



THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA ON PUBLIC ATTITUDE DURING THE BRAND VALUE CRISIS: EVIDENCES FROM *GRIGEO* CASE

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Abstract

Many scholars have focused on consumers when analysing the brand crisis and the importance of the media during the event, creating a lack of empirical research on public attitudes. In addition, the empirical studies of public attitude conducted so far analyse it abstractly, dividing the attitude into positive, negative and neutral. The significant effects of the brand value crisis drive the need for more detailed research, i.e. to analyse the public's attitude through the components of emotions, cognition and behaviour. Such a study would allow us to understand better the expression of public attitudes against the background of brand crisis and media information about the crisis and how public attitudes, brand crisis and media information interact. It should also be noted that each crisis is unpredictable and different, so each investigated case of a crisis becomes another source of knowledge and crisis prevention. This study aims to evaluate the effect of media on public attitude during the reputational crisis of the paper and wood industry company group in the Baltic countries. The research revealed that during the brand value crisis, the media is dominated by information that emphasises immorality. The brand value crisis has had a negative impact on public attitudes through all three of its components. The established unfavourable public attitude towards the brand was demonstrated by feedback, causing negative consequences for the brand. The research findings allow the authors to confirm the obvious relationships between the brand value crisis, media information reflecting immorality, and public emotions, cognition, and behaviour. The study revealed the case of a brand value crisis that provoked a strong public reaction. Public attitudes have been analysed through its components (emotions, cognition, and behaviour), thus making it clearer to identify preventive communication activities and avoid the larger-scale development of the brand value crisis. This study provides a basis for the theoretical development of crisis management and expands the discussion of the crisis's effect on public attitude. The research findings may provide insights into corporate crisis communication and be prerequisites for sound brand communication solutions in public, by anticipating the possible development of public attitudes and seeking to control them. The interaction between the symbolic value and the effects of the brand, and the emotions, cognition and behaviour of the public, which was formed with the dominance of media information reflecting the immorality of the brand value crisis, was established. The interaction between the brand value crisis and public attitude regarding in terms of the impact of media information has been reasoned.

KEYWORDS: crisis management, brand management, brand value crisis, corporate reputation, public attitude.

Introduction

Reputational crises of organisations are just a few of the challenges of this century that encourage companies to take care of their reputation (Iglesias et al. 2011; Da Silveira et al. 2013). The painful consequences of the crisis make brands seriously prepare for the occurrence of the event. Even with the action plan, Coombs, Holladay (2014), and Pace et al. (2017) argue that crises remain unpredictable and different each time. The unpredictability of crises is determined by society and the attitudes that can develop during a crisis, which can lead to brand negative behaviour by spreading word-of-mouth communication, affecting other societal actors, including consumers, and contributing to declining financial performance (Bennett and Kottasz 2012). In addition, it is believed that the freedom of society to express its beliefs can prolong the crisis period, even when events in the media calm down (Goodman et al. 2010).

The increasing relevance of brand crisis has attracted the interest of researchers, focusing on three key areas:

1) the factors that influence public attitudes by highlighting the different assessments of public comments and information provided by the media (Holton et al. 2014; Hong and Cameron 2018; Ping et al. 2014);

2) crisis management by assessing the type of crisis, which influences the choice of strategy for brand response

(Coombs and Holladay 2006; Greyser 2009; Dutta and Pullig 2011);

3) the factors that determine the responses of consumers during the crisis by emphasising importance of the media, as an important variable in the face of the crisis, and by highlighting its possible impact on the formation of consumer attitudes (Yannopoulou et al. 2011; Helm and Tolsdorf 2013; Jeon and Beack 2016).

Scientific studies on the latter topic focus on the public, highlight the media as the primary source of information about the brand crisis, on the basis of which the public assesses the crisis situation.

Many researchers, analyzing the brand crisis and the importance of the media, study public attitudes rather abstractly, dividing attitudes into positive, negative and neutral (Sung, Lee 2015; Ip et al. 2018).

Literature review results showed that the significance of the brand crisis for the reputation of organizations prompts the need to analyse public attitudes through emotional, cognitive and behavioral components. Such a study would allow to research the expression of public attitudes towards the brand crisis and information about the crisis in the media, and to evaluate how public attitudes, the brand crisis and information in the media interact. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What is the focus of information in the media during a brand crisis: lack of skills or immorality?

RQ2: What is the attitude of media consumers to the crisis of brand value shaped by media information? Which component of society's attitude - emotions, cognition, and behaviour is the most expressed?

RQ2a: What public emotions are shaped by media coverage of the brand's immorality toward the brand value crisis?

RQ2b: What public awareness of the brand equity crisis is shaped by media coverage targeting brand immorality?

RQ2c: What kind of public behaviour is shaped by brand value crisis media coverage of brand immorality?

RQ3: Does public attitudes to the crisis of brand value affect the brand in crisis?

A media content analysis approach was used to answer the problematic question how the brand crisis and information about it in the media affects public attitudes. The following method was chosen to analyse the brand value crisis of one of the largest paper and wood industry company group in the Baltic countries, which was sparked by particular attention both in the media and in other interested groups. The mentioned crisis was characterized by a very strong public reaction, high media coverage, and the scale of the crisis itself.

Theoretical background

Brand crises have become an inevitable reality faced by almost every organization; brands are trying their best to prepare before the first manifestations of a crisis appear. The biggest problem is that it is almost impossible to fully prepare for a brand crisis and accurately predict its further course, as each crisis is different and varies depending on the situation and the stage of the crisis (Johar et al. 2010; Pace et al. 2017).

Despite the possible classification options for different types of crises, product-harm crises and values-related crises receive the most attention of researchers. According to Dutta and Pullig (2011), both types of crises respond to the value created by the brand and indicate the nature of the crisis. In the case of a product-harm crisis, the defects in the products offered by the brand and the damage they may cause are covered, while the crisis reflects the failure of the functional value created by the brand. The crisis affects the symbolic and emotional values created by the brand. Damage to any of the value elements can lead to a value crisis and negatively affect a company's ability to deliver benefits to consumers. In each type of crisis, brand value suffers, the only difference being whether it appeals to functional or symbolic and emotional values. Due to the frequency of occurrence, the product-harm crisis is chosen much more often than the values-related crisis, but the latter crisis is characterized by a greater negative assessment of consumers, especially in the current context.

