The Role of Transparency In Brand Reputation Management

By

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This dissertation is submitted to the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Culture, Cardiff University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in International Public Relations& Global Communications Management.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I learned a lot during my time at Cardiff University.  First lesson for me, how trustworthy flatmates will drop what they are doing late at night and four of them willing to cram into an Uber to rush me to the ER as I was in anaphylaxis.  It was a great way to be recognized as the “girl who drank” too much rumor went around the IPR and GCM peers after the first gathering we had as a group. From then on, eating out with anyone involved in “the incident” made sure there were no peanuts in anything … including the water.  I am grateful for the loyal friends that watch out for me. The second lesson, dinner made by two great lifelong friends made home not seem so far away. The third lesson is, I actually learned more about India than Wales and I now am good with super spicy food. The fourth lesson, traveling with friends to new places is good for the soul.  The fifth lesson, which I will use as much as possible, is that I learned I have the ability to visit anywhere in the world with the friends I have made while in Cardiff. To all of you, my Cardiff family, until we meet again: *Côf a lithr, llythyrau a geidw  (*Translation: Memory slips, letters remain).

Anyone who knows me, knows that I am very close to my family.  I speak to them more than once a day and two of my brothers were able to visit me during their spring break.  My parents have always supported me in whatever direction I want to go. I graduated one year early with my Bachelor but was at a loss as to what to do next.  My parents encouraged me to apply to grad school even though I had landed a great job. I am so grateful for their unconditional support and love and words of wisdom that they give allowing me the space to decide if I need it or not.  I need to shout out to my brothers, Samuel, Niklas and Theo for sending me funny gifs, memes, stories and snapchats.. You always seemed to know when I needed a laugh to lighten the moment. To my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who were supportive in asking me about my endeavors and in helping me in any other way I needed.

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Lastly, I would like to say, like I did to my professor when she asked if I was okay and I started to tear up:  “it’s not a dissertation unless you cry at least once”

# ABSTRACT

This study seeks to find how transparency in brands is perceived, recognised and valued by the publics, and how their perceptions may affect the brands ability to maintain its reputation, even during a time of reputational management crisis. The study focuses on researching the ethical dilemmas public relation professionals face when needing to tell the truth, reputation management, crisis communication, corporate social responsibility, two-way communication theory, and narrative theory in order to explain the importance and scope of transparency in the public relations industry. The present study conducted a questionnaire in July 2019 with 191 respondents, and three focus groups consisting of between two or five participants. The research asked participants to define transparency, their value of transparency, and their opinions on Starbucks and its response to the 2018 crisis that lead to the organisation closing all U.S. stores for “racial-bias” training. The results showed that, while an individual may have varying definitions and perceptions of transparency, they valued brands that were transparent over brands that only told the truth. These variations of transparency definition correlated with factors such as an individual’s occupation and level of education. These findings suggest that not only is transparency an important element organisations need to incorporate, but these elements will only be successful if the organisation communicates this transparency in a way that aligns with the target audience’s perception of transparency.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Public relations practitioners have to be aware of the ethical dilemmas they may face, how narrative theory portrays not only the brand but the audience as well, and they need to do all of this without giving too much information that jeopardizes the organisation.  Copious research has already been conducted that explains the importance of and the ethical dilemmas that arise with truth in the public relations industry. Often times, truth is mixed in with the analysis of brand reputation and crisis communications. Yet, as studies have shown time and time again, it is not that simple. As will be explained later in the literature review, there are many more factors that need to be considered when looking at the influences and affects for brand reputation. For example, there is a big and important difference between truth and transparency that needs to be differentiated, as truth is not only difficult to prove, but is not always trusted by the public either. In addition, many scholarly articles have shown that there is not one agreed upon definition of transparency. Despite this, all of these researches have shown that transparency is a strategy that is continuing to grow in importance for the public relations industry.

Many scholars have defined transparency “as the accessibility of corporate information to external stakeholders” (Holland *et al*. 2018). Yet this definition does not “consider the needs and concerns driving the public’s desire to have access to this information (Holland *et al.* 2018). Thus, Holland et al. (2018) explains that “being transparent in the organisational context should consider the nature of the information provided by the organization, how valuable the public perceives that information, and how easy it is for the public to understand the information (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2015)”.  They continue to explain that these choices of what information to disclose do matter because while it can “be technically truthful, . . . [it can be] present[ed] incomplete or otherwise poorly framed information,” which ends up creating more harm (Holland *et al*. 2018). Holland *et al.* (2018) also states that “transparency extends beyond an organization’s decisions to commit itself to transparent behaviour and indicates that transparency also needs to be conceptualized within a message-centric context,” while disclosing timely, accurate, reliable and balanced information.

Holland et al. (2018) explains that in order to be transparent in the organisational context, the organisation “should consider the nature of the information provided by the organisation, how valuable the public perceives that information, and how easy it is for the public to understand the information (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2015)”.  They continue to explain that these choices of what information to disclose do matter because, while it can “be technically truthful, . . . [it can be] present[ed] incomplete or otherwise poorly framed information,” which ends up creating more harm (Holland *et al*. 2018). Holland *et al.* (2018) also states that “transparency extends beyond an organisation’s decisions to commit itself to transparent behaviour and indicates that transparency also needs to be conceptualized within a message-centric context,” while disclosing timely, accurate, reliable and balanced information.

Since there is not one agreed upon definition of transparency, it is important to not only define, but explain how transparency will be used in this dissertation. Holland *et al.*’s (2018) research was a key influence for this dissertation, as they looked to analyse how transparent messages were perceived by an audience. The article found that transparent messages had a positive impact on perception of organisational transparency. Holland *et al.* (2018)encouraged scholars to continue to move “beyond calls to simply engage in ‘transparency’ and to extend the investigation of the nuanced, inner-workings of transparent communication to reap the benefits of an organization’s commitment to greater transparency”. As such, for the purpose of this dissertation, transparency will be used to evaluate how easily recognized and understood a brands mission statement, or values, are. With this definition, it is important to note the significance of cultural differences and how this impacts the evaluation of the brands success on transparency. With the world becoming smaller and borderless, where nations and communities all over the world are communicating quicker and more easily each day, understanding how culture impacts brand reputation is important. While this dissertation will not be big enough to analyse how much of an impact individual cultures have on a deeper level, it will be kept in consideration through factors such as occupation, level of education and age.

While many studies such as Holland *et al*.’s have researched how transparent messages are perceived by the public, not a lot of research has been done on how transparency is perceived on a wider scale. Research on a wider scale would need to look at its impacts on a brands reputation and the effects this can have for the brand during a crisis situation. Again, while this topic is quite broad in scope, the aims are to help contribute to the growing research in the public relations industry in a way that may help others better understand how, where and why transparency is becoming vital. This dissertation set out to find how transparency in brands is perceived, recognised and valued by the publics, and how their perceptions affect the brands ability to maintain its reputation even during a time of crisis. As such, the following are the proposed hypotheses:

H1: How one defines transparency will be largely influenced by factors such as occupation and personal experiences

H2: Despite these varied definitions, transparency will still be highly valued by the audiences and will be a key influence for their decision on what brands to support.

H3: Transparency will be helpful in maintaining a positive reputation, especially during a time of crisis. \*

H4: Starbucks is a strong example of how transparency can be implemented into a reputation management strategy in order to maintain a positive reputation.

\*For hypothesis three, it is important to note that it is not claiming that transparency will not prevent a crisis, but rather serve as a crisis communications strategy for handling any issues that arise.

