially motivated, they considered the relief response more genuine and sincere, because the relief response was not just a campaign, but a tangible donation, which also takes more effort to do. Another common reason, which appeared prevalent among respondents, as to why the relief response felt more genuine was the size of BrewDog. Respondents One, Four, Five, Six and Seven stated that for a small company, doing something so impactful gives the impression that they were more caring than, for example Nike, due to the effort required in making a new product.

> *I mean, they are a small company, right? Compared to Nike at least...and, making a new product, like, making hand sanitizer takes a lot more effort than posting something on Twitter. I don't know, it feels like to do something like this they give the impression they do care more.* (Respondent Five)

Respondents Seven and Eight also attributed stakeholder-driven motives, stating that the company was probably expected to do something by its consumers.

5.2.3 **Perceived Effectiveness**

Unsurprisingly, BrewDog was scored as the most effective relief response at helping during the pandemic, with a 4,63 out of 5. Six out of the eight respondents gave BrewDog a 5 out of 5 (see Table 3). Respondent Seven cited the lack of scale as reason for not scoring the relief response higher (3 out of 5), as she did not know the amount of the donation and, either way, BrewDog was only donating in the UK.

All respondents cited the tangibility of the help and the specificity of providing an important product during this pandemic to crucial institutions, such as the NHS, as reasoning behind why they considered the relief response so effective.

> *I feel like that's a really good relief response because it not only increases the reputation of the company but also, it gives something. They're trying to do something about the situation, it's not just telling people to do something you know. It's like, making a tangible gesture which is producing hand sanitizer and then giving it to hospitals.* (Respondent Four)

As a marketing campaign, BrewDog scored a 3,63 out of 5. Respondents Two, Three, Four, Six, and Seven cited limitations of the campaign as reasoning to why it was not scored higher. Respondent Two and Four stated that the hand gel does not have the name of the brand on the bottle, which will make it more difficult for those who do not know BrewDog to associate the product with the brand. Respondent Three cited the lack of information regarding whether the hand sanitizer was donated or sold as reason. Respondent Seven, who gave the campaign a 2, and Respondent Six stated that by donating the product only hospitals the exposure of the brand was limited to those establishments.

5.2.4 **Effect of Media and WOM**

The extra information about how the relief response was portrayed by the media and WOM had a slight negative effect on the interviewees. After learning that BrewDog did not initially state that they would donate the hand sanitizer, but that this statement was issued only after receiving backlash, some respondents (Two, Four, Six, Eight) were more critical of the brand and questioned whether BrewDog had the intention to donate the hand sanitizer from the beginning or if it was a choice made due to the backlash. As a result, they were less enthusiastic about BrewDog. Respondent Seven was more positive about BrewDog and ascribed the lack of clarity to a mistake made due to being a small company with less expertise. Respond Five also defended BrewDog, stating that people online were too quick to judge them.

Interestingly, no respondent complained about the fact that the hand sanitizer was branded. Instead, they understood that a company has to benefit in some way when they help, and that that is an acceptable thing:

Respondent One: There's no actual need for the hand sanitizer to have the BrewDog brand on it but at the same time as a publicity stunt it works, it makes sense you know, it becomes a thing and also becomes like a story which then maybe, uh, gets like negative feedback but then people talk about it so it becomes publicity.

Interviewer: So, it doesn't bother you that it's a branded donation?

Respondent One: No because I feel like companies kind of have to... because companies main concern is not being generous, it's business and profit. I don't know how big BrewDog is but, I am imagining that someone like Nike would not need to brand the thing... It sounds more like a move from a company that needs it. But no, I don't have an issue with it, it makes sense. (Respondent One)

5.2.5 **Opinion of BrewDog and Attitude Shift**

Overall, the opinion of BrewDog as a corporation was either positive or neutral. Only three out of the eight respondents knew the brand well (Two, Five, Six). Of these, they all liked it, mentioning the quality of the beer that BrewDog produces, as well as their pubs, as reasoning for liking the brand. The other five respondents had never seen the brand or did not know much about it, with only Respondent Seven stating that she knew BrewDog was a small brand from the UK, so they did not have a proper opinion.

The relief response produced a positive shift in attitudes for all the respondents. Those who knew the brand already said that they were happy about the relief response and stated that they found the brand more caring and genuine than they had previously thought. Those who did not know the brand well also had a positive shift, with a couple of respondents stating that they found the relief response memorable (One and Three) and that they would remember the brand in the future and perhaps even try one of their products.

5.2.6 **Trust towards BrewDog**

In terms of trust, BrewDog scored a 3,63 in ability, 3,63 in benevolence and 3,75 in integrity. Understandably, respondents who did not know the brand struggled to gauge how capable the brand was. Interestingly, those who did not know the company well relied a lot more on the information pertaining the relief response itself when scoring BrewDog's trust factors.

Furthermore, the extra information affected the judgement of two respondents in terms of ability and benevolence. Respondents Five, Six, and Seven stated that the lack of clarity in regard to whether the hand sanitizer was to be donated or sold made the brand appear less capable. While Respondents One, Three, Six, and Eight felt the company might be less benevolent, questioning whether BrewDog only decided to donate the hand sanitizer due to the initial backlash, which affected their scoring. For example, Respondent Eight said that she was more sceptical after hearing about the extra information, despite initially considering the company's motivation to be values-driven and scored their benevolence a 2 out of 5. Overall, BrewDog's score was highest out of all the companies in benevolence. Respondents cited the size of the company; the tangibility of the relief response; and the effort required to produce and donate hand sanitizer as reasons to why they felt BrewDog cared the most about society. Similarly, the scoring of integrity relied heavily on the relief response itself: because the company did indeed donate the hand sanitizer as promised, the respondents felt that BrewDog is more likely to keep their promises.

5.3 McDonald's

McDonald's' relief response was the least liked by the respondents by a large margin, ranking last for all but one of the respondents, Respondent One.

Out of the eight respondents, only Respondent Seven had seen McDonald's relief response before.

5.3.1 **First Impressions**

The overall first impression of McDonald's' logo change was quite heterogeneous. At first glance, half of the respondents liked it (One, Five, Six, Eight) while the other half did not (Two, Three, Four, Seven). Those who liked it understood the idea and found the new logo funny and silly in a good way. Those who did not like it found it low effort, confusing and "stupid", stating that while they eventually understood it was about social distancing, it was not abundantly clear. A lot of comparisons were drawn to Nike's relief response, as it was also about social distancing.

However, while some respondents, such as Respondent One and Eight, liked how tongue-in-cheek and non-patronising McDonald's' campaign was over Nike's, those who disliked it

mentioned the fact that when looking at it, people might struggle to understand its meaning as they themselves did.

> *I mean, it's not very obvious... what they are trying to mean with this... they could have made the arches more separated. Like, they are so close, we are supposed to be one meter apart and, like, this does not look like that. I don't know, it just looks stupid to me.* (Respondent Two)

Respondent Seven, who recalled seeing the ad in the past, stated that she did not like it then the same way she does not like it now, because the intention of the logo change was not obvious enough. She stated:

> *It is a bit stupid, and, yeah, it's a little bit... I think that it's not immediate and it's a little bit forced. If you have a brand that is one letter, why do you have to cut that into pieces and divide it to say to people to keep distance. I think it's a little bit too much. They thought about, okay, let's divide our brand. I think that the idea behind that is good but then the actual result, I don't like it.* (Respondent Seven)

Again, drawing comparisons to Nike, respondents felt that while McDonald's has a good reach as a massive multinational corporation, the campaign was not offering tangible help.

When queried about the fit between McDonald's relief response and the company, only respondents Two, Five, and Seven stated that the logo change fit McDonald's, as they saw similar logo changes from them in the past.

5.3.2 **McDonald's' Perceived Motives**

In terms of motives, initially, all respondents felt that McDonald's did the relief response to keep their brand relevant and/or out of stakeholder pressure. Thus, at first, all respondents ascribed strategic motives, and five out of eight also ascribed stakeholder-driven motives (One, Two, Three, Six, Eight). They felt that McDonald's did not really care about people, but nevertheless was still benefitting the cause in some way without exploiting it. Respondents mentioned the size of McDonald's, its reputation and what they sell as reasons to why they considered it a less benevolent company. Furthermore, just like Nike's relief response, this one was perceived to be low effort.

Respondent Six thought McDonald's was changing their brand to stay relevant throughout the pandemic, while Respondent Seven felt that the company was trying to counter-balance their bad image with a positive action:

I think that they are more opportunistic than other companies ... they do campaigns, for instance, to help children but then they sell food that makes people fat ... that they do that purposely, but then they do nothing about that. So, I don't have a good, let's say, I don't have a very good relationship with McDonald's as a brand. Then, I know that I think that also, in some way, to balance this aspect of the company they do a lot of things in terms of the social responsibility and helping in general. I think that it is in some way because they are concerned about the situation in these days, and they are concerned in general about society. But I think they do this more because they have to balance their image. (Respondent Seven)

5.3.3 **Perceived Effectiveness**

In terms of effectiveness, McDonald was given the lowest score for helping the cause, a 2,63 out of 5. While some, such as Respondent Two and Seven, recognised the large reach McDonald has as a brand, the low score came from the fact that McDonald's relief response was confusing, unclear, not a tangible contribution and very low effort.

They could have, like, animated the arches into like something that's living and that, you know, ... there's so much you could have done but this is just, like, I could have done this in five minutes maximum. (Respondent Three)

It's very low effort and unclear. It could have been done so much better. It just seems like, hey, in what easy way can we tell people to jump on the bandwagon? (Respondent Four)

I don't know, it's a good message of what we should be doing now but it's similar to the Nike thing as well, where it's like just kind of a post, it's not really, like, a tangible thing, and if it was tangible, it would have been better, yeah. (Respondent Eight)

As a Marketing campaign, McDonald's scored a 3,5 out of 5. Respondents gave similar reasoning as the ones stated above, however, they were more positive for it as a Marketing campaign because McDonald's brand is very well known, and the logo change was funny. Respondent Five was particularly positive as he found the logo change to be a smart move.

5.3.4 **Effect of Media and WOM: Perception of Corporate Hypocrisy**

The media and WOM extra information given had a neutral to negative effect on the respondents. While some were not surprised the relief response was not received well and received backlash, others became a lot more critical. To be specific, respondents One, Two, Three, Four and Six said the liked the relief response less after hearing about the backlash it received online. Respondent Two found the company to be hypocritical and exploitative of the cause, ascribing new egoistic motives.

> *It makes me think that McDonald's was just doing this to get their brand out there and to be seen doing something. This is by far to me the most shameless pandering advertising by far. I don't eat at McDonald's but like, this makes me want to not eat at McDonald's even harder.* (Respondent Two)

Similarly, respondents One, Three, Four, and Six said they were not aware or did not realise how McDonald's was treating their workers, and also ascribed egoistic motives.

> *Interviewer: Do you still like the relief response?*

> *Respondent One: I like it less now.*

> *Interviewer: You like it less, why?*
> *Respondent One: Because I realised now the workers are not being protected. They're telling people to social distance but then the workers are not gonna be able to, and they're not gonna be able to have any rights because they're like, you know, workers at McDonald's. It's ridiculous really, like, the people are being paid less than minimum wage and are at higher risk of getting Covid, and McDonald's is ignoring that while trying to appear like the good guys.* (Respondent One)

> *Yeah, I didn't really think about that too much, it's just them shoving their logo in our face.* (Respondent Three)

> *It's hypocritical for once, and I also believe that they're just like, opportunistic, like yeah, we want this really good situation, but we will not follow our own advice... We're just trying to win something from the customer, we're trying to make money off of them, like, they are taking advantage of me.* (Respondent Four)

Respondent Five was the most sympathetic, saying that whatever McDonald does, people would always find a reason to complain because it is a company with a bad reputation.

> *I feel like people are just kind of using this as a red herring to complain about other stuff, because I feel like regardless of what McDonald's does a large crowd is always going to find a reason to hate on them because they're not really that nice of a company.* (Respondent Five)

5.3.5 Opinion of McDonald's and Attitude Shift

The opinion of McDonald as a company was predominantly negative for all respondents. Respondents cited the low wages the pay employees, the unhealthy food they provide, the low quality of the food, the bad reputation, and the fact that they do not feel McDonald's cares about people as reasons.