Backhaus and Fischer (2016), Baghi and Gabrielli (2019) confirmed that a higher negative consumer reaction is observed during the brand value crisis. The following response is based on the inclusion of social and ethical issues, threat to the consumers' interests, regardless of cultural differences.

Researchers note that the severity of the crisis depends on the extent to which the crisis is related to the existing

consumers' associations with the brand, as the resulting situation in the minds of consumers may affect the existing associations (Dawar and Lei 2009; Salvador et al 2017). In other words, consumers tend to assess brands differently during a crisis, depending on how well they are known to them. When consumers know a particular brand, have bought its products or learned about it from the media or other sources, certain associations are formed in the minds of consumers. During a crisis, the following associations and prior information accumulated in the consciousness become relevant again and can mitigate the impact of the negative information received during the incident. Meanwhile, when during a crisis consumers are confronted with an unknown brand, there are no preconceived associations or attitudes in their minds; thus, information provided during the crisis becomes primary, shaping consumers' attitudes towards the brand (Dawar and Lei 2009).

Under present market conditions, the number of factors that can affect brands during the crisis and their various stages is increasing. The variety of factors that can determine the outcome of the crisis and their limited control make it difficult for brands to solve problems smoothly (Do et al. 2019). Helm and Tolsdorf (2013) note that the brand's reputation and the resulting halo effect may reduce the negative impact of the crisis on the brand's reputation, but Coombs (2007), Yannopoulou et al. (2011) give the media a unique role due to its low control possibilities and undoubted importance in times of a crisis. The media have a critical role in influencing the formation of stakeholders' attitudes during a crisis.

In view of the increasing information flows, Yannopoulou et al. (2011) analysed the impact of media on consumer confidence when they have directly faced the brand crisis and received information indirectly, i.e., from the media. It has been observed that when consumers directly faced a crisis, they tend to be more lenient in assessing the situation and forgive faster, while the information in the media exacerbates the situation and sows doubts in the minds of consumers, making them more brand-critical. Coombs (2007) notes that in a crisis, it is important how the media presents the situation and what the level of objectivity is. Stakeholders often do not hesitate to choose the crisis version presented in the media and consider it to be real. Thus, during a crisis stage, communication of the company about the situation is of great importance. Li et al. (2018) state that during a brand crisis, the media information can be directed at emphasizing the immorality or lack of skills of the brand in crisis and affects public attitudes.

Having analysed information provided by the media, the authors emphasized that a greater negative impact on consumers is observed in the case of unfavourable information for the brand (Siomkos et al. 2010; Yannopoulou et al. 2011; Li et al. 2018; Mason 2019), in contrast to positive. It is negative information that in many cases dominates in the media and becomes inevitable for the brand in crisis and the society. The public cannot always support information provided by the media. There are cases when information unfavourable to the brand posted on news portals has not been reflected in public comments and, on the contrary, has contradicted it (Holton et al., 2014; Hong, Cameron, 2018).

Ip et al. (2018) point out that it is important to pay attention to how and what information is presented on the media, as this contributes to the public reaction. During a crisis, however, unfavourable information for the brand that cannot be controlled attracts public attention, which can increase the vulnerability of the brand (Hong, Cameron 2018).

Studies carried out by Siomkos et al. (2010), Yannopoulou et al. (2011), Liu and Shankar (2015), Mason (2019) have identified a greater impact of negative media information on consumers of a brand in crisis. Meanwhile, research by Ping et al. (2014) highlighted that information provided by the media can negatively affect the attitudes of not only consumers but also the public. Research of Li et al. (2018) focused on the reference of media information to immorality or lack of skills. According to the researchers, media presenting information during the brand crisis take into account the crisis situation and highlight the truth by focusing on the cause of the crisis.

It is likely that during a brand value crisis, media based on the situation, will focus most on immorality; thus, research question *RQ1* is formed:

RQ1: What is the focus of information in the media during a brand crisis: lack of skills or immorality?

Ip et al. (2018), Piotrowski and Guyette (2010) confirmed the existence of a relationship between the brand crisis and public attitudes. Not only can the occurred brand crisis negatively affect public attitudes, but public attitudes can also affect the crisis by increasing its scale.

Unfavourable information for the brand encourages the public to be more critical in assessing the situation (Ping et al. 2014). Comments in the public sphere influence public attitudes and can be a strong factor that changes public attitudes (Sung and Lee, 2015). Having read an article in the media and comments from other members of the public, the situation will be assessed on the basis of one's own perception of a more reliable source (Hong and Cameron 2018).

Ping et al. (2014) note that the public is made of consumers of a particular brand and other individuals who do not necessarily are aware of it. In the case of the appearance of negative information in public, the latter part of the public is often more critical, thus contributing to the formation of a negative attitude and at the same time arousing doubts of the consumers of that brand. Ip et al. (2018) revealed that in the case of a brand value crisis, a negative public attitude in terms of a brand in crisis is formed. Based on this research by researchers and accepting the previous assumption that in the event of a crisis of brand value, information directed at its immorality dominates in the media, the research question *RQ2* is formulated:

RQ2: What is the attitude of media consumers to the crisis of brand value shaped by media information? Which component of society's attitude - emotions, cognition, and behaviour is the most expressed?

