UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Master Thesis

Responding to online firestorms on social media:
An analysis of the two company cases Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci

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s2141205
September 17, 2019

Study: Master of Science in Business Administration
Track: Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Strategy (Double Degree)

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Acknowledgements

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have received some great support and encouragement. First of all, I would like to thank my first supervisor Dr. Anna Priante for her excellent guidance during my research. She always gave me constructive, detailed feedback and offered me valuable input. She shared her knowledge and expertise with me, helping and encouraging me with great advice. Additionally, I thank my second supervisor Dr. Michel Ehrenhard who provided a new perspective on my work and gave me some helpful feedback for the last phase of my thesis. I would also like to thank my supervisor from the TU Berlin Dr. Henrike Weber.

My special thanks go to my boyfriend who helped me so much by discussing problems and findings with me and constantly motivated me. Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents and friends for their moral support and encouragement throughout the whole process of writing this master thesis.

Abstract

The rise of social media enables consumers to share criticism and negative opinions about a company to a large number of people within a short period of time, possibly leading to huge waves of outrage. This phenomenon, called online firestorm, poses new challenges and risks for companies (Pfeffer, Zorbach, & Carley, 2014). Research has shown that such online firestorms can damage brand reputation and may lead to customer losses and drops in sales volumes. This thesis aims to examine how organizations can react to a firestorm in order to interrupt its further spread and hence, avoid these negative consequences. To reach this objective, we ask the following research question: "How do companies respond to online firestorms on social media in order to prevent a further dissemination of the firestorm and how effective are these response strategies?".

By analyzing the two company cases Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci, this study applies a mixed method approach. In the first step we deploy qualitative content analysis based on situational crisis communication theory and inductive coding in order to identify the firestorm response strategies of the respective companies. In the second step we determine the effectiveness of these response strategies by applying automatic sentiment analysis to the users' reactions to the company responses. Our results show that the two companies adopted different response strategies, leading to different consumer reactions. Based on that, we find that accommodative responses, including *Rebuilding* and *Bolstering* strategies should be chosen over defensive responses, including *Denial.* These accommodative responses have to be sincere, as insincere responses upset consumers. In addition, we confirm that it is highly important to respond as fast as possible to an online firestorm. Furthermore, we find that the firestorm response should go beyond apologizing by including supporting means which prove a company's dedication to improve and create credibility.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Situation and Problem

In the "analog days" consumers only had limited power. When they were dissatisfied with a company they only had three options: staying loyal to the company, exiting the relationship (Singh, 1990) or complaining to the company (Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987). Hence, in most cases, consumers were rather powerless with limited possibilities to express their dissatisfaction (Rauschnabel, Kammerlander, & Ivens, 2016). Through the development of social media, consumers were provided with tools for mass action, enabling them to increasingly express their opinions about organizations and their behavior. Consequently, these new media channels shifted the power from organizations to consumers, giving them the opportunity to influence each other by sharing their experiences on social media (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

These developments confront companies with new challenges, as consumers now take an active role as market players (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Previously, complaints were only shared with representatives of the respective company and, possibly, a few peers. Now, these complaints are available to a substantially larger group of people (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). As a reaction to questionable actions or statements of a company, social media users can create huge waves of outrage within just a few hours. These sudden waves of negative electronic word of mouth (eWOM) are called online firestorms (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Firestorms are characterized by a high number of messages with an enraged, emotional tonality, spreading extremely fast through social media (Johnen, Jungblut, & Ziegele, 2018) and potentially leading to severe consequences for companies. H&M, for instance, had to close several stores in South Africa and experienced a drop in sales after being hit by an online firestorm in which the company was accused of racism because it published an advertisement with a black boy posing in a sweater with the inscription "coolest monkey in the jungle" (Reporter, 2018). The substantial risk of online firestorms is also reflected in the fact that major US and European insurance firms offer insurances that protect companies against firestorms. These policies cover the loss of income suffered by an organization after a firestorm and professional advice on the complex question of how to handle the firestorm (dpa-infocom, 2018). Reacting to a firestorm indeed is difficult because consumers' reactions towards a specific incident are not only influenced by the original content, but also by the responses of other users to the firestorm (Chan, Skoumpopoulou, & Yu, 2018; Kim & Hollingshead, 2015). Furthermore, a company confronted with a firestorm cannot stop negative comments, has no control over their customers and cannot censor what users post online (Lappeman, Patel, & Appalraju, 2018). Due to these complex dynamics, the consequences of a firestorms are unpredictable and hard to control (Pfeffer et al., 2014). In addition, online firestorms require a

fast response by the respective company, as it has been found that companies which faced an online firestorm and decided not to respond to it, suffered from loss of credibility and image damages (Pfeffer et al., 2014) and that a quick response is critical to avoid further virality of the firestorm (Herhausen, Ludwig, Grewal, Wulf, & Schoegel, 2019). Hence, on the one hand, it is extremely important for companies to intervene into a firestorm and to react as quickly as possible. On the other hand, the characteristics of online firestorms make it very difficult to take appropriate actions, since they spread extremely fast and cannot be controlled by the company. This risk created by social media is still widely left unattended in the literature (Lappeman et al., 2018). While it has been established that it is important to respond to the firestorm and to do so quickly (e.g. Herhausen et al., 2019; Pfeffer et al., 2014), as we will show, the question of how to concretely respond to a firestorm has only be examined in a few papers and findings in this area are quite limited. Little research has been done on specific response strategies that can be taken by companies in order to solve the presented conflict and future research is encouraged to develop strategies for mitigating online firestorms (Drasch, Huber, Panz, & Probst, 2015). Without clear guidelines for responding to an online firestorm, companies will continue to experience heavy damages from negative eWOM disseminating in a firestorm (Herhausen et al., 2019). Consequently, examining effective response strategies to an online firestorm is highly relevant for practice and academics (Lappeman et al., 2018).

1.2 Research Goal and Research Question

This master thesis has the objective to investigate how firms respond to an online firestorm and how effective these responses are, leading to the following research question:

How do companies respond to online firestorms on social media in order to prevent a further dissemination of the firestorm and how effective are these response strategies?

Our research is based on the insights gained from analyzing the two company cases Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci which were affected by online firestorms. We examine the companies' social media responses in depth, using qualitative content analysis in order to get an understanding of the applied response strategies. This content analysis partly consists of deductive coding, based on situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and partly of inductive coding. Subsequently, we deploy sentiment analysis to the users' reactions to these posts in order to determine, whether the respective response strategy was successful in the sense of calming down consumers' negative emotions, consequently interrupting the spread of negative eWOM and by that inhibiting the further dissemination of the firestorm. Hence, this master thesis has the research goal to contribute to the growth of academic knowledge in the field of online firestorms by providing more insights on how companies can effectively respond

to online firestorms in order to fulfill the requirement of quick, appropriate responses. Additionally, we aim at making some contributions to the related fields of crisis communication and reputation management, as our research provides important insights on how companies should communicate on social media in a conflict situation.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter 1 we present the relevance of this research by pointing out the threats of online firestorms and the need for more insights into possible firestorm response strategies. From that, the research question and goal are derived. In Chapter 2 we provide a literature review, starting with a short introduction into social media and eWOM, the underlying concept of online firestorms. In the next sub-chapter, we define online firestorms and establish their main characteristics as well as literature findings regarding online firestorm responses. In Chapter 3 we present SCCT as the theoretical background of this thesis and its connection and relevance for our work. In Chapter 4 we introduce the two cases under examination, Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci, including a reasoning for the choice of the cases and an outline of the main events of the particular online firestorm. Chapter 5 comprises a description of the methodology of this thesis. We present the overall research design, together with a reasoning for the methods choice. Then, in the first step, a qualitative content analysis is conducted on the companies' responses, including deductive coding based on SCCT, followed by inductive coding. In the second step of the research, we apply sentiment analysis to the consumer reactions. The combined results of these analyses are then collected in Chapter 6. Here, we present the companies' response strategies and their effectiveness. In Chapter 7 the main results are first summarized and then discussed. From these findings we derive the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of this thesis for responding to an online firestorm. In the last part of the seventh chapter we outline limitations and directions for future research. Last but not least we present the conclusions of our study in Chapter 8.

2 Literature review

2.1 Social Media and electronic word of mouth

Social media can be defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Through the explosive growth of social media, companies now have less control over the messages and information available about them on the internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and hence, the information flow about a brand is multidirectional, interconnected and hard to predict (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Individuals have changed from passive readers and listeners to active participants (Einwiller, Viererbl, & Himmelreich, 2017), who can create, spread and manipulate content related to a

particular company (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Consequently, consumers are now enabled to obtain information and experiences about products, services and companies not only from people personally known, but from a huge number of people, otherwise unfamiliar to them (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). This phenomenon has been labeled electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and can be defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Using social media, consumers can spread criticism and complaints to a large number of people within hours while other users can continually join in. As companies do not have control over users' interactions and cannot censor what consumers say about the brand on social media (Lappeman et al., 2018), this negative eWOM can disseminate quickly and has the potential to reach a lot of people (Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016). Additionally, negative eWOM on social media is very persistent, as it exists permanently and is searchable for instance via search engines (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). Furthermore, it has been found that consumers diffuse negative online content faster and for a longer period of time, to more people and in a more detailed and assimilated way than positive information (Hornik, Satchi, Cesareo, & Pastore, 2015). This "negativity bias" (Hornik et al., 2015) implies that negative eWOM attracts more attention and is more influential than positive eWOM (Cheung & Lee, 2008; East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008; Hewett, Rand, Rust, & Van Heerde, 2016; Park & Lee, 2009; Wangenheim, 2005). When the affected company does not initiate any counter-actions against negative eWOM, it can turn into a vicious cycle (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012) and eventually into an online firestorm. Consequently, negative eWOM can be understood as the underlying concept of online firestorms, as any negative eWOM has the potential to turn into an online firestorm (Hansen, Kupfer, & Hennig-Thurau, 2018; Herhausen et al., 2019; Lappeman et al., 2018; Pfeffer et al., 2014; Stich, Golla, & Nanopoulos, 2014).

2.2 Online firestorms

2.2.1 Definition and characteristics of online firestorms

The concept of online firestorms was introduced by Pfeffer et al. (2014) (Hansen et al., 2018) who define a firestorm as "the sudden discharge of large quantities of messages containing negative WOM and complaint behavior against a person, company, or group in social media networks" (Pfeffer et al., 2014, p. 118). According to the authors, the definition and circulation of a firestorm is similar to a rumor, which is a "proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by WOM, without secure standards of evidence being presented" (Allport & Postman, 1947, p. ix). The essential difference of firestorms to rumors is the higher level of aggression in an online firestorm and the users' intention to be offensive (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Furthermore, firestorms are characterized by a high number of messages and an indignant, emotional tonality (Johnen et al., 2018). These messages circulating in an online firestorm are

based on opinions, not facts (Pfeffer et al., 2014) and often also contain calls for boycott against the company under fire (Lim, 2017). In many cases the messages are of affective nature, which increases the involvement of users exposed to the negative eWOM of the firestorm (Pace, Balboni, & Gistri, 2017). Possible triggers for an online firestorm are online marketing campaigns which backfired, customers expressing dissatisfaction on social media, moral misconduct of the company or organizational communication which is perceived as unethical or unprofessional (Johnen et al., 2018; Mochalova & Nanopoulos, 2014). Some authors state that everything can spark a firestorm, even irrelevant actions or little mistakes, from low-level employees (Pace et al., 2017; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). The instant waves of criticism created by an online firestorm can have severe consequences for a company, including customer losses, damaged brand reputation, drop in sales volumes and switching intentions of loyal customers (Chan et al., 2018; Lappeman et al., 2018). Hansen et al. (2018) find that 58% of companies suffer from a decreased short-term brand perception and for 40% the firestorms had negative effects in the long run, regarding long-term brand perceptions and consumers' long-term memory.

Related to the online firestorm research field, are studies that examine the interplay of various information sources (Hansen et al., 2018). Social media is increasingly becoming a source of information for traditional media channels, which can lead to "digital spillover" (Diakopoulos, De Choudhury, & Naaman, 2012; Einwiller et al., 2017). This means that, if there is a heavy consumer reaction on social media, traditional media often picks up on the incident and covers the issue at hand but also the online outrage about it. Then again, if traditional media reports about the online firestorms, the interest of additional consumers is raised, who then also take up on the topic by discussing it on social media (Einwiller et al., 2017; Hansen et al., 2018). By that interplay of traditional and new media the speed and reach of the consumer messages are increased and the firestorm is amplified (Einwiller et al., 2017; Hansen et al., 2018; Pfeffer et al., 2014).

Overall, online firestorms are a very complex phenomenon. They often appear without any warning, are hard to predict and spread extremely fast (Lappeman et al., 2018). Additionally, as they comprise many people with different motives for their criticism, firestorms enable clusters of complaints. These are started with one negative opinion shared by a user which attracts the attention of another social media user who then, in turn, comments his or her own experience or opinion (Lappeman et al., 2018). Consumers are thus exposed to the reactions of other social media users, which has an effect on their believes and attitudes, influencing their initial evaluation and consequently their response towards the incident in question (Chan et al., 2018; Kim & Hollingshead, 2015). As a result, unexpected bursts of customer outrage can evolve (Chan et al., 2018).

Due to these complexities online firestorms are extremely unpredictable, and companies often fail to detect them timely to prevent their outbreak. Consequently, companies have to be prepared to respond adequately to online firestorms.

2.2.2 Responding to online firestorms

The presented viral and complex nature of firestorms makes it extremely challenging for companies to intervene. At the same time, finding an appropriate response is very important, as a wrong response may even reinforce the firestorm (Stich et al., 2014). The affected firm should take actions and initiate counter-responses as fast as possible in order to avoid an escalation of the situation (Drasch et al., 2015; Lappeman et al., 2018; Pfeffer et al., 2014; Stich et al., 2014). Accordingly, Pfeffer et al. (2014) point out that it is important to communicate with the attacking users and generally to respond to the accusations, as ignoring a firestorm can lead to heavy image damages. This was confirmed in a recent study by Herhausen and colleagues (2019) who consider not responding to the accusations in a firestorm to be the worst strategy and emphasize that it is highly important to act fast. A timely, adequate and confident response even has the potential to strengthen the brand's position and increase its credibility and image (Pfeffer et al., 2014). While there are many papers pointing out the importance of responding quickly, studies suggesting concrete response strategies are limited.

A response strategy, proposed by Pfeffer et al. (2014), is the diffusion of positive counter information to the negative eWOM to destabilize the adverse attitude people have formed due to the firestorm. A similar reaction strategy was examined by Mochalova and Nanopoulos (2014) and Stich et al. (2014) who introduce a counteraction strategy which initiates the spread of positive eWOM by engaging individuals to act as supporters of the company in order to restrict the spread of an online firestorm.

Herhausen et al. (2019) examine how firestorms can be mitigated and find that a company must tailor its response to the intensity of excitement in the negative eWOM to reduce the virality of a potential firestorm on social media. When the negative eWOM contains a lot of intensive high-arousal emotions, a firm should include more explanation in their response and when negative eWOM contains more low-arousal emotions, more empathy is the better suited response (Herhausen et al., 2019). Furthermore, the authors state that apologizing will "feed the fire" and increase virality and that offering compensations should be the last resort.

Rauschnabel et al. (2016) examine organizational reactions to what they call *collaborative brand attacks*. The authors understand this term as a synonym for online firestorms, but do not base their research on Pfeffer et al. (2014). Additionally, they state that collaborative brand attacks may initially not be aggressive or intended to be harmful, but a high level of aggression is a fundamental characteristic of the online firestorm definition of Pfeffer et al. (2014). Thus, we believe that the authors' understanding of collaborative brand attacks does slightly differ

from online firestorms. Nevertheless, we want to shortly mention the findings of Rauschnabel et al. (2016) as, to our best knowledge, this study is the only study which suggests concrete response strategies based on an analysis of company cases. Rauschnabel et al. (2016) find that the two strategies *ignoring*, and *censoring* led to an increased momentum of the brand attack and a sharper tone of user comments. *Content bumping* was also applied, meaning that companies published a lot of content to replace the brand attack in search engines' top rankings. Also, the companies under examination provided *counter arguments* for why the company behaved appropriately, which intensified the attacks or engaged in *appeasement* strategies, including apologies, which appeared to inhibit further growth of the brand attacks. The strategy *change of behavior* was found to immediately stop the collaborative brand attack. Overall, Rauschnabel et al. (2016) find that the company accusers expect a fast response and apology by the company, as well as an observable change of behavior.

3 Theoretical background

Crisis communication literature provides some important insights on how to handle unpredictable situations which have the potential to damage organizations and can lead to severe consequences (Hauser, Hautz, Hutter, & Füller, 2017). As has been shown above, firestorms are as well unforeseeable and often have negative consequences for a company. In some articles they are even understood as the digital form of a crisis (Hansen et al., 2018; Pace et al., 2017; Pfeffer et al., 2014). Consequently, we expect the research and findings in the field of crisis communication on social media to be relevant for the field of online firestorms and accordingly for this thesis, providing some insights on how companies can respond effectively to avoid the further dissemination of a firestorm (Hauser et al., 2017). Our focus will lie on situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) as it is the most popular stream within the field of crisis communication and response (Kerkhof, Schultz, & Utz, 2011) and one of the mostly cited theories in crisis communication research (Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016).
In the following, the main characteristics and crisis response strategies of SCCT will be presented in the first part, followed by a more detailed explanation of the relevance of SCCT for online firestorms.

3.1 SCCT

A crisis can be defined as "an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders [...] and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2014b, p. 3). SCCT suggests several crisis response strategies which aim at calming negative emotions and protecting organizations against further adverse reactions (Zhang, Kotkov, Veijalainen, & Semenov, 2016).

The crisis response strategies suggested by SCCT can be divided into *accommodative* and *defensive* (Coombs, 1998; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). *Accommodative* strategies are concerned with acknowledging the problem and accepting full responsibility for it (Coombs, 2018; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). *Defensive response strategies,* on the other hand, seek to avoid responsibility and focus on organizational concerns. (Coombs, 2018; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). A basic assumption of SCCT is that stakeholders attribute responsibilities for the crisis to the organization involved in the crisis (Y. Cheng, 2018). When the source of the crisis is seen as internal and/or intentional the public perceives the crisis events as more controllable and consequently attributes more responsibility to the company. In this case, managers are recommended to apply an accommodative organizational response. When the crisis origin is seen as external, unintentional and/or the organization has a low perceived responsibility for the crisis, the public is more likely to accept a defensive company response (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). Overall it is suggested that the more responsible the company appears to be for a crisis, the increasingly accommodative the selected crisis response strategy should be (Coombs, 2007, 2011, 2014a; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002).

SCCT suggests four crisis response clusters: *Rebuilding, Bolstering*, *Diminishment* and *Denial* which can be placed along a defensive/accommodative continuum. As visualized in Figure 1 *Rebuilding* strategies are to a higher degree accommodative than *Bolstering* strategies and *Denial* strategies are to a higher degree defensive than *Diminishment* strategies (Coombs, 2007, 2018).

Figure 1: Crisis response clusters grouped on Continuum

Defensive	←	→	*Accommodative*
Denial	*Diminishment*	*Bolstering*	*Rebuilding*
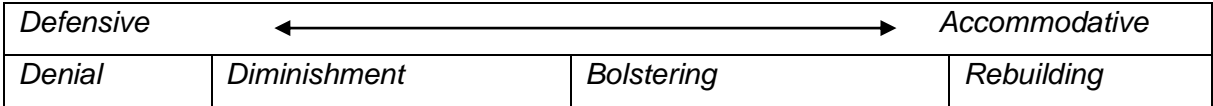
based on Coombs (2018)

Each of these crisis response clusters, can be sub-categorized into concrete response strategies (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007) provides a collection of the response strategies, which he determined in his studies. In the following years, additional response strategies were identified by the literature and assigned to the respective crisis response clusters.

The *Denial* cluster includes strategies which aim at removing any connections between the crisis and the company by claiming that the company is not responsible for the crisis (Coombs, 2015). Coombs (2007) determines the strategies *attack the accuser*, *denial* and *scapegoating* for this cluster. Lee and Song (2010) and Liu (2010a) additionally suggest the *ignoring* or *no action* strategy to account for those companies which choose to not respond at all to a crisis.