This question of how transparency is perceived by its audience is important to answer as this understanding will allow an organisation to better understand how to communicate and act in a way that will portray them as transparent. Not only could this potentially help organisations maintain their reputation and handle a crisis and prevent it from damaging its reputation, but it could also help public relations professionals solve some of the ethical dilemmas they face when needing to tell the truth. In order to put into context what is being explained, an analysis on Starbucks will be conducted alongside the research. Starbucks has faced multiple potentially reputational damaging crises over the past few years. For example, the crisis that will be analysed alongside this research took place in April of 2018 at a Starbucks location in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA. The crisis occurred when two black men, who were waiting inside the café for an acquaintance, were arrested after refusing to leave the premises due to not having purchased anything.  In response to the incident, Starbucks closed down all U.S. store locations for a ‘racial-bias’ training. Despite these events, Starbucks has been able to maintain a positive reputation with many loyal customers. It is because of this that an analysis of Starbucks communication strategies alongside the research of consumers thoughts and opinions will help to better understand transparency from the consumers point of view. This understanding might then be used to better a brands reputation. While this dissertation is looking at transparency from a brand and organisational perspective, it is still relevant to the maintenance of public figures and non-profit organisations and can be an area for future research.

Following this introduction, the paper will review articles that discuss transparency in the literature review, which is split into multiple sections where its relevance to transparency in the public relations industry is discussed. The first section will look at the ethical dilemmas public relations professionals face when telling the truth. This will be used to establish how and why understanding and implementing transparency into brand reputation strategies is so important. The second section will be looking at communications strategies that are relevant to transparency at an organisational level. This section will be broken off into four subcategories, focusing on brand reputation management, two-way communications, corporate social responsibility, and narrative theory. Once the relevant literature has been reviewed and analysed, the dissertation will set out to explain in detail why and how questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and social listening were used as the research methodologies. To test these hypotheses, questionnaires, focus groups and a case study on Starbucks using social listening tools were used to gain a better understanding of what and how consumers decide to trust brands.

Once the used methodologies for the research are explained in detail, and analysis of the results from the research will be discussed in the findings and discussions section. After all relevant findings have been analysed and discussed, the dissertation will conclude with what possibilities lie for future research. In doing so, this dissertation can hopefully be used to gain better knowledge of how transparency within a story gains trust from the audience and why this is so important for the public relations industry.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Ethics of telling the truth

The first distinction that must be made is how truth, honesty and transparency are often lumped into the same definition despite each implicating something completely different. Telling the truth is often used when explaining the ethical implications of public relations. The issue with truth is that the public is often sceptical of what is being communicated to them, thus, the challenge becomes “defining what truth is in public relations” (Parsons 2016, pp. 15, 21). “PR’s advocacy role has been misunderstood and maligned for years, [and has caused confusion] as it has been [associated] with the manipulation of the public mind,” (Parsons 2016, pp. 103), and as such, it is often mistaken for, and is still viewed by many, as propaganda (Moloney 2006, pp. 101; Place 2019). Despite this misconception, studies have shown that public relations professionals “generally exhibit high levels of moral reasoning” (Place 2019). Therefore, it is important to not only understand what ethical dilemmas public relations professionals must deal with, but what strategies can be used to reduce the chance of a campaign being seen as propaganda.

Parsons (2016, pp. 104). explains that despite this preconceived notion from the public, there are ways to avoid the label of propaganda in persuasive communication. She lists:

Avoid false, fabricated, misrepresented, distorted or irrelevant evidence to support your point of view.

Avoid intentionally specious, unsupported or illogical reasoning.

Avoid trying to divert the public’s attention by using such approaches as smear campaigns, or evoking intense emotions related to bigotry, God or the devil.

Avoid asking your public to link your idea to emotion-laden values, motives or goals to which it is not really related.

Don’t conceal your real purpose (or the real supporters of your cause).

Don’t oversimplify complex situations into simplistic, two-valued either/or polar views or choices

(Parsons 2016, pp. 104)

Although these guidelines were for avoiding being labelled as propaganda, they can also be used as guidelines for how an organisation can appear transparent. While this does not answer the question of how transparency in brands are perceived or valued by the consumers, these guidelines are important to list as they provide context for what consumers might notice in messages from the brand. Yet most important of all, is to not take on the role of advocate for something you do not believe in yourself (Parsons 2016, pp. 104-5; Ingham, pp. 19). While it is difficult to define the ‘truth’ of what is being said, it is not as difficult to be clear on what the objectives, goals or aims are.  The issue with this then, is being able to recognise it.

Another ethical issue that Parson’s (2016, pp. 118) raises is ‘political correctness’ and whether something is in ‘poor’ or ‘bad’ taste. Yet, once again, therein lies the issue; “there is a fine line between good and bad taste, good taste is at least somewhat related to personal preference, and the line between tastefulness and tastelessness is difficult to discern” (Parsons 2016, 118). Furthermore, Parsons (2016, pp.118-119). argues that it is not so much about whether a campaign was in tasteful or tasteless, but rather the purpose and reasoning behind it.

Parson uses social responsibility as an “ethical framework for achieving [organisational] goals” (2016, pp. 149). With that, corporate social responsibility becomes a term that not only needs to be defined but analysed for its purpose as well. Parsons (2016, pp. 149) defines corporate social responsibility as meaning “operating a business that meets or exceeds both the legal and ethical expectations that society has for that kind of industry.” She further argues that “if a good social responsibility programme can have benefits for image and reputation, then it stands to reason that enhancing the ethical conduct of the business – and ensuring that the appropriate publics know about it – is a sound PR strategy” (2016 pp. 150). Yet this in and of itself does not ensure ethical public relations practice, and thus there is a need to examine the following roles: internal relations; client/consumer relations; community relations; media relations (Parsons 2016, pp. 151-52).

Kristin Demetrious (2019) explains that with the rise of focus on corporate self-interest, “the social impacts and ethics of PR have come under intense scrutiny and criticism for its covert practices, conflict of interest, manipulation of the science and ‘truth’ and undermining of democratic ideas such as people’s right to engage with protest (Beder, 1997; Conway and Oreskes, 2010; Stauber and Rampton, 1995).” Demetrious continues that by analysing the case study of the AEFL campaign (Peabody Energy), it provides a “window into PR understanding of societal values, public debate and ethics.” While this case study focused on the dialogue and impacts that took place on social media, Demestrious (2019) uses this research to show how Peabody and the AEFL campaign “actions assist[ed] their short- and long-term financial self-interest but [did] little to provide clarity or greater rationality in relation to the issues at hand.” While not explicitly mentioned in the paper, the findings from her social media listening do suggest that the lack of transparency was a contributing factor for the backlash the campaign received.

Accuracy, according to Holland *et al*. (2018), “is the perception that the information provided by the organisation is not just observable, but also valid and truthful.” When taken together, “the level of organizational transparency – as a management strategy – should inform the design of organizational messages” (Holland *et al*. 2018). The emphasis, they (Holland *et al.* 2018) explain, is on the “idea of intentionally shared information [which] implies that the organization must be willing to share access to information, whereas perceived quality highlights the importance of the information itself (i.e., the message) and the public’s perception of that information at the individual level of message processing.” Thus, at an individual level, transparency is conceptualized as perceived transparency (Holland *et al*. 2018). It becomes paramount for organisations to understand how transparency is perceived by their audience as truth is difficult to discern and not always trusted by the public. Transparency, however, means being clear in what is being said. One of the main issues with ethics in PR comes to the public's perspective of this profession’s honesty.