In recent decades, the importance of an attitude has increased due to its impact on the behaviour of individuals (Jain 2014). Attitudes influence the choice and actions of a person (Fabrigar and Wegener 2010). Jain (2014) suggests to examine attitude as an umbrella expression covering such concepts as preferences, feelings, emotions,

beliefs, expectations, judgments, principles, and intentions. The following results in the attitude being subjective and difficult to be measured due to available personal attributes (Jain 2014). To understand the attitude and its structure, researchers analysed its possible components and developed different models. According to Jain (2014), Spooncer (1992) offered a "Tripartite Model", which consisted of three components of attitude: feelings, beliefs, and behaviour. The first component included an individual's emotions expressed in words and reflecting one's feelings. The second relied on a person's cognitive response, illustrating one's beliefs. The third component showed the individual's overt action and intended behaviour (Jain 2014). According to Jain (2014), previous research on only positive, negative or neutral attitudes lead to a weak assessment of the formed attitude. The following shows that the public response to the brand in crisis remains not yet been explored completely and leaves questions concerning the changes of public attitudes in the media background. The following observations allow to raise research questions *RQ2a*, *RQ2b*, *RQ2c* to clarify the brand in crisis and the public's attitude to the crisis though its constituent elements.

RQ2a: What public emotions are shaped by media coverage of the brand's immorality toward the brand value crisis?

RQ2b: What public awareness of the brand equity crisis is shaped by media coverage targeting brand immorality?

RQ2c: What kind of public behaviour is shaped by brand value crisis media coverage of brand immorality?

Research by Liu and Shankar (2015), Baghi and Gabrielli (2019) revealed that consumers' response to the crisis may result in negative communication by "word of mouth" and a changed intention to buy, which would contribute to a decrease in the brand's market share and other financial losses, such as decrease in demand or redistribution of consumer preferences. Hong and Cameron (2018) believe that negative information about the brand, which is impossible to control, increases its vulnerability, as it attracts more public's attention and generates a negative reaction from them. The media becomes part of the crisis, as it is seen as a key source of information for stakeholders and society as a whole, thus contributing to the formation of its attitude (Ping et al. 2014), and emphasizes that greater public interest can further prolong the period of the brand's crisis (Goodman et al. 2010).

Researchers point out that the boundaries of the crisis are "drawn" by the brand crisis itself, the information provided in the media and public attitudes. All of the following participants are interrelated and should be analysed together. Media information, in the case of a brand value crisis and public attitude, becomes an area for the development of the interaction between these two variables. It is possible to claim that the media is one of the essential sources of information, which shapes public attitude about the crisis that has taken place (Bennett, Kottasz 2012), while the public, whether or not it had direct contact with the brand, but encountered indirectly through the media, can influence the brand crisis. This leads to *RQ3: Do attitudes to the crisis of brand value affect the brand in crisis?*

Methodology

In order to reveal the relationship between the brand value crisis, public attitude, and media information, a content quantitative analysis method was used.

The brand value crisis of *Grigeo, AB* (**Grigeo, AB** is the only paper and wood industry company group in Lithuania and one of the largest in the Baltic countries) that took place in January 2020 has been chosen for the qualitative research. In 2019 *Grigeo* occupied almost a quarter of the Lithuanian market, and is well known to the majority of the country's population for its products, intensive communication and marketing. At the beginning of 2020, it became clear that one of the companies belonging to the company group had been intentionally polluting the Lithuanian port city lagoon with untreated sewage for a long time.

According to the concept of the brand value crisis, in the case of the *Grigeo* brand, the crisis occurred by violating the symbolic value of the brand and elements of corporate social responsibility attributed to it. Before the crisis, *Grigeo* publicly declared:

1) in the mission: activities of *Grigeo* aim to improve the quality of life by producing environmentally friendly products”;

2) in the list of values “360° responsibility” that is based on “consideration of the smallest details, responsible behaviour, as everything we do affects our results”.

The case of *Grigeo, AB* is also distinguished by the fact that despite improper actions of one company (*Grigeo Klaipėda, AB*), the crisis covered the entire group of companies (five companies). The following was confirmed by actions taken by consumers and partners of stopping purchasing products from companies of the *Grigeo group*. In the case of the occurred crisis, the public associated the incident mainly with *Grigeo* hygienic paper and packaging products, including the *Grite* brand, the production of which is mainly focused on the daily needs of the public. The actions of the public, the media and partners have shown that consequences of the crisis have also affected other companies belonging to the group.

The research was conducted using the method of quantitative content analysis. In order to research what the information about the crisis of brand value in the media is focused (lack of skills or immorality) and to determine which sub-components of the company's social responsibility the symbolic value created by the company is violated, a semantic analysis was chosen, i.e., what basic sentences and how often they occur in the text. A thematic analysis was chosen to answer the other research questions, i.e., what concepts and how often they occur in the text (assumptions: meaningful units that reflect the attitude of media users).

The analysed articles (N=162) and comments from members of public (N=1434) were selected by applying non-probability sampling. Taking into account the excess of information and the abundance of online media portals, based on the data of *Gemius Baltic* (Gemius, 2020) of January 2020, two main news sites in Lithuania (*delfi.lt* and *15min.lt*) were selected. The *Facebook* social platform was chosen for public comments related to a particular article, where news sites hosted articles published on their site. The *Facebook* social network was chosen as an

alternative to comment sections after articles, given that articles of the analysed period no longer posted comments from registered and unregistered readers on the website, but the same articles, shared on the social network by news portals, still have public comments.

A document review approach was used to collect data. The investigation was carried out: January – February 2020 were chosen purposefully by taking into account the period of the crisis of the *Grigeo Klaipėda, AB*, i.e. from the first article about the incident to the publication of research results. Method of selection of articles was based on targeted selection on keywords: *Grigeo* and *Grigeo Klaipėda* were used in the search for articles on news portals, and are directly related to the analysed incident.

Data collection tool: two groups of documents (*delfi.lt*; *15min.lt* and readers' comments, respectively); N=162 articles and N=1434 comments, six codes, sixteen sub-codes were analysed.

Operationalization of the research instrumentation. The content analysis allowed dividing the elements of the brand value crisis, public attitude towards the brand during its value crisis, and media information, into specific components and subcomponents.

