



Preparing for the inevitable: Strategically navigating negative publicity in the contemporary business landscape



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Abstract In the contemporary business landscape, the effective management of negative publicity stands as a critical challenge for organizations seeking sustained success. This prompts a crucial inquiry: How should firms handle different instances of negative publicity? This article presents a strategic and comprehensive review of existing approaches to navigating the complexities of negative publicity. While not rooted in an empirical study, this work contributes to the literature through a systematic literature review encompassing 63 peer-reviewed journal publications spanning from 2008 to 2022. We find that effective management of negative publicity depends on a dual-focused strategy. On the one hand, firms must deploy proactive measures to prevent the effects of a negative event; on the other hand, they need to enact strategies to promptly respond to a negative event once it transpires. Therefore, we propose a framework capturing the pre- and post-negative-publicity strategies that firms can adopt in situation-specific contexts. Within this framework, we establish connections between these strategies and two types of negative publicity (value-based and performance-based), along with the sources of negative publicity situations, identifying customers, employees, and the company itself as critical triggers.

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1. Negative publicity: A threat to modern-day brands

In today's business landscape, characterized by the integration of multiple digital tools such as social

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media channels, email communication, and video-conferencing, the velocity of communication and information dissemination has reached unprecedented levels. Against this backdrop, the repercussions of negative events for brands are truly unparalleled, driven by their increased visibility. Brands' heightened visibility significantly affects their ability to foster meaningful engagement with consumers, thereby underscoring the critical nexus between digital exposure and brand resonance (Kohli et al., 2015). Especially noteworthy is the influence wielded by media exposure when negative events are thrust into the public eye, giving rise to negative publicity. This phenomenon triggers a potential erosion of confidence in an organization's ability to provide functional benefits (Pullig et al., 2006). Consider the example of Cristiano Ronaldo, who removed the Coca-Cola bottles during a press conference at Euro 2020, encouraging people to drink water (Larkin, 2021). Likewise, H&M faced backlash for an online advertisement with racially insensitive undertones, featuring a Black child in a sweatshirt with the text "coolest monkey in the jungle" (Bever, 2018). More recently, Adidas found itself in the eye of the storm owing to its association with Kanye West, whose controversial remarks, marked by anti-Semitism and sexual impropriety, coupled with erratic behavior, triggered a tidal wave of backlash (Reuters, 2022).

Negative publicity is defined as the publication of a problematic incident through the media, which can have a detrimental effect on the reputation of the individuals or brands involved (Dean, 2004; Weinberger et al., 1981). Negative news tends to spread with exceptional speed (Dean, 2004), as it commands greater attention and elicits more pronounced behavioral responses than positive news. When consumers perceive a brand as culpable—even in cases where the negative publicity is not extremely severe—their brand perceptions and purchase intentions undergo a noticeable decline (Yu et al., 2018).

Researchers have classified negative publicity into two main types: performance-based and value-based (Pullig et al., 2006). Value-based negative publicity is concerned with social or ethical issues such as the disclosure of sexual harassment or racial discrimination within an organization, which erode a brand's ability to provide symbolic benefits. In contrast, performance-based negative publicity converges on specific brand features that cast doubt on the brand's ability to provide functional advantages, such as a product damage crisis. In the current business environment, allegations of unacceptable brand conduct reverberate ceaselessly across media, contributing to the rising prevalence of negative

publicity. At the heart of this narrative lies a crucial dichotomy: Negative publicity can stem either from warranted criticism or from unfounded, malicious accusations. Warranted criticism can sometimes provide opportunities for improvement (Warrell, 2018). Conversely, unfounded allegations or fake news can cause both financial and emotional distress among customers while concurrently harming a company's reputation, trust, and sales (Baccarella et al., 2018).

Indeed, the enduring effects of negative publicity manifest over time (De Paola & Scoppa, 2013). Consumers tend to distance themselves from brands with negative publicity to avoid involvement in future negative episodes and to safeguard their social status (Lee et al., 2009). This negative sentiment can harm the company's image, reputation, and market share, ultimately impacting its revenue (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). Studies indicate that a year after negative news reports about product quality, customers continue to demonstrate lower demand for the involved firms' products, compelling firms to lower their pricing (De Paola & Scoppa, 2013). For instance, in 2017, PepsiCo faced outrage for an ad starring Kendall Jenner that was accused of trivializing the Black Lives Matter movement, resulting in a notable decline in the company's brand perception (Victor, 2017). In response, PepsiCo changed promotional pricing strategies, giving limited-time discounts and bundling offers to attract consumers and to divert attention away from the controversy. Therefore, the repercussions of negative publicity may include decreased sales, damage to reputation and legitimacy (Ouyang et al., 2020), decreased future idiosyncratic stock returns (Luo, 2007), and a decline in a company's perceived expertise and attractiveness (Renkema & Hoeken, 1998). Negative publicity may also trigger negative spillover effects (Pullig et al., 2006), altering people's perceptions beyond explicitly mentioned issues (Hansen & Onozaka, 2011). This can take the form of within-species or within-country-of-origin effects, spreading negative perceptions within the same product category or country, respectively (Hansen & Onozaka, 2011).