Considering that the origin of public relations came from the idea that people could be manipulated for good, this comes as no surprise. Parsons (2016, pp. 18) suggests that there are five pillars to public relations:

veracity (to tell the truth)

non-maleficence (to do no harm)

beneficence (to do good),

confidentiality (to respect privacy)

fairness (to be fair and socially responsible)

(Parsons 2016, pp. 18)

Because of the pillars for PR, being ethical means that one always seeks out opportunities to do good. Yet the biggest dilemma when it comes to PR ethics, as Parsons (2016, pp. 20) so perfectly puts it, is that the “decision-making is nothing if not a balancing act.” Although these pillars provide a basic understanding of how to analyse ethical implications of PR, there are more personal issues that are important to note as well. For example, “it’s rarely a simple matter of considering an individual’s rights to privacy when dealing with journalists whose believe in the public’s right to know and further believe that his take precedence over what you might define as an individual’s – or even an organisation’s – right to privacy” (Parsons 2016, pp. 20).

Parsons (2016, pp. 22) argues that “telling the ‘truth’ isn’t always enough. . . sometimes you tell the truth and you are still left with a dilemma. . . [yet] with trust, much can be accomplished.” In order to understand the relationship between truth and trust, one must define what truth consists of (Parsons 2016, pp. 22-23). Using *Webster’s Dictionary* definition of trust (“a confident reliance on the integrity, veracity, or justice of another; confidence; faith”), Parsons (2016, pp. 22-23) argues that “if you don’t tell the truth, then [once your] public are aware of this, [they will] have difficulty trusting you,” yet what is less simple is defining what truth “really means in business today.” Tied into this relationship between truth and trust is the issue of loyalty. Parsons (2016, pp. 24-25) describes the four overriding loyalties a public relations practitioner faces everyday as being: “duty to your employer or client . . . duty to society . . . duty to your profession . . . duty to yourself.”

Jackson and Moloney (2018) conducted a series of interviews with Public Relations professionals. Of their responses, some of the most interesting were those that mentioned their dilemmas with not just telling the truth, but how much truth needed to be told (2018). What was interesting about the results from these interviews was, despite not directly saying it, many interviewees mentioned the importance of transparency by saying statements such as “you cannot not tell the truth, but you will be selective” (2018).  Eschenfelder (2011) explains how “ethical decision making is one of the most important issues in the industry and practice of public relations, [and] yet professionals entering the discipline overestimate their knowledge and skills related to ethical principles.” Jackson and Moloney’s conclusion was that public relations professionals’ understanding and perceptions of truth telling are contradictory. This proves why a better understanding of transparency is needed, so it can help professionals deal with the ethical dilemmas that involve telling the truth and provides ways to develop and maintain positive brand reputations.

## Communications Strategies

The importance of having a communications strategy is explained in Anne Gregory’s *Planning and Managing Public Relations Campaigns* (2015, pp. 26), which emphasizes how each stakeholder has different communications requirements. Stakeholders can be anyone from consumers to donors, may be individuals or other organisations, and each have individual requirements (Moloney 2006, pp.111-113). In order to meet these different requirements, Gregory names seven reasons why planning these strategies are so important:

-   It focuses effort [ensures the unnecessary is excluded]

-   It improves effectiveness [saves time and money]

-   It encourages long term view

-   It helps demonstrate value for money

-   It minimizes mishaps [identifies all potential problems/issues]

-   It reconciles conflicts [helps confront difficulties before they arise]

-   It facilitates proactivity

(Gregory 2015, pp. 43-45)

These reasons for why developing a communications strategy is important could also be applied to explain why transparency is an important aspect to be included in a brand. Equally important to planning is the setting of realistic aims and objectives for targeting the aware or unaware stakeholders and public (Gregory 2015, pp. 90-91). Here in lies another issue, as attitudes and beliefs develop over time and are what influences the stakeholders and public’s level of awareness, yet this is “difficult to unpick” (Gregory 2015, pp. 91). Gregory (2015, pp. 91-92) continues to explain that attitudes are formed by: “first-hand knowledge [(one’s self)]; second-hand knowledge [(a trusted friend or acquaintance)]; the on- and offline media; conditioning [(background influences such as education and upbringing)]; commonly held beliefs; first-hand beliefs; facts.” Since these attitudes are specific to the individual person, it makes it difficult to predict how the individual will behave and react (Gregory 2015, pp. 101).

## Brand Reputation Management

A brands reputation is comprised of the perceptions from outsiders on the brand and its characteristics which can and is affected by the outsider’s positive and negative experiences (Fombrun & Rindova 2000, pp.78-80). With the constant changes and advancements in modern media, information is spreading more quickly than ever before, making transparency no longer an option, but rather a necessity, as sooner or later the truth will get out (Kerpen 2013, pp. 68). However, “being transparent [does not] have to mean being a completely open book. . . but as a rule of thumb, the more [one] share[s], the more trust [one will] gain” (Kerpen 2013, 70). Furthermore, “perceived authenticity and positive reputation go hand in hand,” and although there are “at least four contexts of authenticity,” communications play a role in all of them (Greyser 2009). The four contexts, according to Greyser (2009), are: talking authentic (communication); being authentic (the organisations behaviour); staying authentic (the core values); defending authenticity (trust generated over time). He (Greyser 2009) continues to explain that the organisations credibility is the main source of defence for protecting itself from problems that may arise.

Crisis communications can be defined as “an event which causes [an organisation] to become the subject of widespread, potentially unfavourable attention from the international and national media and other groups such as customers, shareholders, employees and their families, politicians, trade unionists and environmental pressure groups who, for one reason or another, have a vested interest in the activities of the organisation” (Regester & Larkin 2005, p.43). This means that a crisis can happen at any moment, especially if there is an element of “unpredictability, threat to stakeholder expectations, impact on organizational performance, and potential for negative outcomes” (Coombs & Holladay 2012, pp. 97). These elements therefore are important to understand, as they explain why incorporating transparency in a brand is so imperative. Theaker (2012, pp. 129) even states that an organization's reputation “is bound up with trust, visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, consistency and responsiveness.”

With the constant changing of technology and the digitalisation of all information, the world is becoming smaller each day. The benefit of this is that almost anyone can have an opinion online. The downside to this is that it allows for false information to be spread quickly and increases the risk of a brands reputation being ruined. With so many voices being heard on social media, opinions are being shared to more people than ever before, and one wrong move can be spread across multiple communities involving millions of people before anything can be done to prevent it. While it is nearly impossible for a crisis to be completely prevented, there are measures that can be done to help keep the crisis from escalating. It is with this that it becomes incredibly important to understand what influences audiences to spread information, and more importantly, what is needed to be done in order to maintain a positive reputation.