The element of *public attitude* was identified according to three subcomponents distinguished by Jain (2014), i.e., *emotions*, *cognition* and *behaviour*. Each subcomponent of the public attitude was identified by analysing individuals' comments (see Table 1). The first component – *emotions* of the public – was identified on the basis of basic emotions distinguished by Ekman (1999) and very often used by researchers. Keywords and sentence wordings, identified by research results of Chen et al. (2011) were used to measure the emotions elicited, in which the essential, most commonly used words characteristic of each emotion subcomponent, were identified for each emotion. The expression of the emotion in the analysed public comments helped to determine the verbal expression of emotions in the research.

Table 1. Expression of components of public attitudes

Public attitudes codes	Sub-codes	Keywords
Emotions	Disgust	shame, scary, horrible, dissatisfied, odious, disgusting, deplorable, fed up with.
	Joy	to be impatient, rejoice, enthusiastic (full of enthusiasm), happy, cheerful, satisfied, pleased, great, wonderful, best.
	Anger	anger, rage, scam, lie (liars), grumpy, cruel, dislike, furious, mad, hate, annoying.
	Sadness	sad, grief, tragedy, misery, oppression, depressed, disturbed, broken, wrong, painful, repulsive, belittled, discouraged.
	Fear	to fear, fear, scary, panic, horror, helpless, vulnerable, stuck.
	Surprise	wow, strange, surprised, did not expect.

Cognition	Beliefs	Entries can reveal a subjective assessment of the situation based on personal experience or non-direct knowledge accumulated over time (rumours, information shared by others). A person's belief can be presented as a statement that reflects a positive (favourable to the company, supporting it) or a negative (expressing negative beliefs and an unfavourable assessment of the company) assessment.
	Knowledge	Entries present arguments, facts, it can be stated that information is available. Statements are directed against or in favour of the participant of the incident.
Behaviour	Intention to buy	Verbal expressions about future actions, intention to purchase or not to purchase brand products. For example: I will (not) buy..., I would buy, I would purchase, I am going to buy, I would consider buying, I plan to buy.
	Intention to recommend	Comments express the intention to recommend or not recommend brand products to others. For example: I would encourage/stimulate, I would/would not recommend.

The component of *cognition* is defined as a person accumulated knowledge and existing beliefs, but the distinction between them is very blurred. Nonetheless, according to Pehkonen and Pietilä (2003), when confronted with the term of belief, it is important to define how it will be perceived. In the present research, beliefs are defined using recommendations of Pehkonen and Pietilä (2003) to consider them as a subjective statement of a person without providing any facts. Knowledge is defined as statements that contain arguments or facts.

In the approach model presented by Jain (2014), the component of *behaviour* focuses on a person's intentions to repurchase or not to buy a product. According to Schuh et al. (2018), the component of behaviour can be analysed not only by repurchase, but also by the intention to recommend. Taking the following into account, the component of behaviour is divided into two subcomponents: intention to buy and intention to recommend, the expression of which is formed based on question scales and statements of Barber et al. (2012), Schuh et al. (2018) and El-Said, Aziz (2019).

Media information (the second element), during a crisis, is usually characterized by anti-brand content that is negative. In order to identify the dominant information in the media during a crisis, it is possible "framing" directed at a brand's lack of skills or immorality, is used. Table 2 presents operationalization and examples of both areas of information, compiled from the study by Li et al. (2018), which included information directed towards both, brand immorality and lack of skills. According to the latter claim, areas of information often depend on the type of brand crisis and closely correlate with it, thus in the case of the following empirical research, articles in the media were assigned to only one area of information.

Table 2. Areas of information provided in the media

Codes	Code explanation	Examples
Immorality	The violation of the company's morals and declared values.	The inappropriate, unethical, or harmful actions, violating moral standards, causing damage to the environment or social responsibility. The information appeals to selfish actions of the company that cause damage to the environment, violate the rules.
Lack of skills	The flaws in the product quality.	The company's inability to control the ongoing production processes, poor quality of products or services, inadequate, limited or outdated technologies that caused the failure.

Analysing the articles and readers' comments, seven topics of the articles were identified (basic sentences, the coding of which is presented in the Table 3).

Table 3. Topics highlighted in media articles

Source of articles	Topics	Content of articles	Number of shares
Media-initiated articles on "Grigeo"	General information about the situation	Data provided by the prosecutor's office, details of the incident, suspects, previous activities of the company and allegations made against it.	19 847
	Responses of stakeholders	Actions of partners, incentives in the online space to boycott products.	3 580
	Position of politicians, business representatives	Comments of politicians (ministers, party representatives), opinions expressed by businesspersons (excluding company partners) regarding the participants of the incident.	3 357
	Transparency of environmental authorities, the municipality, and gaps in the law	Allegations to environmentalists, the municipality and other public institutions due to possible non-transparent activities during the inspection of "Grigeo Klaipėda".	2 182
	Environmental pollution	Water pollution of the Curonian Lagoon and research results. Intentions of public authorities, in terms of other independent sewage treatment companies and another company potentially polluting the environment.	1 066
	Grigiškės "Grigeo"	Allegations of possible pollution, complaints from local residents, inspections by environmentalists.	935
	Changes in the financial situation of the company	Suspension, resumption of trading shares, seizure of assets, changes in sales	614

		volumes and product labelling.	
Company-initiated articles		Presentation of the company's position on the incident, intentions and results of the research initiated by the company.	2 758

In cases of a brand value crisis, when the existing ethical and social standards are violated, researchers focus on the damage to the symbolic value created for brand consumers (Dutta and Pullig 2011; Hansen et al. 2018). Corporate social responsibility becomes inevitable in the creation of symbolic value due to the increased public demand for ethical standards (Alcañiz et al. 2010). Moreover, in the case of the analysed brand value crisis, the focus is on the brand of the company group, therefore social responsibility becomes more relevant to the situation. Considering the following, the brand value crisis is analysed through the essential symbolic value that is often associated with this type of crisis, which will be limited to subcategories that make up corporate social responsibility. Table 4 presents operationalization and examples of the company's symbolic value components, compiled according to Zhang and Gowan, (2012), Kostyuk et al. (2013).