Diminish strategies claim that the crisis is not as serious as people think or that the company did not have control over the crisis events with the goal to reduce the perceived crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2018). This cluster contains the strategies *excuse, justification* (Coombs, 2007) and *separation* (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011).

The aim of *Bolstering* is to connect positive information with the company (Coombs, 2015, 2018). To do so, Coombs (2007) suggests the strategies *reminding, ingratiation* and *victimage*. Additionally, *endorsement* (Liu et al., 2011) and a *CSR-based response* (Ham & Kim, 2017) were identified as *Bolstering* strategies.

The *Rebuilding* cluster contains strategies which involve taking positive actions that address the opponents concerns and offset the crisis (Coombs, 2018). These strategies comprise *compensation, apologizing* (Coombs, 2007), *corrective actions* (Lee & Song, 2010), *transcendence* (Liu et al., 2011) and *sympathy* (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Regarding, the *apologizing* response, Dulaney and Gunn (2017) suggest to distinguish between *genuine* and *pseudo-apologies*. Widely accepted components of a *sincere apology* are: acknowledging wrong, describing how wrong occurred, expressing remorse and sincerity and commitment to avoid it from happening again (Lazare, 2005). In a *pseudo-apology*, on the other hand, wording is used which is intended to look like an apology but is not sincere and avoids accepting responsibility (Dulaney & Gunn, 2017). Commonly applied methods of those insincere apologies are evading responsibility, downplaying the seriousness of the firestorm and apologizing for something (Boyd, 2011; Dulaney & Gunn, 2017).

In Table 1 the SCCT crisis response clusters and the corresponding response strategies are visualized and defined.

Table 1: SCCT crisis response strategies

Crisis response cluster	Crisis response strategy	Crisis response strategy description
Denial	Ignoring/no action (Lee & Song, 2010; Liu, 2010a)	Remaining silent in the attempt to separate from the negative events (Lee, 2004)
	Attack the accuser (Coombs, 2007)	Attacking the crisis accusers
	Denial (Coombs, 2007)	Denying that a crisis exists
	Scapegoating (Coombs, 2007)	Blaming someone outside of the organization for the crisis

Diminishment	Excuse (Coombs, 2007)	Minimizing responsibility of the organization by denying intention to harm and/or arguing inability to control events that triggered crisis
	Justification (Coombs, 2007)	Minimizing perceived damage of the crisis
	Separation (Liu et al., 2011)	Dissociation from the person within the organization who is responsible for the crisis (Benoit & Brinson, 1999)
Bolstering	Reminder (Coombs, 2007)	Reminding about past good work of the company
	Ingratiation (Coombs, 2007)	Praising of stakeholders for their actions
	Victimage (Coombs, 2007)	Reminding that company also is a victim of the crisis
	CSR-based response (Ham & Kim, 2017)	Using CSR initiatives to offset negative effects of a crisis and positively impact consumers' evaluation of the organization
	Endorsement (Liu et al., 2011)	Mentioning of third-party supporters of the organization
Rebuilding	Compensation (Coombs, 2007)	Offering of money or gifts to crisis victims
	Apologizing (Coombs, 2007)	Apologizing and taking full responsibility for the crisis
	Corrective actions (Lee & Song, 2010)	Engaging in activities that correct mistakes
	Transcendence (Liu et al., 2011)	Shifting the attention away from the direct crisis to bigger issues (Liu, 2010b)
	Sympathy (Coombs & Holladay, 2008)	Expressing concern for the victims of the crisis

3.2 Relevance of SCCT for online firestorms

Hauser et al. (2017) define SCCT as one of the relevant literature streams, related to online firestorms, as recent research on crisis communication on social media builds on SCCT to examine the impact of different response strategies to crises in the social media field. Ott and Theunissen (2015), for instance, tested the applicability of SCCT in the social media context, by comparing the response strategies of three multinational profit-making organizations in a crisis with those suggested by SCCT. In all cases under examination the SCCT strategies have been applied. The authors find that accommodative response strategies are more successful than *Denial* or *Diminishment* strategies. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2016) applied SCCT, focusing on the Facebook and Twitter activities of organizations in various offline crisis situations. The authors find that most companies replied in a supportive way and apologies were commonly used to calm down angry users. This shows that the organizations under examination applied SCCT in the sense of accepting responsibility and utilizing *Rebuilding* response strategies. Ki and Nekmat (2014) also focused on the social media platform Facebook, by examining the usage of Facebook of Fortune 500 companies through the lens of SCCT. In their study the authors looked at companies' statements or messages on Facebook in the context of a crisis and labeled them as a 'denial,' 'attack the accuser,' 'scapegoating,' 'excuse,' 'justification,' or 'full apology' response strategy. They find justification and apology to be the most frequently utilized crisis response strategies.

The preceding findings from literature show that SCCT response strategies are successfully applied on social media by companies in a crisis. Based on these findings, we expect that SCCT is also valuable for handling an online firestorm on social media. Additionally, we provide new insights because firestorms differ from traditional crises in two main aspects. Firstly, firestorms can be initiated by minor incidents (Pace et al., 2017), often related to moral misconduct (Johnen et al., 2018) or in some cases even without any concrete company misdeed, whereas crises are always triggered by specific company wrong-doings (Pace et al., 2017). Secondly, firestorms are always initiated in the social media domain, while traditional crises can develop anywhere in the media scape (Pace et al., 2017). Hence, we will show if and how SCCT response strategies are applied in the specific case of an online firestorm.

In addition, SCCT responses have already been deployed for responding to negative eWOM. Lee and Song (2010), for instance, tested the effects of SCCT response strategies in the case of negative eWOM and find that a company's response strategy strongly impacts the consumers' perception of company responsibility and evaluation. Consistent with previous studies they conclude that an appropriate response strategy can generate positive consumer attitudes towards the company (Lee & Song, 2010). As it has been found before (e.g. Conlon & Murray, 1996; Coombs, 1999), Lee and Song (2010) also show that consumers may be

disappointed by defensive response strategies and that accommodative strategies may lead to better outcomes regarding customer satisfaction and continued loyalty. With these findings the authors prove that SCCT can also be applied in the online context and that overall the crisis response strategies have the same effect online as they have offline. Chang, Tsai, Wong, Wang, and Cho (2015) also test the effects of accommodative and defensive response strategies to reduce the detrimental effects of negative eWOM. The authors confirm that adopting an accommodative response strategy can reduce the customers' perceptions of a company's responsibility for negative events and that a defensive strategy has the contrary effect. Similarly, Weitzl, Hutzinger, and Einwiller (2018) investigate how online interactions with complaining consumers can mitigate the detrimental effects of negative eWOM. The authors differ between *no*, *accommodative* and *defensive* responses and again come to the same results regarding the effects of the accommodative and defensive responses. Consequently, these papers show that the findings of SCCT have already been successful tested in cases of negative eWOM and it has been proven that SCCT response strategies can be successfully applied to react to negative eWOM.

As mentioned above, negative eWOM, can turn into a firestorm if no effective counter-actions are initiated (Pfeffer et al., 2014; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). Hence, as negative eWOM is the underlying concept of online firestorms, (Herhausen et al., 2019; Pfeffer et al., 2014; Stich et al., 2014), we can expect that the findings of SCCT are also relevant for the case of online firestorms. In addition, our study provides new insights, as we show whether SCCT response strategies are also effective in the case that negative eWOM escalated into an online firestorm. To our best knowledge there is no study which studies online firestorm responses, using SCCT as a theoretical framework. Rauschnabel et al. (2016) build a connection between their similar concept of collaborative brand attacks and SCCT and define this literature stream as relevant for their research. In their study the authors find that SCCT in its initial form is not applicable to collaborative brand attacks. It is important to note, that Rauschnabel and colleagues (2016) do not empirically test whether the SCCT response strategies are also applicable online but base their findings only on theoretical differences. Additionally, they claim that SCCT is only suitable in the offline context and has not been applied in connection with social media. As we showed in the preceding literature review, we cannot confirm this statement. Hence, we believe that with our approach we propose an alternative view and show that SCCT response strategies are applicable for online firestorms.

4 Case description

The following analysis will encompass two recent firestorm cases in the high fashion industry with Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci as the affected companies. Thus, this study will be based on two case studies. A case study can be defined as a "detailed examination of a single

example" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 220). It was chosen to perform case studies, as this empirical method has been found to be especially useful for answering "How" questions (Yin, 2009), like the research questions of this thesis. Furthermore, case studies are very suitable for understanding complex social phenomena and 'real life events' in depth (Yin, 2009). Although case studies are often perceived as lacking generalizability (Ruddin, 2006), this study follows the argumentation of Flyvbjerg (2006) that it is possible to generalize from a single case, as long as it is carefully chosen. We did select the respective cases carefully, based on four reasons.

First of all, the two cases were chosen because they clearly fulfill the criteria of firestorms. Both companies were confronted with a high number of messages on social media containing negative eWOM against them, which is in line with the basic definition of an online firestorm (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Additionally, in both cases this circulation of negative messages was initiated on social media by social media users (Pace et al., 2017). As it is typical for firestorms these messages were based on opinions and often contained a high level of aggression (Pfeffer et al., 2014).

The second reason for selecting Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci is the topicality of these two cases. In the last years, the number of online firestorms initiated by moral misconduct or unethical company behavior such as racism, discrimination and general insensitivity increased. This phenomenon is illustrated by Table 2, containing examples of firestorms which were triggered by such reasons and took place in the same years as the presented cases. Consequently, the two selected firestorms were initiated due to highly relevant and current causes and analyzing the companies' response strategies can provide some valuable insights and indications for future research.

Table 2: Examples of online firestorms in 2018 and 2019

Affected company	Year	Firestorm reason	Accusation
H&M (Jarvis, 2018)	2018	"Coolest monkey in the jungle" sweater advertised by black boy	Racism
Prada (Chiu, 2019)	2018	Key chains that resembled blackfacing	Racism
Revolve (Henderson, 2018)	2018	"Being fat is not beautiful" sweater	Fat-shaming
Dr.Oetker (Jansen, 2018)	2018	Advertisement for soccer world cup with the title "Bake your husband	Role distribution clichés

		happy, even when he has a second love"	
Burberry (Taylor, 2019)	2019	Sweatshirt with noose instead of drawstrings	Insensitivity to suicide
Hornbach (Pleasance, 2019)	2019	Advertisement in which an Asian woman smells enthusiastically on sweaty men clothes	Racist clichés
Adidas (Hsu & Paton, 2019)	2019	Release of an all-white shoe for black history month	Cultural insensitivity
Katy Perry Collections (Ocbazghi & Skvaril, 2019)	2019	Release of shoes that resemble blackfacing	Racism

The third reason for choosing these two cases is that they have similar characteristics. Both companies are luxury brands, which operate in the high fashion industry. Additionally, Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci were both accused of racism and cultural insensitivity, which sparked very emotional reactions, especially by the groups which were insulted by the companies' actions. Due to the heavy reactions by users and the high number of negative messages, both firestorms quickly reached a high impact and subsequently were strongly discussed in traditional media. In addition, several celebrities openly voiced their criticism towards the two companies.

While the two cases show a lot of similarities, the fourth reason for comparing Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci is that their firestorm response strategies fundamentally differ from each other, which makes comparing them especially interesting. As we will show in our research, the company responses differ in regard to timing, content, extent, format and responsibility acceptance. Overall, Gucci put a lot more effort into reconnecting with their stakeholders and clarifying that they accept accountability and will make up for their mistakes, while Dolce & Gabbana tried to evade responsibility and did not provide concrete actions how they will correct their wrong-doings. The comparability of the two cases on the one hand and the difference of the chosen response strategies, on the other hand, makes it very relevant to compare the two cases to one another in order to determine which response strategy was more successful.

In the following sections we will describe the two cases in more detail. For reconstructing the course of events we relied on news articles, following the approach of Salek (2015) and

Hansen et al. (2018) who used traditional media articles and reports to understand the events of a firestorm. The following case descriptions are thus based on a news research on Google News. For each case we selected 10 online articles from popular news outlets. Based on these articles, we summarize the main firestorm events and user reactions. In addition, we present exemplary screenshots of Twitter and Instagram posts which directly address the companies or use respective hashtags in order to illustrate the accusations made in the course of the firestorm.

4.1 Dolce & Gabbana

Dolce & Gabbana is an Italian high fashion company which designs, produces and distributes high-end clothing and accessories (craft, 2019). It was founded in 1985 by Stefano Gabbana and Domenico Dolce and has its headquarters in Milan (businessoffashion, 2019).

On November 18, 2018 Dolce & Gabbana released an online video campaign on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter (Chung & Holland, 2018), which triggered a big firestorm. In the videos a young Chinese model tries to eat the Italian dishes Pizza, Spaghetti and Cannoli with chopsticks. In the background traditional Chinese-sounding music is playing and a male narrator is commenting in Chinese and instructing the woman how to handle the chopsticks. The model struggles to get the food into her mouth and in one of the videos the commentator asks her, whether the Cannoli is too huge for her. In all videos the woman is clumsy and giggles a lot.[1]The campaign was supposed to advertise a fashion show in Shanghai (K. Cheng, 2018) but caused an outcry by Weibo users who accused the video of racism, insensitivity (Bloomberg, 2018; Carder, 2018) sexism (Yang & Liu, 2018) and trivializing Chinese culture (Eube, 2018). Many users were also upset about the portrayal of chopsticks (Koetse, 2018) in the video series and the patronizing tone of the narrator (Cockburn, 2018). The video was removed within 24 hours from Weibo but has already been shared to other social media sites, like Twitter and Instagram (Tobin, 2018). In the further development of the firestorm, the company was attacked by users for posting the offensive videos (see Figure 2 (User1, 2018) for an example of a tweet) and accused of discrimination and stereotyping (Carder, 2018; Tobin, 2018), as Figure 3 illustrates (User2, 2018).

Figure 2: Example of Dolce & Gabbana's video called offensive on Twitter

Replying to @dolcegabbana
THIS IS SO OFFENSIVE!!!! GET OUT OF SHANGHAI! GET OUT OF CHINA!
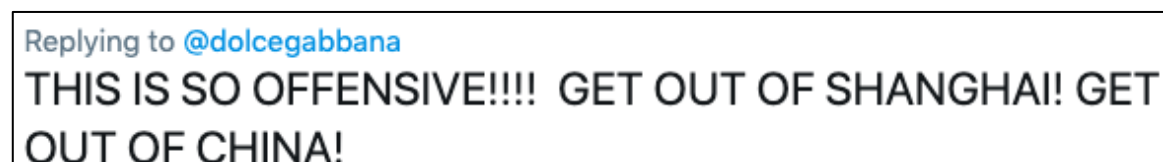
[1] Our description is based on a version of the video with English subtitles published by Li (2018)

Figure 3: Example of racial discrimination and stereotyping accusation on Twitter

Replying to @dolcegabbana
Filled with disgusting stereotypes and prejudice. This is racial discrimination.

The accusations intensified on November 21, when the Instagram account "Diet Prada", which has 1.4 million followers and is known for criticizing the fashion industry, shared screenshots of what appears to be an Instagram direct message conversation between Stefano Gabbana and Michaela Phuong Thanh Tranova, a fashion writer (Carder, 2018; K. Cheng, 2018; Cockburn, 2018; Eube, 2018). In the messages Gabbana calls China, a country of shit, using the poo emoji. He also insults the Chinese as an "Ignorant Dirty Smelling Mafia" and claims that the Chinese "eat dogs". Furthermore, he expresses his anger that the video has been taken down by stating "It was deleted from social media because my office is stupid […] it was by my will I never canceled the post". Gabbana also makes clear that he does not understand why the videos are accused of racism, as he writes "Why you think is racist that video? You think we are stupid to come in china and post a wrong video???? Is a tribute" and "We are racist for what?". (diet_prada, 2018). Exemplary screenshots from "Diet Prada's" Instagram post are shown in Figure 4 (diet_prada, 2018).

Figure 4: Exemplary screenshots from diet_prada's posts
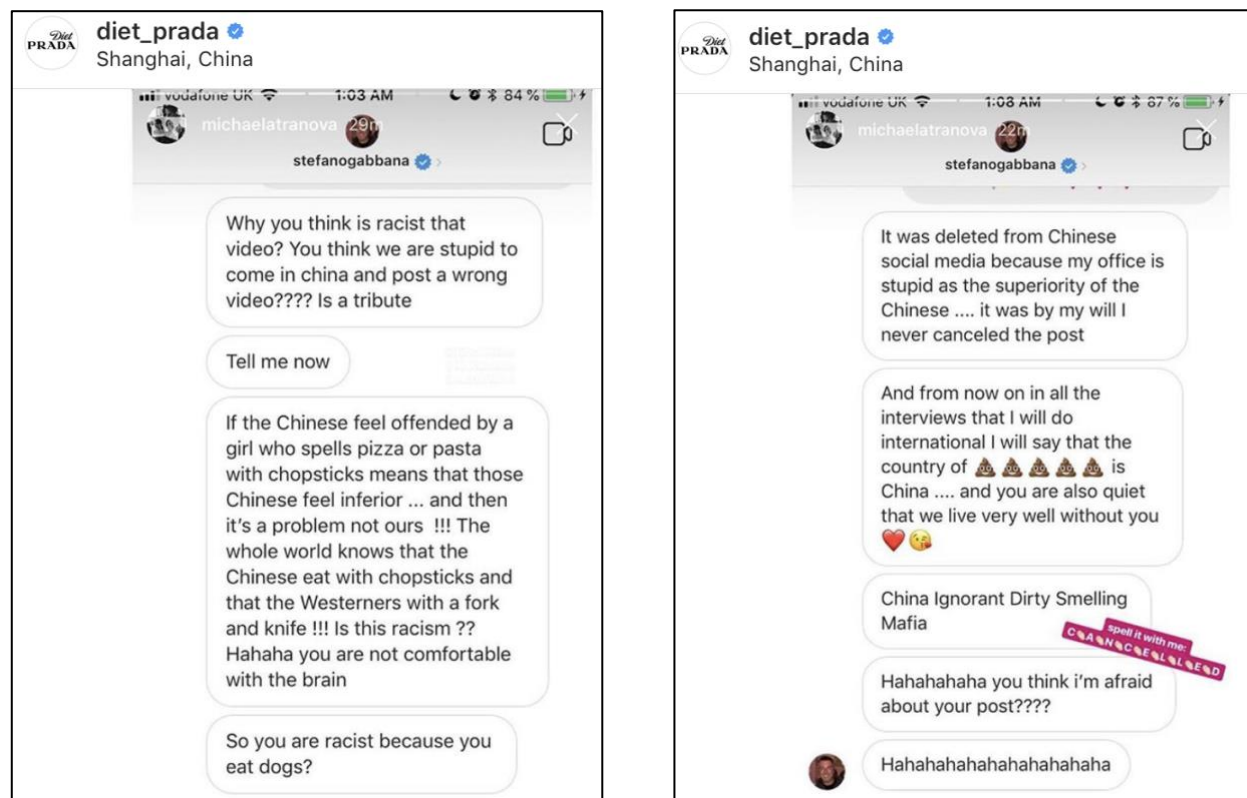
The screenshots of this conversation quickly went viral and were also reposted by big Chinese state media accounts such as Global Times (Koetse, 2018), leading to waves of criticism and rage and calls for a boycott of Dolce & Gabbana (Carder, 2018; Cockburn, 2018; Haas, 2018). Stefano Gabbana claimed that his Instagram account has been hacked (Eube, 2018) and posted an image on Instagram of Tranova's screenshots with "Not me" written across them (K. Cheng, 2018; Chung & Holland, 2018), as the reader can see in Figure 5 (Yue, 2018).

Figure 5: Gabbana's "Not me" post on Instagram

Nevertheless, a lot of fashion show guests cancelled and many of the booked models pulled out (Bloomberg, 2018). Additionally, many Chinese celebrities made statements against Dolce & Gabbana on their social media accounts (Bloomberg, 2018). Actress Zhang Ziyi and singer Wang Junkai for instance announced that they will not attend the show and will boycott the brand (Bloomberg, 2018; Cockburn, 2018; Eube, 2018; Haas, 2018) and the company's ambassadors for the Asia Pacific region singer Karry Wang and actress Dilraba Dilmurat ended their contracts with Dolce & Gabbana (Bloomberg, 2018).