Greyser (2009) explains that, while “reputational troubles can come in many forms, from a wide variety of causes and from many publics,” some of the most damaging crises are those that tarnish the ‘essence of the brand’. He continues to explain that “in reputation-intensive situations, effective communications typically are based on a foundation of trust in the communicating entity by the relevant receiving publics” (Greyser 2009). Trust, Greyser (2009) argues, is based on an organisation’s performance, behaviour, and is a foundation of authenticity and reputation. Authenticity in this sense calls for seeing the “reality of an organization from this inside” and relates to the identity (Greyser 2009).  Thus, as is explained by Gregory (2015, pp. 3), “organizations will be judged not only by their corporate words and actions, but by the myriad of individual transactions that they and their employees engage in.” She quotes Philip Sheldrake to list the six influence flows:

         The organization’s influence with stakeholders

         Stakeholders’ influence with each other regarding the organization

         Stakeholders’ influence with the organization

         Competitors’ influence with stakeholders

         Stakeholders’ influence with each other regarding competitors

         Stakeholders’ influence with competitors

(Gregory 2015, pp. 3)

Gregory explains how Sheldrake’s point is that “organizations need to be influential in all these flow of influence if they are to gain traction with stakeholders” (3). More so, a good reputation takes time and is not something earned overnight” (Gregory 2015, pp. 5; Meech 1996, pp. 69). Some of the key changes since Gregory’s (2015, pp. 3) last publication is that “organizations will have to be more adept at responding to a variety of societal issues . . . [and] will have to demonstrate that they are living their espoused values and the mandate.” This is due to the rapid and continuous changes that are being seen in the digital and technological spheres. Balmer (2006, pp. 35) states that a corporates brand culture can “be realized by a variety of stakeholder groups through a multitude of means:

         Consumer consumption [(the preference of a consumer)]

         Employment [(the status of)]

         Endorsement [(the prestige of an award or label)]

         Association [(belong to a prestigious group)]

         Acquisition [(ownership of a brand)]

         Aspiration [(status influencing consumer behaviour)]

         (pp. 35)

These means can be used as a navigational tool to any stakeholder (Balmer 2006, pp. 35) and explain how brands become popular and its consumers maintain loyalty to the brand. Yet these means are not enough to maintain audience loyalty, as it does not consider the effects transparency may have. Therefore, it should be noted that a key to developing and maintaining audience trust can be through ensuring authenticity and transparency in all aspects of the organisation, from slogans to advertisements to brand promises, which needs to be communicated clearly, both internally and externally, and needs to be accomplished early on (Kerpen 2013, pp. 49; Meech 1996, pp. 67). If a brand strays from this authenticity and transparency, it gives room for the audience to doubt it (Kerpen 2013, pp. 50). While this does not necessarily lead to a crisis, being authentic and transparent can help in overcoming a crisis and maintain or restore a brands reputation (Kerpen 2013, pp. 51).

 Hatch and Schultz (2000, pp. 15) argue that corporate branding “highlights the important role employees play in brand practice, making how employees engage with and enact the values and vision of the brand more profound and strategically important to corporate brands.” They define the key alignments for a successful corporate brand in:

1. strategic vision – the central idea behind the company that embodies and expresses top management’s aspirations for what the company will achieve in the future

2. Organizational culture – the internal values, beliefs and basic assumptions that embody the heritage of the company and manifests in the way’s employees feel about the company they are working for

3. Stakeholder images – views of the organization developed by its external stakeholders, the outside world’s overall impression of the company including the views of customers, shareholders, the media, the general public, and so on (Hatch and Schultz 2000)

(Hatch and Schultz 2000, pp. 16)

When taking these three alignments into consideration, an organisation can be aware of how transparency at all levels can lead to higher levels of trust from their audience. If an organisations strategic vision is clearly defined and recognisable by the public, not only would the organisation be perceived as transparent, but the public will trust the organisation more as well. Yet in order for this to be successful,

## Two-Way Communications Theory

Holland et al. (2018) explain disclosure impacts transparency and the quality of information, “which refers to the nature of public access to information.” Yet accessibility is a passive stance, and in order to appear more transparent, “Craft and Heim (2008) . . . [state that] disclosure is an active process of bringing information to light” in a relevant and timely manner (Holland *et al*. 2018). This bringing of information to light does not only extend to the publics, as transparency between employees on an internal-organisation level is equally important as it ensures all members are on the same page and takes accountability for their work and actions (Kerpen 2013, pp. 67).

Oh and Ki (2019) argue that one key strategy to having a strong social presence is “message audiences feel a higher social presence when they think they are interacting with another 'intelligent being behind the message”. Oh and Ki (2019) continue to explain that by having a first-person narrative and using personalization will increase perception of human contact and thus gain more trust. One way to do so is through tone of voice. Oh and Ki (2019) explain that the “public expect their communication experiences to be more transparent and authentic. . . [and that] by directly interacting with the audience, organizations and their communications can be humanized to provide a feeling of interpersonal communication.” This communication strategy is defined as conversational human voice. However, this extends beyond just using a conversational voice, as using “culture metaphor . . . [such as] language, norms, folklore, ceremonies and other social practices that communicate the key ideologies, values, and beliefs guiding action” can bring attention to the human side of an organisation (Meech 1996, pp. 67). By using this conversational voice, it not only builds trust, but helps when in a crisis situation. In order to do so effectively, Oh and Ki (2019) state that the organizations should make the messages “focus on the needs and wants of the message receivers.” One way that a conversational voice can be developed is through storytelling, as it not only makes it interesting, but makes it more relatable and forges an emotional connection (Kerpen 2013, 31). Storytelling is equally important when developing one’s brand, vying for the audience’s attention and trying to establish trust and loyalty. Telling a story accomplishes this because it creates a deeper emotional connection (Kerpen 2013, 31).

Gregory (2015, pp. 99) argues that, based on the discussions on “public relations and communications developments theories . . . transparent, two-way, proactive and interactive public relations is the only sensible way to operate . . . [as there are] too many other sources of information to permit any alternative to transparency.” Gregory (2015, pp. 2015) continues that by being transparent, it leads to being seen as a useful source of information and an indicator of social responsibility. Gregory (2015, pp. 92) also explains the importance of two-way communication, where information and interaction are exchanged by both parties. She (Gregory 2015, pp.93-94) describes the process as the sender sending a message to the decoder (the brand or organization to the public or stakeholder) and the decoder using their attitudes to understand the message, and this process is explained as being cyclical.

When communicating with groups, Gregory (2015, pp. 94-95) lists ‘co-orientation model’ as the most applicable as it involves a genuine dialogue, one where “the organization is prepared to change its position to accommodate its publics.” She (Gregory 2015, pp.  96) describes this model as a network model since it includes features such as connectedness, integration, diversity and openness, which are important in order to understand what is happening in communication. Between understanding all of these features and influences, a public relations professional can understand why issues arise, and develop better strategies to resolve them.

Gregory (2015, pp. 11) explains that a key aspect to having a successful brand and organization (where it has a good reputation) is by communicating with the public, both speaking to them and listening to what they say. With this in mind, Gregory (2015, pp. 11) notes that different communities (especially different cultures, such as nationalities) have different values. By communicating strategically and during all steps of the campaign, it helps “ensure the purpose, vision and values of the chief executive and organization are understood” (Gregory 2015, 11). This difference of perceptions extends to factual knowledge as well, as it has the potential to be influenced by emotions (Meech 1996, pp. 70).

Novak and Richmond’s (2019) analysis of the Starbucks 2015 #RaceTogether campaign shows how only using two-way communication does not always work, especially when it is perceived to be forced. They explain that many scholars have found that the public are “quick to reject corporate campaigns that seen to take advantage or profit from social conflicts.” In these incidences, identified as crass commercialization, the public turns to social media to voice their frustrations (Novak & Richmond 2019). This is where corporate social responsibility plays an important role.

## Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is something many organizations have begun to implement in their strategies, and while a lot of research has been done on the impacts CSR has, Oh and Ki (2019) bring to light the lack of research in communications strategies effectiveness relating to CSR. They argue that one key strategy to having a strong social presence is having “message[s that] audiences feel [have] a higher social presence [and that] they think they are interacting with another intelligent being behind the message” (Oh & Ki 2019). They (2019) continue to explain that by having a first-person narrative and using personalization will increase perception of human contact and thus gain more trust. One way to do so is through tone of voice. Oh and Ki (2019) explain that “publics expect their communication experiences to be more transparent and authentic. . . [and that] by directly interacting with the audience, organizations and their communications can be humanized to provide a feeling of interpersonal communication.” This extends beyond just using a conversational voice and can include using “culture metaphor . . . [such as] language, norms, folklore, ceremonies and other social practices that communicate the key ideologies, values, and beliefs guiding action” can bring attention to the human side of an organisation (Meech 1996, pp. 67). By using this conversational voice, it not only builds trust, but helps when in a crisis situation. In order to do so effectively, Oh and Ki (2019) state that the organizations should make the messages “focus on the needs and wants of the message receivers.” One way that a conversational voice can be developed is through storytelling, as it not only makes it interesting, but makes it more relatable and forges an emotional connection (Kerpen 2013, 31). Storytelling is equally important when developing one’s brand, vying for the audience’s attention and trying to establish trust and loyalty. Telling a story accomplishes this because it creates an emotional connection that influences one’s audience to invest and stay loyal to the brand (Kerpen 2013, 31).

Kim et al. (2019) explain that the role of Corporate Social Responsibilities is dependent on the consumer’s perception, mainly whether their focus is from an economic or social viewpoint. By using Uber’s 2016 scandal, they (2019) explain that the way a consumer engages with a crisis is dependent on what the consumer values. If the consumer values align more on the economical side, the consumer will be more likely to forgive, or not engage with, a crisis based off of a social issue. Consumers whose values align more on the social rights side, however, will be more likely to engage with the crisis when it is dealing with a social issue. While this article has room for more in depth research – specifically in understanding which consumers value economic or social views more, and what other cultural impacts there might be – this research proved to be helpful in understanding how transparency extends beyond just social issues and includes economical value as well. Kim et al.’s (2019) research also only looks at the corporate social responsibility and crisis situation of an organisation and does not mention the influence nor importance of transparency in these situations. While they do allude to the importance of transparency, it is not elaborated or explained. For example, they explain that their findings show how ethical expectations are dependent on the stakeholders’ own expectations. While Kim et al.’s research focused on finding the correlation between economical CSR and social CSR, this dissertation will focus on tracking the changes of level of trust a brand has depending on the level of transparency it exhibits.

## Narrative Theory

While “clarity is identified as the amount of understandability perceived by the information receiver. . . consumers must have the ability to understand the information being presented” (Holland *et al*. 2018). In other words, being transparent would mean communicating in a way that avoids using “jargon that could hinder the receiver’s understanding of the message.

Since “organizational transparency is only achieved if stakeholders view the organization’s effort as transparent (Rawlins, 2009) . . . public perceptions of organizational and message transparency are just as important to consider as the organization’s motives and actual behaviours regarding sharing of information, as well as the specific message characteristics intended to implement and communicate transparency” (Holland *et al.* 2018). Holland *et al.* (2018) cites Rawlins’ (2008) four dimensions to explain how organizational transparency is perceived: level of organizational participation, the delivery of substantial information, how accountable the organization is regarding said information, and to what degree the organization is being secretive in their delivery of information. While these four lists were used in the context of public relations scholarships, it is still applicable to understanding how transparency is perceived by the public.

Holland et al.’s (2018) research confirmed that “an organization’s strategic decision to be transparent can be communicated to the public at tactical level via decisions regarding message design.” These findings also suggest that it is “not enough for an organization to intend to be transparent – organizations must ensure that their communication efforts exhibit features that clearly convey a transparent stance via message design” (Holland *et al.* 2018).

Holland *et al.* argue that transparency is based on the publics/stakeholder’s perception, and thus it is important to incorporate storytelling, or the narrative theory, in the brand as this helps the audience better understand and relate to the brand.

Kent (2015) analysed the 20 master plots that have been used throughout history in order to explain narrative theory to public relations scholars. The importance for this analysis, he (2015) explains, is that despite storytelling being the staple of public relations, there is room for major storytelling improvement in the industry. Using the example of Edelman, Kent points out how the website lacks clarification on what storytelling is and why it is important. Using multiple links to specific sections on Edelman’s website (that are no longer accessible as the links were first accessed back in 2013), Kent (2015) explains that what is being explained and described on the website misses “any features of storytelling” and seems to suggest that “storytelling is just a branding tool that seems not to require any explanation.” When looking at Edelman’s website ([www.edelman.com](http://www.edelman.com) 2019) now, there seems to be some improvement to the explanation of storytelling. For example, searching ‘storytelling’ under the search location on the website resulted in many articles or blogs referencing or explaining storytelling. The first result (<https://www.edelman.com/post/collaboration-future-social-purpose-storytelling> accessed 2019) was a blog post by San Francisco senior account executive, Mike Hower, explaining how “today’s complex and confusing media environment means that reporters and communications professionals must learn to work together to develop and deliver new narratives capable of affecting positive social and environmental change.” While much of what is said in this blog seems to reflect Kent (2015)’s original critiques – such as not explaining storytelling in more depth – this blog post seems to show how improvements are being made by critiquing how public relations professionals focus to much on the ‘who’ rather than the ‘why’ when pitching stories to journalists (Hower, 2016).

While Kent (2015) lists multiple storytelling elements that illustrate how complicated this process is, there are some elements that are key to explore in order to understand how important storytelling is when it comes to transparency and brand reputation. First, is a process called emplotment, where a series of events are assembled together to create a narrative with a plot (Kent 2015). He uses this process to explain how, despite public relations dealing with truth and transparency, individuals are moved by different things (Kent 2015). Gregory (2015, pp. 90-92) supports this claim by citing how attitudes are framed by first-hand, second hand, on- and off-line media, conditioning and beliefs.

Kent continues to explain that storytelling proves to be valuable to the public relations industry as, since “professionals help shape important moral issues,” these stories not only resonate with people, but make it difficult to argue (Kent 2015). This understanding is especially important when it comes to corporate social responsibility, as it explains not only why, but how a brand can be so successful over incorporating social responsibilities in their branding. Starbucks, for example, has made clear how their coffee is fair trade. This can be seen by looking at its website, where an entire tab is dedicated to the different responsibilities Starbucks takes on. This will be analysed more in the findings and discussion (4.0) section of this dissertation.

Kent explains the importance of identification, using Burke’s theories to distinguish three kinds of identification. Identification by Sympathy uses empathetic language and thus creates a sense of identification with someone else (Kurt 2015). Identification by antithesis, in contrast, makes "explicit references to something shared in common with an audience, or pointing out a shared enemy” (Kent 2015). The last kind of identification is that by unawareness, where this identification “invokes imagery, symbols, people, ideas, etc. that resonate with audience members, but are not explicitly spelled out” (Kent 2015). This last form of identification best represents Starbucks, as the Starbucks logo has become a well-recognised symbol that not only is identifiable but creates an emotional connection as well.

# Chapter 3: Methodologies

This dissertation set out to find how transparency in brands is perceived, recognised and valued by the audiences, and how their perceptions affect the brands ability to maintain its reputation even during a time of crisis. As such, it was hypothesised that:

H1: How one defines transparency will be largely influenced by factors such as occupation and personal experiences

H2: Despite these varied definitions, transparency will still be highly valued by the audiences and will be a key influence for their decision on what brands to support.

H3: Transparency will be helpful in maintaining a positive reputation, especially during a time of crisis.

H4: Starbucks is a strong example of how transparency can be implemented into a reputation management strategy in order to maintain a positive reputation.