> *I think their interest in helping goes as far as it looks good to be seen helping. I already have a preconception of their intentions and, I mean, like, they're not going to change what I think of their intentions just by like showing me some words.* (Respondent Two)

The relief response had no effect or a negative effect on the respondents' opinion of the firm. Those who cited no change said that they already disliked McDonald's a lot (Four, Five, Seven, Eight). The rest of the respondents said that even though they disliked McDonald's, the relief response made them dislike the company even more (One, Two, Three, Six).

5.3.6 Trust towards McDonald's

In terms of trust, McDonald's scored a 3,75 in ability, 1,5 in benevolence and 3,13 in integrity. Overall, McDonald's was the least trusted company in this study. Despite being a large company, respondents asserted a bad supply chain, unhealthy food, and unclean restaurants as reasons for why the company is seen as less competent than Nike or Dove. McDonald's is considered to be very uncaring towards society, and the relief response did not make people think any differently. The company is also considered to have less integrity than the other multinationals in this study, because it appears to be less trustworthy, and the type of company who is not willing to promise much.

5.4 Dove

As seen in table 3, Dove was the second most liked relief response by consumers, slightly lagging behind BrewDog.

Out of the eight respondents, even if some had seen similar pictures of health care practitioners with bruises caused by masks online, only Respondent Six had heard about the campaign before.

5.4.1 **First Impressions**

All respondents understood the goal of the relief response: to spread awareness about the health care workers taking care of us during the pandemic.

The first overall impression of Dove's relief response was very positive for six out of the eight respondents (all but One and Five). Those who liked it found the video to be very impactful and emotional; they considered the issue being portrayed to be relevant and showing support to health care workers important. Some of these respondents said that they were blown away by the campaign in a positive way, due to the music and images being shown, and that they will remember it in the future (Respondents Three and Eight). Those who liked the campaign felt it to be more genuine and sincere than the likes of McDonald's and Nike. Another critical aspect given as a reason for liking the campaign was the fact that Dove included information about giving out donations to hospitals, as it made the relief response help more tangible. Respondent Eight, a nurse in Italy, said that this was her favourite relief response by a large margin as it touched her personally.

Some small critiques given by respondents, however, were that the relief response, just like Nike's, lacked a call to action for consumers, as it did not ask them to be less careful:

> *I don't think it's going to have an impact on consumers. If it said something like: "Honour their sacrifice, don't go to the bar!" But like, there's no, there's no call to action it's just, well "They are healthcare workers, they are brave, Dove."* (Respondent Two)

Respondent Six stated the following when recalling how she felt about the campaign:

> *Interviewer: What was your opinion back then?*

Respondent Six: Well, I know, I actually know Dove is one of the nice brands that do a lot of good things for people, uh, so it doesn't surprise me that they did this campaign. I think it's a good one.

Interviewer: So, you thought that back then as well?

Respondent Six: I don't really remember much about it before, I just heard that they were doing something to do with like giving products to help with people's, like, faces. I guess it's always like that with Dove, they always seem to be doing quite responsible, um, advertisement and products. (Respondent Six)

Respondents One and Five were more critical of Dove and did not like this campaign. Respondent Five said that the campaign felt fake and forced: something he would expect from Dove to do, not because they actually cared about it, but as a marketing ploy.

They're these companies which I associate with really bad mass-produced products with bad quality... it's a product that I don't agree with and I think it's a company that's financially motivated and just sells trash to people ... I don't know, this one seems just a little too cheesy, exactly the type of thing I would expect from Dove, and I don't like it…I think they saw an opportunity in the fact that the pandemic has some sort of association to their industry. In this case it was, you know, masks and the marks that they leave on your face, and they were kind of seeing that that's pretty relevant to what we do [referring to Dove], *so let's, uh, let's make use of it.* (Respondent Five*)*

 Respondent One was even more critical, stating that the campaign felt exploitative with its images and pictures:

I think that one is exploitative [referring to Dove's video] *…It's just like one of those ads of people, uh, wanting money for like African children and, so, like charities and, uh, you see them like with very big bellies or like very bright smiles, you know, that just tries so hard to make you feel something... It's very sappy, I mean, what they're showing... it's a cute concept it's, an elegant concept but really, they're taking advantage of people's like, um, suffering and then going like oh, by the way we fixed it! We fixed it because we're so good that we're donating! I mean it's fine donating, that's really cool, that's really nice, but the side really pisses me off.* (Respondent One)

Multiple respondents said they wished they would know how much Dove was donating for the cause, as that was not stated. Some were critical about the positioning of the logo on the pictures, wishing it would only be showed at the end, while others were more sympathetic as the logo was comparatively small.

5.4.2 Dove's Perceived Motives and Mentions of Dove's Past

In terms of motives, all respondents but One and Five attributed strategic-driven motives, as this is relief response is still a marketing campaign. Respondents Three, Six and Seven also attributed values-driven motives to the campaign, citing Dove's reputation, tangibility of the relief response, and past campaigns as reasons. To be specific, these respondents recalled the "Beauty at Any Size" campaign Dove developed in the past, drawing comparisons with the current relief response.

> *Respondent Six: A lot of their campaigns are also about the problem of perfection and things like that. And saying that everyone is just as beautiful and showing different body shapes. I would say, like, showing the skin is still beautiful* [referring to the relief response] *... it's kind of a Dove thing to do. So, I am not surprised that they wanted to use the faces of people that were, like, being damaged as a way of still showing beauty. It's really something that, like, it's just something they always seem to do.*

> *Interviewer: So, would you say that this campaign kind of reflects their values as a company?*

> *Respondent Six: Yeah, I'm not surprised they were part of this particular conversation. And in this case, it's like, it's good values.* (Respondent Six)

Respondent Eight also ascribed stakeholder-driven motives to Dove, saying that they were also doing it to meet society's expectations as a big corporation.

On the contrary, Respondents One and Five attributed egoistic motives to Dove, as they felt the company was exploiting the cause for its own benefit, as mentioned in the previous section's quotes.

All respondents recognised the fit between the campaign and Dove's business, either because they related it to Dove's past campaigns or because the relief response put focus on the concept of beauty as well as the skin of the healthcare workers.

5.4.3 **Perceived Effectiveness**

In terms of effectiveness at helping the cause, Dove scored a 4 out of 5, only lagging behind BrewDog. Dove's large reach as a multinational company, the power of the message and especially the fact that the campaign included tangible help in the form of a donation were the reasons why respondents felt this relief response to be effective.

> *It's definitely a way of showing that their brand is important and that they care, and that they're doing something. So, there is still of course the same theme where it's like, oh yeah, well, they just want people to look and remember that it's their brand, right? But again, they are doing something tangible and they're also bringing up an important conversation about the nurses ... And again, like helping nurses in this time is similar to the BrewDog example too. So, it's like, really actually going straight to the cause of the people that were most affected I would say.* (Respondent Six)

As mentioned above, some respondents would have wished to know more specifically the type of products and amount of donations given out.

In terms of effectiveness as a marketing campaign, Dove scored a 4,13 out of 5. Again, respondents felt the campaign was a very good move from Dove. Some felt that the message "Courage is beautiful" was memorable and very sellable. However, others, such as Respondent Seven who gave the campaign a 3 out of 5, commented on the fact that the brand logo was not overtly obvious and may be missed.

5.4.4 **Effect of Media and WOM**

The extra information related to how the relief response was perceived online did not have a discernible impact on the respondents' opinion of the relief response: even those who did not like it expected it to do well and be well received online.

5.4.5 **Opinion of Dove and Attitude Shift**

The opinion of Dove as a company was positive for the majority of respondents, even if they did not use their products.

> *I quite like it* [the brand]*; they're trying to stress the normality of people. Like, the fact that we're all different but we are all beautiful in the same way. So, they are trying to*

put a stress on the fact... or they are trying to put a stress on a beauty that is different from the one that, let's say, is promoted by TV and by majority of social networks, and so on. So, in this sense I like it as a company; they're trying to promote like, health instead of beauty in its maximum term. So, in this sense I think it is a good brand. (Respondent Seven)

Only Respondents Two and Four were indifferent towards the brand, while Respondent Five said he openly disliked Dove, as well as its marketing and products. Those who were indifferent towards the brand (Respondent Two and Four) or disliked it (Respondent Five) experienced no attitude shift. On the contrary, those who liked the relief response and the brand said that they experienced a positive shift, and now liked the company even more (Respondent Three, Six, Seven, Eight). Interestingly, Respondent One, who does like the company, said that her negative opinion of the relief response made her like the company less, and that she was considering throwing away her Dove cream as a result.

5.4.6 **Trust towards Dove**

In terms of trust, Dove scored a 4,75 in ability, 3,5 in benevolence and 4 in integrity. Most respondents found Dove to be trustworthy. The company was considered to be very capable thanks to its good branding and successes over the years. Respondents felt Dove seems to care about society due to its history of helping in regard to different social issues. Nevertheless, Respondent Five, who was more critical of the company, scored Dove a 2 out of 5 for benevolence.

5.5 Further Findings and Observations

5.5.1 **Contribution Type**

Respondents said that relief responses which gave a tangible contribution to the cause felt more effective. A tangible contribution, as stated by the respondents, refers to the donation of goods, such as with the examples of BrewDog and Dove, while a non-tangible contribution was that of McDonald's and Nike, who did awareness campaigns.

Referring to BrewDog:

They're actually doing something... I don't know, I feel like it's more... it's more concrete because it's an actual product. (Respondent Eight)

Referring to Dove:

I feel like, at least they are doing something tangible; they are donating something. (Respondent Four)

This seems more honest and genuine, more sincere compared to Nike's and McDonald's'... because it's a tangible contribution, because it spreads a good message but there's also a donation, it's not just words. (Respondent Six)

Respondents feel that the use of marketing campaigns is not a very effective way of helping with Corona, and that donating products is preferred.

Referring to McDonald's:

Bring substance... you have to do something tangible. I think that's the most effective [relief response] *than, like something, that's more or less clear. Like the logo change doesn't help anyone, it only helps McDonald's.* (Respondent Two)

Referring to Nike:

Even though Nike has a bigger scale, it has a lower impact because it's just awareness. Because I believe that awareness can have some kind of strength and power but at the end it relies a lot on, let's say, on the people's behaviour. (Respondent Four)

When probing deeper into tangibility of relief responses. Seven out of the eight respondents (all but Respondent Eight) said that they preferred the donation of goods as a form of helping with the pandemic, followed by the donation of money second, and campaigns as the least preferred method.

Respondents considered products to take more effort compared to money donations, thus giving the impression that the company is more caring.

[Referring to BrewDog] *This is more sincere than Nike because there's a lot more effort to it, because they have to go through, like, planning, like, coming up with the product, a label; they have to, you know, make a packaging and everything; they have*

to like start from scratch and make everything and then they're giving it out for free to people in need at hospitals. I think that's great. (Respondent Three)

Donating or creating a product like BrewDog did shows more care and effort put into the actual thing. It's harder to create something of value like that because you don't just invest money but you're also investing time and resources and people into creating this. Money is just a transaction; you can do it over a day probably. So, I do feel like more heart and effort and care is put into by those companies that create something... Money is still really good; it still is better than doing just campaigns with messages. (Respondent Five)

[Referring to McDonald's] *It doesn't feel very genuine because of the lack of effort and because it's McDonald's, yeah, they haven't done anything really except change their logo.* (Respondent Six)

Actual donations take more effort and, like, it makes it look like... It's more impactful, and it feels like they are actually doing something useful, that they care more. (Respondent Seven)

Product donations feel more genuine as they show less of a personal immediate gain for the company itself:

They are putting money into something that, like, you can assume ... will give them profit at the end but in the immediate, like, when they're making this actual product, they are spending money for nothing basically. So, I do feel like it's more, I don't know, more of a general genuine thing. (Respondent Eight)

Furthermore, the donation of a product which is very in need, like hand sanitizer, feels a lot more important than money, because even with money if the product is not available for purchase it cannot be bought.