Furthermore, major retailers like Alibaba, Net-A-Porter, Kaola, Secoo, Yoox, Mr Porter, Yangamatou and JD.com dropped the label (Bloomberg, 2018; Carder, 2018; Haas, 2018; Yang & Liu, 2018).

The show was officially cancelled on November 21 (Carder, 2018; Yang & Liu, 2018). The official People's Daily account released a comment stating that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a cancellation notice for the event (Bloomberg, 2018).

4.2 Gucci

Gucci was founded in 1961 and designs, produces and distributes luxury goods, including clothes, accessories, jewelry, perfumes and cosmetics. The company's headquarter is based in Haywards Heath, United Kingdom (Bloomberg, 2019).

In its fall/winter collection 2018 Gucci released a $890 sweater which caused a firestorm on social media, starting on February 6, 2019 (Chiu, 2019; Ferrier, 2019; Hsu & Paton, 2019). The product in question was a black balaclava-style jumper featuring a pull-up neck with a cut-out around the lips, surrounded by a thick red circle (Chiu, 2019; May, 2019). The black color of the sweater in combination with the bright red "lips" was denounced of evoking blackface imagery by many social media users (Ferrier, 2019; Hsu & Paton, 2019; May, 2019; Young, 2019), as it resembled the title character of the children's book "The Story of Little Black Sambo", a pejorative caricature of dark-skinned children (Chiu, 2019; Ocbazghi & Skvaril, 2019). Additionally, in the 1800s white actors would paint their faces black and leave out large outlines around the mouth to mock black people and portray them as inferior and unintelligent (Ocbazghi & Skvaril, 2019). Consequently, blackfacing is perceived as racism. The firestorm was apparently initiated on the afternoon of February 6th by a Twitter user who shared a picture of the sweater (Chiu, 2019). A screenshot of the Tweet can be seen in Figure 6 (User3, 2019). Following this post, many social media users called the sweater racist and expressed outrage and exasperation (Cave, 2019) and calls for boycott started circulating (Chiu, 2019; Young, 2019), as shown in Figure 7 (User4, 2019). Additionally, many users pointed out the especially unfortunate timing for the sweater release, as February is the black history month in the US (Ferrier, 2019; Young, 2019), as Figure 6 illustrates.

Figure 6: Post which apparently initiated the firestorm

Balaclava knit top by Gucci. Happy Black History Month y'all.
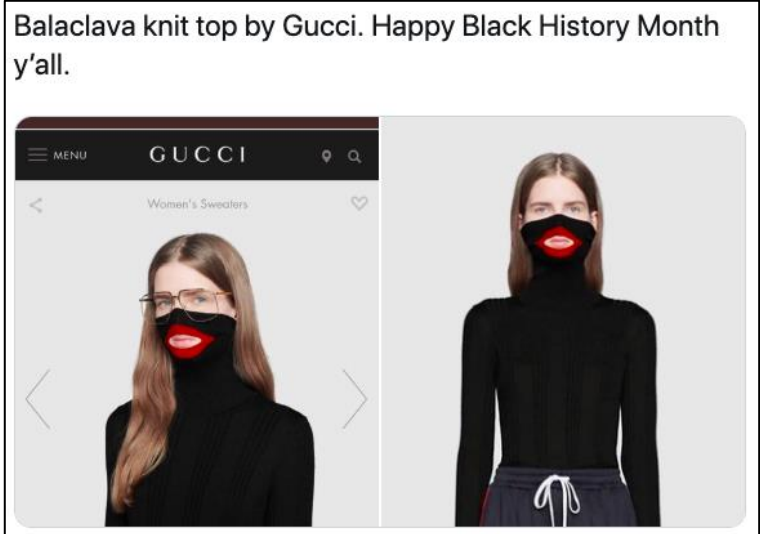
Figure 7: Example of a call for boycott of Gucci on Twitter

So ya'll just going to let #Gucci act like they ain't know better? #Blackface

STOP supporting brands that mock you! #BoycottGucci

Gucci reacted quickly and immediately removed the sweater and issued an apology on its Twitter channel on the same day as the accusations started circulating (Ferrier, 2019; Hsu & Paton, 2019; Ritschel, 2019; Young, 2019). Nevertheless, in the following days, the posts attacking the company did not stop. Users criticized a lack of diversity at Gucci and stated that this incident could have been avoided if Gucci would employ more black people (Chiu, 2019; Ferrier, 2019; Hsu & Paton, 2019; Young, 2019), as illustrated by the example post in Figure 8 (User5, 2019). Others questioned Gucci's motivations indicating that the company and the following apology were part of a publicity stunt (Hsu & Paton, 2019).

Figure 8: Example of a request on Twitter telling Gucci to hire more black people

Replying to @gucci

If you hire more Black people and cultivate an environment where people on all levels of the company feel comfortable to speak up incidents like this will be avoided.
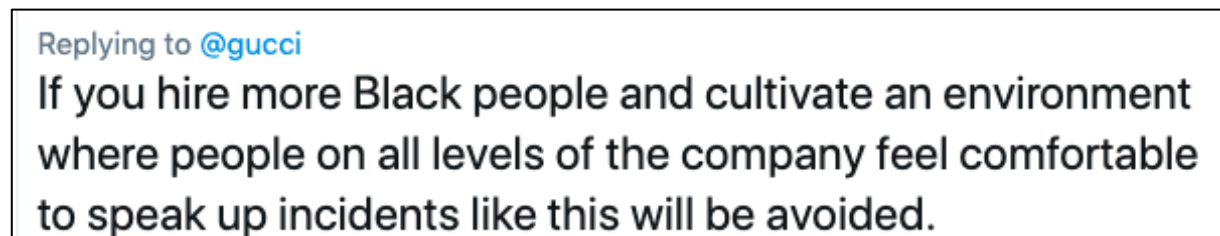
While criticism and anger dominated, some users did not agree with the outrage and the racism accusations towards the company (Chiu, 2019). Figure 9 provides an example of a user who does not understand why people think that the sweater resembles blackfacing (User6, 2019).

Figure 9: Example of a user not understanding the outrage

Replying to @gucci

Oh for goodness sake, which black person has a face like that because I don't. Things are just getting out of hand everything seems to be offending. How fragile are these people can be to even think that looks like a blackface, Gucci you have nothing to apologise for. Crazy peopl
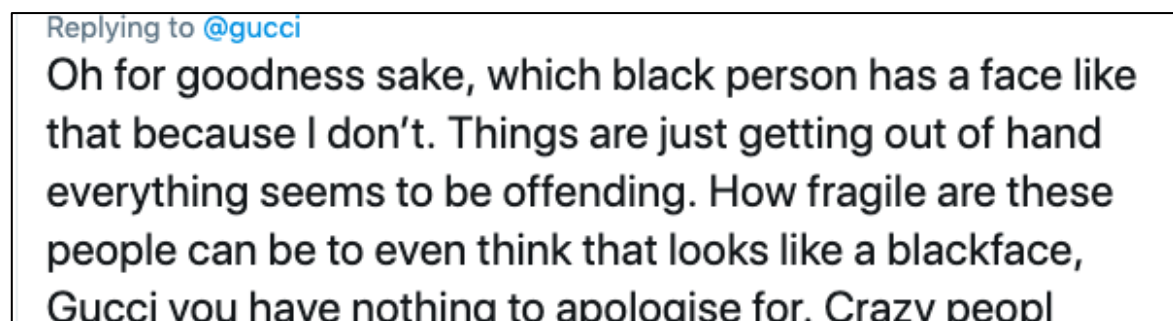
Nevertheless, many celebrities turned against the company. Rapper 50 Cent for instance posted a video on Instagram where he burns a Gucci shirt, stating that he has to get rid of all his Gucci clothes, as he is not supporting the brand anymore (50cent, 2019; Ritschel, 2019). A screenshot of this video can be seen in Figure 10 (50cent, 2019).

Figure 10: Screenshot of 50 Cent burning his Gucci Shirt on Instagram

Other celebrities such as Lil Pump, Russell Simmons, Spike Lee and rapper T.I. announced that they will boycott the company (Griffith, 2019; Ritschel, 2019). The rapper Souljaboy posted a video on his Instagram account announcing that he will replace the Gucci bandana, his hallmark with a headband of Fendi, because "Gucci is cancelled" (Griffith, 2019; souljaboy, 2019). The black Harlem designer Dapper Dan who worked with Gucci in 2018, harshly criticized the company on his Instagram account (Associated Press, 2019) and stated that "no excuse nor apology […] can erase this kind of insult". He also announced that he will meet with Gucci's CEO and other industry leaders to hold the company responsible for their actions (dapperdanharlem, 2019). Figure 11 represents a screenshot of this post.

Figure 11: Screenshot of Dapper Dan's post on Instagram

5 Methodology

5.1 Overall research design

We applied a mixed method approach, which can be divided into two main steps. In Step 1 we analyzed the companies' responses and in Step 2 we determined the sentiment of users' reactions to these responses. Our analysis only comprises the companies' responses on social media, as online firestorms are a social media phenomenon and we are interested in how they can be addressed on social media. Additionally, only social media posts allow to retrieve the direct reactions of consumers because of the comment function underneath the posts.

In Step 1 we examined Dolce & Gabbana's and Gucci's social media response posts, by applying qualitative content analysis. The overall goal of this step was to gain an in-depth understanding of the companies' response strategies. Qualitative content analysis was chosen because this method can be used to enhance the understanding of a phenomenon, as it allows the evaluation of rich information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter (2000) content analysis can be used if communicative content is of great importance, if schemata of categories can be formulated in advance and/or if the analysis is concerned only with the vocabulary of a text (Kohlbacher, 2006). All three variables apply to this research. In addition, there are several examples of studies in the field of firestorms and negative eWOM research, where content analysis was applied as well to understand companies' responses (e.g. Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Rauschnabel et al., 2016; Williams & Buttle, 2014). Moreover, Kohlbacher (2006) shows that qualitative content analysis is a useful

analysis and interpretation method for case study research, due to its openness and ability to deal with complexity. Additionally, it enables the integration of different materials and evidence and allows a theory-guided analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006). Hence, these characteristics make content analysis an appropriate method for this research.

In Step 2, we examined the reactions of social media users in order to determine the success of the companies' actions. To do so, we applied sentiment analysis to the comments directly referring to the specific company posts in order to understand, whether users generally reacted positively or negatively to the companies' responses. Collecting comments from social media sites and coding them as positive, negative and neutral by applying sentiment analysis is an approach which has already been taken by other authors (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Zhang et al., 2016) and thus we expect it to be appropriate for this thesis. Furthermore, it has been found that publicly available social media comments can indicate if a company response is accepted by the public and whether this response has the desired effect (Coombs, 2014a; Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Coombs & Holladay, 2014), which is in line with the goals of our analysis.

5.2 Qualitative content analysis of companies' social media posts (Step 1)

5.2.1 Data collection

We collected Dolce & Gabbana's and Gucci's firestorm responses from the companies' social media accounts, namely Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. As we do not speak Chinese, we decided to no take Dolce & Gabbana's activities on Weibo into account because this platform is mainly used in China and all posts are in Chinese.

Dolce & Gabbana

On November 21, after the show was officially cancelled, Dolce & Gabbana released their first statements on Instagram and Twitter, expressing their regret about the recent events and thanking all the people who worked on the fashion show, and the company's friends and guests (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018e; dolcegabbana, 2018b). Additionally, Dolce & Gabbana published a post on Instagram, saying that the company's Instagram account and the account of Stefano Gabbana have been hacked. They apologize for the distress caused and promise to investigate the hack (dolcegabbana, 2018c). Two days later, on November 23, a video was published in which the two designers apologize in Italian, express their regret for the recent events and ask the Chinese for forgiveness. There are two versions of the video, one with Chinese and one with English subtitles which have been posted on YouTube (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018c, 2018d) and Twitter (Dolce&Gabbana, 2018a, 2018b). On Instagram a picture was released saying "Dolce&Gabbana apologizes" in English, Italian and Chinese with a reference to the YouTube link in the post description (dolcegabbana, 2018a). In Table

3, the responses of Dolce & Gabbana are collected. A full transcript of the posts is included in Appendix A of this thesis.

Table 3: Summary of social media responses of Dolce & Gabbana

Date	Post	Channels
November 21	Statement about cancellation of fashion show	Twitter Instagram
	Claim that Instagram account has been hacked	Instagram
November 23	Apology video with English and Chinese subtitles with Dolce and Gabbana personally apologizing in Italian and asking for forgiveness	Twitter Instagram YouTube

Gucci

As already mentioned, Gucci quickly issued an apology on its Twitter channel on February 6, 2019, (gucci, 2019e) the same day as the accusations started circulating. Almost ten days later, on February 15 and 16, the company released an extensive post on Twitter and Instagram in which it announces and describes a long-term plan of actions to further embed diversity and cultural awareness in the company (gucci, 2019g, 2019h, 2019i, 2019j). One month later, on March 15, Gucci released a follow-up post on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with a long-term diversity and inclusion action plan and an announcement of "Gucci Changemakers", a global program to support industry change, including a "Changemakers fund" of $5 million (gucci, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019f). In Table 4 an overview of Gucci's responses on social media can be found. A full transcript of the posts is included in Appendix A of this thesis.

Table 4: Summary of social media responses of Gucci

Date	Post	Channels
February 6 (Evening)	Apology post and confirmation that sweater was withdrawn from physical and online stores	Twitter

February, 15 February, 16	Posts with four initiatives in a long-term plan of actions designed to further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company	Twitter Instagram
March 18	Post with long-term diversity and inclusion action plan, Introduction of Gucci Changemakers	Twitter Instagram Facebook

5.2.2 Analytical approach

We applied qualitative content analysis to the presented social media posts from Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci in order to get an in depth understanding of the companies' firestorm responses. To do so, we used deductive as well as inductive coding to classify the data into categories. In deductive coding the categories are based on previous knowledge such as theory or previous research (Schreier, 2014) and the prior formulated theoretical derived categories are brought in connection with the text (Mayring, 2004). We applied deductive content analysis in the first part of the analysis, because our categories are based on SCCT. In inductive coding the categories are derived from the data (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2014). We deployed inductive coding in the second part of the analysis in order to provide a complete understanding of the data.

The outcome of this content analysis is a set of categories describing the companies' response strategies. In order to determine these categories, we developed the following content analysis process, based on a combination of Mayring's (2014) *Content structuring* process and Schreier's (2014) method to combine deductive and inductive coding.

1. Research questions and theoretical background
2. Selecting materials
3. Definition of categories from theory (main- and sub-categories)
4. Development of a coding guideline with definitions and anchor examples
5. Material run-through, preliminary coding
6. Assigning all the material to categories
7. Second run-through based on inductive coding
8. Building main and sub-categories
9. Revision of coding guideline
10. Final working through materials

Step 1: Research questions and theoretical background

The qualitative content analysis is guided by the research question of this thesis, namely: *How do companies respond to online firestorms on social media in order to prevent a further*

dissemination of the firestorm and how effective are these response strategies? The theoretical background of the deductive coding is SCCT.

Step 2: Selecting materials

The materials under examination are all the social media posts of Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci posted on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. For the case of Gucci this comprises three posts and for the case of Dolce & Gabbana two posts and one video. A transcript of these posts can be found in Appendix A.

Step 3: Definition of categories from theory (main- and sub-categories)

To build a coding frame, main- and sub-categories have to be defined (Schreier, 2014). In this step we defined categories deductively, meaning that the categories are based on theory, namely SCCT (Schreier, 2014). In this case the main categories are the crisis response clusters *Denial, Diminishment, Bolstering* and *Rebuilding*, because the objective of this analysis is to find out which of the crisis response strategies were applied by Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci. Additionally, *Sincere Apology* and *Pseudo-Apology* are added as main categories in order to determine if the provided apologies are sincere (Dulaney & Gunn, 2017). Based on SCCT research, as presented in Chapter 3, we established the following categories and sub-categories, collected in Table 5.

Table 5: Main and sub-categories of deductive content analysis

Main category	Denial			
Sub-categories	Attack the accuser	Denial	Scapegoating	Ignoring/no action

Main category	Diminishment		
Sub-categories	Excuse	Justification	Separation

Main category	Bolstering				
Sub-categories	Reminder	Ingratiation	Victimage	CSR-based response	Endorsement

Main category	Rebuilding				
Sub-categories	Apologizing	Sympathy	Corrective actions	Compen-sation	Transcendence

Main category	Sincere Apology				
Sub-categories	Acknowledging wrong	Explaining how wrong occurred	Commitment to avoid future mistakes	Expressing remorse and sincerity	Accepting responsibility

Main category	Pseudo-Apology		
Sub-categories	Evading responsibility	Apologizing for something else	Downplaying seriousness

Step 4: Development of a coding guideline with definitions and anchor examples

In the fourth step we defined the categories and developed a coding guideline. Each of these category definitions consists of a category name, a description and an anchor example (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2014). Coding rules were not established, as these are only necessary when there is high uncertainty how to code the material (Schreier, 2014).

Step 5: Material run-through, preliminary coding

In this step a first run-through of the material was performed, by going through the response posts line by line and provisionally assigning the material to the categories. After a first run-through of 10-50%, Mayring (2014) recommends a revision of the categories and coding schemes. In this case, we only undertook small revisions, as we conducted a more extensive revision in Step 7 by applying inductive coding.

Step 6: Assigning all the material to categories

In this step we assigned all the material to the categories. The material which we could not classify, was categorizes as residual. We sorted the materials into a coding sheet, where the columns correspond to the sub-categories and the rows to the individual social media posts. The results of the deductive coding of this step were brought together in coding frames.

Step 7: Second run-through based on inductive coding

In this step we applied inductive coding to the categorized materials from Step 6 with two objectives. Firstly, we refined the developed deductive categories, by building sub-categories. Secondly, we performed a run-through through the residual categories in order to define categories for this material inductively.

Step 8: Building main and sub-categories

After defining new categories, we bundled them in this step. We assigned some of the newly created categories to existing main categories and grouped the remaining categories into new main categories.

Step 9: Revision of coding guideline

In this step we revised the coding guideline according to the previous findings. If applicable, we replaced the anchor examples from theory with an example from this analysis. The revised and final coding guideline can be found in Appendix B.

Step 10: Final working through materials

Based on the new coding guideline, we coded the material again. The resulting, final coding frames of this qualitative content analysis can be found in Appendix C.

5.3 Sentiment analysis of user responses (Step 2)

In the second step we applied sentiment analysis to the user comments underneath the companies' response posts. The objective of this step was to determine whether users generally reacted positively or negatively to the companies' posts.

5.3.1 Data Collection

The respective user comments were downloaded from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, using the program exportcomments (exportcomments, 2019a). This tool can export public comments from social media platforms including the comment owners name, the message of the comment, date and time, likes, URL and nested comments (exportcomments, 2019a). We chose the option to exclude nested comments, meaning comments which are replies to original comments from another user, when we downloaded the data due to the following reasoning, explained with an example: User X replies to the company post in a negative way. User Y reads the comment of user X and responds directly to user X, expressing his agreement for the negative sentiment of user X. In that case the sentiment analysis tool would interpret the agreement of user Y as a positive sentiment, even though user Y is agreeing to a comment with a negative sentiment towards the company. Consequently, we only took comments into account which directly answer to the company's response posts. The limit of downloadable comments of exportcomments is 50,000 comments (exportcomments, 2019b). The posts of Dolce & Gabbana on Instagram received an even higher number of comments. Nevertheless, we expect that 50,000 is still a representative number of comments, sufficient to apply a sentiment analysis and determine the overall polarity of the comments.

After downloading the data with exportcomments, all the comments were transferred into Google Sheets for the sentiment analysis.

In addition to downloading the comments we collected the number of comments per post from the companies' social media sites in order to gain an overview about the quantity of comments generated by each response (date of collection: August 25, 2019).