Table 4. Operationalization of the symbolic value of the brand value crisis

Symbolic value component	Codes/Sub-component	Essential sentences	Examples
Corporate social responsibility	Economic	The company's difficulties in fulfilling its obligations to consumers or partners, and notifies of financial problems.	The company's non-competitiveness, financial difficulties (e.g. inability to pay taxes or dividends).
	Legal	Violation or non-compliance with laws, activity regulations.	A violation of the established legal requirements or laws, which can be related to labour, business or environmental laws.
	Ethical	The company is associated with unethical actions.	The company's conscious actions that society expects from the company and that have violated moral and ethical standards that are important for it, such as environmental protection, working conditions, and fair treatment of employees.
	Philanthropic	The articles present the company's contribution (financial	Information in the articles presents the company's financial or time

		support, volunteering) to the community, being social.	(volunteering) investments in various areas (e.g., arts, education, research, community, humanities programs, et al.).
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In the case of the analysed crisis, they will help to find out in terms of which subcomponents of the corporate social responsibility the symbolic value created by the company is damaged. Manifestations of the damage are sought by analysing media articles. It is important to note that the philanthropic component is not necessary for companies (meaning that it may not occur during the analysed crisis), thus, the non-performance of the following activity in society was not considered unethical.

Results

During the crisis, the name of *Grigeo Klaipėda* was mentioned N=656 times in media articles, of which N=126 times in company-initiated articles that presented their press releases or comments on the situation. The analysis of articles revealed that some of them could be considered as initiated by the company, as they contain its comments on the incident or press releases. There were seven key thematic groups in the media-initiated articles focusing not only on *Grigeo* itself, but also on environmental authorities and environmental pollution (see Table 3).

The analysed media articles revealed the existence of information reflecting both immorality and lack of skills, but the latter area of "framing" information appeared only in company-initiated notifications (N=10 articles). With the elimination of the following articles, the media was clearly dominated by emphasis on immorality. The articles raised questions concerning the integrity of environmental authorities and their officials, and most of all concerning the intentional and environmentally damaging actions of *Grigeo Klaipėda* and the entire group of companies (e.g.: "*Millions of tons of wastewater discharged into the Curonian Lagoon, hundreds of times exceeding the permissible pollution, <...> it has been established that bypasses have been installed, by which wastewater bypassed the treatment plants and travelled to the lagoon untreated.*"). Actually, the emphasis of immoral actions of the company is presented in articles in two ways:

1. By informing about the investments made into the environment, reminding about the company's communication and the declared values, which were obviously violated during the incident.
2. By highlighting conscious actions of the company in carrying out environmental pollution.

Articles on news portals did not mention the possibility of a breakdown or a scourge, but clearly presented the public with information reflecting the company's intentional and inappropriate actions that have caused damage to the *environment*.

Based on the following research, it can be concluded that the answer to *RQ1* is as follows: *In the case of a brand equity crisis, the media is dominated by immorality-oriented information.* The articles that provided information on the lack of skills were initiated by the

company itself, commenting on the incident and constituted only a minor part in the general sum of articles (N=10 out of N=162). The remaining articles clearly highlighted the intentional and inappropriate actions of the participants of the incident by confirming the dominance of immoral information in the case of the brand value crisis.

In the analysed articles, it was also searched for signs of brand value crisis according to the violated elements of corporate social responsibility (*ethical, legal and economic*).

Analysis of articles in the media revealed violations of the ethical element, with the company clearly declaring that “...mission of the group is to create and produce environmentally friendly products and the investment in ecology is the company’s responsibility”, but carrying out opposite actions and deliberately polluting the environment.

The company’s action in relation to its own interests, which are thought to “avoid taxes and other property losses” cause millions of euros in environmental damage and reveal gaps in the morality and ethics of the company. The intolerance of the mentioned actions is also confirmed by the reaction of the *Grigeo* company partners, when the further purchase of products is stopped, as the company’s behaviour violates the “social and environmental obligations that need to be complied with when supplying products”. In the articles that provide expert comments, it is noted that “...Lithuanians are increasingly concerned about business ethics and transparency...”, while “consumers <...> not only about the quality and price of the product, but also the sustainability of the business“, which suggests that *Grigeo* actions in society will be considered incorrect. The public perceives the company’s responsibility and transparency in relation to the environment as a necessity; therefore, intentional pollution that contradicts not only their expectations, but also values declared by the company, violates the ethical element of corporate social responsibility. In the case of the analysed crisis, the information dominant in the media highlights the violation of ethical standards by emphasizing intentional actions that violate moral standards.

In the case of the *Grigeo* brand value crisis, unethical actions taken by the subsidiary *Grigeo Klaipėda* at the same time violated the law and affected the legal component of the corporate social responsibility. Manifestations of legal violations in media articles were primarily identified through expressions, claiming that “...the prosecutor’s office <...> initiated an investigation...”, “...criminal offences...”, “...covered up the crime...”, “Specialists of the Department of Environmental Protection ordered the company to immediately stop polluting the environment...”, etc. Articles on the *Grigeo* crisis revealed that the crisis was characterized by breaches of nature pollution laws and forgery of documents, related to the possession and use of an illegal emergency pipeline. The law stipulates that for the forgery of documents natural persons face an imprisonment up to 6 years, while “...for polluting the environment one faces a fine, arrest or imprisonment up to six years”. Thus, it can be assumed that in the case of the analysed brand value crisis the legal element is violated

through non-compliance with the law in relation to the damage to the environment and forgery of documents.