Money is really good but, like, back then it was hard to find hand sanitizer and masks... For like, everyone. I think even the, you know, hospitals had issues. Money is good but if you cannot buy what's really necessary then it does not help as much... It's better to give products that are in shortages. (Respondent One)

Respondent Four also pointed out the importance of donating what is most needed at the moment.

> *I think that to donate something valuable, the most valuable in the situation is the best thing. Sometimes the stuff you give isn't necessary, so like, the best thing depends on the situations.* (Respondent Four)

Respondent Eight asserted that she preferred money donations over goods as "money gives freedom" and allows for the purchase of whatever is needed at the time.

> *I think that if you are even just giving hand sanitizers or face masks you don't actually know that in that precise moment that it's exactly what is needed. So, if you give money there's more the freedom for...for example, the NHS or hospitals or whatever to actually invest in what they need. They can choose what to put that money towards.* (Respondent Eight)

Nevertheless, Respondent Eight felt that companies should give out physical donations: *"It would be nice if they did something, like, actually do something physical like donating."* (Respondent Eight)

Respondent Six, while preferring goods over money donations, stated that it also depends on the type of product being donated.

> [Referring to Dove] *If it's, like, beauty products that's not useful, if you can't donate something useful donate money instead.* (Respondent Six)

5.5.2 Expectations from Companies

The expectations respondents have towards companies when it comes to relief responses fell into two main categories. Respondents One, Three, Six, Seven and Eight stated that they expect companies to help during the pandemic as long as they have the resources to do so.

> *It's obvious that the businesses need to, um, take care of themselves first, yeah. ... But I do think that they should do something to help if they can do it.* (Respondent One)

Respondents Two, Four, Five and Eight stated that they did not expect them to help, but that if they did it, they would appreciate the gesture.

Respondent Two: Honestly, like, I don't have any expectations from companies. If they do something it's great if they don't, like, whatever. It's the government's job to help.

Interviewer: So, you don't expect them to take action, you think the government should deal with it?

Respondent Two: The only action I expect companies to take is, um, like retail establishments: I expect them to maintain, like, distance and, like, have hand sanitizer, and ask people to wear masks in the stores. But I have zero expectations of any company. I still think what they did, like, for example BrewDog, is still a nice thing of course. (Respondent Two)

Actually, I do not expect anything from companies. The only [thing] *I expect them to do is for their employees, you know, the ones that they are responsible for. But everything else I think is more of a nice thing to have than a must have.* (Respondent Five)

I don't know I'd call it an expectation ... I feel like it's quite unrealistic to expect every company to do that just because I know that a lot of companies probably don't care. So, I don't know if I'd call it an expectation, but it would be nice if they... I'd think higher of them if they did these things. (Respondent Eight)

When queried about whether size had an impact on what they expect from companies doing relief responses, all respondents said that they expect more to be done from larger companies. Larger companies have more resources, in terms of money, supply chain, reach and competence: therefore, the larger the company the higher the expectation.

Yes, I do think size is important, I mean, if you are a big corporation, you obviously can do a lot, like, a lot more because you have a lot more resources. So yes, I expect more from big companies. (Respondent Four)

In contrast, a small company would be expected to do comparatively less, as it has less resources.

I believe that size can make a difference in the sense that, obviously, if you are a big company with a huge amount of money that you can use for social purposes you obviously have more opportunities, let's say, to help than small-medium enterprises. If

we look also at very small companies at this moment of crisis, I don't think that they can do a lot to help ... I think that also big companies have more responsibilities in these terms like, um, if they are present all over the world, and they basically have a lot of money, and they produce a lot of the wealth of a country, they should help in this sense. (Respondent Seven)

Bigger corporations are, by default, perceived to be less caring:

Some companies have strong ideals that go either way, but the, uh, at the level of Nike I don't think matters. I don't think they care. They probably have a an ethical like section that deals with uh, things. They, um, they are sensitive to the issues of... the global daily issues, or like, yearly issues, whatever they are, and they respond in compliance with what the majority of people think so that they can stay popular and have a good image basically. (Respondent One)

I think when you are a big corporation the size of Nike, I mean... sure, I am sure some employees in it might care but the corporation itself makes decisions based on money, not on what the employees care about. (Respondent Two)

Furthermore, big companies must do more to be seen as being concerned about the cause:

The bigger you are as a company and the more important you are as a company, um, the more difficult it is to do something that is perceived as enough. Let's say so, um, for McDonald's to be received as a company that is concerned about the situation and it's not like, doing only a change of logo, uh, they should have done a lot more than that. (Respondent Seven)

On the other hand, smaller companies seem to appear more genuine and caring, as they are felt to be closer to their community and less "corporate".

I think it kind of goes hand in hand with the fact that they're such a small company. I feel like they're more of the like local, not champion, but they have a stronger local connection to the countries that they are in and that therefore might care a little more about these questions. If you compare it to Nike who has a presence everywhere I don't feel like they would be extra committed to one specific like country nation or part of society, while BrewDog is a little closer or tighter with where it has a presence... My

idea is that BrewDog is a company which is closer to its consumers than Nike, because it's smaller as well. (Respondent Five)

Another interesting finding was that respondents did not seem to be aware about the other relief responses the companies present in this study did. However, respondents were curious to know how much Dove and BrewDog were donating, which was not stated in the relief response itself.

5.5.3 **Ethicality of Relief Responses**

Seven out of the eight respondents did not find any of the relief responses to be unethical. Even in cases where they did not like the relief response, or considered it to be done for egoistic motives, they concluded that at least the company was doing something useful, and thus not a bad thing.

> [Referring to McDonald's] *I think because they're a big company with big impact, I think it's a good thing at the end of the day. Even though I question their motives behind it, I think it's a good thing still.... most big companies should do it because, at the end of the day, if someone reads this and they're like: hey I should follow this. Then, if even one person follows it, they've done something right, and I think that's great. And I think all major companies should do that, to impact as many people as possible.* (Respondent Three)

> *A lot of people criticize a private company* [that] *decides to donate money ... and that it was a marketing campaign only to have people talking about the brand. But my belief about this is that maybe they did it also for that, but who cares? At the end of the day, they gave money to do something good. So, even if they also had a good return on that it doesn't matter, because the return is for everyone. So ... if a company does something good for the population, even if it would have a good effect also on the company's image it doesn't matter, the company is still helping. This is my point of view.* (Respondent Seven)

On the other hand, hurting consumers would make a relief response appear unethical, for example by selling or donating faulty products such as face masks that do not meet compliance or do not work (Respondent Three, Seven, Eight), exploiting workers by lowering salaries or making them work overtime (Respondent Two and Eight) or by hurting consumers in general

(One, Respondent Four), or selling an important item, like face masks, for exorbitant prices (Respondent Five). Respondent Six however was more critical, stating that if the company is not doing anything actually useful and only trying to exploit the cause, they should not do the relief response.

> [Referring to McDonald's] *They're just clearly doing it for themselves and only they benefit from it, they don't actually help anyone else. I think it could have worked as long as they did other things, because I did kind of like it as much as it looked stupid. I did think it was quite an interesting idea because it's such a well-known brand to, like, teach the message of social distancing, but because it was the only thing that they wanted to do it was really bad.* (Respondent Six)

Table 3: Summary of the scorings from respondents (for the full scorings, see Appendix D)

		Nike	BrewDog	McDonald's	Dove	
		Average	*Average*	*Average*	*Average*	
EFFECTIVENESS	**Cause**	2,88	4,63	2,63	4	
	Marketing	4,38	3,63	3,5	4,13	
TRUST	**Ability**	4,5	3,63	3,75	4,75	
	Benevolence	2,38	3,63	1,5	3,5	
	Integrity	4,13	3,75	3,13	4	
RANKING	**Like**	3	1	4	2	
	Cause	3	1	4	2	
	Marketing	2	3	4	1	

6. Discussion

Perception of relief responses is a complex matter. From this thesis, it has become clear that there are multiple factors affecting it. According to Kim and Lee (2019), CSR can impact consumer attitudes, and the findings show that CSR can affect the attitudes a consumer holds towards a brand even in a disaster relief setting. Relief response perceptions can affect attitudes positively, as in the case of BrewDog and to some extent Dove, or negatively, as in the case of McDonald's. Specifically, it appears that attitude shifts particularly relate to the degree of positive or negative perception: the more a relief response is liked or disliked, the more it appears to affect attitudes.

CSR perception can also be positive or negative, depending on various factors. In reality, this may not always be the case, and consumers' perceptions and motives attribution are complex and varied, even in a disaster setting.

In this section, the various factors that have been theorised to impact relief response perception from the literature review are presented in detail together with other emerging factors that resulted from the interviews' findings, with the goal of ultimately answering the research question:

Which factors influence consumer perception of cause marketing relief responses during the Covid-19 pandemic?

In doing so, both the pre-existing literature on CSR perception presented in Chapter 3 and newfound relevant theoretical concepts have been used to interpret the findings further and give a potential understanding of which factors affect relief response perception.

Furthermore, based on the interpretation of the findings of Chapter 5, and the literature review of Chapter 3, a tentative theoretical model of relief response perception was developed, and can be found in section 6.7.

6.1 Relief Response Characteristics

From the findings, the perceived effectiveness of the relief response and the company-relief response fit seem to affect consumers' perception of relief responses.

6.1.1 **Perceived Effectiveness**

As shown in this thesis, the effectiveness of a relief response is a very important factor which is taken into consideration by respondents when assessing whether they like the relief response, and consumers ascribe different degrees of effectiveness to a relief response. Thus, the effectiveness consumers ascribe to a cause marketing relief response seems to have a strong impact on their perception.

As mentioned in section 3.7.2, consumers will judge CSR more positively when a greater magnitude of effectiveness is perceived (Jordan et al., 2012). Across all respondents, a major criterion which they related to whether they found the relief response to be good or bad was how effective they considered it to be at helping during the pandemic. As seen in Table 3, the most liked relief response, BrewDog, also scored the highest in effectiveness towards the cause. The second most liked relief response, Dove, had the second highest score in effectiveness at helping the cause, and so on. There may be a possible correlation between the ranking of the relief responses (positive perception) with the perceived effectiveness of the relief response towards helping with Corona. On the other hand, when the relief response is perceived to be less effective at helping, it will also be received less positively. Interestingly, the effectiveness of relief responses as marketing campaigns did not seem to correlate with whether they were liked or not. While this aspect cannot be completely discounted, it could be argued that the marketing characteristics of a relief response are not a primary factor affecting a consumer's perception. One possible explanation is that the quality of a campaign as a marketing tool does not affect how helpful it is at actually dealing with the cause in a relief response setting. Thus, consumers may discount this factor and focus on effectiveness towards helping the actual cause. But what makes a relief response effective at helping during the pandemic?

Respondents felt that relief responses which gave a tangible contribution to the cause were more effective at helping during the pandemic. A tangible contribution, as stated by the respondents, refers to the donation of goods, such as in the examples of BrewDog and Dove. On the other hand, a non-tangible contribution, such as that of McDonald's and Nike, who did awareness campaigns, is perceived as less effective and in general was liked less by the respondents.

In a study of charitable programs by retailers, Ellen, Mohr and Webb (2000) found that consumers are more positive towards donations which require greater effort from companies, such as products, compared to the donation of money in a disaster relief setting. A study about disaster relief contribution type by Hildebrand et al. (2017) also found that consumers prefer product donations over monetary ones, as they require more effort and hold greater emotionality. Hildebrand et al. (2017) add that this is especially true when the supported cause related disaster appears to be uncontrollable, like in the case of, I would argue, a disaster such as the pandemic. Instead, if the disaster is deemed to be controllable, monetary donations are preferred (Hildebrand et al., 2017). In the same way, the findings show that respondents felt a contribution in the form of a physical good to be better compared to a monetary donation, as they require more effort from the corporation: monetary donations, while welcome, not only feel less personal and take less effort, but do not guarantee the recipient the ability to buy any product which is in short supply (Respondent One). Thus, in the Covid-19 pandemic, as it is an uncontrollable disaster, consumers will find tangible donations in the form of products as the best type of help and be found to be the most effective and perceive the relief response and the company more positively as a result.