5.3.2 Analytical approach

We used sentiment analysis to analyze the users' reactions to the two companies' responses. Before running the analysis, we selected only English comments, because the companies' communication language in the posts was English and thus most of the comments were English as well. Looking at English comments also allowed us to capture the international reaction of users, as it can be assumed, that people who wrote their comment in English wanted people all over the word to understand their post and not only people who speak the respective language. Additionally, it has been found that sentiment analyses perform best for English text (Thelwall, 2017). We also deleted all links in the comments because they did not provide any value for us.

In order to determine the comments' sentiment, we used the tool MeaningCloud, an Add-in tool for Excel and Google Sheets, which is able to classify the comments into strongly positive, positive, neutral, negative and strongly negative (MeaningCloud, 2019c). MeaningCloud was chosen as a tool because it is able to detect global sentiment and sentiment at an attribute level, analyzing in detail the sentiment of each sentence. The "individual phrases are identified and the relationship between them is evaluated, which results in a global polarity value of the text as a whole" (MeaningCloud, 2019d). Furthermore, it is claimed that MeaningCloud is also able to detect irony (MeaningCloud, 2019b). Another important rationale for selecting MeaningCloud was, that the program can classify most of the important emojis. As emojis are heavily used in the present social media comments, this feature is especially relevant for this case. Further reasoning for choosing MeaningCloud is, that the company appears trustworthy and competent, as it has important customers such as Pfizer, Telefonica and Ing Direct (MeaningCloud, 2019a) and has been applied and recommended in some studies (e.g. Dale, 2018; Herrera-Planells & Villena-Román, 2018).

In order to get more valuable results, we built a customized model, after conducting a test-run over the data and determining which comments can be classified by the software and which cannot or are classified wrongly. In order to get better results, we defined words or groups of words, called multiwords, with the according positive or negative sentiment in MeaningCloud for both cases. Examples of data that could not be classified by the software in the test-run and hence were added to the customized model include special emojis, hashtags and content-specific multiwords. The detailed description of our sentiment analysis process and the customized models can be found in Appendix D. After we determined a customized model for

each company, we ran the sentiment analysis tool over all the data, resulting in a list of abbreviations indicating the sentiment of the comments. In order to determine the share of positive, negative and neutral sentiment, we counted positive and very positive and negative and very negative comments together. Then, the resulting values were added up with the number of neutral comments to determine the absolute number of comments that could be classified. Finally, the share of negative, positive and neutral comments was calculated based on this number.

6 Results

In this chapter we present the results of our analysis, by combining the outcomes of the qualitative content analysis and the sentiment analysis of both company cases. The response strategies and the respective user reactions of Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci are visualized in Figures 13 and 14 and will be presented along these figures[2]. In Appendix E the SCCT response strategies applied by the companies are collected, together with those strategies which we determined additionally in the qualitative content analysis by inductive coding.

6.1 Dolce & Gabbana

In order to give a first overview over our results, we provide Figure 13, a collection of the identified response strategies of Dolce & Gabbana and the respective user reactions. In this figure the companies' responses are divided into accommodative and defensive responses and the user reactions are represented by the total number of comments from all channels and the comments' sentiments. The sentiment is portrayed by a pie chart visualizing the shares of negative, positive and neutral comments of those comments which could be classified by the software, calculated from all channels.

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[2] In Appendix E-G the reader can find a detailed overview over the identified firestorms response strategies and in Appendix H the results of the sentiment analysis per channel.

Figure 12: Collection of main results for Dolce & Gabbana

| | Company response strategy | | Number of comments | User reactions |
	Accommodative	Defensive		Comments' sentiment
Before First Response		**Denial** • Ignoring		

First Response
 	
21/11/2018
	Bolstering
	• Reminder
	• Ingratiation
	• Victimage
	• Endorsement
	• Positive counter-position
	  ▸ Positive emotions
	
	Rebuilding
	• Rebuild Connection
	  ▸ Personalization
			91,369	

Second Response
 	
21/11/2018
	Bolstering
	• Victimage
	• Positive counter-position
	  ▸ Positive emotions
	
	Rebuilding
	• Apologizing
	• Corrective actions
	  ▸ Prevent future wrong-doings
	
	Sincere **Insincere**
	• Apologizing for something else
		Denial
		• Scapegoating
		• Claiming innocence
			73,735	

Third Response
 	
23/11/2018
	Bolstering
	• Positive counter-position
	  ▸ Positive emotions
	
	Rebuilding
	• Apologizing
	• Sympathy
	• Corrective actions
	  ▸ Prevent future wrong-doings
	• Rebuild Connection
	  ▸ Personalization
	
	Sincere **Insincere**
	• Accept Responsibility
	• Commitment to avoid future mistakes
	• Remorse & Sincerity
	• Learning • Evading responsibility
	  ▸ Not owning mistakes
	  ▸ Avoid mentioning
			46,088	

Before first response

In the first three days after the video was deleted, Dolce & Gabbana apparently ignored the firestorm, as the company did not provide any response to the accusations. This behavior indicates an *Ignoring* strategy which is part of the *Denial* cluster and thus a defensive strategy, according to SCCT.

First Response

After three days Dolce & Gabbana published a response in which the company provides a statement regarding the cancellation of the big Shanghai fashion show. In this post, we identified several response strategies of the SCCT *Bolstering* cluster through deductive coding. First of all, the two designers remind users about their past good work by mentioning their history and vision. This indicates the application of the *reminder* strategy.

Additionally, *ingratiation* apparently is applied, as the designers praise Dolce & Gabbana's stakeholders by stating "From the bottom of our hearts we would like to express our gratitude to our friends and guests".[3]

Dolce & Gabbana also uses *victimage* by stating for instance "What happened today was very unfortunate for […] us" and thus presenting the company as a victim of the firestorm.

Moreover, third-party supporters are subliminally mentioned by bringing up all the people around the world who love Dolce & Gabbana, indicating an *endorsement* strategy.

Besides these SCCT strategies we defined a new *Bolstering* response strategy through inductive coding. Dolce & Gabbana writes that the fashion show was "something that we created especially with love and passion for China". We interpret this statement as a means of the two designers to express their positive attitude towards China, trying to contradict the racism accusations which they were confronted with. To account for these actions, we suggest *positive counter-position* as a new response strategy, comprising all company responses which aim to create a positive image which refutes the accusations made in the course of the firestorm. To concretize how the company provides a *positive counter-position* we created the sub-strategy *positive emotions*. This strategy means that the company emphasizes its positive attitude towards the group of people which were offended by the firestorm cause. We assigned these new response strategies to the SCCT *Bolstering* cluster, because the focus of this cluster lies on connecting positive information with the company and to create a favorable connection with consumers (Coombs, 2015; Roshan et al., 2016).

The first response post is signed by Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana. We interpret choosing the two designers as the sender of the post as a tactic to make the message of the

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[3] Exemplary quotes are taken from the coding frames. In order to get a complete overview over the coded material the reader can check Appendix C.

post more personal with the aim to connect with the accusers. In the course of the inductive coding process we defined this recurring phenomenon as *personalization*. We believe that *personalization* is applied with the goal to rebuild a positive relationship with stakeholders, by connecting with the firestorm participants. Consequently, we created *rebuilding connection* as a new response strategy and assigned *personalization* as a sub-strategy to it. We assign this new *rebuilding connection* strategy, together with its sub-strategy *personalization* to the *Rebuilding* cluster because, according to SCCT, the objective of strategies in the *Rebuilding* cluster is improving the company's reputation and taking positive actions to address the accusers' concerns (Roshan et al., 2016).

Summing up, Dolce & Gabbana applied mainly *Bolstering* strategies and one *Rebuilding* strategy in their first response and hence, a slightly accommodative response. This response provoked mainly negative reactions. Taking the two social media channels together 72% of users reacted negatively to the post and only about 20% positively. Additionally, on both channels a very high number (91,369) of comments was posted. Consequently, it appears as over all users did not react well to the statement of Dolce & Gabbana and their anger was not calmed down, leading them to create additional negative eWOM. Additionally, the high number of comments also indicates that the firestorm could not be stopped with the company statement, as firestorms are characterized by large message volumes (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Hence, we interpret Dolce & Gabbana's first response post as ineffective and it even appears as Dolce & Gabbana might have fueled the firestorm with this response.

Second Response

On the same day, Dolce & Gabbana released a second response, on Instagram, stating that the company's and Stefano Gabbana's Instagram account have been hacked. It is not specified which consequences this hack had, and which concrete Instagram activities of the company were affected by it. Especially, as the formulation "unauthorized posts" is used, without mentioning which posts exactly the company is referring to, it is not clear whether the whole online video campaign or the racist messages of Stefano Gabbana or both were supposedly published because of a hack.

We find that Dolce & Gabbana applied strategies of the defensive SCCT *Denial* cluster. By claiming that their Instagram account has been hacked, the company indicates that the racist statements and/or the videos have been released by someone outside the company. Hence Dolce & Gabbana blame others, indicating a use of the SCCT *Scapegoating* strategy.
Additionally, we introduce *claiming innocence* as a new *Denial* strategy because the formulation "unauthorized posts" is used. We believe that the company thereby intends to

demonstrate that they are not responsible for the occurrence of the firestorm and have nothing to do with the firestorm causes.

Moreover, we identified response strategies of the SCCT *Bolstering* cluster in Dolce & Gabbana's second response. By stating that they have been hacked, the company also presents itself as a victim of the firestorm and hence deploys the *victimage* strategy. Additionally, the company claims: "We have nothing but respect for China and the people of China." and thus, again provides a *positive counter-position* by emphasizing their *positive emotions* towards the group insulted by the company's actions.

After clarifying that they have been hacked, Dolce & Gabbana states that they are "very sorry for any distress caused" and consequently use the *apologizing* strategy of the *Rebuilding* cluster. In addition, Dolce & Gabbana announces that their legal office "is urgently investigating" the hack which we interpret as a promise of the company to make sure that such a mistake will not happen again. In order to account for this promise we inductively created *corrective actions* to *prevent future-wrong-doings* as a new sub-strategy of the *Rebuilding* strategy *corrective actions*. This new sub-category comprises those initiatives which a company applies to prevent similar mistakes in the future.

If applicable, we identified characteristics of insincerity and sincerity for *Rebuilding* responses, as defined by Dulaney and Gunn (2017), who suggest determining the sincerity of an apology (see Chapter 3). During the revision of our coding frame in Step 5 of the content analysis we redefined the respective categories as *sincere Rebuilding response* and *insincere Rebuilding response* because we realized that these sincerity indicators do not only apply to the *apologizing* strategy but to the whole *Rebuilding* cluster. In Appendix F these sincerity characteristics are collected.

Regarding the sincerity of Dolce & Gabbana's *Rebuilding* strategy in the second post, we noticed that by apologizing for the distress caused by the hack the company does actually *apologize for something else* than the cause of the firestorm, namely the online video campaign. This indicates an insincere *Rebuilding* response.

All in all, the second post of Dolce & Gabbana does not show a clear response strategy, as we find two strategies for each of the *Denial, Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* clusters. Nevertheless, the central message of the post is that the Instagram accounts of Gabbana and Dolce & Gabbana have been hacked and the Rebuilding response seams insincere. Hence, we understand *Denial* as the dominating strategy of this response.

Again, this post led to mainly negative reactions, as almost 72% of user comments were negative and only 22% positive. Additionally, the company received almost 74,000 comments, even though the post was only published on one channel. This heavy negative reaction indicates again that the company's post could not inhibit the further spread of the firestorm and consequently the second response post as well appears ineffective.

Third Response

The third response is delivered as a video of the two designers Dolce and Gabbana. This response contains strategies of the *Rebuilding* cluster. *Apologizing* is applied by using formulations like "We are very sorry".

In addition, the two designers express *sympathy* by stating that they put a lot of thought into what has happened and feel sad about what they have caused in China.

Additionally, Dolce and Gabbana promise that they "will respect the Chinese culture in every way possible", which we interpret as a *corrective action*, concretely as an action that *prevents future wrong-doings,* as the promise to behave more respectfully towards China probably aims at avoiding future misconduct of the company.

Furthermore, the company seams to apply means of *personalization*, a sub-strategy of *rebuild connection*, as the two designers personally deliver the apology. Additionally, Dolce states "Our families have always taught us to respect the various cultures in all the world". Sharing this private story probably also has the purpose to personalize the message.

Regarding the sincerity of this *Rebuilding* response, several indicators of sincerity can be found. It appears as the two designers *accept responsibility* by stating "what we have caused in your country". Furthermore, expressions of *remorse and sincerity* such as "From the bottom of our hearts we ask for forgiveness" and *"*We take this apology very seriously" are used. Dolce and Gabbana additionally prove their *commitment to avoid future mistakes* by promising that such an incident will never happen again and assuring that the firestorm was a *learning* moment for the company. We introduce the latter as a new characteristic of a sincere *Rebuilding* response as promising to learn from a mistake can be interpreted as a means to demonstrate how serious the firestorm incident is taken.

Opposed to these findings regarding the response's sincerity stands the fact, that some indicators of *evading responsibility* can be found. During the analysis we sub-divided the indicator *evading responsibility* into *not owning mistakes* and *avoid mentioning* the firestorm cause. The latter can be found in the video as the two designers use very vague formulations like "everything that has happened" and "this experience" when talking about the firestorm. Not once do they openly talk about the racist advertisement videos and statements of Gabbana. We also find that the designers do *not own* their *mistakes* as both designers use the vague

formulation "if we made mistakes" instead of "that we make mistakes", indicating that they do not fully stand up for their mistakes and by that appear to discreetly evade responsibility, even though on the first look it seems like they accept accountability.

The company also uses one *Bolstering* strategy, as both designers emphasize their *positive emotions* towards China by stating for example "We love your culture" or "We have always been in love with China". We interpret these statements again as providing a *positive counter-position* to refute the accusations of racism towards China.

Summarizing we can state that Dolce & Gabbana's third response post was accommodative, containing one *Bolstering* and four *Rebuilding* response strategies. Compared to the two previous posts, this response received slightly fewer negative reactions. The share of comments with a negative sentiment decreased to about 65% and the share of positive comments increased to about 25%. The total number of comments reduced by around 30% to 46,000, compared to the previous post, even though the video was distributed via three channels. Nevertheless, considering this outcome independently from the previous posts, the number of comments is still very high. This indicates that users are still engaged in the issue. In addition, the main reaction towards Dolce & Gabbana's last response was still negative and additional negative eWOM was produced by the users. Hence, it does not appear as the company's response could inhibit the further spread of the firestorm. Consequently, none of Dolce & Gabbana's firestorm response posts can be considered effective.

6.2 Gucci

Gucci's firestorm responses and the respective user reactions are visualized in Figure 14. In this figure we divided the companies' responses into accommodative response strategies and means to support these responses. The user reactions are again represented by the total number of user comments and the sentiment of these comments.

Figure 13: Collection of main results for Gucci

| | Company response strategy | | Number of comments | User reactions |
	Accommodative	Supporting Means		Comments' sentiment
First Response 06/02/2019	**Bolstering** • Positive counter-position **Rebuilding** • Apologizing • Sympathy • Corrective actions ▸ Correct wrong-doings ▸ Prevent future wrong-doings **Sincere** **Insincere** • Accept responsibility ▸ Explicit mentioning • Acknowledging wrong • Remorse & sincerity • Learning		1054	14.2% / 55.7% / 30.2% Negative / Neutral / Positive
Second Response 15/02/2019 16/02/2019	**Bolstering** • CSR-activities • Endorsement • Ingratiation • Reminder **Rebuilding** • Rebuild connection ▸ Personalization ▸ Involvement • Transcendence • Compensations • Corrective actions ▸ Prevent future wrong-doings **Sincere** **Insincere** • Accept Responsibility ▸ Explicit mentioning • Acknowledging wrong • Explanation • Commitment to avoid future mistakes	**Credibility creation** • External cooperation • Details **Proving dedication** • Executive involvement • Charitable, goals	3037	12.6% / 83.2% Negative / Neutral / Positive
Third Response 18/03/2019	**Bolstering** • CSR-activities • Endorsement • Reminder **Rebuilding** • Rebuild connection ▸ Personalization ▸ Involvement • Transcendence • Compensations • Corrective actions ▸ Prevent future wrong-doings	**Credibility creation** • External cooperation • Follow-ups • Details **Proving dedication** • Executive involvement • Charitable, goals • Resource investment	516	12.3% / 85.6% Negative / Neutral / Positive

First Response

The first response of Gucci contains four strategies of the SCCT *Rebuilding* cluster. First of all, *apologizing* is applied as Gucci "deeply apologizes". Additionally, we understand the usage of the formulation "offense caused" as an expression of *sympathy* from Gucci.

Furthermore, the company points out that it is "fully committed to increasing diversity" throughout the organization. We interpret this statement as a *corrective action* to *prevent future wrong-doings*, because with a more diverse workforce, it is more likely that similar mistakes will be avoided in the future. Gucci also confirms that the sweater has been removed from all physical and online stores. To account for these actions we newly create the category *correct wrong-doings* in the inductive coding as a second sub-category of *corrective actions*. This category comprises those company activities which have the purpose to immediately correct the mistakes which led to the firestorm.

Regarding the sincerity of this *Rebuilding* response we find that by apologizing for the "offense caused", an *acknowledgement* of the *wrong-doings* is indicated. Moreover, Gucci expresses *sincerity* by using the formulation "deep*ly* apologizes". In addition, it is affirmed that the company will use the firestorm as a *learning* moment. Gucci openly mentions "the wool balaclava jumper" as the cause of the firestorm, indicating that the company *accepts responsibility* for the firestorm. Hence, we created the strategy *explicit mentioning of firestorm cause* during the inductive coding as a sub-strategy of *responsibility acceptance*. These identified characteristics suggest a sincere *Rebuilding* response of Gucci.

Besides *Rebuilding* strategies, we also identified a strategy of the *Bolstering* cluster. In the course of the firestorm the company was accused of racism, insufficient diversity and cultural insensitivity. In order to refute these allegations, the company provides a *positive counter-position,* by stating "We consider diversity to be a fundamental value to be fully upheld, respected and at the forefront of every decision we make" and hence trying to refute the accusations of a lack of diversity at Gucci.

All in all, Gucci applied accommodative response strategies, using one *Bolstering* strategy and four sincere *Rebuilding* strategies. Almost 56% of the reactions to Gucci's first post were negative. About one third of the users published comments with a positive sentiment and 14% reacted neutrally. Consequently, the main emotion towards Gucci's apology post was negative. Hence, it can be expected that Gucci could not calm down users' anger with their first response, indicating that the dissemination of the online firestorm could not be prevented with this post and the response was rather ineffective.

Second Response

Nine days later the company released its second response. In this post Gucci again applied strategies of the *Rebuilding* cluster. We find two means of *personalization*: Firstly, the post begins with a personal quote of Marco Bizzarri, the CEO of Gucci, signed with his name. Secondly, a quote of Gucci's creative director Alessandro Michele is provided, in which the designer tells "My entire life has been dedicated to fight to grant myself and any other the possibility to be different and to freely express themselves." and thus shares a personal belief and story. During the analysis we inductively created *involvement* as a second sub-strategy of *rebuild connection*. Bizzarri mentions the involvement of Dapper Dan in helping the company to get counseling from diversity experts during the firestorm. We interpret this involvement of Dapper Dan in the firestorm as a move to reconnect with the accusers because firstly, Dan was one of the first people who openly condemned Gucci's sweater and articulated some harsh accusation on his social media channels (dapperdanharlem, 2019). Secondly, he is a black man and thus a representative of the group which was offended by the balaclava jumper. Hence, by involving him in the company's corrective actions, Gucci involves an accuser as well as a representative of the affected group. Thus, we find that Gucci deploys the *rebuild a connection* strategy by applying its two sub-strategies *personalization* and *involvement*.

Gucci introduces four initiatives for incorporating more cultural diversity and awareness in the company which we again interpret as *corrective actions to prevent future wrong-doings*. The company for instance promises to "create a more diverse and inclusive workplace on an ongoing basis." and wants to introduce "a specific diversity and inclusivity module within its new employee induction programme". In addition, the company plans to "launch an internal Global Exchange Program to promote a multicultural and diverse workplace". The declared objectives of these activities are for instance to "further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company" and to "increase awareness of unconscious cultural bias".