While prior studies have primarily explored recovery strategies concentrating on mitigating damage after negative publicity unfolds (Cao et al., 2014; Roozen & Raedts, 2020; Yu et al., 2018), less attention has been paid to developing strategies for preventing negative publicity. Moreover, while recognizing that a one-size-fits-all marketing strategy is unlikely to be the most effective approach (Yu et al., 2019), previous investigations have often overlooked the nuanced dimensions of negative publicity itself,

leading to a dearth of strategies meticulously tailored to address its diverse facets (Yu et al., 2019). This issue merits consideration from a theoretical perspective in order to explain how distinct types of misconduct can trigger scandals necessitating precisely tailored responses (Okhmatovskiy & Shin, 2019).

Strategies may evolve depending on the nature of negative publicity—performance-based versus value-based (Pullig et al., 2006)—and on who is implicated in damaging corporate reputation: the customer, the employee, or the corporation itself (Dean, 2004). Firms should strive for an integrated approach to strategy development that considers all these aspects. Investigating these nuances is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of effective strategies for managing negative publicity across diverse scenarios and stakeholders.

In this article, we systematically review the literature on negative publicity with the aim of understanding how firms should handle different instances of negative publicity. We develop an integrative framework that extends the current understanding of negative publicity in important ways. It distinguishes between pre- and post-negative-publicity strategies and specifies how these strategies depend on the nature of the event (value-based versus performance-based). We subsequently consider the extent to which the determinants of negative publicity (customers, employees, and the company) are particularly relevant in influencing pre- and post-negative publicity strategies. Our study provides useful insights for managers, as it enables them to pursue more precise and customized responses based on the nature of each incident, thereby enhancing strategic planning by allowing firms to allocate resources proactively and to maintain consistency across actions.

2. Methodology and approach

We conducted a systematic literature review following Tranfield et al.'s (2003) approach, synthesizing research on negative publicity from 2,067 articles retrieved from the EBSCO, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. Using search terms such as “negative publicity” and “unfavorable publicity”—and variations thereof, such as “scandals”—we narrowed down the sample to 63 articles published between 2008 and 2022. We then evaluated the titles and abstracts, reviewed the complete texts, and tracked citations manually.

In developing our framework, we systematically categorized articles into two overarching themes:

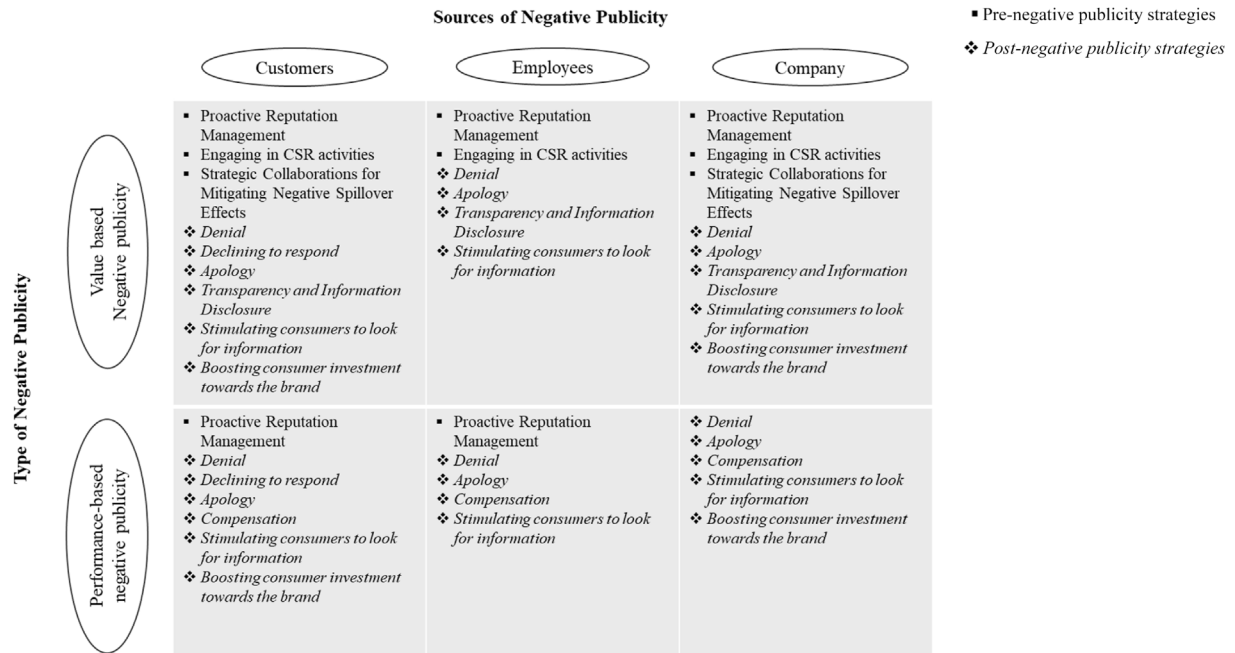
consequences and handling strategies for negative publicity. This approach provided a thorough overview of the existing literature on negative publicity, making data extraction easier. We then proceeded with content analysis using the full text of the 63 key articles as the source of data, identifying both sources of negative publicity (the customer, the employees, and the company itself) and the key strategies to mitigate the risks associated with negative publicity. We categorized these strategies as follows: pre-negative-publicity strategies and post-negative-publicity strategies. Within the thematic categories that emerged from the analysis, we establish connections between the above strategies, sources of negative publicity, and two types of negative publicity (value-based and performance-based). This process culminated in a comprehensive framework, providing a coherent explanation for the identified constructs and their relationships. This comprehensive framework (Figure 1) guides the development of our arguments throughout the remainder of this article.