From the findings, and specifically from section 5.5.1, the required amount of effort behind tangible help, such as a product donation, gives the impression that the company is also more benevolent because the greater effort signifies less personal net gain for the company itself.

In addition, from the findings, it appears that there is possible relationship between greater exertion of effort in the form of tangible help (contribution of goods) and intrinsic attribution of motives as well as more positive perception of the relief response and company. In fact, BrewDog and Dove's relief responses received the most values-driven attribution of motives out of the four examples studied and were also the most well received relief responses.

Furthermore, in terms of effectiveness, this study shows that in an uncontrollable disaster setting, consumers put particular emphasis on tangible help that is the most useful in a specific situation. Therefore, it is not enough to donate any product, but companies must donate something that is particularly in demand in order to help during the disaster, in order for consumers to perceive effectiveness to be high. This was shown by respondents being extremely positive about BrewDog's donation of hand sanitiser, compared to the more generic donation from Dove. In the case of Covid-19, donations of hand sanitiser, masks, ventilators, etc. could be argued to be the most effective type of tangible help. Nevertheless, if a company

cannot donate what is most in demand, donating money could be seen as an acceptable second best (Respondent Six). Respondent Eight, on the other hand, said that she preferred monetary donations, as they will allow establishments such as hospitals to make the best decision on what they need, as they might not have a shortage of hand sanitiser or masks. While this may seem contradictory with the theory, it could be argued that, again, the main interest consumers have when it comes to Covid-19 donations, and probably uncontrollable disasters in general, is to donate what is most needed in that specific moment, by that specific receiver. By fulfilling such a need, the CSR effort will also be seen as more authentic because the company is actually benefitting society in the best way possible (Kim and Lee, 2019). One important consideration to add is that respondents wondered how much was donated, as companies did not make that clear. Commitment to a CSR cause has been theorised to affect a consumer's attribution of motives and subsequent response, and a bigger donation denotes greater commitment (Gao, 2009). As a matter of fact, the amount of the donation does seem to play an important role, perhaps because bigger donations not only show higher effort exerted but higher impact for the receivers.

But why do consumers put so much emphasis on tangibility of the help?

As stated in the Covid-19 pandemic section, Covid-19 can be classified as a disaster which is not under human control or caused by any specific person or corporation and is, thus, uncontrollable.

When there is a lack of perceived controllability for an event, the affective response from consumers will be more intense (Hildebrand et al., 2017). The same affective state will, in turn, have a significant impact when the consumers judge a relief response.

According to Hildebrand et al. (2017), the way a consumer will evaluate a company's relief response to a disaster, in this case Covid-19, is also affected by the emotional concepts associated with the contribution towards the disaster by the company and the intensity of the emotion felt by the consumer, controlled by the controllability factor of the disaster. When a consumer feels that an issue is uncontrollable, such as a pandemic would be, higher emotional intensity is elicited from the consumer who will consequently assess in-kind contributions, such as donations of products, to the cause more favourably, as they attach higher emotionality to it.

Therefore, it could be argued that due to the emotional impact behind an uncontrollable disaster such as Covid-19, consumers will find tangible help in the form of highly needed products to be more impactful and soothing, appeasing their emotional turmoil.

6.1.2 **Company-Relief Response Fit**

The connection between company-relief response fit and perception is not abundantly clear yet, but there seem to be two main types of fit: fit between a company's marketing and the messaging of the relief response campaign and fit between a company and its product donation. In terms of campaigns, from the findings, it could be argued that fit in this context only applies when the person in question belongs to the target segment of the company. For example, while respondents recognised that there was a strong company-relief response fit in the case of Nike's relief response, half of the respondents were not affected by this, as they do not do sport or buy from the company. Something similar happened with Dove, recognising the fit between the relief campaign and Dove did not always lead to better perception; it was dependant on other factors. Nevertheless, respondents who liked Dove's past marketing campaigns and linked them with the relief response seemed to be more appreciative of Dove. Thus, it could be argued that high fit between a relief response's message and the company's marketing may only relevant when the respondent likes the company and its marketing or belongs to its target segment. This could also explain why the relief response was well received online by Nike's consumers, while, on the other hand, it did not receive as much praise during this study. In the case of McDonald's', the fit was perceived to be low, but it is not clear if or how this played a role in the relief response being disliked, or if it was due to the other factors.

In terms of product donations, it appears that, in an uncontrollable disaster setting such as the pandemic, fit may only goes as far as ensuring the donation comes from a company that has the expertise necessary to make a good product. For example, in the case of BrewDog, the majority of respondents understood that donations of hand sanitiser made logical sense. Therefore, I would argue that high company-relief response fit in terms of a product donation will have a positive effect on perception. On the other hand, the donation of a product which has nothing to do with a corporation, for instance BrewDog donating and making masks, may raise concerns, because it has no experience working with textiles (Respondent Two). Furthermore, respondents said that one way in which a company may appear to be unethical is if it sold or donated malfunctioning products which are in high demand during the pandemic. This implies that consumers may be less trusting of a product donation which is not in line

with the known capabilities of a company, as they will question how the company has the expertise to make such a product. Therefore, it could be argued that congruity between a company's donation, if it is a product, and the company's expertise would lead to lower suspicion, higher trust, and generally reduce the risk of providing something that does not meet standards. While this goes against Ellen et al.'s (2000) study in terms of congruency between company and donations, which showed that consumers may be more likely to prefer incongruent product donations as they are less likely to induce attribution of extrinsic motives, it is important to highlight that the context and nature of their study was different. It is understandable that consumers put higher importance on safety and will trust a company more if they donate or sell something they have high expertise in making during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, Respondent Three, the only outlier who did not think there was a logical connection between BrewDog and making hand sanitiser, was still very positive about the relief response. It could be possible that he did not perceive the lack of fit as a threat to the quality of the product donated; or that he made the connection subconsciously without realising it, as beer and hand sanitiser are both liquids containing alcohol. Ultimately, I would still argue in favour of the importance of congruity, but it is possible that a lack thereof will not have a negative effect on every single consumer's relief response perception.

6.2 Company Characteristics

From the findings, it appears that company characteristics could also have an impact on consumer perception. The two main relevant characteristics are the company size and reputation.

6.2.1 Size

From the findings, it appears that company size may mediate perception and potentially attribution of motives. More seems to be expected from large corporations compared to smaller ones and, at the same time, smaller corporations tend to be perceived as more genuine when doing relief responses.

Corporate Ability (CA) can be defined as the "company's expertise in producing and delivering its outputs" (Brown and Dacin, 1997, p. 68). While CA has been related to a more positive attribution of motives in a CSR context (Marín et al., 2015), in a relief response context it does not seem to be the leading factor. On the contrary, one could argue bigger

companies have more CA compared to small companies, but respondents pointed out how they expect more from big companies, and they tend to judge them as less genuine.

This can be seen also from how respondents judged BrewDog's relief response compared to the other firms presented in this study. Among other factors, respondents cited BrewDog's small size as a reason for why the company felt more genuine and its relief response even more impressive. At the other end of the spectrum, respondents felt Nike and McDonald's, as much larger company, could have done more than what was shown to them.

A possible explanation could be related to the CSR Ability of a company. Not to be confused with corporate ability, CSR Ability, as defined by Gao (2009) is a "proxy for social power" (Gao, 2009, p. 277). According to Gao (2009), larger corporations not only are more likely to donate to philanthropic causes but can also do so because they have more resources that they can dedicate to a cause. Furthermore, Gao (2009) clarifies how, despite no clear definition in the CSR literature, company size can be seen as one of the possible factors determining a company's CSR Ability. Because larger corporations have more CSR Ability, they should also do more, as asserted by respondents in section 5.5.2. A positive (or negative) discrepancy, or gap, between a company's CSR Ability and CSR activity may have a positive (or negative) effect on the consumer's response (Gao, 2009).

BrewDog, which is a small company with less CSR Ability and its relief response were perceived more positively, while McDonald's and its relief response, for instance, were perceived more negatively, potentially because McDonald's relief response did not make use of the company CSR Ability, thus creating a negative gap.

Furthermore, CSR Ability could be related to the perceived exertion of effort mentioned in section 6.1.1. BrewDog's smaller CSR Ability compared to the effectiveness of their donation (CSR activity) could lead consumers to perceive a higher amount of effort was exerted. The positive gap between CSR Ability and activity, together with the higher perception of effort needed, could explain why smaller companies can be seen as more benevolent when putting a lot of effort into their CSR. In fact, BrewDog received the most attributions of values-driven motives. On the other hand, since big corporations have a high CSR Ability, not only is it harder for them to create a positive gap, which is why consumers expect more, but also the perceived effort, by contrast, may appear lower than for a small company, which has fewer resources. Thus, big companies have to do more to be perceived as caring, and, in the case of

Nike or McDonald's, respondents did say that they wished these companies would have done more. With Dove, it is possible that respondents did not perceive a negative gap, because the company did give out donations together with their cause marketing campaign, but that the positive gap was smaller compared to BrewDog's, and thus was seen as less benevolent due to its bigger size. It appears that smaller size can have a positive effect on the perception of relief responses, when there is increased perception of exerted effort compared to the CSR Ability of small companies.

Furthermore, as seen in section 5.5.2, bigger companies seem to fight a more uphill battle in general, as they are perceived to be more detached from their community and more profit driven, which affects their ability to appear genuine further.

6.2.2 **Reputation**

Another company characteristic respondents referred to when judging relief responses is the reputation of the firm. When a company was perceived to have a good reputation, respondents were more positive of the relief response as well (Sen et al., 2016). On the other side, a negative reputation had the opposite effect (Yoon et al., 2006).

To illustrate, we can look at specific examples. Nike can be considered to be a company that has made strides in improving its reputation over the past decades. The association between Nike and sweatshops employing underage workers seems to be long gone, and Nike has become one of the most admired companies globally (Fortune, 2021). Those who liked Nike and thought the company had a good reputation were more positive of Nike's relief response. On the contrary, those who were critical of Nike's past, recalling Nike's reputation as a company that uses sweatshops, were more critical towards the relief response, showing that this correlation still lingers in the minds of some. For Dove, which has a reputation as a company that cares about social issues such as body shaming and body positivity, those who recalled this information were more positive of the relief response and also found the company to be more genuine, as it showed a track-record of caring about society. Specifically, Dove is well-known as a celebrator of natural beauty, holding a good reputation in this matter. For instance, with the Dove Real Beauty campaign, which ran from 2004 (Unilever, 2017), and the more recent Dove Beauty Pledge campaign (Dove, 2021), Dove has been a long-standing champion of showing everyday women in their ads, displaying the message that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes, and should be celebrated as such. Thus,

because this Coronavirus campaign follows the same values Dove has held for decades, respondents who recalled this information attributed intrinsic motives to the campaign and perceived it positively.

McDonald's does not have a predominantly good reputation, being a provider of fast food. As a result, consumers will be more likely to hold a negative view of McDonald's (Yoon et al., 2006; Du et al., 2010). This manifested itself during the study: McDonald's' was regarded to have a negative reputation as a company which sells unhealthy food and does not care about its workers, which again, among the other factors illustrated in this section, may have led to a more negative perception of the relief response. As pointed out by Bhattacharya and Sen (2004), as well as Yoon et al., (2006), and Du et al. (2010), companies working in industries which have a negative impact on society's wellbeing tend to be seen more sceptically when doing CSR by consumers, who question the sincerity behind the firm's action. Furthermore, McDonald's' bad reputation coupled with the low tangibility of their relief response enhanced the feeling that McDonald's' was doing the relief response only to help themselves (Yoon et al., 2006).

Lastly, BrewDog's seemingly positive reputation as a provider of good quality beers only influenced those who knew the company. Those who did not know BrewDog used other factors to judge the relief response. It could be that reputation only impacts perception when the consumer has at least some basic knowledge of a firm.