Gucci also indirectly offers *compensations* to those who were offended by the balaclava jumper as they introduce a "Multi-Cultural Design Scholarship Program" with fashion schools for college students. These compensations "aim to amplify opportunities for underrepresented groups of talents leading to full-time employment".

Finally, Gucci applies the *transcendence* strategy, as they shift the attention to the bigger issue of "brining positive change and inspiring solutions for a better future".

Gucci's *Rebuilding* response shows many signs of sincerity. First, Bizzarri openly states that he *accepts* full *responsibility* and the balaclava jumper is *explicitly mentioned.* Furthermore, the CEO *acknowledges* Gucci's *wrongdoings* by admitting that the company has shown strategic shortfalls in embedding diversity in the organization and its activities. Furthermore, the balaclava jumper is *explicitly mentioned,* which again can be seen as a sign of *accepting*

responsibility. By stating that the incident was unintentional the company at least gives a little *explanation* of how the wrong-doing occurred. *Commitment to avoid future wrong-doings* from happening again is shown by planning "to further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company" and to "increase awareness of unconscious cultural bias".

Besides *Rebuilding*, Gucci also deployed several strategies of the *Bolstering* cluster. First of all, the *Reminder* strategy is utilized as the CEO mentions that diversity already is of strategic importance for Gucci and thus reminds the public of the good work that the company is already doing regarding a diverse company structure.

By expressing his gratitude to Dapper Dan, Bizzarri praises this stakeholder and thus uses the *ingratiation* strategy.

Furthermore, "regional experts", "industry leaders" and "Dapper Dan and other community leaders", as well as "other experts" are brought up as third-party supporters, who offer counseling to the company and help Gucci with the implementation of their initiatives. Thus, Gucci appears to use the *Endorsement* strategy.

Finally, Gucci applies *CSR initiatives* as the company plans to implement initiatives for more cultural diversity and awareness at Gucci.

During the content analysis we realized that Gucci applied additional means which are not reflected in the SCCT response strategies. To account for this company behavior we developed several new strategies through inductive coding and bundled these under the new main category *Supporting means*. *Supporting means* are applied in combination with accommodative responses in order to appear believable and trustworthy by showing dedication to improve and making sure that the company's accommodative response is credible and not just an empty promise. The first strategy applied as *Supporting means* is *proving dedication*, including the sub-strategies *investing resources, executive involvement* and *charitable, ambitious goal.* The second strategy *creating credibility* involves the sub-strategies *external cooperations*, *details* and *follow-ups*. An overview over the *Supporting means* of accommodative responses including the respective strategies and definitions can be found in Appendix G.

In their second response post Gucci *proves dedication* by formulating *ambitious, charitable goals* such as "bringing positive change and inspiring solutions for a better future" or "for Gucci to represent a voice of inclusivity". Additionally, *executive involvement* is applied as Gucci's CEO Bizzarri is personally involved in the initiatives. In addition, Gucci states that Alessandro Michele, creative director at Gucci, will be involved in selecting new employees and Michele personally claims that he looks forwards to welcoming new talents to his team.

Regarding the second group of supporting means, *credibility creation,* the company apparently puts a lot of focus on *providing details* about their initiatives, such as locations, concrete tasks, timeframes and administrative details. We expect that this is done with the purpose of creating believability, by showing that the company already put a lot of thought into their actions. Another means to *create credibility* can be seen in the facts that Gucci emphasizes that they built *external cooperations* with "regional experts" and "community leaders" and will "continue to engage with this group". We believe that these cooperations make the company's promises more credible, because Gucci will continually work together with experts outside of the company. Thus, these externals can, on the one hand, offer the company advice and guide its actions and, on the other hand, also play a controlling role, as they have special insights and can communicate to the public if the company does not implement the corrective actions as promised.

Summing up, in their second response post Gucci utilized five *Rebuilding* and four *Bolstering* strategies and supported these accommodative strategies with *Supporting means* to *create credibility* and *prove dedication*. This post received many more positive comments. Taken both channels together, 83% of the users reacted positively and the share of negative comments decreased from 56% to 12%. This is a big improvement compared to the preceding post. Additionally, it stands out that the amount of comments drastically declined from 1054 to 89 on Twitter (see Appendix H for data per channel). Overall the second response of Gucci received many positive reactions, indicating that the further dissemination of the firestorm could be prevented. We hence interpret this response as effective because it appears as many users appreciated Gucci's post and generally users' anger could be calmed down and almost no additional negative eWOM was created by the comments.

Third response
One month later, on March 18, the company released a follow up on the post from February 15, announcing "Gucci Changemakers", a global program that supports industry change. Again, we find several strategies from the *Rebuilding* cluster. Firstly, Gucci provides *corrective actions to prevent future wrong-doings* for example by promising to change "the long-term infrastructure at Gucci" to increase the diversity at Gucci.
Gucci also engages in *compensations* by investing resources into community-based programs and offering scholarships to "impact youth and the African-American community".
Again, we find two statements which we assign to the *personalization strategy*. Firstly, a direct quote of Bizzarri is included, in which he describes his personal views, stating "I believe in dialogue, building bridges and taking quick actions" and "I believe in the promise of the next generation". Secondly, Gucci's partner Dapper Dan is quoted who expresses his pride to work

with Gucci. In addition, we again interpret including Dapper Dan in the company response as an *involvement* strategy. Especially as he states "it is imperative that we have a seat at the table to say how we should be represented and reimagined" which clarifies that Dan is a representative of the black community which was offended by the sweater. Thus, Gucci apparently applies *personalization* and *involvement* in order to *rebuild a connection* with their stakeholders.

Additionally, the company deploys *transcendence* as the attention is shifted to bigger issues by promising for example that Gucci will "support social change", "create more opportunities for talented young people with diverse backgrounds" and "guide programs that will create meaningful impact for the Black community and fashion as a whole".

Moreover, Gucci applies several *Bolstering* response strategies. We understand the whole Gucci Changemakers initiative, including a volunteering program, a community fund and a scholarship program as a *CSR initiative*.

Furthermore, Gucci states that the company already introduced a company-wide volunteering program for all 18,000 employees in 2018. By pointing out that this program already led to "8,000 days of volunteering support in North America" in four different areas the company mentions its past good work and hence applies a *Reminder* strategy. Additionally, it is claimed that Gucci already "placed three regional employees in the corporate offices", an achievement of the initiatives announced in the previous post and hence again an application of the *Reminder* strategy.

Moreover, Gucci deploys *Endorsement*, as third-party supporters again are mentioned including a detailed list of community leaders and social change experts who form a "Changemaker council" which will "help select eligible students from North American schools to participate in the Gucci Changemakers Scholarship Fund".

In addition to the *Rebuilding* and *Bolstering* strategies we identified several *Supporting means*. Regarding the *proving dedication* strategy, *charitable and ambitious goals* such as "empowering young people through education by giving a voice to the next generation" or "creating lasting social impact in our communities and within the fashion industry" are formulated. Additionally, *executive involvement* is utilized as the CEO appears to be personally involved and *resource investments* are conducted as "the program includes a multi-year $5 million Changemakers Fund and a $1.5 million scholarship program in North America".

We as well find *Supporting means* to *create credibility*. The sub-strategy *external cooperation* is applied by building the "Gucci Changemakers Council" to support Gucci in their decision making and "ensure transparency, accountability and long-term impact". Hence, these cooperations probably again have a controlling function, especially as most of the council

members hold influential positions or even are celebrities which increases their ability to control Gucci. In addition, Gucci refers back to the previous announcement of the first four long-term initiatives and mentions placing three regional employees in the corporate offices as an accomplishment of this initiative. By doing so the company provides *follow-ups* to the previous announcement which we interpret as an additional means to *create credibility*, as it shows that matters are pursued and taken seriously. Moreover, Gucci provides *details* of the planned initiatives, like for instance locations and administrative details of Gucci's volunteering program.

To summarize, we find that Gucci applied five *Rebuilding* and three *Bolstering* strategies along *Supporting means* to *create credibility* and *prove dedication* in their third firestorm response post. Combining the two channels, 86% reacted positively to Gucci's last post and only 12% negatively. Again, this is an improvement compared to the previous post. Overall the amount of comments decreased once more. Only 11 comments were posted on Twitter which were all positive, and 480 on Instagram, compared to 2,948 in the previous post (see Appendix H for data per channel). Overall, with each of the company's posts less consumers replied, and the reactions got increasingly positive. Thus, it appears as the company managed to calm consumers down and to even change their sentiment towards Gucci. This indicates that the company was able to prevent a further spread of the firestorm and that the last response was effective.

7 Discussion and summary of main findings

In this section of the thesis, the main findings regarding the research questions are collected and discussed. Additionally, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are derived from the analysis and last but not least limitations and directions for future research are outlined.

7.1 Summary of the key findings

This master thesis examined two recent online firestorm cases with the objective to answer, how the affected companies responded to the online firestorms on social media in order to prevent a further dissemination of the firestorm and how effective these responses were, based on users' reactions to the response.

We find that the two companies Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci chose different response strategies. Dolce & Gabbana first engaged in a *Denial* response as they ignored the firestorm for three days. In their first response post the company then used mainly *Bolstering* response strategies, and one *Rebuilding* strategy leading to mostly negative user reactions. The main response in Dolce & Gabbana's second post was *Denial*. Additionally, the company applied a

couple of *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* strategies. Most of the reactions to the second post were as well negative. In the final response post, Dolce & Gabbana applied many *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* strategies. We found characteristics of sincerity as well as of insincerity in these *Rebuilding* responses. Again, most comments reacting to this post were negative. Hence, none of Dolce & Gabbana's responses can be seen as effective, as for all three responses most user reactions were negative and the posts generated a very high number of comments, indicating that the further spread of the firestorm could not be prevented by the company.

Gucci very quickly issued a first response in which the company applied several sincere *Rebuilding* response strategies and one *Bolstering* response. This post led to mostly negative reactions. In the second and third firestorm response posts, Gucci utilized many *Bolstering*, as well as sincere *Rebuilding* strategies. Additionally, *Supporting means* were added, including strategies which *increase credibility* and *prove dedication.* The user reactions to the second and third posts were mainly positive. Additionally, the share of negative comments decreased drastically. Hence, the first firestorm response post of Gucci was rather ineffective, while the second and third posts were effective in preventing the further dissemination of the firestorm.

7.2 Discussion

Comparing the two cases, we find that Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci applied fundamentally different responses.

In the first response post, Gucci used several accommodative *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* strategies, including an apology. Dolce & Gabbana on the other hand did not issue an apology and mainly used *Bolstering* strategies. In both company cases, more than half of the user comments underneath the respective posts were negative. The share of Gucci's negative comments was almost 20% lower than Dolce & Gabbana's and the share of positive comments twice as high. Hence, in comparison, Gucci's response was more successful than Dolce & Gabbana's. Nevertheless, with more than 50% negative comments Gucci's response can still not be considered effective. Thus, even though Gucci used an accommodative approach as suggested by the SCCT literature, the company's firestorm response was not able to change users' negative sentiments and to calm down the firestorm. This finding refutes previous findings in the literature which state that accommodative response strategies are generally more successful in the sense that they have a stronger impact on the consumers' evaluation of the company, restoring his or her sympathy and trust and encourage users to forgive a company's misbehavior (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Ki & Nekmat, 2014; Lee & Song, 2010; Ott & Theunissen, 2015). In addition, this outcome differs from Rauschnabel et al. (2016) who state that appeasement strategies can stop the further growth of a collaborative brand attack.

One possible cause for this effect is, that in the last years, the number of online firestorms triggered by racism, discrimination and general unethical behavior of companies increased (See Table 2), which could have the consequence that users are annoyed by the frequent offensive actions of companies, followed by an apology as the following exemplary user comments show:[4]

„@gucci I'm so sick and tired of apologies from people and companies for being racist; just stop being #racist (…)"

„@gucci heard it all before"

People might also expect more from a company than a simple apology after it engaged in moral misbehavior, like for example this user:

"@gucci That is not enough. You are a multi billion dollar company. What else are you doing besides this weak apology?"

This result that users might be annoyed and disappointed by a simple apology supports Herhausen et al. (2019, p. 18) who find that apologizing can "feed the fire".

Regarding the ineffectiveness of Dolce & Gabbana's first response post we argue that the first reason for the high share of negative comments is that the company did not engage in a fully accommodative response, because regarding the accommodative/defensive continuum, *Bolstering* is considered a less accommodative response than *Rebuilding* (Coombs, 2018)*.* Hence, this finding shows that it is not recommendable to only use *Bolstering* strategies when responding to an online firestorm, which confirms the proposition of Coombs (2018) that *Bolstering* is a secondary response and that it makes little sense to use strategies of this cluster as the only response.

As the second reason for the post's ineffectiveness we identify the application of the *ignoring* strategy in the first days of the firestorm. The company received more than 90,000 comments for their first response post, indicating that during the time in which Dolce & Gabbana did not respond, the firestorm was heating up as the *ignoring* strategy allows negative information to spread unchallenged (Lee & Song, 2010). Then, in the moment that the company finally made a statement, people let go of their pent-up anger and disappointment, leading to many negative user reactions. Based on this finding we can confirm, that ignoring an online firestorm is the worst response strategy (Herhausen et al., 2019; Pfeffer et al., 2014). Consequently, we argue that Dolce & Gabbana's first response was not successful because firstly it mainly applied *Bolstering* strategies and secondly because the company initially applied the *Ignoring* strategy, which increased the momentum of the firestorm.

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[4] The exemplary comments in this section are taken from our data set of downloaded user comments.

For their second response posts Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci again chose quite different strategies. Gucci applied many *Rebuilding* and *Bolstering* strategies, while Dolce & Gabbana's main strategy was *Denial* alongside a couple of *Rebuilding* and *Bolstering* strategies. We find Gucci's response to be effective as the share of negative comments for Gucci's post decreased drastically and the positive comments increased to about 80%. Dolce & Gabbana's response on the other hand again is interpreted as ineffective because the share of negative user reactions remained at about 70%.

In order to determine why Gucci's second response was more successful than their first response, we firstly compare the two posts. We find that in their second response Gucci applied several strategies which they did not apply in their first post. These include the *Rebuilding* strategies *rebuild connection*, *transcendence* and *compensation* and the *Bolstering* strategy *CSR-initiatives*. Also, they described more *corrective actions,* including some concrete initiatives to improve the company's diversity in order to avoid similar future misbehavior. In addition, they supported their accommodative response with *Supporting means* which *create credibility* and *prove dedication*. Hence, we believe that Gucci's second response was more successful because they added these additional response strategies and means, putting a lot of efforts into making some changes and improving their behavior. The following example comments from our data referring to Gucci's Instagram post support our findings, as the users express their respect for Gucci initiating changes to avoid future mistakes.

"... it's refreshing to see a big and powerful brand accept fault, be humbled enough to learn from it, and take immediate and effective action to ensure it doesn't happen again 👍*"*

"Appreciate taking full responsibility and didn't try to excuse the situation away. Also super impressed with the detailed and well thought out steps to address the root cause of the problem rather than a band-aid solution to. Well done and Thank you."

This outcome supports the finding of Ham and Kim (2017) that *CSR-based* response messages can be very effective in offsetting negative effects and positively affecting consumer behavior. Additionally, we contradict the proposition of Herhausen et al. (2019) that *compensations* should only be used as the last resort.

We believe that with its second response Gucci might have even turned the negative attitudes of users around and changed them into positive ones. Pfeffer et al. (2014) propose that an appropriate, believable response can even increase a company's reputation and image. Possibly, Gucci might have achieved this effect with their response. This conclusion is again supported by the high share of positive comments and the following exemplary user comments from Instagram in which users express their enthusiasm for Gucci's initiative:

"Deep appreciation & loud applause 🖐"
"Amazing and sophisticated move, @gucci nothing but respect "
"This is so so so great ❤"

Regarding Dolce & Gabbana's second response, we find that the company mainly deployed a defensive strategy, by denying their responsibility for the firestorm and blaming a hack. The result that this response was ineffective, on the one hand, refutes the proposition of the SCCT literature that in the case of a company being not responsible for a crisis, or in this case firestorm, the public is more likely to accept a defensive response (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Jin et al., 2014). On the other hand, it has also been found that *Denial* strategies represent a major risk (Coombs, 2015), especially if there is evidence that the company can actually be linked to the respective incident (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Even though in this case no proof exists that Dolce & Gabbana have not been hacked, there is also no proof that the hack really happened. Consequently, users might not believe the company's statement, especially as Dolce & Gabbana's post lacks a clarification, which of the company actions exactly have been affected by the hack. Hence, if users do not believe that Dolce & Gabbana have been hacked, they also do not see the company as a victim. This presumption is supported by the following exemplary comments, downloaded from Instagram, in which users clearly state that they believe that Dolce & Gabbana has made up the hack:

"Hacked" LOL acknowledge your blatant ignorance instead of trying to lie and cover it up. Absolute garbage 😊"
"Both accounts were hacked at the same time? Make a better excuse will you?
"Its so ridiculous...who will believe in this? Hacked two accounts just for saying chinese are stupid..."

Consequently, we attribute the ineffectiveness of Dolce & Gabbana's second response to the application of *Denial* strategies. Thus, we confirm the findings of the SCCT literature that *Denial* strategies are likely to escalate the situation and can trigger negative perceptions of the company (e.g. Chang et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010).

All in all, our outcome that Gucci's response was more successful than Dolce & Gabbana's response supports the proposition of SCCT literature that an accommodative response should be chosen if the company is responsible for the cause of the consumer outrage (Coombs, 2007, 2011, 2014a; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002). Additionally, we support the common finding of the literature applying SCCT in the social media context, that accommodative strategies are generally more successful than defensive strategies (e.g. Lee & Song, 2010; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Zhang et al., 2016).

In their last posts, both companies used accommodative response strategies, applying *Bolstering*, as well as *Rebuilding*. Gucci's response again was effective, receiving more than 85% positive user reactions, while Dolce & Gabbana's response remained rather ineffective as about 65% of user comments were negative. Hence, even though both companies applied strategies of the *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* cluster, Gucci's response was much more successful in inhibiting the further spread of the online firestorm. Comparing the two posts, we realize that Gucci used some strategies which have not been applied by Dolce & Gabbana. These strategies comprise the *Rebuilding* strategies *transcendence* and *compensation* and the *Bolstering* strategy *CSR-initiatives.* In addition, Gucci applied many more *corrective actions* than Dolce & Gabbana. While the latter only promised to respect the Chinese culture in the future, Gucci, as suggested by Rauschnabel et al. (2016), showed a change of behavior. The company extended its corrective actions by not only including initiatives to bring about change in their own company but throughout the whole fashion industry. In addition, Gucci again applied *Supporting means* to *create credibility* for their activities and *prove* their *dedication,* which were not utilized by Dolce & Gabbana. Besides the high share of positive reactions for Gucci's third post, the following exemplary Instagram comments from our data illustrate that users value Gucci's efforts and activities.

"I'm glad to see that the fashion industry and @Gucci are ahead in making a real change in policies that concern about the communities, diversity and global change.❤"

"Well done @gucci so excited to see and support your efforts for change! Be the change!"

Consequently, as Gucci's response was more successful than Dolce & Gabbana's response, our findings show that an accommodative response should include the strategies *transcendence*, *compensation* and/or *CSR-initiatives,* as well as concrete, ambitious *corrective actions*, supported by *Supporting means* to *create credibility* and *prove dedication.*

After comparing Gucci's and Dolce & Gabbana's response we hence propose as a first reason for the ineffectiveness of Dolce & Gabbana's third response that they did not use any of these strategies and means.

As a second possible reason for the lack of success we would like to point out that Dolce & Gabbana showed some inconsistent behavior which possibly upset consumers. The company first claimed that they were hacked, then, in the third response, they apparently changed their mind and apologized for their actions and behavior, which strengthens the presumption that Dolce & Gabbana might have lied about the hack in the first place. Our proposition that users are angry about Dolce & Gabbana's inconsistent behavior is illustrated by the following exemplary comments from Twitter in which the users voice their anger about the company's behavior:

"@dolcegabbana First acc-been-hacked theory, then an insincere appology. Oh, u just want this, right, to get out of China? U SUCCEED !"