3. Genesis of negative publicity: What are the sources?

According to scholars, negative publicity comes from three main sources: the customers, the employees, and the company's practices (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Berthon et al., 2012; Miles & Mangold, 2014).

When a customer has a negative experience with a product or service, they have the potential to set off a snowball effect among other customers by spreading rumors or complaints (Berthon et al., 2012; Monga & John, 2008). When customers are unhappy about an incident, they believe that discussing it is morally justified and even important. Perhaps they consider themselves as righteous warriors with the responsibility to punish “evil” companies for the benefit of the general good (Grégoire et al., 2019). For example, in the summer of 2019, a customer flying with EasyJet from England to Switzerland shared on Twitter a picture of an elderly woman sitting on a backless seat (Adams, 2019). Since the customer tagged EasyJet in the tweet, the airline was promptly made aware of the situation unfolding on one of its planes. But what started as an isolated incident swiftly escalated as numerous individuals, including journalists, engaged with the tweet, amplifying the negative publicity directed at the company. Researchers suggest that customers deeply committed to a brand may be reluctant to publicly voice their dissatisfaction, fearing potential offense to the company (Bolkan et al., 2012). On the other hand, customers with lower commitment

Figure 1. Categorization of pre- and post-negative-publicity strategies, linking them with sources and types of negative publicity



levels toward an organization can emerge as significant sources of negative publicity.

Another important source of negative publicity is represented by employees. A negative remark from an employee regarding a company’s workplace culture has the potential to significantly damage its reputation, undermining years of extensive efforts and investments (Miles & Mangold, 2014). For example, Global Labour Justice (2018) reported on the terrible conditions of female garment workers at major brands like H&M and Gap in countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Testimonies provided by these workers revealed alarming mistreatment stemming from intense pressures and unrealistic targets set by these companies, intensifying the negative publicity surrounding those (Hales, 2018). These testimonials, whether posted to personal accounts or on the organization’s own platforms, such as blogs or social networking pages, can rapidly generate negative publicity, tarnishing the company’s reputation and impeding its ability to attract critical talent.

In addition, we argue that the seniority of an employee plays a crucial role in the context of negative publicity. When an employee holds a senior position to the extent of being the face of the company, they wield a more substantial influence on public perception. Their behavior and remarks

can profoundly affect the company. A notable example is a scandal involving a senior manager who discouraged workers from joining a union. The video was posted on YouTube. Subsequently, on Facebook pages, both supporters and opponents engaged in intense discussions regarding the motives and repercussions of publicly exposing their manager and tarnishing the company’s reputation (Lazar, 2022).

The third source, the company itself, focuses on corporate actions that have the potential to undermine the reputation and brand image of the firm (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). For example, ineffective marketing strategies, like brand anthropomorphism gone wrong (Puzakova et al., 2013), can lead to negative publicity. Furthermore, when customers form a certain perception of a business, any actions that deviate from this image can result in negative publicity about the company. This claim is exemplified by the case of the Volkswagen emissions controversy, which broke out in September 2015 after the company was accused of cheating on pollution emissions tests in the United States. Volkswagen had used a hybrid positioning strategy, emphasizing elements such as price and sportiness while also presenting their diesel vehicles as environmentally friendly. When loyal Volkswagen customers who had associated the automaker with eco-

friendly vehicles later discovered that Volkswagen had broken its promises and betrayed their trust, their attitude turned negative. This situation, perceived as a betrayal, not only explains the negative impact on customer attitudes but also the shift from identification to disidentification with the brand (Einwiller et al., 2019).