An important aspect to consider in the case of Dove or Nike for example, is that reputation played different roles. Respondents Six, who recalled Nike's history with sweatshops, was less positive compared to other respondents who either did not or accepted Nike's past. Respondent Five on the other hand, mentioned Nike's good actions with the NFL anecdote as proof that, to him, the company' relief response stemmed from their good values, and ascribed values-driven motives. Thus, it could be inferred that perhaps reputation is not black and white, and that it will differ depending on which factors the consumer recalls. As per Du et al. (2010), consumers will refer back to the company's past CSR History when evaluating their current CSR propositions. This idea could be related to the concept of Corporate Social Performance (CSP). CSP can be defined as "social outcomes of firm behaviours" (Rowley and Berman, 2000, p. 398). Authors such as Gao (2009) also argued that past CSP may impact consumers as they compare a company's current CSR and what they have done in the past.

Indeed, past CSR from a company, or CSR History, such as Dove's or Nike's, appears to play a role in the perception of relief responses. Interestingly, however, it will not work the same way for everyone. Rather, this will depend on the type of information recalled, and how this information actually affects the respondent. For example, not every respondent recalled Nike's sweatshops scandal or Dove's beauty campaigns. Even when they did, some accepted Nike's past relationship with sweatshops while others did not.

6.3 External Factors

From the findings, WOM and Media coverage appear to influence consumers' perception.

6.3.1 **Media and WOM**

From the findings, it appears that media and word of mouth (WOM) together can have an impact on perception of relief responses, particularly when they carry negative information about the relief response and company rather than positive. It seems that negative media and WOM effects perception of relief responses, and it does so in a negative way. Positive media and WOM on the other hand did not appear to affect perception in a tangible manner.

Before going deeply into the how, it is important to clarify why this may be the case. One possible explanation could be related to the effect of the negativity bias. According to the negativity bias, when faced with events or information, people will tend to give more weight to negative rather than positive information, even when they are presented with the same intensity (Baumeister, 2001). Thus, information of a more negative nature will have a larger effect on people compared to positive or neutral information. This could explain why the respondents were affected more by the negative media and WOM reactions rather than the positive ones. Moreover, as explained in section 3.7.4, negative media and WOM has been found to be more effective on consumers compared to positive (Laczniak et al., 2001; DeCarlo, 2007; Mark-Herbert and von Schonz, 2007; Kölbel et al., 2017).

In fact, the respondents were more affected by the negative information surrounding BrewDog and McDonald's compared to the positive information surrounding Nike and Dove.

This manifested itself in two ways: for BrewDog, the negative information made some respondents question BrewDog's intentions, and ponder whether it was actually genuine or not. As mentioned in the findings, section 4.3.2, BrewDog did not initially state that the hand

sanitiser was going to be donated but did so only after the backlash. While some respondents chalked it up to miscommunication, others wondered if BrewDog rectified themselves only in order to appear more caring, and not because they intrinsically were so.

While the perception of BrewDog's relief response remained incredibly positive, this shift in perception, or consumer scepticism, influenced BrewDog's perceived ability and benevolence. In terms of ability, respondents felt BrewDog might be less capable than initially thought. Especially in terms of benevolence, respondents felt BrewDog may be less concerned with the well-being of others than initially thought. Furthermore, my findings show that this shift could happen as a result of negative information given about the relief response. Thus, it is possible that the negative information provided through media and WOM can affect consumer trust towards a company.

The other way in which negative media and WOM affected consumers happened in the case of McDonald's, where they led to the perception of corporate hypocrisy.

6.4 Contextual Factors

Two contextual factors that appeared from this study are the perception of corporate hypocrisy and the time when the consumer sees the relief response.

6.4.1 **Corporate Hypocrisy**

Perception of corporate hypocrisy can have a negative impact on a consumer's perception of a CSR action (Wagner et al., 2009; Yoon, 2006; Shim and Yang, 2015) and this appeared very clearly in this study.

From the findings, it appears that perception of corporate hypocrisy can lead to more extrinsic motives attribution and negative perception. This was present in the case of McDonald's, where respondents attributed egoistic motives to the company when they realised there was a discrepancy between the company's positive message, which is the relief response, and the way it had been acting during the pandemic. This discrepancy led to the perception of corporate hypocrisy (Wagner et al., 2009).

Interestingly, it appears that the respondents did not initially make this consideration themselves, possibly because they lacked information about the company needed to come to

this conclusion. Instead, it seems that negative media and WOM portrayals of McDonald's triggered the perception of corporate hypocrisy. In fact, the media coverage and WOM reported specifically highlighted this discrepancy. The media affecting corporate hypocrisy attribution is not a new concept (Wagner et al., 2009). This is supported by the fact that respondents stated that they did not realise that McDonald's was being hypocritical at first but made the connection once the extra information was given to them. Thus, it could be argued that media and WOM may also lead to a higher perception of corporate hypocrisy when the discrepancy between a company's words and actions are part of their messaging.

Furthermore, as pointed out by the respondents, McDonald's has underdelivered, due to the lack of effort they put into protecting their workers and providing them with appropriate wages during these difficult times. Because McDonald's is a large multinational company, it can be assumed that the respondents had much higher expectations of McDonald's compared to what the company delivered, which further increased corporate hypocrisy perceptions (Zhigang et al., 2020). This could be related to the negative gap between the CSR Ability of McDonald's versus the effort exerted to do their relief response (see section 6.2.1), giving the impression that company size can also has an effect on corporate hypocrisy attribution.

Lastly, according to Shim and Yang (2016), reputation can act as a mediating factor when assessing the level of corporate hypocrisy of a firm doing CSR. For instance, a company's bad reputation can give the impression that their interest in pursuing a CSR activity is to improve it (Yoon et al., 2006). Therefore, McDonald's' bad reputation may have further increased the perception of corporate hypocrisy, since, as clarified in section 5.3.5, the company was seen to have a bad reputation by respondents.

6.4.2 Timing

Another important contextual factor affecting perception may be the timing of the relief response. As a reminder, the examples used in this study include only relief responses that were issued at the beginning of the pandemic. Timing of a CSR action has been theorised to potentially affect consumers' perception (Gao, 2009). From the findings, it appears that when the consumer sees the relief response also plays a role in perception. For example, while BrewDog's relief response received criticism when it was announced at the beginning of the pandemic, it was the most well received relief response of this study. Of course, one possible explanation is that the number of people interviewed, eight, is too small to generalise the

findings or make any strong conclusion. Nevertheless, they open up the possibility that consumers judge CSR in different ways; depending on how soon after the disaster they see the CSR activity, their perception will change.

For example, Respondent One, who had seen BrewDog's relief response at the beginning of the pandemic, was a lot more critical of it at the time compared to now. Her reasoning, that the high state of alert and general emotional distress caused by the pandemic affected her judgement, could signify that emotionality plays a part in relief response perception, and is supported by the fact that BrewDog's relief responses was not as well received when it was announced at the beginning of the pandemic compared to during this study.

Another example of the effect of timing can be seen in how Respondent Four perceived Nike's relief response differently at the beginning of the pandemic compared to now. This effect, however, was not witnessed for Dove or McDonald's.

There is no doubt that the population at large has been experiencing higher levels of stress due to the pandemic (WHO, 2021b), and ongoing stress has been found to affect cognitive processes (Calvo and Gutiérrez-García, 2016). Thus, it is possible that timing of the relief responses will also affect perception, and in the case of the pandemic, high emotional and stress levels may negatively impact the perception of cause marketing, especially when the company risks being perceived as more egoistical, such as in the case of BrewDog branding its own hand sanitiser and not clarifying that it would be donated from the very beginning.

This can create a difficult situation. In a CSR setting, the first mover advantage, in which the company does CSR before its competitors, can potentially benefit a firm (Gao, 2009; Kopel, 2009). However, the heightened level of stress affecting consumers after a disaster is something that cannot be discounted, as it may make consumers particularly susceptible to a company's self-serving practices.

6.5 Consumer Characteristics

From the findings, consumer characteristics such as trust, and ethical values, appear to also affect perception.

6.5.1 **Trust**

From the findings, it could be argued that trust does indeed have an effect on the perception of relief responses. As mentioned in the literature review, according to Zasuwa's study (2018) low trust mediates the effect of motives attribution by making attribution of extrinsic and intrinsic motives have a stronger effect on perception. McDonald's' perceived low trust and egoistic motives attribution resulted in the relief response being particularly disliked. Conversely, BrewDog's lower overall trust compared to Nike and Dove may have caused the values-driven motives attribution to have a stronger positive effect on perception.

However, it could be that benevolence is the trust antecedent which has the biggest impact on perception. While Nike and Dove received the overall highest score for trust, they were only the second and third most liked relief responses. On the other hand, BrewDog, which was the most liked relief response, only scored the highest in benevolence. Thus, it could be possible that benevolence plays the most important role in consumer perception under the trust paradigm.

While it may be a coincidence, the rankings of the relief responses: BrewDog, Dove, Nike and McDonald's, reflects the average score they received on benevolence: BrewDog (3.63), Dove (3.5), Nike (2.38), McDonald's (1.5).

While it is not possible to state in more detail how or why this correlation may be happening from the findings of this study, it is nonetheless still a valuable finding.

It is possible that when a firm is perceived to be more benevolent (higher benevolence score), the relief response, as well as the company, should also be perceived more positively by consumers. The higher the perceived benevolence, the more likely the consumer should be to appreciate the relief response and vice versa. Zasuwa (2018) also proposed that benevolence-based trust might be the most important antecedent of trust affecting consumers' perception, compared to integrity and ability.

As per Marín et al. (2015), when trust is high, consumers will be more likely to attribute values-driven rather than egoistic motives (Marín et al., 2015). In a relief response setting, this could be particularly true in terms of benevolence. When the consumer gave a higher score of benevolence, the motives attribution was also more intrinsic. For example, Respondent Five was the only person who gave Nike a 4 out of 5 in benevolence, and also the only person who

ascribed values-driven motives to the company. Similarly, the three respondents who attributed values-driven motives to Dove also gave it some of the highest scores in benevolence (Respondent Three = 5, Respondent Six = 5, Respondent Seven: 4). On the other hand, Respondent Five, who thought Dove was motivated by egoistic motives, gave it a low benevolence score, a 2 out of 5. While Respondent Two also gave Dove a 2 out of 5, he did not dislike the relief response. In fact, he gave low benevolence scores to all companies. Thus, it is possible that his general propensity to trust corporations is low independent of any other factors (Mayer et al., 1995), and it is not about the specific company. Furthermore, despite not having the highest overall level of perceived trust when considering ability, benevolence and integrity, BrewDog received the highest amount of values-driven motives attribution and was perceived as the best relief response. But, if we only consider the benevolence factor, BrewDog scored the highest out of the relief responses, even when considering that BrewDog's perceived benevolence took a hit due to the negative media and WOM. While other factors affected BrewDog's positive perception and motives attribution, this strengthens the notion that benevolence may be the most important trust factor in a relief response setting, and the biggest contributor to the attribution of values-driven motives, compared to ability and integrity. Of course, one limitation could be that five respondents scored BrewDog's trust based on the relief response itself, as they did not know the company well compared to the other three. This could also explain why media and WOM were able to affect the perceived trust, as it was still forming, due to the lack of knowledge about the company. As the scoring was based on the relief response for five respondents, it is possible that BrewDog's score was due to the reasons explained in the sections 6.1.1, 6.1.2 and 6.2.1. BrewDog donated a highly needed product, which was perceived to require a lot of effort compared to the company's small size.

6.5.2 **Ethical Values**

Another consumer factor affecting perception appears to be the moral viewpoint of the respondents. First, it is necessary to lay out the two main ethical viewpoints that surfaced in this study: consequentialism and deontology.

Consequentialism can be defined as "the doctrine that the morality of an action is to be judged solely by its consequences" (Britannica, 2009). Under a consequentialist view, consumers will judge an action based on the end result and, specifically, based on whether said action will

lead to the greatest good possible. In this context, respondents with a consequentialist view focus on the outcome of the relief responses.

Deontology on the other hand, states that the morality of an action is not based on the outcomes, but as proposed by Immanuel Kant, the motives behind said action (Kelly, 2004). In other words, it is not about what you do but why you do it that will make an action moral or immoral. Under a deontological view, a relief response may appear to be unethical because the intention of the corporation is not pure, or altruistic, but egoistic in nature.