"@dolcegabbana Why bother to apologize? Isn't it a hacked account? What about that Instagram thing? So all you have is a pack of lies."

"@dolcegabbana Too late and after you claimed you didn't even write all of that because you were "hacked.""

An additional reason for the little success of Dolce & Gabbana's third response might be that even though the response does show a lot of characteristics of a sincere *Rebuilding* response, there are also some indicators of the designers *evading responsibility*, as the designers *avoid mentioning* the cause of the firestorm and do not concretely name what they did wrong. Thus, users might not believe that Dolce and Gabbana apologize sincerely. This proposition can be supported by users' comments in which the commenters are questioning the designers' sincerity:

"@dolcegabbana OMG, don't look at the teleprompter. You don't look sincere at all."

"...The eyes and gestures indicate how insincere you are"

"@dolcegabbana I can't feel a little sincerity [….] apologizing insincerely and looking insincere..."

Additionally, many users also realized the usage of the formulation "if" instead of "that" which they interpret as another indicator for evading responsibility.

"@dolcegabbana It might just be the translation, BUT apologies should never contain the term 'if'. If we offended you. If we made a mistake. NO. You made a mistake. Apologize to everyone, not just those offended. And not IF you made a mistake. You fucked up."

"@dolcegabbana Keyword in this apology is "IF". "We are sorry IF we made mistakes..." In my opinion, this isn't taking full responsibility for their actions. This isn't a matter of *IF* they made mistakes, because they did; and they should own that."

These examples show that indicators of insincerity are identified and condemned by social media users. Hence, we find that even if a *Rebuilding* response shows all signs of sincerity, indicators of responsibility evasion and hence insincerity can drastically reduce the believability of a response and produce anger and hostility. This is supported by the fact that Gucci's effective responses did not show any signs of insincerity. From that it can be derived that it is extremely important for a company in a firestorm to avoid any characteristics of an insincere *Rebuilding* response and to fully own their mistakes, without any attempts to evade responsibility.

Finally, we would like to mention that it might also be argued that Gucci's last response was only effective because people simply lost interest in the online firestorm. It could be the case that users did not engage in the firestorm anymore, but still their perception of Gucci changed

to the negative. On the one hand, this is supported by the fact that even though most of the responses were positive, the total number of comments drastically decreased. On the other hand, this proposition is contradicted by the fact that the company only received very few negative responses. We believe that if many users' perception of the company would have been sustainably changed to the negative, more users would have reacted negatively to the response posts.

Regarding the timeframes of the two companies' responses it is striking that both companies chose completely different timings to publish their responses. Considering the success of the respective response timings, Gucci's strategy of reacting quickly at first and then letting some time pass appears to be more efficient. Firstly, this might be due to the fact that, like already illustrated, fast responses are highly important to hinder negative eWOM from spreading. Secondly, letting some time pass after the first response might be reasonable in order to let people calm down. By responding after a few days, the company, on the one hand, proves that it is taking the issue seriously and has put some thought into how it can be solved, on the other hand it might be able to avoid impulsive negative responses from angry users.

Both companies did not apply any SCCT *Diminishment* strategies. SCCT *Denial* strategies (*ignoring* and *scapegoating*) were only found in the case of Dolce & Gabbana, but the two strategies *denial of firestorm existence* and *accuser attack* were not utilized. Regarding the insincerity characteristics, no proof for *Downplaying seriousness* could be found. In the cases of *Bolstering, Rebuilding* and the respective sincerity characteristics all response strategies could be found. This finding that some of the response strategies were not applied in the two cases does not necessarily mean that these strategies are not applicable in online firestorms. However, it shows that accommodative strategies are applied to a higher degree than defensive strategies, which is in line with previous findings regarding the application of SCCT response strategies on social media (e.g. Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Zhang et al., 2016).

7.3 Theoretical contribution
This thesis offers several theoretical contributions which can be assigned to four research fields.

First our findings contribute to the relatively new research field of online firestorm. This literature stream has only been established in 2014 and thus, research in this field is still limited, especially regarding appropriate response strategies. This thesis follows the request of earlier studies in this field for further research on how to deal with firestorms and to examine more recent firestorm cases (Hansen et al., 2018). Drasch et al. (2015) for instance

encouraged future research to develop strategies for mitigating online firestorms. We followed this call by examining the responses of two companies on social media and determining the most recommendable response strategies. From this case studies we can derive four theoretical contributions for the online firestorm research field. First, we confirm that it is very important to respond quickly to an online firestorm and that *ignoring* is the worst strategic choice (Herhausen et al., 2019; Pfeffer et al., 2014; Stich et al., 2014). Second, we show that in an online firestorm companies should apply accommodative *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* strategies and should avoid *Denial* strategies. Third, regarding the effectiveness of response strategies, our findings indicate that responses which include the strategies *transcendence, compensation, CSR-initiatives* and concrete *corrective actions* in combination with *Supporting means* which *prove dedication* and *create credibility* are more successful in preventing the further spread of an online firestorm. Additionally, we show that *Bolstering* strategies should not be used as the only response. As a fourth contribution we determine that these accommodative responses have to include characteristics of sincerity and avoid any indicators of an insincere accommodative response. We especially show that evading responsibility should be avoided as this behavior is identified and condemned by users.

Second, we theoretically contribute to SCC theory, by applying the SCCT response strategies in the field of online firestorms. We show that these response strategies are applicable in the social media context. Hence, we contribute to studies examining crisis communication on social media by proving that SCCT response strategies are not only appropriate for responding to offline crises via social media (e.g. Ki & Nekmat, 2014; Zhang et al., 2016) and to negative eWOM (e.g. Chang et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010; Weitzl et al., 2018), but also for the specific case of online firestorms. This finding refutes Rauschnabel et al.'s (2016) claim that SCCT strategies are not applicable in the online context. In addition, we extend SCCT and add additional crisis response strategies. We suggest *positive counter-position* as a new strategy of the *Bolstering* cluster and *rebuild connection* as a new strategy of the *Rebuilding* cluster. Additionally, we propose to subdivide the *Rebuilding* strategy *corrective actions* into actions which *correct wrong-doings* and actions which *prevent future mistakes*. Thus, we adapted the theory for the case of online firestorms.

Third, our findings regarding the effectiveness of response strategies contribute to organizational theory on conflict management and crisis communication in general, as we show how companies can successfully handle situations which have the potential to hurt them and may generate negative outcomes. Hence, we followed the call for further research in the field of crisis management on how companies can respond to adversity in times of increasing complexity and user interconnectedness due to social media (Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe,

Shepherd, & Zhao, 2017). In addition, our results confirm findings from the crisis communication as well as conflict management literature. First, as found in both literature streams, we confirm that *no action* strategies are the least effective organizational response (e.g. Lee, 2004; Lee & Cranage, 2014; Liu et al., 2011). Second, as it has been found in previous studies, in our research accommodative response strategies led to more positive, and defensive response strategies to more negative reactions, which is in line with the demand for collaborative, problem solving responses of the crisis and conflict management literature (Hauser et al., 2017). Third, we confirm that denying strategies can be very ineffective and harmful as suggested by both literature streams (Hauser et al., 2017).

Fourth, the findings of this thesis also contribute to brand and reputation management studies concerned with the questions of how companies should react when consumers criticize them publicly via social media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Our thesis provides some important insights on appropriate ways to interact with consumers who have posted negative, offensive messages about the company. Based on our findings we can confirm that companies have to engage in proactive communication in order to prevent reputational damages (e.g. Aula, 2010). This proposition contradicts those studies, suggesting that reactive responses should be chosen over proactive responses, meaning that companies should only intervene in negative messages about their company when consumers specifically demand a response, to protect their reputation (e.g. Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012; Van Noort, Willemsen, Kerkhof, & Verhoeven, 2015). We object this statement because we find that if a company waits too long to respond to an online firestorm, it is difficult to interrupt this firestorm and hence additional negative eWOM which can harm a company's reputation is spreading. This proposition is illustrated by the fact that Dolce & Gabbana was confronted with very high amounts of negative eWOM after they did not react proactively to the accusations and that the company could not interrupt the online firestorm with their apology video. Furthermore, our finding that Dolce & Gabbana created a lot of additional negative eWOM through their responses confirms the notion that a company's own communications activities, including their reactions to user statements presents a reputational risk (Aula, 2010). Then again, we also find that an appropriate response has the potential to restore and possibly even improve organizational reputation (Pfeffer et al., 2014), as the positive reactions to Gucci's response posts demonstrate.

Finally, we would like to point out that we applied a mixed method approach by combining qualitative content analysis, as a traditional method with automated sentiment analysis as a computational method. This thesis hence proves that combining methods from different fields and including computational methods is a beneficial approach for social sciences, as it allowed

us to not only understand the applied strategies in depth, but also to gain some insights on the effectiveness of the respective strategies. Nevertheless, we also showed that an automatic sentiment tool comes with some difficulties and requires building a customized model in order to get valuable results.

7.4 Managerial implications

The findings of this thesis regarding company response strategies to online firestorms are highly relevant for practice, as 72% of firms rate their preparedness to an online firestorm below average, and managers claim a lack of know-how on how to address an angry mass-audience (Herhausen et al., 2019). This is why, in this section we want to provide some practical implications for responding to online firestorms, derived from the findings of this thesis.

Respond quickly

At the first sign of an online firestorm, managers should react immediately and issue a response on social media as fast as possible. If too much time passes between the initiation of the online firestorm and the company response, the firestorm might gain momentum, leading to a higher amount of negative, harmful eWOM. Consequently, *ignoring* a firestorm is the worst strategy that can be chosen and should be avoided.

Avoid Denial strategies if it cannot be proven that the company is not responsible

Managers should avoid *Denial* responses, as they are risky and might disappoint consumers, leading to even more negative eWOM. As long as it cannot be proven that the company is not responsible for the firestorm, managers should avoid blaming others and presenting the company as innocent.

Choose accommodative over defensive strategies

As has been shown by several studies before, this thesis proves, that accommodative responses are more promising than defensive firestorm responses. Hence, when choosing a firestorm response strategy, managers should use *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* responses.. We suggest including the strategies *transcendence, compensation, corrective actions* and/or *CSR-initiatives* in the accommodative response, as these strategies show effort and our findings indicate that responses which include those strategies are more effective.

Make sure Rebuilding responses are sincere

If a *Rebuilding* response is chosen, managers should make sure that the respective response fulfills the criteria of a sincere *Rebuilding* response. This especially involves making sure that no signs of evading responsibility for the issue at hand can be found in the response. We

showed that users identify these responsibility evasions and then classify the response as insincere, which then again increases their negative emotions towards the company.

Add Supporting means to your accommodative response
Consumers might be skeptical of the believability of a companies' initiatives and engagement; thus, managers should make sure to add means that create trust and believability. These *Supporting means* should *increase credibility* and *prove dedication* of a company to make up for their mistakes and to do better in the future.

Figure 16 summarizes these managerial implications and provides a guideline for managers how to respond to online firestorms.

Figure 14: Managerial guideline for responding to online firestorms

Choose among the following accommodative strategies. Make sure to involve some of the underlined strategies.

Bolstering

‣ Positive counter-position
‣ CSR-activities
‣ Endorsement
‣ Ingratiation
‣ Reminder

Rebuilding

‣ Sympathy
‣ Apologizing
‣ Corrective actions
   - correct wrong-doings
   - prevent future wrong-doings
‣ Rebuild connection
   - Personalization
   - Involvement
‣ Transcendence
‣ Compensations

Make sure that the response is interpreted as sincere by users by ensuring that some of the following characteristics are present:

Sincerity

‣ Accepting Responsibility
   - Mentioning firestorm
‣ Acknowledging wrong
‣ Explanation
‣ Commitment
‣ Remorse and sincerity
‣ Learning

Make the response more believable and trustworthy by adding some Supporting means:

Credibility creation

‣ External cooperation partners
‣ Follow-ups
‣ Providing details

Proving dedication

‣ Executive involvement
‣ Resource investment
‣ Charitable goals

7.5 Limitations and directions for future research

Even though this thesis provides some important contributions for theory and practice, it is important to recognize some limitations of this study and to suggest further research.

First of all, the applied method sentiment analysis implies some limitations of this study. Generally, sentiment analysis of eWOM on social media is challenging, because of personal, cultural and contextual impact factors (Drasch et al., 2015). Even though we could increase the accuracy of our sentiment analysis tool through the application of customized models, it is naturally not completely accurate. Especially, we expect that the accuracy of the sentiment analysis algorithm is reduced by significant amounts of sarcasm (Thelwall, Buckley, & Paltoglou, 2012) because sarcastic texts often include expressions of sentiment that are intended to be understood with the opposite polarity (Thelwall, 2017). Sarcasm is especially associated with negative statements (Filatova, 2012). Consequently, it might be the case that MeaningCloud misclassified negative, sarcastic comments as positive. Additionally, in the case of Dolce & Gabbana many users declared their positive emotions towards China as these examples from comments underneath Dolce & Gabbana's first Instagram post illustrate:

"China is always one of the greatest countries in the world! I love China forever, i will not buy your goods again!"

"Dear Chinese people I am so sorry for that , we love China , Chinese culture and people. A lot of love from Italy."

In these two examples, the users actually criticized Dolce & Gabbana by expressing positive emotions towards China, but naturally this is still classified as positive sentiment overall. Additionally, we only considered English comments and left out Chinese comments. We expect that the share of negative comments might be even higher if Chinese comments would be classified as well, as Chinese people were personally insulted by Dolce & Gabbana's video and thus might be more enraged by the companies' behavior. Future research could try to find a way to better detect sarcasm and contextual factors in user comments and determine whether a sentiment analysis leads to different outcomes when non-English comments are also taken into account.

As a second limitation of our study it should be considered that using the sentiment of user comments as an indicator for the effectiveness of the firestorm response is rather narrow as there are many additional variables which could not be included due to the extent of this thesis. Future research could for example examine other user communications on social media such as twitter posts under a certain hashtag and/or mentions of the company to determine the ability of a company response to inhibit the further spread of a firestorm. Additionally, helpful insights could be gained by analyzing the content of the user comments, not only their

sentiment to get a better understanding of how exactly users perceive the company's response. Moreover, sales, stock market prices and revenue data of the respective company are also important indicators of the consequences of an online firestorm which could be included by future studies in order to get more insights on how the firestorm developed after the intervention of a company.

The third limitation of this study derives from the fact that we could not assign the sentiment of the user reactions to the specific response strategies, as we could only determine the users' sentiment towards a whole response post. When the companies used different strategies in one response, we could not assign the users' sentiments to the respective response strategies as we could not determine from the comments which strategy sparked which reaction. Future research could develop a method which allows to understand which response strategy leads to which user reaction in order to get an even deeper understanding of the strategies' effectiveness.

The fourth limitation of this thesis is, that it is based on two specific case studies, which might impact the generalizability of this thesis' findings (Ruddin, 2006). Future research could test our findings, taking a bigger, more comprehensive approach by including more company cases and involving companies from different industries and countries. Those further studies could then also reveal whether the SCCT responses, which were not applied by Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana are applied in other firestorm cases, or if they are generally avoided by companies hit by an online firestorm. An additional avenue that could be taken by such future research is testing the managerial implications of this thesis empirically by examining whether managers, who respond to online firestorms according to the presented practical propositions, are indeed more successful than those managers that do not.

As a fifth and final limitation of this study we want to point out that we put the focus of this study on the company's firestorm responses on social media leaving out any of the companies' offline activities regarding the online firestorms. Even though this focus was chosen deliberately, it might also be interesting for future research to examine company responses outside of the online context, such as press releases or comments and interviews in traditional media and to determine how these responses are interconnected with the online responses.

8 Conclusion

Firestorms as sudden bursts of negative attention are an increasing source of fascination and anxiety in theory and practice (Lamba, Malik, & Pfeffer, 2015). This master thesis had the

objective to determine how companies respond to online firestorms and to establish the effectiveness of these response strategies.

All in all, we show that companies use different response strategies which induce different reactions by users. Positive user reactions imply that the further spread of the firestorm could be prevented, and the response hence was effective, while negative reactions imply the contrary. We ascribe the varying effectiveness of the responses to the companies' different applications of response strategies, sincerity and supporting means. We derive from our findings that it is important that companies respond accommodatively to the users' accusations, using *Bolstering* and *Rebuilding* strategies. In this accommodative response a simple apology is not enough, instead the company under fire should initiate *CSR-initiatives* and *corrective actions* leading to company- or even industry-wide changes to avoid future mistakes. Hence, in those initiatives the company should make sure to shift the attention to big, important issues, by applying the *transcendence* strategy. In the case of a firestorm due to unethical behavior of a company it is especially important to provide *compensations* in order to make amends to those insulted by the company's behavior. We also illustrate that it is recommendable to support these accommodative actions with means which *create credibility* and *prove the dedication* of a company to improve. In regard to firestorm responses which should be avoided, we found that it is not recommendable to *evade responsibility* as users can identify this behavior and denounce it. Furthermore, we show that it is risky to apply *Denial* strategies, especially if the company cannot prove that it is not responsible for the firestorm cause and behaves inconsistently. After such a behavior the risk of an escalation of the situation is high, and the likelihood of interrupting the firestorm with an apology low. All in all, our findings regarding recommendable response strategies are helpful for minimizing the risk of reacting inappropriately to an online firestorm and by that worsening the situation. Hence, we contribute to the online firestorm literature, as well as to research in the field of crisis communication, conflict management and reputation management as we show how companies can handle situations which have the potential to harm them.

In addition, we extend SCCT by suggesting new *Rebuilding* and *Bolstering* response strategies. By that we confirm that SCCT is applicable for online firestorms and adapt the theory to this specific case.

All in all, our findings extend the research on how to intervene into an online firestorm and by that help to reduce the risk created by social media. By determining concrete, effective response strategies we provide important insights on how to react quickly and appropriately to the complex phenomenon of online firestorms in order to prevent severe negative consequences.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Transcript of company responses to the online firestorm on social media

Dolce & Gabbana
Response 1
Our dream was to bring to Shanghai a tribute event dedicated to China which tells our history and vision. It was not simply a fashion show, but something that we created especially with love and passion for China and all the people around the world who loves Dolce & Gabbana. What happened today was very unfortunate not only for us, but also for all these people who worked day and night to bring this event to life. From the bottom of our hearts, we would like to express our gratitude to our friends and guests.
Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana

Response 2
Our Instagram account has been hacked. So as the account of Stefano Gabbana. Our legal office is urgently investigating. We are very sorry for any distress caused by the unauthorized posts. We have nothing but respect for China and the people of China.

Response 3
The video was transcribed from the English sub-titles of the Italian video.
Title: Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana apologize
Dolce: *Over the past few days we have thought long and hard with great sadness about everything that has happened and what we have caused in your country and we are very sorry. Our families have always taught us to respect the various cultures in all the world and this is why we want to ask for your forgiveness if we have made mistakes in interpreting yours.*

Gabbana: *We also want to apologize to all of the many Chinese people throughout the world. We take this apology very seriously as well as this message.*

Dolce: *We have always been in love with China. We've visited it and seen many of its cities. We love your culture and we certainly have much to learn. That is why we are sorry if we made mistakes in the way we expressed ourselves.*

Gabbana: *We will never forget this experience and it will certainly never happen again. In fact, we will work to do things better. We will respect the Chinese culture in every way possible. From the bottom of our hearts we ask for forgiveness.*

Both: *Sorry*

Gucci

Response 1

Gucci deeply apologizes for the offense caused by the wool balaclava jumper. We can confirm that the item has been immediately removed from our online store and all physical stores. We consider diversity to be a fundamental value to be fully upheld, respected, and at the forefront of every decision we make. We are fully committed to increasing diversity throughout our organization and turning this incident into a powerful learning moment for the Gucci team and beyond.

Response 2

Following the recent unintentional balaclava jumper incident, Gucci announces the first four initiatives in a long-term plan of actions designed to further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company.