Businesses also risk negative publicity when they select an inappropriate spokesperson. Companies often expect that the favorable feelings harbored by their target audience toward the chosen spokesperson—typically a celebrity—will seamlessly transfer to the endorsed brand, thereby enhancing the overall corporate image (Thwaites et al., 2012). When negative information emerges about a spokesperson, it has the potential to hurt customer intentions to buy, the overall customer attitudes toward the organization (Roozen & Raedts, 2017), and the sponsor's brand image (Wang & Kim, 2020). A noteworthy example of this phenomenon unfolded in late 2022 when the Italian influencer Chiara Ferragni promoted a special Pandoro Pink Christmas cake as a charity initiative. A subsequent inquiry uncovered fraudulent marketing and philanthropic claims. The single charitable donation came from the cake maker Balocco, while Ferragni and her companies profited significantly from the cakes' sales (Giuffrida, 2024). Italy's antitrust authority penalized Ferragni's companies and Balocco for misleading consumers in claiming that buying the cake would benefit a children's hospital. This controversy affected Ferragni's companies as well as Balocco, exemplifying how such incidents can have far-reaching consequences for all parties involved.

4. Fighting negative publicity: What are the strategies?

Effectively managing negative publicity is paramount for organizations, given its demonstrated impact on stakeholders' perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise within the firm (Decker, 2012). Restoring a trustworthy image and securing consumer forgiveness become critical elements in regaining confidence following a breach of trust accompanied by negative publicity. People are more willing to forgive wrongdoers and to trust them again if the offending companies are able to showcase honesty, competence, and kindness throughout the crisis-management process (Xie & Peng, 2009).

Researchers have proposed that successful service recovery serves as a great way for the company to generate positive publicity (Grégoire et al., 2015). Therefore, in the face of negative publicity, such as service failures, a company's adept

response and crisis management present an opportunity to develop trust and to enhance the overall corporate image. Responding promptly is equally vital, signaling to consumers the organization's awareness and concern regarding the crisis. Proactive monitoring of the business environment reinforces this approach, enabling companies to identify potential issues before they escalate into major headlines.

Conversely, delayed responses may inadvertently convey incompetence, irresponsibility, and insensitivity (Rhee & Yang, 2014). Timely responses have demonstrated positive effects on abnormal stock returns, particularly within the 3-day window following the occurrence of the event (Hock & Raithel, 2020). Furthermore, companies are advised to proactively inform the public about issues, seizing control of the narrative before others do, as individuals tend to pay more attention to issues they are already invested in. By doing so, companies can ensure that those concerned with the issues will be less swayed by negative publicity that may arise later (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015).

In view of the substantial impact that negative publicity can have, it becomes imperative for organizations to adopt effective strategies in managing and mitigating the fallout from such situations. Our systematic literature review highlighted two key strategies as valuable tools in navigating these challenges: pre-negative-publicity strategies, designed to prevent the effects of a negative event, and post-negative-publicity strategies, aimed at responding to a negative event once it transpires.

In the subsequent sections, we delineate, exemplify, and elaborate on each strategy, establishing connections with sources of negative publicity (customers, employees, corporate itself). We also explore the applicability of these strategies in addressing two distinct types of negative publicity: value-based negative publicity and performance-based negative publicity. We have developed a comprehensive framework (Figure 1) that logically organizes these strategies based on their discussed relevance.

5. Pre-negative-publicity strategies

Pre-negative-publicity strategies emerge as proactive actions that are implemented by firms with a dual purpose: both to prevent the onset of negative publicity and to reduce its potential impact in case it arises. These strategies look beyond the mere containment of negative

publicity's repercussions, extending their reach to safeguard a brand's long-term reputation. Companies can also cultivate a culture of accountability and continual development by taking actions that prevent unfavorable situations. Our systematic literature review has identified three key actions as pivotal pre-negative-publicity strategies: (1) proactive reputation management, (2) engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, and (3) strategic collaborations for mitigating negative spillover effects.

5.1. Proactive reputation management

The evaluation of a company's standing—whether positive or negative—is encapsulated in its corporate reputation (Laufer & Coombs, 2006). Researchers argue that reputation is shaped by a company's past actions and future prospects, which serve as a critical determinant of a firm's appeal to the wider audience (Chun, 2005). Proactive measures constitute the best defense for a company's reputation.

Drawing insights from the academic literature, two important approaches for proactive reputation management emerge: (1) fostering positive prior relationships with customers, and (2) building a favorable pre-negative-publicity reputation. Consistent implementation of these actions is posited as instrumental in offering a competitive edge, attracting stakeholder support, and creating avenues for sustained growth and expansion (Johnson, 2023).

Negative publicity can harm both consumers' and prospective employees' perceptions, as well as media portrayals. By contrast, a robust reputation can engage consumers, generate investor interest, garner favorable media coverage, and attract talent toward a company (Davies et al., 2003). It also serves as a formidable defense against negative publicity. To address the uncertainty regarding who is responsible for the crisis, consumers may rely on their prior beliefs and information-processing biases (Laufer, 2012).