All respondents held a consequentialist view: none found any relief response to be unethical in nature, even when they attributed egoistic motives to a company. Instead, they judged them based on the actual outcome. For example, McDonald's' relief response, which was highly disliked, was not seen as unethical because it still had the potential to do something good, if people followed the message. Respondent Six was more critical however, stating that McDonald's' relief response did not seem to be offering any real help and that the company was just exploiting the situation. It could be that, to her, a simple logo change does not have enough impact to actually affect people in a good way. As respondents put greater emphasis on the tangibility of the help, it could be assumed that the outcome is, indeed, what they value the most in an uncontrollable disaster setting. In fact, respondents felt that a relief response would be unethical when it would do harm to consumers, which, again, displays a consequentialist view.

The findings give the impression that the ethical values, or moral stance, of the consumer may affect perception. Nevertheless, the predominance of a consequentialist view could be simply the result of the small sample size present in the study. While an interesting finding nonetheless, as this consideration is limited by the small sample size of the study, further research would be required to give a clarification.

6.6 Attribution of Motives

Motives ascribed to a corporation's intention behind the relief response varied among the respondents. All four of the motives theorised by Ellen et al. (2006) appeared in this study. Respondents attributed multiple motives to the same response, at times, both intrinsic and extrinsic. This is in line with the idea that consumers can make sense of and attribute multiple motives to a company from the same CSR action (Fein, 1996; Ellen et al., 2006; Sen et al.,

2016). The most common motives attributed to the four examples were strategic motives, followed by stakeholder-driven motives, while values-driven and egoistic motives appeared more sparsely. This is not surprising because cause marketing relief responses do not hide the possible benefits the corporation may reap from its marketing. As theorised in the literature review (section 3.6), respondents were very positive towards a relief response when they ascribed values-driven motives, and very negative when they ascribed egoistic motives. Mainly, respondents ascribed values-driven motives when they felt there was a high effort exerted and the relief response was tangible (BrewDog: all respondents but Two). Or when the company was considered to have a good history of helping society as part of their core values (Nike: Respondent Five and Dove: Respondents Three, Six, Seven). Instead, they ascribed egoistic motives when the company was felt to be exploiting the cause (Dove: Respondents One and Five) or when corporate hypocrisy was perceived (McDonald's: Respondents One, Two, Three, Four and Six). The literature on CSR perception also states that the attribution of values-driven motives will lead to a positive perception of the CSR activity, and vice versa with egoistic motives (Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009; Misani, 2017; Jeon and An, 2019; Ginder et al., 2021).

However, attribution of strategic and stakeholder-driven motives did not seem to strictly relate to either a positive or negative perception. Rather, when respondents ascribe both intrinsic and extrinsic motives that are not values-driven or egoistic, other factors may have affected perception more. In other words, attribution of strategic and stakeholder-driven motives by themselves did not result in a specific outcome in relation to the respondent's perception of a relief response, which refutes Ellen et al.'s (2006) and Marín et al.'s (2015), findings that stakeholder-driven motives would lead to negative perception and strategic motives lead to positive perception.

For example, some of the respondents who attributed strategic and stakeholder-driven motives to McDonald's still disliked the relief response, even before being exposed to the extra information given, while those who attributed the same motives to Dove liked it. The same happened with Nike: despite attributing these two motives, the relief response perception differed depending on the respondent. BrewDog's relief response was also received positively even when only strategic motives were attributed. In fact, Respondent Two still liked the relief response.

Ellen et al. (2006) found that a combination of attributing both self-centred and other-centred motives results in a more positive perception of CSR and the company compared to when only one is attributed. However, in this study, even when both self-centred and other-centred motives were attributed, perception was not necessarily more positive. This was present in the example of McDonald's, where some respondents attributed stakeholder-driven (other-centred) and strategic (self-centred) motives even if they did not like it.

Different authors already theorised that strategic motives could lead to negative perception (Vlachos et al., 2009) and stakeholder-driven motives to positive perception (Jeon and Ang, 2019). However, from these findings, it appears that motives attribution does not binarily lead to a specific perception outcome. Rather, as theorised in the literature review, egoistic and values-driven motives would lead to negative and positive perception, respectively. On the other hand, things become blurry when it comes to the attribution of strategic and stakeholder-driven motives.

The reason behind this interesting finding is not clear. It could be that this overarching theory of CSR attribution does not have the same application in the Covid-19 context. One possible explanation is that previous studies on CSR attribution of motives using Ellen et al.'s (2006) categorisation did not consider a disaster relief context, but rather cause marketing campaigns in general. In the study by Ellen et al. (2000) on charitable giving, which also used disaster relief examples, a more simplistic motive attribution was used: intrinsic (egoistic) and extrinsic (altruistic), without the nuance that Ellen et al. (2006) developed in later years. Thus, a proper comparison cannot be made.

In truth, it could be possible that perception of relief responses follows different mechanisms because of the nature of the pandemic itself. Past CSR literature using attribution theory in a cause marketing context made use of fictitious cases in order to analyse consumer's perception (Ellen et al., 2006, Marín et al., 2015; Ginder et al., 2021). Even when applied to a disaster setting (Ellen et al., 2000), while respondents were shown real footage of floods and asked to imagine it happened in their own city, they were not first-hand victims. The Coronavirus pandemic, on the other hand, is happening worldwide, with people being impacted first-hand. It could be possible that CSR perception and motives attribution works differently when the respondents are affected personally by the disaster in question.

It could be possible that, in the Covid-19 setting, strategic motives are not a focal point, or rather, that they are accepted by consumers when the company is also giving tangible help towards a cause: this would explain why strategic attribution did not relate to negative perception in the case of Dove, but it did in the case of McDonald's. Nevertheless, strategic attribution was not seen negatively in the case of Nike. In truth, it is possible that attribution of strategic motives by themselves do not lead to any specific perception outcome, as long as the company does help the cause in some form without exploiting it, but other factors, and other motives (egoistic or values-driven) play a bigger role.

In terms of stakeholder-driven motives, it is possible that consumers accept the fact that companies help out of external expectations: after all, half of the respondents explicitly think companies should help, and the other half thought of it as a positive thing if they did. As seen in Chapter 2, in a disaster setting such as Covid-19, it seems like helping due to outside pressure is not a bad thing in and of itself, because consumers do want companies to get involved (see section 2.1). In the case of McDonald's five respondents attributed stakeholder-driven motives: of these five, three liked the relief response (One, Six, Eight) and two disliked it (Two, Three). Again, just like strategic-motives, it is possible that stakeholder-driven motives do not play a big role in consumer's perception of Covid-19 relief responses, as acting due to external pressure is expected. Instead, other factors, such as tangibility of the help, etc, may play a bigger role.

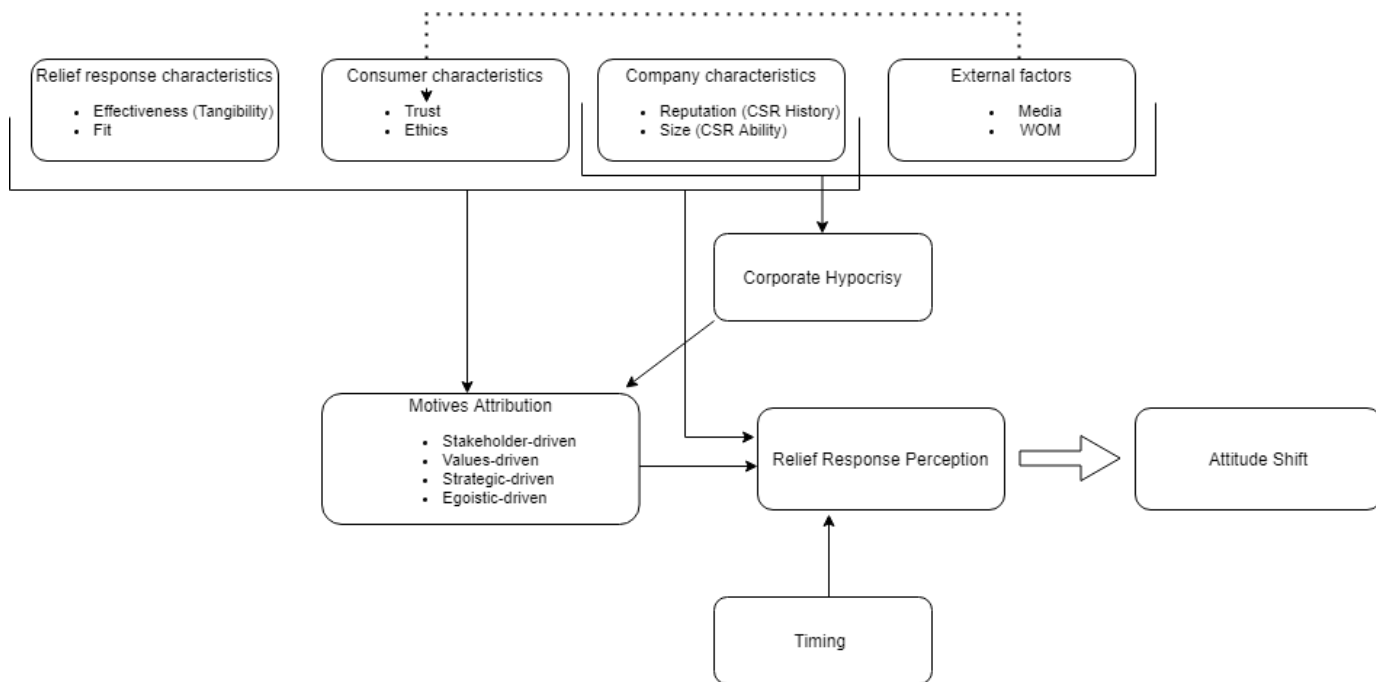## 6.7 Theoretical Model of Coronavirus Relief Response Perception

Figure 2: Coronavirus Cause Marketing Relief Response Perception Model

Three major factors have an impact on relief response perception:

1. Characteristics of the relief response, consumer, and company
2. Motives attributed to the company carrying out the response
3. Timing, or when the response was observed by the viewer

Number 2, motives attribution, is in turn influenced by Number 1, the combined characteristics of the relief response, consumer, and the company. Furthermore, perception of corporate hypocrisy also influences motives attribution negatively. Perception of corporate hypocrisy is in turn affected by company characteristics, such as size and reputation, and factors external to the company, such as WOM and media. Media and WOM can also affect the trust a consumer holds towards a company.

All of these factors combine to create a positive or negative perception of a relief response, which will finally produce a positive or negative attitude shift in consumers towards the brand depending on the degree (positive or negative) of the perception outcome.

6.8 Theoretical Implications

Literature on CSR perception has used attribution theory, together with a variety of different factors, in order to understand, categorise, and predict how consumers perceive the CSR activities of companies. However, very little research has been done in the context of cause marketing during a disaster, and, at the time of writing, no study has been done regarding a disaster of the magnitude of the Coronavirus pandemic. This study contributes to the CSR literature by giving an in-depth view of the possible mechanisms behind consumer perception of relief responses in the context of Covid-19. First, these findings align with the view present in the larger body of CSR literature that CSR does impact consumer attitudes (Kim and Lee, 2019). This does indeed happen even for disaster relief. Furthermore, the findings contradict Ellen et al.'s (2000) study, in which they state that a firm's support during a disaster will likely lead to attribution of altruistic motives by consumers. In reality, this may not always be the case, and consumers' perceptions and motives attribution are complex and varied, even in a disaster setting such as Covid-19.

It has become clear that consumers will not blindly react positively to a cause marketing CSR action simply because it is done in a disaster setting. Rather, consumer perception is nuanced and affected by many factors. An interesting theoretical ramification is that the motives and factors theorised to affect CSR perception at large in Chapter 3 are also relevant in the perception of Covid-19 cause marketing relief responses.

Alongside the moderating factors presented in section 3.7 of the literature review, more have been brought to light and found to be not only pre-existing in the CSR literature but also relevant for relief response perception. For example, the tangibility of the help given in an uncontrollable disaster setting (Ellen et al., 2000; Hildebrand et al., 2017), as well as the size of the company in the context of CSR Ability (Gao, 2009), versus effort of the relief response (Ellen et al., 2000). These findings also reflect Zasuwa's (2018) assertion that benevolence-based trust might be the most important antecedent of trust affecting consumers' perception, compared to integrity and ability. In addition, the findings highlight the importance of past CSR History in terms of reputation (Du et al., 2010) by showing how this will affect consumers differently depending on what type of information they can recall. This is an important implication, as these are additional factors to be considered when studying CSR perception.