The *Grigeo* group company is considered to be a financially viable and a competitive company, but in the event of the crisis, a breach of the economic component is suspected. The analysed information shows that already at the beginning of the incident, partners like “Ikea”, major Lithuanian retail chains and others, began to suspend purchases from *Grigeo* and *Grigeo Klaipėda*, the assets were seized, and trading of *Grigeo* shares was suspended three times on the stock exchange. Although *Grigeo* itself stated at the beginning of the incident that it would not experience a decrease in sales, it later admitted that “...the company felt the decline in orders...”. The following was also confirmed by retail chains that sold their products, according to which “...*Grigeo* sales are falling...”, and “...product sales have fallen by 22%”. Losses were also incurred on the stock exchange, when the company’s share price initially fell by 40%, and during the crisis “...the value of *Grigeo* on the stock exchange decreased by more than 20 million euros...”. What is more, the company will receive a fine and would have to compensate for the damage to polluted nature, which may exceed 60 million euros. It is important to mention that *Grigeo* tissue paper and its products were labelled by “Ecolabel” eco-label marks that were requested to be temporarily discontinued for product labelling, and as a result “...*Grigeo* will inevitably suffer financial losses...”. The following shows that during the crisis, financial losses affected the entire *Grigeo* company group, despite the fact that the pollution was carried out by *Grigeo Klaipėda*. Therefore, it can be assumed that the economic element of the corporate social responsibility is violated, because the production and sales of the company’s products are disrupted, which reduces profitability; financial difficulties due to compensation of damages are encountered, and the value of the entire company on the market decreases.

After carrying out the analysis of media articles, comments expressing public attitude through emotions, cognition and behaviour, were further analysed. A total of N=1434 comments provided by *delfi.lt* and *15min.lt* accounts on the social network *Facebook*, below the analysed articles. More than half of the comments made by the public expressed their cognition; most often through beliefs based on the outcomes of previous incidents (see Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of recurrence of the attitude elements in comments

Articles by topic	Emotions	Cognition	Behaviour	Neutral
Responses of stakeholders	65	91	38	26
Grigiškės “Grigeo”	15	54	-	4
Changes in the financial situation of the company	23	26	2	6
Transparency of environmental authorities, the municipality	10	52	1	1

and gaps in the law				
Environmental pollution	18	67	1	3
Position of politicians, business representatives	101	147	1	18
General information about the situation	176	455	12	21
Total N	408	892	55	79

Articles related to general information about the situation received the highest number of public comments in terms of emotions and cognition, though it should be noted that the number of articles on this topic was the highest compared to other topics. Moreover, the following articles included the very first reports about the incidents, which received more than 100 comments. Nevertheless, it was noted that articles expressing the position of politicians and business representatives were also marked by a high degree of manifestation of the mentioned elements, but at the same time they diverted a lot of emotions and cognition from *Grigeo* and focused on themselves. Politicians' speeches were often criticized, as were their personalities. The expression of the element of behaviour in articles was the weakest, with the exception of a group of articles about the responses of stakeholders. It is likely that this kind of articles, in terms of their content, led to comments related to behaviour, as they focused specifically on information covering purchases. It can be assumed that a certain topic of articles can not only enhance the manifestation of one of the elements, but also direct the public's attention to other persons or institutions.

The analysed comments showed that the element of emotions was most strongly expressed through the emotion of anger, which was repeated in the comments N=273 times (Table 6). The emotion of anger in public comments was the most frequently repeated one, but it was directed not only at *Grigeo* or its managers, but also at politicians. "Parasites" and "guilty" have become the most commonly used keywords for the public to express their anger. Moreover, it was observed that the first articles reporting on the pollution aroused the emotion of anger more than the later ones, in which the element of cognition was more pronounced. The anger expressed in public comments concerning the need to punish the perpetrators may at the same time show that *Grigeo* was immediately convicted in society, without questioning its guilt. It can be assumed that during the brand crisis, the emotion of anger, especially directed at *Grigeo*, was most pronounced among consumers, at the same time showing a negative public perception of the situation.

Table 6. Frequency of repetition of emotions in comments

Disgust	Joy	Anger	Sadness	Fear	Surprise
33	60	273	33	6	2

The expression of the emotion of surprise and fear in public comments was the weakest. The surprise or fear expressed in only a few comments suggests that *inappropriate actions of Grigeo did not surprise*

consumers, and the situation did not lead to manifestation of fear of the public. However, the more significant absence of the emotion of surprise makes one wonder how the public perceived *Grigeo* before the crisis, that its actions did not evoke the emotion of surprise.

The emotion of joy in public comments was most strongly expressed in the analysis of articles on the reaction of stakeholders, where joy was expressed in support of traders' decisions not to buy *Grigeo* products, in short comments expressing joy: "Way to go!!!", "I'm glad", "Cool", "SUPER", "Amazing all chains should do this" and using the "👍" (*like*) symbol. The analysis of the latter emotion in comments suggests that the public, negatively assessing the situation, was pleased with the actions of the surrounding persons or institutions against *Grigeo*. Disgust in public comments was expressed with keywords "shame" and "horrible", but in general, the following emotion was expressed relatively little in society. The emotion of disgust in comments was also directed towards the government, being disgusted by its failure to act. Therefore, it can be assumed that the public did not tend to express obvious disgust in response to the situation. The emotion of sadness in comments was observed 33 times, of which 7 times the keyword "sad" was used.

In summary, the element of *emotion* allows to state that *the emotion of anger was most strongly expressed in public comments*, and was mostly repeated and aimed at the *Grigeo* brand. The emotion of joy was second in frequency of recurrence and expressed public support for the actions of stakeholders or comments of politicians. The mentioned emotions also showed the importance of the topic of the article, when in the case of politicians' speeches; negative public emotions were partly diverted from the *Grigeo* incident and concentrated on politicians. The amount of emotions of disgust and sadness in comments was the same (33), in the first case focusing mainly on *Grigeo* and in the second case expressing sadness about the improper actions towards the affected or to be affected groups of individuals. The expression of the emotions of fear and surprise was the weakest in comments. The latter encouraged the questioning of how the public perceived the company before the crisis, that its actions did not surprise members of the public.