In order to answer this question and prove these hypotheses, three research methods were used. The first one was a questionnaire ([Appendix A](#_Appendix_A)) which had both open and closed questions. A question asking the participants familiarity with Starbucks was used as a control variable so that the participants who were familiar with Starbucks were the only responses being evaluated. Therefore, only 191 of the 194 responses were used. Other errors that should be considered from the questionnaire are data-collection errors. Multiple participants responded to the nationality question with a racial answer (such as “white” or “Caucasian”), thus making these responses unusable for analysing how one’s nationality might impact one’s opinion of Starbucks.

While creating the questionnaire, the question “what do consumers think about transparency and Starbucks” were kept in mind, so as to create questions that would assess how what factors influence the individual’s perceptions of transparency in brands and Starbucks. This was accomplished by using both quantitative and qualitative methods, where quantitative was used to identify habits and participants understanding of the topic. There were only two optional open-ended, or qualitative, questions, where the participant was asked to elaborate on their reaction to the event identified in the questionnaire. As for the process of selecting which questions to ask, a key factor that was considered was ecological validity (Bryman 2012, pp. 48; Jones *et al.* 2011). Questions were asked only if they pertained to people’s everyday life, or were questions one would already have knowledge or experience in.

The questionnaire received responses from majority of participants being from the United States of America. As all other participants came from various other nations (totalling 23 unique countries), participants were grouped in one of six categories: North America; Central America; Europe; Asia; Africa; Race. The ‘race’ category were for the participants who responded to the nationality question with an ethnicity. Participants from these other nations were included as a way to analyse how Starbuck’s reputation is perceived at a global scale, that way more analyses could be conducted on the success of Starbuck’s overall transparency. The responses were collected through digital platforms, using snowball sampling method. While the digital method was successful in reaching a wider audience, it also allowed for more non-responses, as Jones *et al*. (2011) have already established as a disadvantage. The snowball method, as explained by Bryman (2012, pp. 424), uses an initial group of participants to then establish contact with others. In this instance, it was done by having participants share the questionnaire with others. Initially the issue was thought that by using this sharing method it would limit the responses to represent a specific group of people (i.e. only one age group, nationality or mindset), and not be representative of the target population. However, this ended up not being a major issue, as there was balance in age and occupation, with nationality being primarily from north America or Europe. The only potential issue was respondents were predominantly female.

The first set of questions were personal factual questions about participants gender, age, nationality, level of education and occupation (whether area of study or work). These questions were used as the control variables to see and understand how these factors might influence one’s perception and understanding of Starbucks. While political values were first thought to be asked, in order to assess how that influences one’s perceptions on Starbucks as a brand and on brand transparency, it was decided that this would not only be difficult to conduct on an international level but would not answer the question of how transparency is perceived and understood based off of factors such as occupation and personal experiences. Instead, questions such as nationality, occupation and level of education were used to see if and how these factors might influence a participant’s responses. Kim *et al.* (2018) had proved through their research that a consumer’s perception on corporate social responsibility is influenced by a more economical or social point of view. This questionnaire aimed to expand on these findings by seeing how one’s occupation and level of education, among other factors, might influence their defining and value of transparency in brands.

Questions about attitudes where then used to assess familiarity with Starbucks, which served as the control variable where any participants who responded as being unfamiliar where not used. Questions about attitudes where also used to gage respondent’s perception on level of how successful Starbucks’ response was to the 2018 incident in Philadelphia, USA. The final set of questions where about normative standards and values. This saw both open and closed answers, and for the closed answered, allowed for multiple answers to be selected. Open-ended questions were used in order to allow for unusual responses that had not previously been thought of. Bryman (2012, pp. 246) raises the complication that might arise when using open ended questions. One of the biggest factors that had to be considered for this research was participants might be less likely to respond to these open questions as it takes more time and requires more effort (2012, pp. 247; Jones *et al*. 2011). Some advantages, however, are that open-ended questions allow for respondents to answer in their own terms and are more flexible, which in turn allows for unusual responses that the researcher may not have considered (pp. 247; Jones *et al*. 2011).

For the questions asking the participants preference and factors influencing their decision on what brand to support were not limited to one option. Participants were able to selective multiple options as well as write in their own response, which prevented the results from being skewed because of forcing the participant from selecting an answer that did not pertain to them. The options that were provided were based off of characteristics commonly seen in brands but avoided any specific terms that an individual might not understand. For example, when asked “do you prefer brands that,” the options “have strong public stances on social issues, regardless of if they align with my views; have strong public stances on social issues only if they align with my views; have no public stance on social issues” were used instead of asking corporate social responsibility to ensure all participants would be able to answer the question honestly. This does, however, raise an issue that these answers do not allow the researcher to understand why the selection was made. As such, it becomes even more imperative that a focus group is used to understand what, how and why the audience member thinks about brand transparency.

These responses where then analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively in SPSS. For the quantitative analysis, the responses were sectioned into categories such as ‘positive, negative or neutral’. Closed answers were used to ensure comparability of answers. Some advantages to this include allowing for comparability of answers, are more likely to be answered, and may still lead to a variance in how respondents interpret the question (Bryman 2012, pp. 250). Some disadvantages, however, include a loss of spontaneity in respondents answers and do not allow for the responses to be as in depth (Bryman 2012, pp. 250). Despite the initial concerns of the questionnaire being limited to only one group of people, the responses were actually well balanced for the categories of occupation and age. However, it should still be noted that the biggest issue with this questionnaire was that it was easy to over generalize much of the findings (Byrman 2012, pp. 406). While this questionnaire did lead to some interesting findings and prove that transparency was most valued across all factors, it did not provide in depth understandings for what individuals define as transparency. As such, focus groups ([Appendix B](#_Appendix_B)) were used to help further define transparency and elaborate on the factors that influence such perceptions.

The key qualitative method used for this research was three focus groups (one group of two, one group of four, and one group of five). For this methodology, the groups were instructed to discuss their definitions and perspectives on transparency and how it impacts their opinions on brands. In doing so, a better understanding was able to be gained in how transparency on a brand level affects consumers and the publics opinion and loyalty to the brand. As previous research had shown, transparency has had various definitions for each practitioner and researcher, so having the consumer define transparency from their perspectives would provide beneficial information on how to better communicate with audiences in a way that would maintain their loyalty, even during a time of crisis.

Bryman (2012, pp.502) noted that focus groups having become increasingly popular online and can generate “a considerable amount of relevant data.” While this digital method could have provided more extensive results, as a more diverse of participants could have been used, it was ultimately decided against as it would not allow for analysis of body language, as well as having a face to face conversation allowed for more discussion, rather than the participant’s simply agreeing with one another for the sake of agreeing. Bryman (2012, pp. 504) also notes that focus groups “offers the researcher the opportunity to study ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it.” This was especially pertinent in gaining a deeper understanding of how consumers perceive transparency in brands, and how much value this transparency holds. Thus these focus group were successful as some participant’s perceptions might change after another’s example or explanation for their reasoning.