Reputation can be built by fostering positive relationships in the form of positive brand associations. Firms should focus on building probrand sentiments by making consumers feel invested in their company and brand while guaranteeing that there are no superior alternatives to their product or service (Bolkan et al., 2012). A firm must also provide the perception of truly caring about its customers' interests, as well as make them believe in its competence, integrity, and compassion (Cao

et al., 2014), which is believed to promote brand attachment among customers. The resultant probrand sentiments can motivate consumers to defend the brand against negative comments and complaints from other consumers, so much so that this duty is often best left in probrand consumers' hands (Hassan & Ariño, 2016).

A favorable pre-negative-publicity reputation emerges as a potent strategy to mitigate the impact of negative publicity in both value-based and performance-based scenarios. In the former, this strategy can cast organizations in a positive light by elevating their brand image. In the latter, it serves to fortify the brand's image, reassuring loyal customers that isolated incidents do not affect the company's overall quality and motivating them to afford the company another opportunity. Consider the case of Toyota during the 2009–2010 recall crisis, when a solid precrisis reputation for quality and reliability allowed the company to mitigate the impact of negative publicity and maintain its brand image (Shaikh, 2023). Another real-world instance, like Johnson & Johnson's handling of the 1982 Tylenol poisoning crisis, lends credence to this strategy (Petros, 2022). Through transparent crisis management during the crisis and positive relationships with consumers, the company was able to lessen the negative publicity surrounding the incident and preserve its reputation.

As shown in Figure 1, proactive reputation management is effective in addressing both values- and performance-based negative publicity situations. In case of value-based negative publicity, it helps mitigate the risks posed by all three sources of negative publicity (i.e., customers, employees, the company itself). For instance, positive customer relationships act as a shield, as loyal customers tend to withhold judgment, allowing the organization to address the issues and present a balanced perspective before negativity spreads. In cases of performance-based negative publicity, this strategy is effective in countering negative publicity posed by customers and employees.

For customers leveraging the goodwill and trust built over time, this approach encourages them to give the product the benefit of the doubt, enticing them to try it and to refrain from perpetuating negative publicity. Positive customer relationships bolster the brand's image, as loyal customers offer support, believing that isolated incidents do not define the brand's overall quality, thereby preventing the spread of negative sentiment. In the case of employees, a positive company reputation diminishes the credibility of employee criticisms,

as customers are more likely to trust in the product's quality and value based on their past positive experiences and established trust.

5.2. Engagement in CSR activities

CSR has a favorable impact on business reputation, or how people assess a firm. Previous research has shown that the tone and salience of news media coverage of CSR can have a positive impact on corporate reputation (Vogler & Eisenegger, 2020). We identified CSR activities as a distinct strategy from building a favorable corporate reputation because CSR activities involve a broader commitment to social and environmental responsibility that extends beyond mere reputation management.

CSR acts as a moderator, changing and reducing customers' weight on negative publicity, which harms trust and affective identification (Lin et al., 2011). For example, Unilever experienced a negative publicity situation in 2017 when Dove, one of its brands, aired an advertisement that sparked criticism for being racially insensitive (Chaudhuri, 2017). But thanks to Unilever's significant CSR initiatives, notably its sustainable living plan focused on social and environmental responsibility, the company was able to respond to the matter properly. Customers' trust is readily harmed by negative publicity when perceived CSR is missing, as seen by the considerable moderating effect of perceived CSR on the link between perceived negative publicity and trust. When negative publicity spreads in the market, a company with good CSR will have more time to connect with consumers before their faith is eroded (Lin et al., 2011).

Engaging in CSR activities can serve as a strategy to mitigate the risks associated with value-based negative publicity situations triggered by all three negative publicity sources: consumers, employees, and the company itself. Furthermore, when a company has a significant CSR history, one-sided messages, which primarily contain the supporting arguments of the communicator's position, are more effective because the consumers' strong CSR association with the company helps the consumers process the information in a way that makes them less suspicious of CSR intent (Rim & Song, 2017).

5.3. Strategic collaborations for mitigating negative spillover effects

Negative publicity, like a domino effect, may extend its influence to the entire product category (Hansen & Onozaka, 2011) and to rival businesses (Havard et al., 2021). To mitigate the repercussions of negative spillover effects, marketers should first focus on

eradicating the root cause (Hansen & Onozaka, 2011). But a more proactive and effective approach involves leveraging these spillover effects through strategic partnerships. Transforming negative spillover into a platform for positive narratives entails forging associations with partners boasting a positive reputation (Havard et al., 2021), such as upscale importers or retailers with strong brand images (Hansen & Onozaka, 2011). This approach capitalizes on the partner's favorable image to counterbalance the adverse impact, enabling marketers to craft compelling narratives that resonate with consumers and enhance goodwill for their own firms, thereby minimizing the long-term consequences of negative incidents.