The element of cognition was most strongly expressed in the comments analysed (repeated 868 times), usually expressed in subjective belief of individuals, without providing the specific facts or sources of information in comments. Public cognition, based on knowledge, is detected in comments when the specific facts that explain how the person evaluates the situation, are presented. Several comments showed that individuals assess the company negatively based on personal experience and knowledge, accumulated during that time. Other entries were on different topics, based on articles read or news learned on television. It can be assumed that *only a small number of those who commented on the situation tended to present the specific facts in support of their statements.* The majority of public comments (N=867) provided their beliefs directed at *Grigeo* or other participants of the incident, which can be divided into the following emerging topics: outcomes of the incident; not the only polluter; *Grigeo*; corruption; politicians, government and others.

The analysed comments that expressed cognition highlighted the relatively low knowledge-based assessment of the situation or at least its expression in public comments. Most of the public comments expressed their beliefs based on personal experiences or a general perception of the situation. The beliefs expressed suggest that the public did not doubt the guilt of *Grigeo* and was convinced that the illegal activity, which had been going on for many years, remained unnoticed because *Grigeo* paid bribes. Moreover, the prevailing beliefs in the comments highlighted that the outcome of the incident would be favourable to *Grigeo* without finding fault or accusing ordinary employees.

The **element of behaviour** in public comments, compare to other elements, is the weakest in terms of direct expression. A total of N=48 persons spoke about their intention to buy or not to buy *Grigeo* products. The part of society that did not intend to buy *Grigeo* products, made the following decision due to violated norms that are important to them, i.e. environmental pollution. Persons, who have chosen to continue to buy products, do so because these products meet their needs and should not be associated with the company that caused the damage. Moreover, innocence of the company's employees is also presented as one of the arguments, and the greatest damage would be done to them if the products will not be bought. In the case of the intention to recommend, it has been observed that the recommendation not to buy products is expressed more strongly, thus expressing one's position in terms of environmental pollution and at the same time indirectly implying that they will not buy the products.

The analysis of comments to find out the public attitude through its three constituent elements allows assuming that the *public negatively responded to the crisis*. Environmental pollution violated environmental values that are important to it, thus provoking the expression of the emotion of anger directed at *Grigeo* and other potentially guilty institutions. The emotion of joy in the public was evident when actions against *Grigeo* were taken by initiating a refusal of production or a severe punishment for the company. Public convictions have shown that there is no doubt about *Grigeo* guilt, not only in discharging sewage into the Curonian Lagoon, but also in giving bribes to cover up illegal activities. Regardless of the mentioned, the prevailing belief in the public was that the polluter *Grigeo* would go unpunished or ordinary workers will be charged. Public behaviour, nonetheless, does not allow to draw an unequivocal conclusion as to the public's intention to buy or not to buy products. Even though the public expresses dissatisfaction with their behaviour, stating that it does not intend to buy *Grigeo* products, and the information provided by traders about the decrease in *Grigeo* sales confirms the following, there remains a relatively similar part of comments made by the public in terms of not intending to give up the production. One of the reasons for such behaviour is innocent workers, who would suffer from the boycott of products. The following public behaviour demonstrates its ambiguous assessment of the situation, accepting and condemning the damage done, but at the same time avoiding harming innocent people.

RQ2 response would be: *In the context of media information, the brand value crisis has a negative effect on*

public attitudes towards a brand that has experienced a crisis, because the public in response to the information provided, considered the brand responsible for environmental pollution, expressing anger, disgust and other negative emotions directed at *Grigeo*. Public cognition, based on beliefs, most strongly highlighted that the public was immediately inclined to condemn the actions of the brand and to find it guilty not only of the pollution, but also of corruption by bribing environmentalists. Moreover, based on past incidents, the public was convinced that the brand that had experienced the crisis would go unpunished, despite being guilty. Even though the public did not express a cardinal intention to abandon products offered by the brand, it revealed the reasons for the encouraging part of the public to continue to use products offered by *Grigeo*. Nevertheless, the research revealed that public attitudes have been negatively affected through all three of their constituent elements, most strongly expressed through cognition, and least through behaviour.

In the context of media information, the brand value crisis has a negative effect on the public emotions (RQ2a), as with the public's response to the brand's intentional acts of pollution; the emotion of anger directed at *Grigeo* was highlighted. Moreover, the expressed emotion of joy focused on the restrictions and the suspension of sales of *Grigeo* products initiated by partners, thus showing joy of the difficulties for the brand.

In the context of media information, the brand value crisis has a negative effect on the public cognition (RQ2b), because beliefs expressed by the public have clearly shown no doubt about *Grigeo* guilt by also attributing the alleged acts of corruption. Moreover, it was believed that the brand would succeed in going unpunished by accusing ordinary employees.

In the context of media information, the brand value crisis has a negative effect on the public behaviour (RQ2c), because some members of the public expressed their intention not to buy *Grigeo* products, and some have recommended that others do the same. The following shows that the incident was viewed unfavourably in the public, provoking the formation of unfavourable behaviour towards the brand.

The unfavourable public attitude formed in the context of media information has a negative effect on the brand that experienced a value crisis (RQ3), because the element of behaviour that is part of the public attitude has expressed the intention of N=21 members of society not to buy products of the brand in crisis, thus responding to the actions of the brand that violated moral standards important to them. Moreover, 6 other individuals urged other members of the public not to tolerate the polluting behaviour and to boycott *Grigeo* products. The public shared media articles more than 34000 times, in this way increasing the dissemination of anti-brand information among the public. It is likely that the analysed brand value crisis will serve as another example for the public to follow and remember cases of other major brand crises. Probably the strongest negative public attitude is confirmed by the information provided in the articles about the decrease in sales of *Grigeo* products in retail chains. The general attitude of other members of society also highlights the negative consequences for the brand, which include a

reduction in the share price and the choice of partners to withdraw from the brand products.