The selection process for the focus group were not regulated, and instead focused on maintaining a balanced yet diverse group of individuals. In doing so, the results lead to not only a better understanding of each individual’s perception and value on transparency, but allowed for observation on cultural or occupational influences for responses as well. Another benefit to using focus groups was it allowed for the topic and discussion range freely. The questions asked in the focus group were similar to those from the questionnaire. For example, the focus group started with asking the group to define transparency, followed by if they thought transparency was important component for a brand and why. A final question was asked on the participants perception of Starbucks and its portrayal of transparency. Depending on the participants responses, more questions were asked, such as explanations or examples, in order to gain more in-depth conversation (2012 Bryman, pp. 509). One thing that was important to note is that, as the mediator of the focus group, the researcher allowed for long pauses, and avoided filling the silence by asking the next question. Often times, it was during these moments of silence that the best observations and opinions were stated. Bryman (2012 pp. 508) also stated that the mediator should be careful to not be too quick on refocusing the participants attention when the discussion goes off tangent, as it might lead to an interesting revelation. This was seen in the second focus group, where one participant seemed to be making a joke observation, but lead to another participant making a unique connection that allowed all other participants to have a more in-depth conversation.

One potential challenge that might arise from focus groups are no-shows, which is something that was experienced for this research method. While a focus group was scheduled, only two out of the five showed up. Instead of wasting the time, a focus group of two was conducted. While the results were not as valuable as those gained from the larger focus groups, they still provided insight to consumers perception and value of transparency. Another challenge is the size of focus groups. Bryman (2012 pp. 506) explains that focus group can vary in size, depending on the topic needing to be discussed, ranging anywhere from two to ten. Bryman raises the concern that larger focus groups are not necessarily superior, as they might cause some participants to have less involvement. As such, the focus group was kept to a maximum of five participants. The focus groups with four or five participants were found to have been the most successful, as more discussions and debates took place. The focus group with two participants, in turn, was found to have been less successful as there was not as much discussion, and the participants were instead found to have agreed more.

The researcher also observed behaviours during the focus groups to gain understanding of unspoken ques such as agreeing or disagreeing with what was said (Bryman 2012, pp. 284-85). For example, silence after an individual’s statement or observation could signify the other group members not necessarily agreeing with what was said, but also not disagreeing enough to vocalise this. Conversely, if a group member reacted with a negative facial expression it would signify disagreement, or if they nodded their heads it would signify agreement. This behavioural observation was especially important for members of the focus group who were not as vocal as the other members.

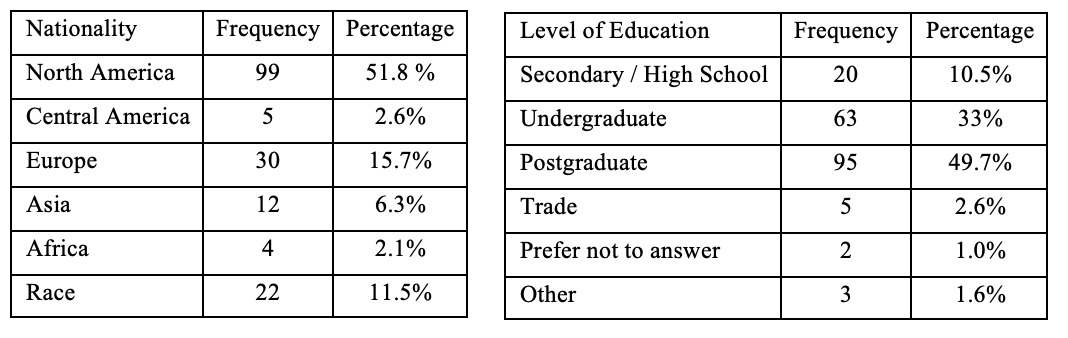
The focus groups proved to be incredibly successful in gaining a more in-depth understanding of the consumers perspectives on brand reputation and transparency. However, since only three focus groups were conducted, there was not enough information that was gathered to confidently make any conclusions. Yet in order to get an even better understanding, more focus groups with diverse participants would need to be conducted.

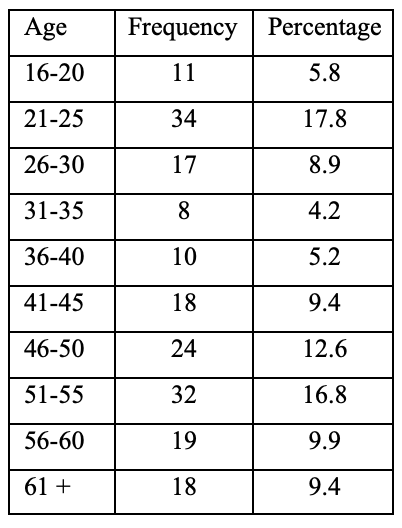
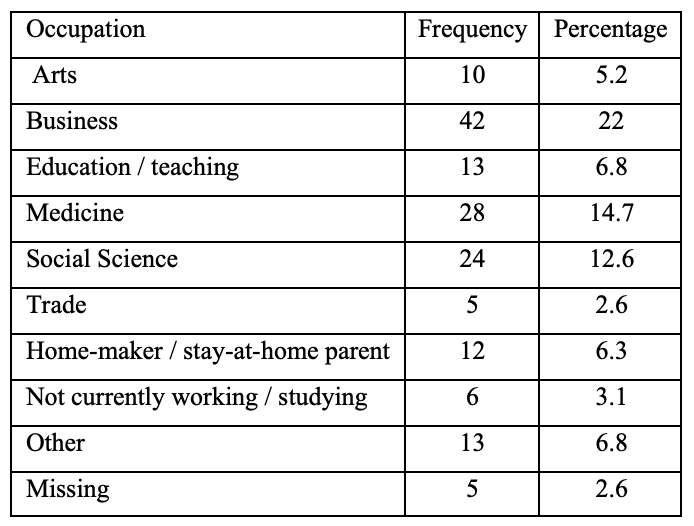
Flyvbjerg (2006, pp. 223) argues that, while case studies have not been valued or have been discredited by many previous researchers, case studies provide important details and provides a view of reality. One key method used to implement this was social listening and hermeneutics. Bryman (2012, pp. 560) explains that this method interprets media from the publishers or authors perspective. This method would then provide context to what was said in the questionnaires and focus groups in relation to Starbucks’ reputation. This will be accomplished by analysing content published by Starbucks (either directly to the Starbucks website or on Twitter) and creating qualitative data from audiences’ responses to these posts. A majority of this will take place through social listening and the use of tools such as Answer the Public.

# Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

Transparency is an important concept for public relations professionals to understand, as it not only affects the ethical dilemmas they face when it comes to telling the truth, but can affect a brands reputation as well. Despite all the research that has been done on transparency in the public relations industry, there are still some contradictions for how transparency is and should be defined, as was shown through Holland et al.’s (2018) research on the reception of transparent messages, where it was emphasised that transparency can only be achieved if stakeholders and the public perceive the brand and what is being communicated to be transparent. This understanding is important from an ethical perspective, as public relations is still considered propaganda by many (Place 2019) and is what leads to the public's distrust. This causes public relations professionals to face dilemmas in deciding when they need to tell the truth and what truth they need to tell the public, all while taking into consideration both the audience’s and the client or organisation’s values and needs (Jackson & Moloney 2018; Eschenfelder 2011).

The questionnaire (appendix A) that was distributed for this dissertation was a key method in establishing audience’s perspectives and values of transparency in brands, and how this has influenced the participants perception of Starbucks. The questionnaire received 191 usable responses, with participants varying in age from 16 to over 60. The responses also saw a wide range of nationalities, occupations and age groups. This diverse range allowed for some insight on what factors might influence an individual’s perception of brand transparency and Starbucks. The graphs below show the amount of responses for nationality, level of education, occupation and age. From the results, 71% were female, 28.5% were male, and 0.5% preferred not to say. These statistics are important to note for future analysis to see how these factors might influence the way an individual might respond. Since these factors only show that there is a correlation, yet do not tell why this might be, the focus groups will be used to further elaborate on what influences are made.