These collaborative agreements allow firms to harness the established positive reputations of their partners for quality and excellence, considerably reducing negative spillover effects. Consequently, this aids in mitigating risks originating from consumers and companies as sources of negative publicity in value-based situations. From the partners' perspective, particularly if the negatively publicized company is a well-established brand, they may perceive it as an opportunity to connect with a brand boasting a huge customer base. This presents the potential for positive exposure and the chance to contribute to a meaningful cause or initiative. Additionally, we propose that partners may view these collaborations as a chance to promote their positive reputations and values. By associating with the negatively publicized company, they can demonstrate commitment to CSR, assisting the partner in addressing and improving its environmental and social issues.

6. Post-negative-publicity strategies

The public image of a company is not uniform but is shaped by the opinions of diverse stakeholders (Bishop et al., 2023), including consumers, employees, investors, and the community. Each group holds different expectations, perceptions, and interests in the company. Effectively engaging with this varied audience demands a tailored and targeted communication approach that recognizes and addresses the unique concerns of each stakeholder group. Whether conversing with investors, customers, or the local community, using distinct language, channels, and messaging ensures authenticity and resonance in communication.

To mitigate the effects following a negative publicity incident, it is imperative for firms to implement post-negative-publicity strategies. These strategies do not act as preventive measures; rather, they are

reactive actions aimed at controlling the damage caused by adverse events. Researchers classify post-negative-publicity strategies into two key categories, according to their aims: reducing offensiveness and corrective actions (Liu et al., 2018). Reduction-of-offensiveness strategies encompass (1) denial, (2) declining to respond, and (3) apology. Strategies associated with corrective actions include (1) compensation, (2) transparency and information disclosure, (3) stimulating consumer information seeking, and (4) boosting consumer investment toward the brand.

6.1. Reducing offensiveness

We advocate for the implementation of the reduction-of-offensiveness strategy as a post-negative-publicity measure, strategically designed to mitigate the potential guilt imposed on a company in the aftermath of a negative publicity event. The perceived diagnostic of negative publicity significantly influences consumer responses to the accused brand. Therefore, an effective approach to alleviate these negative effects involves diminishing its apparent diagnostic (Liu et al., 2018). Reducing offensiveness entails efforts to lessen the perceived offensiveness associated with the problem (Liu et al., 2018).

6.1.1. Denial

Denial strategy involves actively refusing or rejecting the allegations or negative information that has surfaced. This approach proves effective when the company believes the negative information is untrue or misleading and seeks to clear the record (Laufer & Coombs, 2006). It is also effective when the evidence of the organization's culpability is insufficient (Fuoli et al., 2017). For example, in response to reports of a sudden unexpected acceleration crisis in 2009–2010, Toyota first used a denial approach, attributing incidents to floor mat entrapment and sticky pedals, and portraying them as isolated instances unrelated to broader car defects. This initial denial was intended to maintain the company's reputation for safety. Previous studies have suggested that denial can be relatively effective in repairing trust in the short term. But it also raises concerns, as culpable organizations may exploit it to sidestep accountability for their actions (Fuoli et al., 2017).

In the context of the Toyota case, subsequent investigations brought to light more intricate issues, prompting a shift in Toyota's approach and the eventual recall of millions of vehicles to address various contributing factors. This response aligns with prior research, which suggests that apologies

tend to be more effective than denials, especially when the guilt of the trust breaker is later revealed (Fuoli et al., 2017).

The denial strategy plays a crucial role in mitigating the risks of negative publicity driven by customers, employees, and company actions in both value-based and performance-based scenarios (see Figure 1). In value-based negative publicity situations, the denial strategy allows the organization to dispute false or misleading information, upholding its commitment to ethical standards and social responsibility. Supporting this argument, previous research has suggested that denial might be an effective trust-restoration strategy following an integrity-based trust failure (Fuoli et al., 2017).

In performance-based negative publicity scenarios, this strategy assists the organization in countering inaccurate claims or negative portrayals of its functional benefits. Companies frequently leverage their social media channels to correct misinformation, making it a standard business practice. Such misinformation may occasionally fall into the category of fake news, and an effective social media strategy can be instrumental in setting the record straight (Berinsky & Wittenberg, 2020). Denial may be an effective response strategy for a reputable and innocent company. A company with a poor reputation is less likely to be trusted when denying guilt (Decker, 2012).

6.1.2. Declining to respond

The nonresponse strategy involves refraining from addressing negative information publicly or providing any official statement or response. This approach is particularly effective when the negative publicity originates from individuals rather than from organizations (Rhee & Yang, 2014). In addition, companies might choose this strategy if they believe that responding could inadvertently draw more attention to the negative information or if they fear that addressing it might lend it more credibility. Some researchers argue that in situations where customers initially react with little anger to the initial action, not responding may be beneficial. But should more information surface, the nonresponse can cause heightened consumer stress and increased anger (Rhee & Yang, 2014).