"We accept full accountability for this incident which has exposed shortfalls in our ongoing strategic approach to embedding diversity and inclusion in both our organization and in our activities. I am particularly grateful to Dapper Dan for the role he has played in bringing community leaders together to offer us their counsel at this time."
Marco Bizzarri, Gucci President and CEO

Talent Hiring
1) GLOBAL AND REGIONAL DIRECTORS FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
Gucci is working to not only hire talented and diverse candidates but also create positions within the company whose sole responsibility will be to ensure the company reaches these standards. Gucci is now initiating a search for the newly created role of Global Director for Diversity and Inclusion, based at Gucci America in New York. The role will be responsible for developing and executing Gucci's diversity and inclusion strategy to ensure the vision is effectively deployed globally.

This role will also focus on recruitment practices, ongoing development of Gucci Education Programs, and aligning the Gucci Changemakers with worldwide volunteering initiative supporting local communities in which the brand operates. Directors for Diversity and Inclusion will also be appointed in each region of the world reporting to the Global Director.

2) MULTI-CULTURAL DESIGN SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
Gucci is launching a Multi-Cultural Design Scholarship Program with fashion schools around the world, this 12-month fast track program will aim to amplify opportunities for

underrepresented groups of talents leading to full time employment to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace on an ongoing basis. The schools of focus will be in the following cities: New York (Harlem), Nairobi, New Dehli, Beijing, Hangzhou, Seoul, Tokyo, Beirut, London and Dubai

Meanwhile, Gucci will immediately hire five new designers from around the world to fill positions within the Rome design office in order to increase the diversity of perspective with immediate effect. Gucci's Creative Director Alessandro Michele will be personally involved in the selection process.

GLOBAL LEARNING
1) DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY AWARENESS PROGRAM
Gucci is creating a new global learning program with the objective to increase awareness of unconscious cultural bias and create a more inclusive workplace. This program will be launched by the beginning of May for all 18,000 global employees and complete by the end of June, with an initial focus on Italy and the United States and will be taught in one full day session with required follow-up by all participants on an annual basis. The company will also be introducing a specific diversity and inclusivity module within its new employee induction program developed in conjunction with regional experts.

2) GLOBAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM
Gucci will launch an internal Global Exchange Program to promote a multicultural and diverse workplace by providing internal mobility for talents to come from the regions to work at the headquarter offices in Italy. Selected participants in the program will have the opportunity to grow their skills and experience, always paired with a mentor to ensure seamless integration.

As a result, corporate office employees will improve their cultural sensitivity and will consequently be able to integrate these insights into the company's ways of working.
This exchange program will be launched with immediate effect. In developing the thinking behind these immediate initiatives, Marco Bizzarri met with Dapper Dan and other community leaders, as well as other experts and industry leaders, in Harlem to receive their
perspective and insights. Gucci will continue to engage with this group as it develops its long-term plan to ensure that diversity and cultural awareness become a sustainable and
integral part of Gucci's culture and operations.

"My entire life has been dedicated to fight to grant myself and any other the possbility to be different and to freely express themselves. I look forward to welcoming new perspectives to my team and together working even harder for Gucci to represent a voice for inclusivity."
Alessandro Michele, Gucci Creative Director

Response 3
Gucci Changemakers
ANNOUNCING GUCCI CHANGEMAKERS
Introducing Gucci Changemakers, a global program that supports industry change and fosters unity through community action, following the company's announcement of a long-term diversity and inclusion action plan. Initially launched internally in 2018, the program includes a multi-year $5 million Changemakers Fund and a $1.5 million scholarship program in North America, alongside a global employee-volunteering framework that will fuel
the company's commitment to creating lasting social impact in our communities and within the fashion industry.

GUCCI CHANGEMAKERS FUND
The Gucci Changemakers Fund will support social change by investing in community-based programs in cities across North-America. This $5 million fund focuses on building strong connections and opportunities within the African-American community and communities of color at-large, while bringing positive change and inspiring solutions for a better future.

GUCCI CHANGEMAKERS COUNCIL
The external Gucci Changemakers Council includes community leader and social change experts to ensure transparency, accountability and long-term impact. The Council will select non-profit partner organizations in cities across North America, starting with Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, San Francisco, Toronto,
and Washington DC.

GUCCI NORTH AMERICA CHANGEMAKERS
COUNCIL MEMBERS
Bethan Hardison, Fashion Activist,
Brittany Packnett, Activist, Educator and Writer, Cleo Wade, Poet and Activist, Dapper Dan, Harlem Couturier, DeRay McKesson, Activist, Eric Avila, Professor of History and Chicano Studies, UCLA
Ivy McGregor, CEO, The IVY Inc., Kimberly Blackwell, Business Leader, CEO, PMM, Michaela Angela Davis, Activist and Writer, Robert Carter, Chair of Gucci Internal D&I Committee

Gucci Project Manager Dapper Dan Atelier, Susan Chokachi, Gucci, President and CEO, North America

Yaseen Eldik, Lawyer and Writer

Yasmeen Hassan, Executive Director of Equality Now, Yvette Noel-Schure, Co-Founder & Exec. VP Schure Media Group, Will.i.am, Entertainer, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist

To be appointed, Gucci Global Director for Diversity and Inclusion

GUCCI CHANGEMAKERS

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Gucci Changemakers focuses on empowering young people through education by giving a voice to the next generation. Scholarships for college students across various disciplines in fashion will be offered to diverse talent from North America. The Changemakers Council will help select eligible students from North American schools to participate in the Gucci Changemakers Scholarship Fund. Over the course of four years, each student shall receive a $20,000 grant toward completing their college education. Information on eligibility and college education process will be announced this Spring. Inquiries can be submitted to: changemakerscholarship@gucci.com

GUCCI CHANGEMAKERS VOLUNTEERING

Announced in 2018, the Gucci Changemakers volunteering program empowers all 18,000 Gucci employees worldwide to dedicate up to 4 paid days off for volunteering activities in their local communities. Representing 8,000 days of volunteering support in North America, the first region in the global rollout, where volunteering opportunities cover four main pillars: equality, support for refugees and the homeless; protection of the environment; and education. A parallel $5 million Changemakers Fund will be established in Asia Pacific.

LONG-TERM INITIATIVES

The Changemakers Program follows four long-term initiatives announced Feb. 14: hiring a Global Director for Diversity and Inclusion led by Hanold Associates and Regional Directors for Diversity and Inclusion; a Global Multi-Cultural Design Scholarship Program in partnership with colleges in 10 cities around the world for Gucci's design office; Diversity and Inclusivity Awareness Program for the company's 18,000 employees; and the Internal Global Exchange Program that has already placed three regional employees in the corporate offices.

"I believe in dialogue, building bridges and taking quick action" said Marco Bizzarri, Gucci President and CEO. "This is why we started working immediately on the long-term

infrastructure at Gucci to address our shortcomings. And now through our Changemakers program, we will invest important resources to unify and strengthen our communities across North America, with a focus on programs that will impact youth and the African-American community," Bizzarri continued, "I believe in the promise of the next generation, and through our scholarship fund we will also create more opportunities for talented young people of diverse backgrounds to gain access to careers in the fashion industry."

"As a partner, I am proud to work with Gucci and other community leaders to help guide programs that will create meaningful impact for the Black community and fashion as a whole," said Harlem couturier Dapper Dan. "It is imperative that we have a seat
at the table to say how we should be represented and reimagined. Through our work together, Gucci is in a position to lead the overall industry toward becoming a better more inclusive one."

Appendix B: Final coding guideline qualitative content analysis (Step 9)

Main category	Sub-Categories I	Sub-Categories II	Definition	Anchor Example
Denial	The company aims at removing any connections between the firestorm and the company.			
	Attack the accuser		The people who accuse the company get attacked in the company response.	"[…] Nestlé Corporation, which chose to censor comments and verbally attack others in response…" (Ki & Nekmat, 2014, p. 141) *e.g. "Oh please...it's like we're censoring everything to allow only positive comments"* (McCarthy, 2010)
	Denial		The company denies that a firestorm exists.	*"We want to reassure you that we'll continue to offer a full range of vehicles in Australia and our customers will experience no difference in the way they purchase or service their [CarCo] vehicles* (Roshan et al., 2016, p. 356)
	Scape-goating		The company accuses people outside of the company to be responsible for the firestorm.	*"Our Instagram account has been hacked."* Dolce & Gabbana
	Ignoring/no action		The company remains silent and does not provide any	In the first days Dolce & Gabbana did not provide any response.

			comments to the accusations.	
	Claiming innocence		The company states that it is not guilty of the accusations made against it.	*"unauthorized posts"* Dolce & Gabbana
Diminish-ment	The company tries to reduce the perceived firestorm responsibility (Coombs, 2018).			
	Excuse		With an excuse companies try to diminish the perceived responsibility of the company by claiming that they had no harmful intentions and/or arguing that they had no control over the events that triggered the firestorm.	*"Because I have been the president during a time of tremendous stress on our economy and made the decisions necessary that will enhance recovery […]The stock market started to decline in March of 2000 […] The recession started upon my arrival."* (Benoit, 2006, p. 297)
	Justification		The company tries to reduce the damage which stakeholders perceive.	"The organization said the damage and injuries from the crisis were very minor." (Coombs, 2006, p. 248)
	Separation		The company dissociates itself from the person within the organization who is responsible for the firestorm.	Wal-Mart employed separation by having Andrew Young state: "*My comments in no way reflect on Wal-Mart's record, progress or role as a diverse employer and community citizen*" (Liu, 2010b, p. 344)
Bolstering	It is tried to connect positive information with the company (Coombs, 2015).			
	Reminder		The company mentions good deeds and work from the past.	*"Announced in 2018, the Gucci Changemakers volunteering program empowers all 18,000 Gucci employees worldwide to dedicate up to 4 paid days off for volunteering activities in their local communities."* Gucci
	Ingratiation		The company praises its stakeholders.	*"From the bottom of our hearts, we would like to express our gratitude to our friends and guest"*

				Dolce & Gabbana
	Victimage		The company presents itself as a victim of the firestorm.	*"What happened today was very unfortunate [...] for us,"* Dolce & Gabbana
	CSR-based response		The company points out its CSR initiatives.	*Announcing #GucciChangemakers, a community fund and scholarship program for North America alongside a global volunteering program.* Gucci
	Endorse-ment		The company mentions third-party supporters of the organization.	*"Marco Bizzarri met with Dapper Dan and other community leaders, as well as other experts and industry leaders, in Harlem to receive their perspective and insights."* Gucci
	Positive counter-position		The company provides statements that create a positive image with the objective to refute the accusations made in the course of the firestorm.	*"We consider diversity to be a fundamental value to be fully upheld, respected, and at the forefront of every decision we make"* Gucci
		Positive emotions	The company emphasizes its positive attitude towards the group of people which were offended by the firestorm cause.	*"We have nothing but respect for China and the people of China."* Dolce & Gabbana
Rebuilding	The company takes positive actions, addressing the accusers' concerns (Coombs, 2018).			
	Compen-sation		The victims of firestorm are offered amends.	*"Scholarships for college students across various disciplines in fashion will be offered to diverse talents"* Gucci
	Sympathy		Concerns for the victims of the firestorm are expressed.	*"...we have thought long and hard with great sadness about everything that has happened and what we have caused in your country"* Dolce & Gabbana

	Corrective actions		The companies engage in activities that correct their mistakes.	
		Correct wrong-doings	The company applies immediate actions to correct the mistakes of the company.	*"We can confirm that the item has been immediately removed from our online store and all physical stores"* Gucci
		Prevent future wrong-doings	The company implements initiatives to prevent similar mistakes in the future.	*"long-term plan to ensure that diversity and cultural awareness become a sustainable and integral part of Gucci's culture and operations."* Gucci
	Transcen-dence		The organization shift the focus away from the firestorm towards a bigger issue.	*"creating lasting social impact in our communities and within the fashion industry"* Gucci
	Rebuild connection		The company tries to rebuild a good relationship with the firestorm participants.	
		Personaliza-tion	The company personalizes its messages by including quotes and personal stories and believes of company representatives.	*"I believe in dialogue, building bridges and taking quick action…"* *Marco Bizzarri, Gucci President and CEO.* Gucci
		Involvement	People who were affected by the company's misconduct and/or accusers are involved in the company's response strategy.	Cooperation with Dapper Dan as a counselor for Gucci
Sincere Rebuilding response	In this category the sub-categories represent characteristics of a sincere *Rebuilding* response.			

Accept responsi-bility		The company shows that it assumes its responsibility by assuring that it accepts full accountability.	*"We accept full accountability for this incident"* Gucci
	Explicit mentioning	The company openly and specifically mentions the firestorm trigger.	*"...the wool balaclava jumper"* Gucci
Acknowled-ging wrong		The company acknowledges the offense and its impact (Lazare, 2005).	*"...this incident, which has exposed shortfalls in our ongoing strategic approach to embedding diversity and inclusion in both our organization and in our activities"* Gucci
Explanation		The company gives an explanation of how the wrong-doing could occur, that does not diminish the seriousness of the offense.	*"...unintentional.."* Gucci
Remorse and sincerity		Expressions of regret are offered to the offended parties.	*"We take this apology very seriously as well as this message"* Dolce & Gabbana
Commitment to avoid future mistakes		The company shows commitment to avoid mistakes from happening again.	*"it will certainly never happen again"* Dolce & Gabbana
Learning		The company affirms that it will use the firestorm as a learning moment.	*"powerful learning moment for the Gucci team and beyond"* Gucci
Insincere Rebuilding response	In this category the sub-categories represent characteristics of an insincere *Rebuilding* response.			
	Evading responsibility		The company attempts to avoid responsibility for the firestorm.	

		Not owning mistakes	The company does not clearly stand up for its mistakes but uses vague, evasive formulations.	*"if we have made mistakes"* Dolce & Gabbana
		Avoid explicit mentioning	It is avoided to explicitly mention the firestorm cause by using vague, paraphrasing formulation.	*"everything that has happened"* Dolce & Gabbana
	Apologizing for something else		The company apologizes for something else than the cause for the firestorm.	Dolce & Gabbana apologizes for the hack and not for the firestorm trigger.
	Downplay of seriousness		The seriousness of the firestorm events is played down.	"agrees that salmonella is in the product but says that salmonella is also in products from others and company is meeting current standards" (Dulaney & Gunn, 2017, p. 27)
Supporting means	The company tries to appear believable and trustworthy by showing its commitment to make up for its mistakes and making sure that the company's response is credible and not just an empty promise.			
	Proving dedication		The company applies means to show its high dedication to improving and to making up for its mistakes.	
		Investing resources	To show its commitment, the company makes some investments.	*"$5 million Changemakers Fund"* Gucci
		Executive involvement	High executives are involved to show that the company takes the issue serious.	*"Gucci's Creative Director Alessandro Michele will be personally involved in the selection process."* Gucci
		Charitable, ambitious goals	The company sets itself ambitious goals of public utility to go beyond just correcting their mistakes.	*"Gucci Changemakers focuses on empowering young people through education by giving a voice to the next generation."* Gucci

		Creating credibility		The company applies means that create credibility, so the accommodative initiatives appear believable.	
		External cooperation	The company builds cooperation with externals, who play an advisory and controlling role.	*"The external Changemakers Council includes community leaders and social change experts to ensure transparency, accountability and long-term impact"* Gucci
		Details	For activities which are initiated as a corrective action, details like locations, timeframes, newly created tasks and administrative details are provided.	*"Information on eligibility and college education process will be announced this Spring. Inquiries can be submitted to: changemakerscholarship @gucci.com "* Gucci
		Follow-ups	The company provides follow-ups on the promises and announcements made.	*"…the Internal Global Exchange Program that has already placed three regional employees in the corporate offices"* Gucci

Appendix C: Final Coding Frames (Step 10)

Dolce & Gabbana

Denial			
	Claiming innocence	**Scapegoating**	**Ignoring firestorm**
Video deleted by company			No statement by D&G for three days
Account hacked	*"unauthorized posts"*	*"Our Instagram account has been hacked."*	
		"So as the account of Stefano Gabbana"	

Bolstering				
	Reminder	**Ingratiation**	**Victimage**	**Endorsement**	**Positive counter-position**

					Positive emotions
First statement	*"...tribute event [...] which tells our history and vision."*	*"From the bottom of our hearts, we would like to express our gratitude to our friends and guest"*	*"What happened today was very unfortunate [...] for us,"*	*"...all the people around the world who loves Dolce & Gabbana"*	*"It was not simply a fashion show but something that we created especially with love and passion for China…"*
			"...but also for all these people who worked day and night to bring this event to life"		
Account hacked			*"Our Instagram account has been hacked."*		*"We have nothing but respect for China and the people of China."*
Apology video					*"We love your culture"*
					"We have always been in love with China"
					"We've visited it and seen many of its cities. "

	Rebuilding			
	Sympathy	**Apologizing**	**Rebuild connection** Personalization	**Corrective Actions** Prevent future wrong-doings
First statement			*"Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana"*	
Account hacked		*"We are very sorry for any distress caused"*		*"Our legal office is urgently investigating"*

Apology video	"...we have thought long and hard with great sadness about everything that has happened and what we have caused in your country"	"we are very sorry"	Apology personally delivered by two designers	"We will respect the Chinese culture in every way possible"
		"we are sorry"	"Our families have always taught us to respect the various cultures in all the world"	
		Both: "*Sorry*"		

Sincere Rebuilding Response Characteristics				
	Responsibility Acceptance	**Commitment to avoid future mistakes**	**Remorse & Sincerity**	**Learning**
Account hacked		"Our legal office is urgently investigating"		
Apology video	"...what we have caused in your country"	"it will certainly never happen again"	"we are very sorry"	"We will never forget this experience"
		"we will work to do things better"	"we want to ask for your forgiveness"	"...we certainly have much to learn"
			"We take this apology very seriously as well as this message"	
			"From the bottom of our hearts we ask for forgiveness"	

Insincere Rebuilding Response Characteristics			
	Apologizing for something else	**Evading responsibility**	
		Not owning mistakes	Avoid mentioning
Account hacked	Apology for hack and not for triggers of firestorm		
Apology video		"*if* we have made mistakes"	"everything that has happened"
		"we are sorry *if* we made mistakes..."	"the way we expressed ourselves"
			"this experience"

Gucci

	Bolstering				
	Reminder	**Ingratiation**	**CSR-initiative**	**Endorsement**	**Positive counter-position**
Apology post					*"We consider diversity to be a fundamental value to be fully upheld, respected, and at the forefront of every decision we make"*
First four initiatives	*"...ongoing strategic approach to embedding diversity and inclusion in both our organisation and in our activities."*	*"I am particularly grateful to Dapper Dan for the role he has played"*	*"Gucci announces the first four initiatives in a long-term plan of actions designed to further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company."*	*"...community leaders [...] offer us their counsel at this time."*	
				"in conjunction with regional experts"	
				"Marco Bizzarri met with Dapper Dan and other community leaders, as well as other experts and industry leaders, in Harlem to receive their perspective and insights."	
				"Gucci will continue to engage with this group"	
Gucci Change-	*Announced in 2018, the*		*Announcing #GucciCha*	*"The external Changemakers*	

makers	*Gucci Changemakers volunteering program empowers all 18,000 Gucci employees worldwide to dedicate up to 4 paid days off for volunteering activities in their local communities*		*ngemakers, a community fund and scholarship program for North America alongside a global volunteering program.*	*Council includes community leaders and social change experts"*	
	"Representing 8,000 days of volunteer support in North America (...) where volunteering opportunities cover four main pillars: equality; support for refugees and the homeless; protection of the environment; and education.			List of Gucci North America Changemakers Council members	
	"the Internal Global Exchange Program that has already placed three regional employees in the corporate offices"			*"Changemakers Council will help select eligible students from North American schools to participate in the Gucci Changemakers Scholarship Fund"*	
				"...led by Hanold Associates"	
				"Harlem couturier Dapper Dan"	