Lastly, the study contributes to the literature of attribution theory of CSR by further expanding its determinants and outcomes in a disaster relief CSR context through the categorisation of motives attribution proposed by Ellen et al. (2006). The study has clarified the potential factors affecting perception and motives attribution. Furthermore, the study shows that motives attribution may be more complex and nuanced than previously thought, and the mechanism theorised to dictate perception based on a specific motive attribution appears to be different in the context of Covid-19 and potentially disaster relief. Specifically, stakeholder-driven and strategic motives may not lead to a specific response from consumers in a disaster setting, and thus, require more clarification.

6.8.1 Relevance of the Factors in Other Contexts

In addition, I would argue that some of the findings' contribution to the literature is not bound to the context of Covid-19 and disaster relief. Rather, they contribute to the general literature of CSR perception. Specifically, I believe both consumer and company characteristics-related factors, as well as external and contextual factors, and their potential effect on perception of relief responses should be taken in consideration when assessing perception in other CSR contexts. After all, the study corroborated these pre-existing theoretical concepts which have been proposed to affect CSR perception by previous scholars.

For instance, in terms of company characteristics, a corporation's size, its CSR Ability, reputation, and CSR History have already been theorised to affect CSR perception in a general context (Gao, 2009, Du et al., 2010), and they are not contextually bound to disasters. Therefore, I believe consumers will take into consideration these factors when perceiving CSR propositions from corporations, even for cause marketing campaigns which are not disaster related.

Similarly, the findings on media and WOM could be considered to be applicable, and theoretically relevant, in other contexts. After all, media and WOM having an impact on consumers' trust or perception of corporate hypocrisy have no reason to be bound to a disaster context, but can have these effects in other situations, as long as the information portrayed triggers similar mechanisms as the ones shown in this study.

In terms of consumer characteristics, and trust specifically, I also believe that benevolence may be the most important trust factor considered by consumers when perceiving a CSR action, as theorised by Zasuwa (2018), and should be thus taken into consideration when

considering CSR perception as a whole. However, one must consider that the respondents of this study can be seen to be part of the receivers of relief response's help, as they are part of society as a whole. Therefore, perceived benevolence in terms of trust may be of particular importance in terms of Covid relief responses because it is directed to the consumer and not third parties, but not necessarily apply as strongly when it comes to CSR perception in general.

On the other hand, relief response characteristics and timing of the relief response are bound to a disaster context by definition, as relief responses happen after a disaster strikes. When it comes to the perceived effectiveness of the relief response, for instance, the importance of the tangibility of the help may only be relevant in an uncontrollable disaster context, such as the pandemic. In fact, as found by Hildebrand et al. (2017), in controllable disaster contexts consumers appear to prefer monetary donations. Thus, I do not think tangibility applies in controllable disaster contexts. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is not only bound to the pandemic context either, and the contribution from the findings are likely to remain relevant in other uncontrollable disasters such as tsunamis, hurricanes, etc. On the other hand, the effect of timing will most likely affect only those consumers who are affected first-hand by a disaster and, thus, will be applicable depending on whether the consumers judging the relief response are bystanders or personally affected by the disaster.

6.9 Managerial Implications

Consumers believe that companies have an obligation to help during an uncontrollable disaster such as the Coronavirus pandemic. Companies must act in order to maintain a competitive advantage. However, these expectations are not easily met, and consumers can be quite critical of a company's attempt to do its due diligence. Companies have to be careful with their relief responses, as they can heavily impact consumers' brand attitudes, trust and loyalty (Research Services, 2020a; Hawkins, 2020; Vizard, 2020; Edelman, 2020).

From this study, a few recommendations can be drawn. While companies can do awareness campaigns as their cause marketing strategy, they probably will not reap as many rewards from these alone and might risk receiving backlash from consumers as seen in the case of McDonald's cause marketing relief response. For Covid-19, and possibly uncontrollable disasters as a whole, is that consumers put a very strong focus on the tangibility of the help provided. Thus, it is recommended to give out tangible help when disasters of this kind strike. This can take different forms: it could be products in high demand such as masks, ventilators

and hand sanitiser during the pandemic. In other contexts, however, different things may be needed and should be donated. One point remains certain, the more valuable it is at that specific moment in time, the better. Of course, companies should ensure that said products are something they produce, or something that their manufacturing can be repurposed to make. If this is not possible, one should try to find other ways to offer tangible help. Alternatively, one could donate money to the most suitable recipient.

While the companies shown in this study did not only do the awareness campaigns presented in this thesis, one clear realisation is that consumers are not always aware of what they do. Rather, the opposite might be more likely. Consumers may see relief responses on their own, therefore, it is important to have a strategy in place through which consumers can more easily know what firms are doing. For instance, Dove did a cause marketing campaign, but also mentioned that they were donating, while Nike did not make any mentions of donations. It is important for corporations to state how are helping in a tangible way to strengthen the propositions of their marketing campaigns. Furthermore, where possible, one should be explicit as to how much they are donating, as consumers want to know this.

The amount of donations is, in fact, important, as well as the perceived amount of effort consumers will think was required to provide the help. In function of this, company size plays an important role. Big corporations should do a lot more than small corporations in order to meet expectations, as consumers know that they have the capabilities to do relatively more. Conversely, small companies can do comparatively less and reap the same or more rewards. Consumers are more sceptical of big corporations' intentions, and a high-effort high-impact tangible donation can more easily sway consumers in the right direction, by making them perceive the firm as more benevolent.

Nevertheless, managers must consider to which cause they intend to donate to. The aforementioned recommendations apply when the disaster in question is deemed uncontrollable by consumers. On the other hand, if the relief response in question has the purpose of supporting a disaster which is seen as controllable, monetary donations may be the more suitable option (Hildebrand et al., 2017).

In the context of scepticism and hypocrisy, reputation also plays an important role. If the corporation in question does not have a good reputation, it will be put under higher scrutiny and criticism. If this is the case, it is of the utmost importance to exceed consumers'

expectations with the help provided: not doing so can heavily backfire, as seen in the case of McDonald's, as consumers will be more likely to ascribe the lack of effort behind the relief response as a pursuit of self-interest, a way to only appear to be caring, but not a genuine intention to help. If the firm holds a good reputation, consumers will be more likely to perceive their relief responses positively. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, this is not an excuse to do as little as possible. Rather, a combination of good reputation with tangible help could maximise CSR efforts and results. Additionally, consumers affected by a disaster may be more susceptible to perception of extrinsic motives from the company. Therefore, companies should take this into consideration when devising their relief responses.

Media coverage and word of mouth also plays an important role, specifically, when it portrays the relief response and the company in a bad light. Thus, it is of utmost importance to keep under consideration how one's CSR actions may be portrayed. Companies should communicate their intentions clearly and put extra effort into ensuring what will be donated functions appropriately.

Firms should consider their target. A marketing campaign by itself may only generate positive returns from existing customers. On the other hand, a tangible donation could potentially cast a broader net and appeal to a larger customer segment.

Lastly, companies should deploy their relief responses not too long after disaster strikes, in order to reap the potential rewards that come with the first mover advantage. Nevertheless, due to the possible heightened level of stress experienced by consumers, special care should be taken in order to avoid possible backfire effects. In order to avoid this, companies should provide tangible help and communicate clearly their intentions.

6.10 Limitations

The main goal of this study has been to understand what types of factors affect consumer's perceptions of cause marketing relief responses and how these factors affect said perception. However, as this is a master thesis, limitations have been encountered.

As I interviewed acquaintances, it cannot be discounted that this may have affected the findings in some way. Since I have met and worked with some of the respondents in the past, as well as being friends with the majority of them, it is likely that my respondents are more

similar than a randomly selected group of university students would be. This homogeneity could harm the transferability of the study. Furthermore, it was difficult to separate WOM and Media effects. While the findings are still valuable, a follow up quantitative study could better separate, and thus clarify, how these two factors affect perception.

Another limitation can be found with the timing of the study itself. From the findings, it appears that perception will change depending on when the consumer is interviewed and various other factors, such as their psychological state, will impact it. The beginning of the pandemic heavily affected consumers' well-being and cognitive capabilities. While I do believe that the factors found are relevant in the context of Covid-19 relief response perception, as similar constructs have been found to be present in the literature, one cannot discount how the perception of a relief response at the beginning of a disaster such as Covid-19 could be different a year later. This poses an overall limitation to this study, as well as the study of relief responses in general. Of course, the nature of perception itself, as well as that of exploratory qualitative inquiry, is that experiences and perceptions are often unique not only to the person but also to the timing in which the study is conducted, and these unique insights cannot be discounted.

Lastly, a personal consideration about the length and structure of the thesis is something to mention. Because, to my knowledge, this is the first exploratory in-depth qualitative study on the perception of relief responses, not just in Covid-19 but in the general disaster relief context, I felt the need to give an in-depth overview of how consumers perceived each relief response in my findings. However, I do realise this affected the length and structure of the thesis, and if I were to do this again, I would present my findings in a different and more concise way.

6.11 Future Research

From the findings, future research could go into various directions. The findings from the study have highlighted various possible factors which appear to affect relief response perception. The qualitative study served the purpose of reframing existing factors present in CSR literature, as well as finding new emerging factors which are unique to a disaster setting and not present in the literature. Nevertheless, a proper understanding of which factors hold the most weight or how they affect each other and ultimately lead to a specific perception outcome is not fully clear. Undoubtedly, a quantitative study could give a clearer understanding of how the relief response perception factors discovered in this thesis may

interact with each other, lead to certain motives attributions and ultimately affect perception. In other words, a quantitative study could give further insight on the relationships between the factors as well as outcome causality.

As mentioned in the discussion section, due to the uniqueness of Covid-19 it is possible that the factors found may not play the exact same role in other settings. While I have given a preliminary understanding of how these factors may apply in contexts outside of the pandemic, future studies could also try to confirm how these factors apply in other disaster contexts. This is of particular importance, as Covid-19 is a very unique disaster, confirming the validity of the factors in other instances would give managers better tools on how to best do disaster relief.

Furthermore, the preliminary factors found, which I do not deem to be bound to a disaster context, could also be tested in how they affect CSR perception in other CSR contexts which do not relate to disasters.

Further studies, either qualitative or quantitative, could also follow a longitudinal time horizon to shed more light on how disaster relief is perceived differently depending on how close in time to the disaster the relief response is. A longitudinal, rather than cross-sectional, study could give a better understanding of how perception of relief responses changes overtime. Lastly, future studies could better clarify how relief responses are perceived differently by bystanders and first-hand victims.

7. Conclusion

Companies have been taking part in disaster relief for decades, trying to gain a competitive advantage in a world where consumers' expectations seem to become higher and higher. After disaster strikes, firms cannot just stand by and watch; companies must act and help society in any way they can. However, cause marketing relief responses are not always seen as acts of goodness. As seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers will critically judge companies and their relief responses if they do not find the help offered to be suitable in their eyes. Because consumers' perception of these relief responses can have a long-term effect on a company's standing, it is of utmost importance to better understand how consumers perceive relief responses.

Thus, the goal of this study has been to uncover how consumers perceive cause marketing relief responses during the Covid-19 pandemic by conducting a qualitative study with the research question: *Which factors influence consumer perception of cause marketing relief responses during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

Consumers' perception of relief responses and its determining factors are varied, but an interesting outcome, and an important consideration, is that the factors theorised to affect CSR perception as a whole appear to be applicable in the Covid-19 pandemic context. However, new factors have come to light from this study.

Specifically, what sets Covid-19 and its related CSR actions apart from other contexts are the relief response characteristic factors. Particularly, it is the importance of the tangibility of the help that companies provide, which demonstrates itself through the donation of products that are in high demand. Companies can appear more caring and benevolent by making such donations, which need to be proportional to their size and something they are skilled in producing in order to reap the highest benefits. Furthermore, the study shows the potential importance of when consumers came in contact with the relief response: there seems to be evidence that perception of relief responses may vary depending on this.