Therefore, we contend that this strategy can be employed in both value-based and performance-based negative publicity scenarios to mitigate the risks posed by consumers. It not only minimizes the potential amplification of negative information but also mitigates the risk of escalating consumer anger, especially when responding could inadvertently draw more attention to the issue or give it

more credibility. But most of the extant literature has suggested that declining to respond in the face of an allegation rarely results in better outcomes for the firm compared with other responses. Consequently, maintaining complete silence seldom appears to be the most desirable approach (Decker, 2012).

6.1.3. Apology

Previous research has underscored that extending apologies to both victims and the public while demonstrating concern for customer rights and benefits can be helpful in improving customers' perceptions of kindness and compassion (Cao et al., 2014). Apology, in general, stands out as the most effective strategy for repairing customer trust in the face of negative publicity (Xie & Peng, 2009). Apologies are most effective when they convey a multifaceted message, encompassing an admission of wrongdoing, an expression of remorse for negative consequences, and an assertion of willingness to accept relevant responsibility. This collective impact fosters a favorable impression, signaling that the company is oriented toward problem-solving rather than inclined to conceal reality or shirk responsibility (Xie & Peng, 2009). For example, in 2018, after a negatively publicized incident in which the manager of a Philadelphia Starbucks called the police on two Black men waiting in the store, CEO Kevin Johnson issued a public apology and personally met with the individuals involved to take responsibility for the perceived racial bias (Avila et al., 2019).

An apology can be effective in both value-based and performance-based negative publicity situations to mitigate the risks associated with all three negative publicity sources (see Figure 1). In the case of value-based negative publicity, it serves to enhance customer perceptions of kindness and compassion. For performance-based negative publicity, an apology assures the acceptance of responsibility and a commitment to avoiding similar mistakes in the future. The effectiveness of an apology can vary depending on the extent to which it demonstrates guilt and accepts responsibility, as well as how strongly it expresses regret and promises change (Woo et al., 2020).

6.2. Corrective actions

Corrective actions constitute the measures that an organization can undertake to repair or alleviate the concerns that gave rise to negative publicity. Instead of merely attempting to soften the incident's bad impact or perception (as in the reduction-of-offensiveness strategy), corrective efforts entail

making significant changes or improvements to the underlying problems that generated the negative publicity. This strategy is most likely to improve many aspects of trust, such as integrity-based trustworthiness, benevolence-based trustworthiness, and brand trust (Liu et al., 2018).

6.2.1. Compensation

A compensation response strategy goes beyond the apology response to include monetary reparation or product replacement to address a product-related issue (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). This approach reflects a move adopted by businesses in the aftermath of the exposure of company flaws, displaying their commitment to correcting negative consequences and upholding customer satisfaction. Following a negative publicity situation, firms frequently pay monetary compensation to customers to rectify the consequences, spanning from financial losses to emotional pain (Xie & Peng, 2009). This compensation can take many forms, including issuing refunds in the event of a product recall, providing free repair services after instances of product harm, distributing coupons or discounts in response to service failures, or funding remediation in cases of environmental pollution (Xie & Peng, 2009). By allocating resources for compensation, a company demonstrates a commitment to consumer welfare that extends beyond mere profit making. For instance, British Petroleum employed a compensation strategy to mitigate the negative publicity and environmental impact of the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010. The company established a \$20 billion compensation fund to address economic losses, property damage, and injuries suffered by individuals and businesses affected by the oil spill (Brennan, 2013).

We posit that a compensation strategy is pertinent in performance-based negative publicity situations to mitigate the risks associated with all three negative publicity sources (see Figure 1). It entails compensating consumers monetarily for the functional benefits that the brand failed to provide. It should be noted, however, that compensation is not universally successful. There are instances where compensation may not fully cover the extent of physical or mental injury, rendering it ineffective (Cao et al., 2014). As a result, the choice between an apology and compensation should be made after a comprehensive analysis of the specific negative publicity scenario and the available firm resources. Compensation emerges as a more powerful strategy than an apology in situations where it can successfully reduce the consequences of negative publicity and repair consumer trust.

6.2.2. Transparency and information disclosure

Restoring consumer trust in the aftermath of negative publicity is a worthy goal with the potential to change public perceptions. An effective approach comprises the communication of up-to-date information about the incident's resolution, as well as practical evidence that substantiates the organization's commitment to preventing a recurrence (Cao et al., 2014). For example, following the disclosure of organizational corruption in the media, firms can take substantial actions like replacing key individuals involved in the governance process and implementing both internal corporate governance changes (altering how the organization is governed) and external corporate governance changes (modifying how the organization is perceived; Okhmatovskiy & Shin, 2019). For example, in 2015, Chipotle encountered a series of food-safety concerns at its restaurants. Chipotle responded by establishing stringent food-safety precautions, temporarily closing affected locations, and launching a comprehensive marketing campaign to convey the actions taken (Marves, 2022).