All assumptions provided in the research model of the analysed case were confirmed. Research revealed that *the formed unfavourable public attitude towards the brand is characterised by feedback giving rise to negative consequences for the brand, such as intention not to buy brand products, decrease in sales and the dissemination of unfavourable information among other members of the public. Moreover, the possible indirect impact of public attitudes was evident through the decrease in the share price and the choice of partners to give up production.*

Conclusions

Research on the *Grigeo* brand value crisis showed that the incident was characterized by the violation of three elements of corporate social responsibility that create symbolic value. The environmental pollution caused by the brand contradicted its declared values and the transparency and responsibility considered necessary in society, thus violating the ethical element of social responsibility. At the same time, actions of the brand violated the prevailing laws, and the incident disrupted the process of production and sales, reducing profitability and incurring other financial losses, thus violating the economical element of corporate social responsibility. Moreover, the research showed that during the brand value crisis, the media is dominated by the “framing” of information reflecting immorality by emphasizing violated ethical standards and highlighting awareness of the actions taken. The following confirms the statement of Li et al. (2018) that the media focuses on the cause of the crisis by highlighting it in articles presented to the public. Nevertheless, content analysis has shown that articles initiated by the brand in crisis may lead to the opposite area of information, which focuses on highlighting lack of skills. It should be noted that in the case of *Grigeo*, information provided by the media showed that public authorities were also involved in the incident, and their transparency was questioned. The following confirms the statement of Yannopoulou et al. (2011) that media participation can expand the scale of a crisis by involving other institutions in the incident.

Ip et al. (2018) research highlighted that information provided by the media in the event of the brand value crisis has a negative effect on public attitudes towards the brand in crisis. Results obtained during the empirical research confirm the manifestation of the negative public attitude in the case of *Grigeo* value crisis, in the conditions of exposure to media information. Research of Sung, Lee (2015), Ip et al. (2018) and other researchers in analysing public attitudes was limited only to their positive, negative or neutral assessment, while the *Grigeo* case study expanded the assessment of public attitudes based on Jain's (2014) three constituent components of emotions, cognition and behaviour. Research showed that the public, in response to the articles in the media concerning immoral actions of the company, expressed anger at *Grigeo* in comments, without questioning its guilt. The incident led to a negative manifestation of the element of public cognition through the belief that *Grigeo* is guilty not only of environmental pollution, but also of possible corrupt

practices to cover up the crime. Moreover, despite the company's guilt, it was believed that it would be able to evade responsibility and remain intact. It is important to note that the unfavourable public attitude was also confirmed by the choice of some people not to buy *Grigeo* products and to encourage others to do the same in this way expressing intolerance of the brand's immoral behaviour. When consumers accessed media information, all three components of attitude were characterised by negative reaction to the brand value crisis that has taken place.

Liu, Shankar (2015) and Baghi, Gabrielli (2019) claimed that in response to the crisis consumers can change their purchasing intentions, spread negative “word-of-mouth” communication, and contribute to the occurrence of financial difficulties. In the case of *Grigeo* value crisis, researchers' claims are confirmed, because not only did the public share media articles that provide information unfavourable to the brand, but also encouraged other members of the public to boycott *Grigeo* products. Moreover, comments made by the public on social networks can themselves be seen as negative, as they express dissatisfaction with *Grigeo* actions. The effects on the brand were manifested not only through the verbal expression of the public, claiming that the products of the brand will not be consumed, but also thorough the decrease in real sales volumes in retail chains.

Despite the fact that results of the empirical research confirm the relationship between the brand value crisis, public attitude and media information, the research also has limitations.

The research was conducted in April 2020, when the public was strongly emotionally affected by the pandemic. Thus, it was assumed that during the crisis (before the pandemic) public attitudes in the media and social networks during the crisis, would more accurately and realistically reflect public emotions, cognition and behaviour than could be done by the quantitative method during the pandemic period.

The content analysis performed is limited to one specific case of a brand value crisis, allowing a clearer understanding of the manifestations of the brand value crisis, but according to Do et al. (2019), each crisis is different, thus results obtained in the case of another crisis may differ. Taking the aforementioned into account, it is recommended to analyse more similar cases of value crisis in the future to ensure if similar characteristics of the brand value crisis are highlighted.

The empirical research was conducted by eliminating some elements of the brand value, i.e., emotional value and the prestige and self-expression that belong to the symbolic value (the decision is based on the type of product itself); therefore, in order to better understand features of the brand value crisis, the mentioned elements should be included in the research. Content analysis was conducted with a brand of products with low consumer involvement, and according to Yannopoulou et al. (2011), the following can affect consumer responses to the crisis when confronted with media information. Thus, it is not clear whether public response would change, if brands of products with high consumer involvement were analysed.

During the research, public attitudes were analysed through the public comments provided on the social network *Facebook*, because during the research comments

on media news sites were no longer available. The following situation has led to the loss of some public comments.

The analysis of public attitudes through its three constituent components in the case of a brand value crisis has not been studied in scientific works, therefore the conducted research provided a more detailed way of analysing public attitudes. Taking the aforementioned into account, further empirical research is needed to confirm the importance of public attitudes through the mentioned components and their interaction with the brand crisis in the context of the impact of media information.

The research showed the obvious fact that the value of the brand crisis can provoke a particularly strong negative public response. The brand value crisis affects the public attitude through all three of its components, thus in the case of the following crisis, both the behaviour and communication of the brand and the role of information in the media, are important.

The public attitude, most strongly expressed through emotions, demonstrates the need for promptness, sincerity and transparency of company decisions in the media. The cynical behaviour of the brand by avoiding responsibility and acceptance of mistakes sharpens the rhetoric of media information reflecting immorality, which in turn, reinforces the negative public attitude.

The ability of the brand to demonstrate acceptance of guilt, to seek and communicate about the solutions to remedy and redress damage, would show the public a responsible attitude to the situation, an ability to accept responsibility, and at the same time would encourage the public to believe that the brand will learn from mistakes and change in a positive direction. The opposite behaviour of the brand becomes a reason for negative public attitudes, encourages the media to seek and disseminate negative information about the brand, thus further increasing the scale of the negative public attitude, which in turn can affect directly and indirectly the negative consequences of the brand crisis (e.g., financial losses).

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