Moreover, the study uncovered the importance of benevolence-based trust as a relevant consumer factor in the perception of relief responses, and the possibility that negative media and WOM can affect relief response perception via attribution of corporate hypocrisy.

Ultimately, this study has contributed to the literature of CSR perception by shedding new insights on the perception of cause marketing relief responses in uncontrollable disasters.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Interview Invitation

Hello, my name is Lorenzo Marinelli and I am a master student at the Norwegian School of Economics. For my thesis, I am conducting a study on the perception of relief responses from the perspective of consumers in the context of the ongoing pandemic. I am trying to uncover what consumers think of them. In order to answer my research question, I am going to conduct interviews, and I would like to invite you to participate as I think you will be able to provide me with the information that I seek, due to your characteristics as a consumer.

In the context of this study, a relief response is when a company devotes substantial resources, be it in the form of donations of money or goods, professional expertise or by spreading awareness, in order to support those in need during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The interview will last approximately 90 minutes and take place online via audio call.

Rest assured that your identity will be protected, and personally identifying information, if any, will be removed. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed, and I will take notes, but you will be referred to within the thesis report, notes, and transcripts with a pseudonym. I will be the only person to have access to notes, recordings, and transcriptions, and these will be discarded once the study is complete. The only characteristics I kindly ask you to allow me to insert in my study are your nationality, the gender you identify with, your age group (millennial), and your field of education.

I will not ask you any personally pertinent questions in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. Decision to participate is absolutely voluntary and you can withdraw at any point, for any reason, which you do not have to disclose.

Appendix B – Interview Guide

"Hello and welcome to this interview. My name is Lorenzo Marinelli and I am a master student at the Norwegian School of Economics. For my thesis, I am studying the perception of relief responses from the perspective of consumers in the context of the ongoing pandemic. I am trying to uncover what consumers think of them.

This interview will last approximately 90 minutes.

Rest assured that your identity will be protected, and personally identifying information, if any, will be removed. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed, and I will take notes, but you will be referred to within the thesis report, notes, and transcripts with a pseudonym. I will be the only person to have access to notes, recordings, and transcriptions, and these will be discarded once the study is complete. The only characteristics I kindly ask you to allow me to insert in my study are your nationality, the gender you identify with, your age group (millennial), and your field of education.

I will not ask you any personally pertinent question in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. Decision to participate is absolutely voluntary and you can withdraw at any point, for any reason, which you do not have to disclose.

In the context of this study, a relief response is when a company devotes substantial resources, be it in the form of donations of money or goods, professional expertise or by spreading awareness, in order to support those in need after disaster hit.

If you have any question during the interview, please, feel free to ask. If you do not have any question right now, we can begin"

Questions' list

1) Can you think of any example of relief responses for Covid-19?

If they say yes:

- *ask probing questions: e.g., where did you see / hear this example?*

- *ask question 2*

2) Can you tell me in a few words what do you think of the relief response you just mentioned?

"Now I will show you a list of examples of relief responses and ask you a few questions for each. Let's begin with the first..."

Show the example from Appendix C

3) Have you heard of or seen this example before?

If yes, ask probing questions to find out more based on what they say

4)What is your initial impression?

If they do not know the relief response, give them the baseline information from Appendix C

4)What is your opinion of this relief response?

1. Do you like it or dislike it? Why?
2. Do you think it is a good or a bad relief response? Why?

5) Can you give me any reasons why you think the company did this relief response?

1. Of these reasons, what do you think was the main reason?
2. Who do you think is the relief response for?
3. Who do you think the company intends to benefit with this relief response?
4. Do you think their intention to help is genuine? Honest? Do you think they mean it?
5. Do you think the company has any ethical intentions then / at all?
6. Why would you say that is important in your view?
7. So, do you think the company has / does not have a sincere intention to help then?

6) Effectiveness:

- From your perspective, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not effective at all and 5 being very effective; how effective do you think this relief response is at helping the cause (helping during the Covid-19 pandemic)? Why?

- From your perspective, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not effective at all and 5 being very effective; how effective do you think this relief response is as a marketing campaign? Why?

7) Do you think this relief response reflects the company's business? Why?

"Now I am going to give you some additional information on how this relief response was received online"

Give the extra information in Appendix C

8)What do you make of this extra information?

1. Has this extra information affected your opinion of the relief response? If so, how?

9) What is your opinion of company X (Nike / BrewDog / McDonald's / Dove)?

10) From your perspective, has this relief response affected your opinion of company X (Nike / BrewDog / McDonald's / Dove)?

"Now I will ask you the final question for this example"

11) Trust:

- *Ability:* On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being very much, how much do you think (Nike / BrewDog / McDonald's / Dove) is a competent company?
- *Benevolence*: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being very much, how much do you think (Nike / BrewDog / McDonald's / Dove) is genuinely concerned for the well-being of others?
- *Integrity*: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being very much, how much do you think (Nike / BrewDog / McDonald's / Dove) is the type of company that will do what they say they would do?

Ask probing questions about the scores they gave to understand their reasoning, such as "why did you give this score?"

"Thank you for your input on the examples, for the final part of this interview I will now ask you some general questions"

12) Which relief response did you like the most, which the least?

- Please rank them from best to worst.

13) Which did you think was the most effective relief response at helping the cause, least effective?

- Please rank them from most effective to least effective at helping the cause.

14) Which did you think was the most effective relief response as a marketing campaign, least effective?

- Please rank them from most effective to least effective as marketing campaigns.

15) What expectations do you have from companies during the pandemic?

    1.   Would you expect the same from all companies?

16) Companies have decided to help in different ways, some have donated goods, some have donated money, and some have made awareness campaigns. Which do you personally prefer?

17) Do you think it is ethical for companies to do these relief responses?

The interview is finished, thank them for their cooperation

Appendix C – Interview Guide Aid

Relief response examples shown in the interviews and their relevant information

Nike

Nike Relief Response (Nike, 2020b)

Link shared during the interviews:
https://pbs.twimg.com/media/ETo2LIvU8AEL6dO?format=jpg&name=small

Relief response information: This is an awareness campaign done by the company Nike, which appeared towards the beginning of pandemic in March 2020. Nike's relief response consists of a picture with the message "If you ever dreamed of playing for millions around the world, now is your chance. Play inside, play for the world." (Nike, 2020a). The campaign's

main goal was to raise awareness on the importance of practicing social distancing. To strengthen the message, Nike's affiliated sport stars shared the picture, with some adding their own examples of playing inside. These included well-known athletes such as Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Cristiano Ronaldo and more (Young, 2020).

Extra information on online reception: This campaign was very well received online by consumers for its important message, presented in a clever, Nike-flared way, and received 735.000 likes on Instagram (Nike, 2020a) and 126.000 likes on Twitter (Nike, 2020b).

BrewDog

BrewDog Relief Response (Brewdog, 2020b)

Link shared during the interviews:
https://pbs.twimg.com/media/ETYbZqCXsAQfehA?format=jpg&name=small

Relief response information: BrewDog is a brewery and pub-chain which mainly produces and sells beer. This is a branded hand-sanitiser which BrewDog made during the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, when there were shortages in the UK. The result was a branded hand sanitiser which the company named "Brewgel Punk Sanitiser" (BrewDog, 2020a). The hand sanitiser was donated to hospitals under the National Health Service (NHS).

Extra information on online reception: When the company announced the hand sanitiser on March 18th on their Twitter account (BrewDog, 2020b), consumers were confused, as the company did not clarify whether the product would be sold nor at what cost. Some even

accused the company of doing "shameless marketing" (Mathers, 2020) as the company was giving an appearance of trying to exploit the shortage of hand sanitiser by making it, branding it, and selling it for its own benefit. Following the accusations, the company clarified that the hand sanitiser was not going to be sold but would be donated to the National Health Service (NHS) (Mathers, 2020).

McDonald's

McDonald's Relief Response (Diaz, 2020)

Link shared during the interviews: https://s3-prod.adage.com/s3fs-public/styles/width_792/public/20200320_mSeparated_3x2.jpg

Relief response information: This relief response took the form of a logo change that Mcdonald's released in Brazil in March of 2020 (Valinsky, 2020). McDonald's split the golden arches of its iconic "M" and used this new logo on both a tv ad and on its social media accounts in order to spread the importance of practicing social distancing (Valinsky, 2020).

Extra information on online reception: The campaign was not received well and was heavily criticised on social media and even by US Senator Bernie Sanders, who urged the company to give its workers paid sick leave (Valinsky, 2020). For some, the logo change was too gimmicky to be taken seriously (Steinmetz, 2020). People felt that McDonald's' logo change felt disingenuous and exploitative of the situation, by banking on solidarity like many other brands. Users on Twitter urged the company to provide more tangible help than a simple logo

change, such as providing free meals to those in need, or to turn their drive throughs into safe testing sites (Piper, 2021). Following the backlash, McDonald's discontinued the campaign and issued an apology (Diaz, 2020; Piper, 2021).

Dove

Video link shared during the interviews: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQOq0-ODBbc

Disclaimer: the original video shared in the interviews did not provide any extra information about perception apart from number of views and likes, the comments were disabled. Unfortunately, the video has been made private by Dove and it cannot be watched anymore. To watch the same video, refer to: https://twitter.com/Dove/status/1247898774095060997 (Dove, 2020)

Dove Relief Response, still picture from the video as a visual reference for the researcher (Dove, 2020)

Relief response information: In April 2020, Dove released the "Courage is beautiful" campaign, in which they put emphasis on thanking healthcare workers on the frontlines. The campaign was released both as a 30 second video ad on its social media accounts as well as still images strategically placed in the neighbourhoods around hospitals. The campaign shows pictures of healthcare workers, and their names, with bruises on their faces due to wearing

masks for long hours (Dove, 2020; Eurobest, 2020; Gardner, 2020). At the end of the video message, Dove explained how they were also donating care products to healthcare workers.

Extra information on online reception: The campaign was very successful on social media. From its initial release in Canada, the campaign's positive reception led Dove to expand "Courage is Beautiful" to 15 countries, adapting it every time to show local healthcare workers (Kenny and Ogilvy Toronto, 2021) Various web media outlets also praised the campaign, calling the video "inspiring", "striking" and "powerful" (Callahan, 2020; Schild, 2020).

Appendix D – Summary of Interview Scores

| | | EFFECTIVENESS | | TRUST | | | | RANKING | |
		Cause	Marketing	Ability	Benevolence	Integrity	Like	Cause	Marketing
R1	Nike	2	4	4	1	3	2	2	2
	Brewdog	5	5	4	3	4	4	4	4
	McDonalds	4	5	4	1	5	3	1	1
	Dove	4	5	5	4	4	1	3	3
R2	Nike	3	5	5	2	3	3	3	3
	Brewdog	5	3	5	3	3	4	4	1
	McDonalds	2	3	5	2	3	1	1	4
	Dove	3	4	5	2	3	2	2	2
R3	Nike	3	5	5	2	5	2	1	3
	Brewdog	5	3	3	4	4	3	3	2
	McDonalds	3	1	2	1	3	1	2	1
	Dove	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4
R4	Nike	3	4	4	3	5	4	2	3
	Brewdog	5	4	3	4	3	3	3	2
	McDonalds	2	2	4	2	2	1	1	1
	Dove	4	4	4	3	4	2	4	4
R5	Nike	3	4	5	4	4	3	2	2
	Brewdog	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	4
	McDonalds	2	5	5	1	3	1	1	1
	Dove	3	3	4	2	2	2	3	3
R6	Nike	3	5	4	2	4	2	2	2
	Brewdog	5	3	3	4	4	3	4	3
	McDonalds	2	4	2	1	1	1	1	1
	Dove	5	4	5	5	5	4	3	4
R7	Nike	3	4	5	3	4	3	2	4
	Brewdog	3	2	4	4	3	2	3	2
	McDonalds	4	4	4	2	3	1	1	1
	Dove	4	3	5	4	4	4	4	3
R8	Nike	3	4	4	2	5	3	2	3
	Brewdog	4	4	3	2	5	2	3	2
	McDonalds	2	4	4	2	5	1	1	1
	Dove	4	5	5	3	5	4	4	4