	Rebuilding							
					Rebuild connection		Corrective Actions	
	Sympathy	Transcendence	Compensations	Apologizing	Personalization	Involvement	Correct wrong-doings	Prevent future wrong-doings
Apology post	*"offense caused"*			*"deeply apologizes"*			*"We can confirm that the item has been immediately removed from our online store and all physical stores"*	*"fully committed to increasing diversity throughout our organization"*
First four initiatives		*"...bringing positive change and inspiring solutions for a better future."*	*"launching a Multi-Cultural Design Scholarship Program"*		*"Marco Bizzarri, Gucci President and CEO"*	Cooperation with Dapper Dan as counselor		*"Gucci is working to not only hire talented and diverse candidates but also create positions within the company whose sole responsibility will be to ensure that the company reaches these standards. "*
			"...aim to amplify opportunities for under-represented groups of talents leading to full time employment"		*"My entire life has been dedicated to fight to grant myself and any other the possibility to be different and to freely express themselves."*			*"...newly created role of Global Director for Diversity and Inclusion, based at Gucci"*
					"Alessandro Michele, Gucci Creative Director"			*"...developing and executing Gucci's diversity and inclusion strategy"*
								"create a more diverse and inclusive workplace on an ongoing basis"
								"introducing a specific diversity and inclusivity module within its new employee induction programme"
								"Gucci will launch an internal Global Exchange Program to promote a multicultural and diverse workplace"
								"...corporate office employees will improve their cultural sensitivity and will consequently be able to integrate these insights into the company's way of working"
								"long-term plan to ensure that diversity and cultural awareness become a sustainable and integral part of Gucci's culture and operations."
								"...further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company."
								"increase the diversity of perspective with immediate effect"
								"...increase awareness of unconscious cultural bias"
Gucci Change-makers		*"Gucci Changemakers, a global program that supports industry change and fosters unity through community action,..."*	*"the program includes a multi-year $5 million Changemakers Fund and a $1.5 million scholarship program"*		*"I believe in dialogue, building bridges and taking quick action"*	Including a statement of Dapper Dan		*"...focuses on building strong connections and opportunities within the African-American community and communities of color at-large"*

	"support social change"	"... investing in community-based programs in cities across North-America."		"Marco Bizzarri, Gucci President and CEO."	"It is imperative that we have a seat at the table to say how we should be represented and reimagined"		"...is why we started working immediately on the long-term infrastructure at Gucci"
	"creating lasting social impact in our communities and within the fashion industry"	"Scholar-ships for college students across various disciplines in fashion will be offered to diverse talents"		"I believe in the promise of the next generation"			
	"empowering young people through education"	"each student shall receive a $20,000 grant towards completing their college education"		"As a partner, I am proud to work with Gucci and other community leaders (...), said Harlem couturier Dapper Dan"			
	"create more opportunities for talented young people with diverse backgrounds to gain access to careers in the fashion industry"	"invest important resources"					
	"guide programs that will create meaningful impact for the Black community and fashion as a whole"	"scholarship funds"					
		"impact youth and the African-American community"					

Sincere Rebuilding Response Characteristics							
	Responsibility Acceptance		Acknowledging wrong	Commitment to avoid future mistakes	Remorse & Sincerity	Learning	Explanation
	Explicit mentioning	Accept Accountability					
Apology post	"...the wool balaclava jumper"		"offense caused"		"deeply apologizes"	"powerful learning moment for the Gucci team and beyond"	
First four initiatives	"balaclava jumper incident"	"We accept full accountability for this incident"	"...this incident, which has exposed shortfalls in our ongoing strategic approach to embedding diversity and inclusion in both our organization and in our activities"	"...further embed cultural diversity and awareness in the company."			"unintentional"
				"increase the diversity of perspective with immediate effect"			
				"...increase awareness of unconscious cultural bias"			

	Proving dedication		
	Resource investment	**Executive involvement**	**Charitable, ambitious goals**
First four initiatives		"Gucci's Creative Director Alessandro Michele will be personally involved in the selection process."	"ensure the vision is effectively deployed globally"

		"Marco Bizzarri met with Dapper Dan and other community leaders, as well as other experts and industry leaders, in Harlem to receive their perspective and insights"	*"...while bringing positive change and inspiring solutions for a better future."*
		"I look forward to welcoming new perspectives to my team and together working even harder.."	*"...for Gucci to represent a voice for inclusivity"*
Gucci Change-makers	*"the program includes a multi-year $5 million Changemakers Fund and a $1.5 million scholarship program in North America"*	Involvement of Bizzarri	*"Gucci Changemakers focuses on empowering young people through education by giving a voice to the next generation."*
	"This $5 million fund..."		*"Gucci Changemakers, a global program that supports industry change and fosters unity through community action,..."*
	"A parallel $5 million Changemakers Fund will be established in Asia Pacific"		*"creating lasting social impact in our communities and within the fashion industry"*
	"each student shall receive a $20,000 grant"		*"unify and strengthen our communities across North America, with a focus on programs"*
			"Through our work together, Gucci is in a position to lead the overall industry toward becoming a better more inclusive one."

	Creating credibility		
	External cooperations	**Follow-ups**	**Details**
First four initiatives	*"...community leaders [...] offer us their counsel at this time."*		Locations
	"in conjunction with regional experts"		Tasks of newly created positions
	"Gucci will continue to engage with this group"		Timeframes
			Administrative details

Gucci Change-makers	*"The external Changemakers Council includes community leaders and social change experts to ensure transparency, accountability and long-term impact"*	*"The Changemakers Program follows four long-term initiatives announced Feb. 14: hiring a Global Director for Diversity and Inclusion led by Hanold Associates and Regional Directors for Diversity and Inclusion; a Global Multi-Cultural Design Scholarship Program in partnership with colleges in 10 cities around the world for Gucci's design office; Diversity and Inclusivity Awareness Program for the company's 18,000 employees; and the Internal Global Exchange Program that has already placed three regional employees in the corporate offices"*	Locations
		"following the company's announcement of a long-term diversity and inclusions action plan"	List of council members
		"the Internal Global Exchange Program that has already placed three regional employees in the corporate offices"	Administrative details

	Details[5]				
	Locations	**Tasks**	**Time-frames**	**Administrative details**	**List council member**
First four initiatives	*"Gucci America in New York"*	*"This role will also focus on recruitment practices, ongoing development of Gucci Education Programs, and aligning the Gucci Changemakers with worldwide volunteering initiative supporting*	"beginning of May"	*"18,000 employees"*	

[5] We collected the materials summarized as "Details" in the "Creating Credibility" category in an extra table for better clarity.

	local communities in which the brand operates. Directors for Diversity and Inclusion will also be appointed in each region of the world reporting to the Global Director"			
	"Globally"		*"end of June"*	*"will be taught in one full day session with required follow-up by all participants on an annual basis."*
	"each region of the world"		*"immediate effect"*	*"Selected participants in the program will have the opportunity to grow their skills and experience, always paired with a mentor to ensure seamless integration."*
	"The schools of focus will be in the following cities: New York (Harlem), Nairobi, New Dehli, Beijing, Hangzhou, Seoul, Tokyo, Beirut, London and Dubai"		*"initially launched internally in 2018"*	*"...by providing internal mobility for talents to come from the regions to work at the headquarter offices in Italy."*
	"Italy"			
	United States			

| Gucci Change-makers | *"The schools of focus will be in the following cities: New York (Harlem), Nairobi, New Dehli, Beijing, Hangzhou, Seoul, Tokyo, Beirut, London and Dubai"* | | | *"Information on eligibility and college education process will be announced this Spring. Inquiries can be submitted to: changemaker scholarship@ gucci.com"* | *Bethan Hardison, Fashion Activist, Brittany Packnett, Activist, Educator and Writer, Cleo Wade, Poet and Activist, Dapper Dan, Harlem Couturier, DeRay McKesson, Activist, Eric Avila, Professor of History and Chicano Studies, UCLA Ivy McGregor, CEO, The IVY Inc., Kimberly Blackwell, Business Leader, CEO, PMM, Michaela Angela Davis, Activist and Writer, Robert Carter, Chair of Gucci Internal D&I Committee Gucci Project Manager Dapper Dan Atelier, Susan Chokachi, Gucci, President and CEO, North America Yaseen Eldik, Lawyer and Writer Yasmeen Hassan,* |

					Executive Director of Equality Now, Yvette Noel-Schure, Co-Founder & Exec. VP Schure Media Group, Will.i.am, Entertainer, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist

Appendix D: Sentiment analysis process and building of a customized model

1. Test-run

In order to determine the abilities of MeaningCloud to classify the sentiment of the comments we conducted a test-run. Through this test-run we got an understanding, which comments can be classified by the software and which cannot or are classified wrongly.

2. Building a customized sentiment Model

MeaningCloud allows the customization of a sentiment analysis carried out on text through customized sentiment models. Here, words or groups of words, called multiwords, can be defined with the according positive or negative sentiment (MeaningCloud, 2019e). In order to improve the classification, for each of the two cases we created a customized sentiment model, based on the findings of our test-run.

2.1. Emojis

As already mentioned MeaningCloud recognizes the sentiment of most of the common emojis, nevertheless, is does not know the "pile of poop" emoji. This emoji is important for the Dolce & Gabbana case, because it was used very frequently to express negative emotions towards Dolce & Gabbana. The expected reason for the excessive usage of this emoji is, that Gabbana called China a country of shit, using this exact emoji and people probably wanted to get back at him, by replying with this emoji. A high number of the users' comments only consisted of the poop emoji. Consequently, it is very relevant for the final outcome of the analysis, that this emoji is classified correctly. Thus, we chose to replace all of the poop emojis with the respective CLDR Short Name, namely "pile of poop" (Unicode, 2019). This term is recognized as negative by the tool.

Another emoji that the tool could not classify is the black heart. This emoji is relevant for the Gucci case, as many people sent black hearts as a positive response for Gucci's initiatives. We expect that the color black was chosen so often, because Gucci offended black people

with their sweater and consequently sending a black heart, might be an indicator of forgiveness. The black hearts were replaced with the CLDR Short Name "black heart" (Unicode, 2019) and this multiword was then classified as positive in the customized model for Gucci.

2.2 Specific hashtags, terms and play on words

Especially in the case of Dolce & Gabbana specific hashtags and play on words of the company's initials developed and were posted by many people in order to voice their dissatisfaction and anger with the company. These are very case specific and could not be classified by MeaningCloud. When these unclassified statements or hashtags appeared frequently we expected them to be important for the overall outcome of the analysis and added them to the model. Hashtags that were posted many times in the case of Dolce & Gabbana were for example #ApologyNotAccepted, #boycottdolcegabbana and #Dead&Gone. In the case of Gucci, the hashtags were for instance #boycottgucci and #cancelled.

2.3 Context specific words and multiwords

In both cases there were specific words which generally are not connected to any concrete emotion or sentiment and thus were classified as neutral or without any sentiment by MeaningCloud. But due to the firestorm context and background, these words actually have a certain sentiment. In the case of Dolce & Gabbana for example many people posted the term "Apologize!" underneath the first post of the company, showing that they are not happy with the response and want the company to apologize properly. In the case of Gucci examples include "too late" (negative) and "Where do I apply" (positive). Again, we added the specific words or phrases to the model, when they appeared frequently and when we were certain about their intended meaning.

2.4 Words with a negative sentiment, unknown to the tool

In some cases, words with a negative connotation were not identified as such by MeaningCloud for instance due to slang. We added these terms to the model when they appeared to be relevant. In the case of Dolce & Gabbana this applies for example for the terms "garbage", "loser", "f**k" or "racism". The latter is also relevant in the case of Gucci. Additionally, the words "black face" and "blackface" were added with a negative sentiment to the model.

The complete list of entries from the customized models can be found in the following tables.

Gucci

	POLARITY	N
	POLARITY	N
too_late	POLARITY	N
black_face	POLARITY	N
blackface	POLARITY	N
#boycottgucci	POLARITY	N
black_heart	POLARITY	P
cancelled	POLARITY	N
hire_me	POLARITY	P
racism	POLARITY	N
where_do_I_apply	POLARITY	P

Dolce & Gabbana

	POLARITY	N
#ApologyNotAccepted	POLARITY	N
#boycottdolcegabbana	POLARITY	N
#Not_me	POLARITY	N
not_me	POLARITY	N
Dead&Gone	POLARITY	N
bye	POLARITY	N
Byebye	POLARITY	N
cancelled	POLARITY	N
garbage	POLARITY	N
it's_too_late	POLARITY	N
apologize	POLARITY	N
not_you	POLARITY	N
racism	POLARITY	N
cheap	POLARITY	N
Dog&Garbage	POLARITY	N
hacked	POLARITY	N
loser	POLARITY	N
not_accepted	POLARITY	N
shame_on_you	POLARITY	N
#Dead&Gone	POLARITY	N
delete	POLARITY	N
rip	POLARITY	N

dog	POLARITY	N
fxxk	POLARITY	N
fk	POLARITY	N
go_out	POLARITY	N
goodbye	POLARITY	N
R.I.P	POLARITY	N
shame_on_u	POLARITY	N
where_is_the_apology	POLARITY	N
where_is_your_apology	POLARITY	N
are_you_kidding_me	POLARITY	N
get_out	POLARITY	N
fake_news	POLARITY	N
get_out_of_China	POLARITY	N
get_out_of_our_country	POLARITY	N
get_out_of_my_country	POLARITY	N
go_away	POLARITY	N
don't_believe	POLARITY	N
hack	POLARITY	N
nice_try	POLARITY	N
thank_u_next	POLARITY	N
F**k	POLARITY	N

Appendix E: Identified response strategies, based on SCCT and inductive coding

Strategies marked grey were newly identified during the content analysis through inductive coding.

Firestorm response cluster	Firestorm response strategy	Firestorm response sub-strategy	Definition	Applied by
Denial				
	Scapegoating		The company blames people outside of the company to be responsible for the firestorm.	Dolce & Gabbana
	Claiming innocence		The company claims that it is not guilty of the accusations made against it.	Dolce & Gabbana
	Ignoring		The company remains silent and does not provide any comments to the accusations.	Dolce& Gabbana
Bolstering				
	Reminder		The company reminds users of their good deeds and work from the past.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana

	Ingratiation		The company praises its stakeholders.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Victimage		The company presents itself as a victim of the firestorm.	Dolce& Gabbana
	CSR initiatives		The company points out its CSR initiatives.	Gucci
	Endorsement		The company mentions third-party supporters of the organization.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Positive counter-position		The company provides statements that create a positive image with the objective to refute the accusations made in the course of the firestorm.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
		Positive emotions	The company emphasizes its positive attitude towards the group of people which were offended by the firestorm cause.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
Rebuilding				
	Apologizing		The company apologizes for their actions.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Compensation		The victims of the firestorm are offered amends.	Gucci
	Sympathy		Concerns for the victims of the firestorm are expressed.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Corrective actions		The companies engage in activities that correct their mistakes. Corrective actions can be sub-divided into two kinds of corrective actions	
		Correct wrong-doings	The company applies immediate actions to correct the mistakes of the company.	Gucci
		Prevent future wrong-doings	The company implements initiatives to prevent similar mistakes in the future.	Dolce & Gabbana
	Transcendence		The organization shift the focus away from the firestorm towards bigger issues.	Gucci
	Rebuild connection		The company tries to rebuild a good relationship with the firestorm accusers.	
		Personalization	The company personalizes its messages by including quotes and personal stories and believes of company representatives.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
		Involvement	People who were affected by the company's misconduct and/or accusers are involved.	Gucci

Appendix F: Indicators of sincere and insincere *Rebuilding* responses

Characteristics marked grey were newly identified during the content analysis through inductive coding.

Sincere/ Insincere	Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Definition	Applied by
Sincere Rebuilding response	Accepting responsibility		The company clearly and openly accepts responsibility for its actions and states that it can be held accountable for the firestorm.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
		Mentioning firestorm	The company openly and specifically mentions the firestorm trigger.	Gucci
	Acknowledging wrong		The company accepts that they did something wrong and made a mistake.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Explanation		The company gives an explanation how the mistake could occur.	Gucci
	Remorse and Sincerity		The company uses formulations which convey contrition.	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Commitment to avoid future mistakes		The company express commitment to not make the same mistakes again	Gucci Dolce & Gabbana
	Learning		The company affirms that it will use the firestorm as a learning moment.	Gucci Dolce& Gabbana
Insincere Rebuilding response	Evading responsibility		The company avoids taking responsibility for their mistakes.	
		Not owning mistakes	The company does not clearly stand up for its mistakes but uses evasive formulations.	Dolce & Gabbana
		Avoid mentioning	It is avoided to explicitly mention the firestorm cause by using vague, paraphrasing formulation.	Dolce & Gabbana
	Apologizing for something else		The company apologizes for something that is not the main reason for the firestorm.	Dolce & Gabbana

Appendix G: Means to support an accommodative response applied by Gucci

	Means	Sub-Means	Definition
Means supporting accommodative response strategies	The company tries to appear believable and trustworthy by showing its commitment to make up for its mistakes and making sure that the company's response is credible and not just an empty promise.		
	Proving dedication		The company applies means to show its high dedication to improving and to making up for its mistakes.
		Resource investment	To show its commitment, the company makes some investments.

		Executive involvement	High executives are involved to show that the company takes the issue serious.
		Charitable goals	The company sets itself ambitious goals of public utility to go beyond just correcting their mistakes.
	Creating credibility		The company applies means that create credibility, so the accommodative initiatives appear believable.
		External Cooperation	The company builds cooperation with externals, who play an advisory and controlling role.
		Details	For activities which are initiated as a corrective action, details like locations, timeframes, newly created tasks and administrative details are provided.
		Follow-ups	The company provides follow-ups on the promises and announcements made.

Appendix H: Detailed results of Sentiment analysis per channel

Dolce & Gabbana

Response 1 (Twitter)

Comments Total: 2,286

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	1,502	
Comments classified by software	1,296	
Positive	232	17.90%
Negative	967	74.61%
Neutral	97	7.48%

Response 1 (Instagram)
Comments Total: 89,083

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	22,012	
Comments classified by software	19,192	
Positive	3,812	19.86%
Negative	13,719	71.48%
Neutral	1,661	8.65%

Response 2 (Instagram)
Comments Total: 73,735

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	20,400	
Comments classified by software	17,762	
Positive	3,929	22.12%
Negative	12,712	71.57%

Neutral	1,121	6.31%

Response 3 English Subtitles (Twitter)
Comments Total: 1,733

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	1,102	
Comments classified by software	947	
Positive	215	22.70%
Negative	639	67.47%
Neutral	93	9.82%

Response 3 Chinese Subtitles (Twitter)
Comments Total: 260

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	126	
Comments classified by software	113	
Positive	17	15.04%
Negative	85	75.22%
Neutral	11	9.73%

Response 3 (Instagram)
Comments Total: 42,014

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	11,436	
Comments classified by software	9,166	
Positive	2,408	26.27%
Negative	5,915	64.53%
Neutral	843	9.20%

Response 3 Chinese Subtitles (YouTube)
Comments Total: 374

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	224	
Comments classified by software	192	
Positive	37	19.27%
Negative	134	69.79%
Neutral	21	10.94%

Response 3 English Subtitles (YouTube)
Comments Total: 1,707

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	1,325	
Comments classified by software	1,166	
Positive	244	20.93%
Negative	779	66.81%
Neutral	143	12.26%

Gucci

Response 1 (Twitter)

Comments Total: 1,054

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	972	
Comments classified by software	812	
Positive	245	30.17%
Negative	452	55.67%
Neutral	115	14.16%

Response 2 (Instagram)

Comments Total: 2,948

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	2,913	
Comments classified by software	2,325	
Positive	1,953	84.00%
Negative	279	12.00%
Neutral	93	4.00%

Response 2 (Twitter)

Comments Total: 89

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	84	
Comments classified by software	67	
Positive	38	56.72%
Negative	23	34.33%
Neutral	6	8.96%

Response 3 (Instagram)

Comments Total: 480

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	473	
Comments classified by software	362	
Positive	311	85.91%
Negative	45	12.43%
Neutral	6	1.66%

Response 3 (Twitter)

Comments Total: 11

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments classified by software	8	
Positive	8	100%

Response 3 (Facebook)
Comments Total: 25

	Total	% of classified comments
Comments after cleaning	12	
Comments classified by software	5	
Positive	2	40%
Negative	1	20%
Neutral	2	40%