This information disclosure has a dual purpose: It not only addresses concerns about the specific incident but also underscores the organization's transparency and accountability, fostering consumer trust. Researchers have highlighted the significance of customer satisfaction in organizational recovery efforts, emphasizing that the success of these efforts substantially raises consumers' probability to reengage with the brand (Bolkan et al., 2012). Furthermore, transparency and information disclosure can be an effective strategy for managing negative publicity in value-based negative publicity situations involving all three sources. This strategy helps to rebuild trust effectively, while providing customers with evidence of the commitment to prevent a recurrence.

6.2.3. Stimulating consumer information seeking

In the aftermath of negative publicity, businesses can actively steer customers toward information seeking, thereby orchestrating a transforming journey from skepticism to trust and from ignorance to awareness. Encouraging consumers to seek information holds the potential to increase positive brand sentiments and purchase intentions (Yu et al., 2019).

Therefore, we believe that this strategy can be used to manage all three sources of negative publicity in both value-based and performance-based scenarios. The rationale lies in the fact that encouraging customers to explore information effectively conveys the company's confidence and

promotes favorable brand perception. In both value-based and performance-based negative publicity situations, an information search can demonstrate the company's innocence if it is wrongly accused. Simultaneously, it can provide additional insights into product benefits and into the organization's values, contributing to the mitigation of negative publicity. Moreover, this strategy capitalizes on knowledge about product benefits, and this newfound understanding has the potential to positively influence perceptions, particularly for relatively new products, enhancing purchase intentions. A study revealed that unfavorable book reviews increased sales of books by unknown authors while decreasing sales of books by well-known authors (Berger et al., 2010).

6.2.4. Boosting consumer investment toward the brand

Organizational failures can lead to negative publicity, prompting firms to address potential consumer dissatisfaction and to limit the development of negative feelings. To counteract the adverse consequences of such events, firms can invest in increasing consumer involvement and loyalty, discouraging any desire to defect or to contribute to the spread of negative opinion. One way to accomplish this is by amplifying both consumer investments and influencing opinions on available alternatives. Raising fees or offering premium memberships with additional benefits enhances the value proposition of consumer involvement. Organizations can build a sense of attachment and commitment by providing consumers with real benefits, such as increased services or privileged access. Similarly, rewarding purchases with prizes, such as frequent flyer miles, not only encourages repeat transactions but also fosters a sense of reciprocal loyalty.

Furthermore, implementing profit-sharing incentives, such as annual dividend checks, underscores the organization's joint success with its consumer base, building an enduring relationship (Bolkan et al., 2012). But taking a proactive approach demands more than just maximizing the advantages of involvement; it involves influencing how customers view their options. An effective strategy is to increase consumers' perceived switching costs, making the idea of leaving less appealing. This can be accomplished by continually highlighting the benefits of the product or service, whether in terms of convenience, affordability, or uniqueness. Furthermore, using contractual agreements with penalties for early termination acts as a strategic disincentive to switching. These agreements not only emphasize the organization's

commitment to service excellence but also create hurdles to alternative options (Bolkan et al., 2012).

Therefore, we believe that this strategy is effective in managing both value-based and performance-based negative publicity situations caused by consumers or the company. To address value-based negative publicity stemming from customer and company actions, organizations can focus on building strong customer relationships through increased consumer investment and highlighting the unique benefits they offer, while also proactively pointing out the higher switching costs that come with leaving their brand. For performance-based negative publicity, companies can highlight the unique benefits of their products, use contracts to discourage customers from switching, and stress their commitment to excellence.

It is important to adopt this strategy with careful consideration of the context and proportionality, as any attempt to buy goodwill during a crisis can become a story itself. Increasing customer investments in a brand can be beneficial in terms of creating brand equity and customer loyalty. Companies can increase brand awareness and trust by engaging customers, developing relationships, and telling the company's story, ultimately leading to higher customer loyalty and long-term value. In terms of proportionality, it is critical to ensure that the strategies implemented are authentic and linked with the brand's values. Overly aggressive or inauthentic strategies may alienate customers and disrupt the purchasing process. Therefore, the strategies' proportionality should be balanced with the goal of developing long-term, sustainable customer relationships and brand equity.

7. Final thoughts

Our study emphasizes the importance of implementing nuanced marketing strategies tailored to different instances of negative publicity. Contributing to the current debate on this topic, we not only pinpoint multiple strategies but also establish connections with different types of negative publicity and the underlying sources that trigger these situations. By leveraging the diverse strategies identified and the comprehensive framework developed for their categorization, our article offers valuable insights for managers and practitioners seeking effective ways to mitigate the risks associated with negative publicity. Companies that comprehend the interplay between sources, implement pre- and post-negative-publicity strategies, and customize their responses to the specific contours of value and

performance stand to emerge as stronger, more resilient, and trusted entities in the aftermath of negative publicity.

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