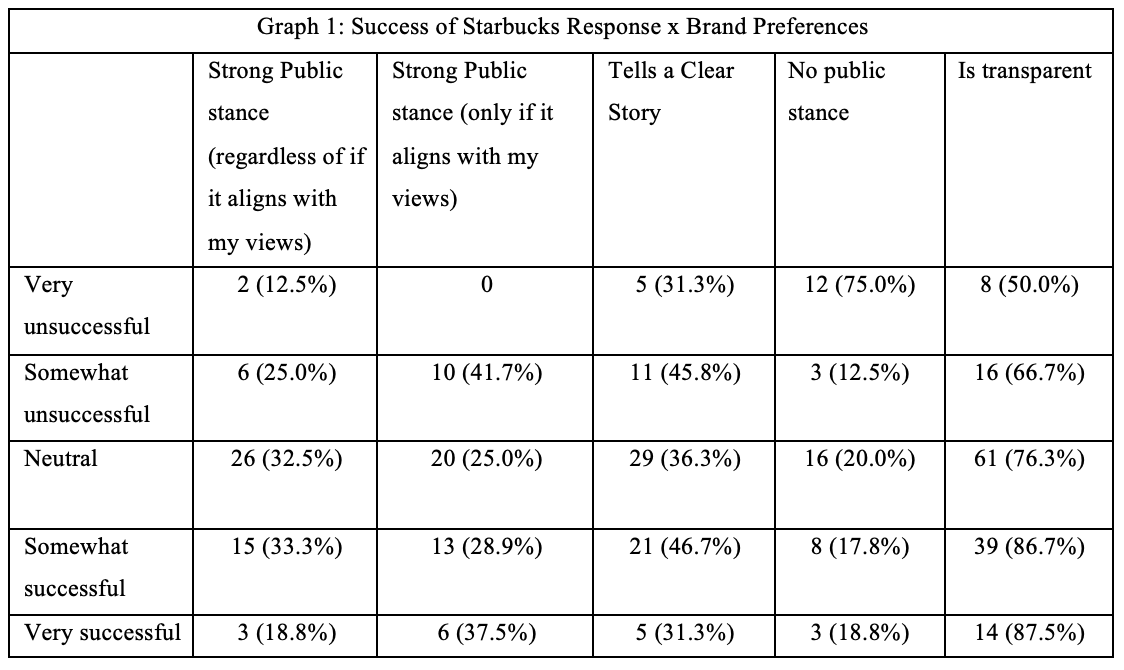


When analysing the data, it was found that no matter the nationality, transparency was still the most valued as a brand characteristic (North America – 83.7%; Central America – 100%; Europe – 60%; Asia – 83.3%; Africa – 100%; responded with an ethnicity – 57.1%). These results cannot be conclusive, however, as these results alone do not explain why or how one’s nationality might impact one’s perception and value of transparency. While comparing occupation to brand characteristic preferences, it was found that respondents who listed art, stay-at-home parent or not currently working/studying as their occupation had the highest percentage of valued transparency (80%, 100% and 100% respectively). Whereas respondents who listed a trade as their occupation had the lowest percentage of respondents who valued transparency at 27.3%. The occupations that were listed under trade included cosmetology, retail, plumbing and home renovations. Respondents who listed computer science / engineering or “other” as their occupation had the second lowest percentages of valued transparency (66.7%). These results show that one’s occupation can and does have an impact one an individual’s values for brands, which was similar to Kim *et al.*’s findings where consumers with economical focused perceptions and values were less likely to engage with an organisations social crisis. Despite these slight variances, however, all occupational categories showed that transparency was the most selected answer. These results proved hypothesis two, in which transparency is valued by the majority of individuals. While the questionnaire did not ask individuals to define transparency, the questionnaire does suggest that hypothesis one has some element of relevance, as there was a correlation between occupation and how many participants responded with transparency as a main value.

The first focus group consisted of two participants between the ages of 22 and 25, both of whom are in a social science occupation. While this focus group resulted in the least amount of discussion, it still provided valuable insight on how transparency influences an individual’s decision on what brand to support. The second focus group consisted of four American students, all aged between 18 and 20. The areas of study for this group consisted of finance and international relations. One of the most interesting findings from this focus group was how different all of the answers were for defining transparency in comparison to truth. For example, the participant who was studying finance viewed truth to be a very black and white construct, with no grey area. The international relations student, however, tried to explain how truth was subjective. While this participant did not explicitly state truth was subjective, the examples and logic used alludes to this thinking). When asked how truth differs from transparency, this participant used the analogy of a mirror and window. He explained that truth is representative of a mirror, as the truth only reflects what the subject wants to see, whereas transparency represents a window, being clear and allowing the subject to see what is actually on the other side. This logic was argued by the two finance and business participants, as they tried to explain that with this logic, it would mean that the statement would no longer be fact, but rather opinion. This in turn was argued that even if something has been proven, it can still be an exaggeration. When asked what transparency means, all participants in this focus group explained how it is related to truth, but went further into explaining that transparency differs from truth because it shows all aspects and perspectives. When asked which they value most, the youngest participant offered possibly the most interesting perspective, saying here that he believed truth can be bent, and therefore does not trust it. On this perspective, the international relations student used the Fyre festival as an example. This fraudulent luxury musical festival took place in the spring of 2017, and despite having been promoted by multiple influencers and marketed as an exclusive luxury event, it left thousands of ticket holders in conditions that were anything but luxurious. The participant explained that everything that was said to promote the festival was technically true, since at the time everyone who was promoting it believed it was true. He further explained that truth can be taken out of context. This perspective and example provide evidence of hypothesis three: transparency will be helpful in maintaining a positive reputation, especially during a time of crisis. Despite this perspective and explanation, the two business participants still argued that this then means it is no longer the truth, yet did agree that transparency is more valuable.

The third focus group consisted of five German or Indian nationality students, all aged 22-25 and all studying business or engineering. Similar to the previous focus group, all of the members felt that truth was based on facts and represents honesty, and similar to lasts, there was only one participant who viewed truth as being flexible and open to interpretation. One difference with this focus group, however, was one participant associated truth with a positive feeling. When asked to define transparency, one participant defined it as showing honesty, while another expressed that transparency is subjective. One participant gave the analogy of transparency opening the curtain and thus shows the “real”. When asked if truth or transparency was more valuable in a brand, all agreed that transparency was more valuable, however, the extent of this opinion varied. One participant in particular contradicted his previous statement of truth should not differ when he said “let [him] decide the facts.” While all participants did think transparency was valuable, many clarified transparency as only being valuable when and if truth is included, and that transparency has its limitations. One business student expressed his perspective that transparency holds organisations liable to their actions, as consumers hear both positive and negative points.

The focus groups, when built off of the findings from the questionnaire, do support hypothesis one: how one defines transparency will be largely influenced by factors such as occupation and personal experiences. While all participants were studying business, engineering or a social science, their perceptions and values of transparency correlated with the findings from the questionnaire. It should be noted that the focus groups would have ideally had at least one participant with a trade occupation in order to prove the validity of the questionnaire in support for hypothesis one. However, the definitions that were discussed for transparency and the examples used during the focus groups still support the first hypothesis that transparency perception and value is largely influenced by occupation and personal experiences. For example, a participant in the second focus group used his financial class as an example to explain why he believed transparency meant an organisation has to show everything that goes on behind the scenes, and how this was impossible as “90% of what’s happening in a company is not actually shown.” All participants from focus group 3 (appendix B.3) gave personal examples to show their understanding and perception of brand transparency.

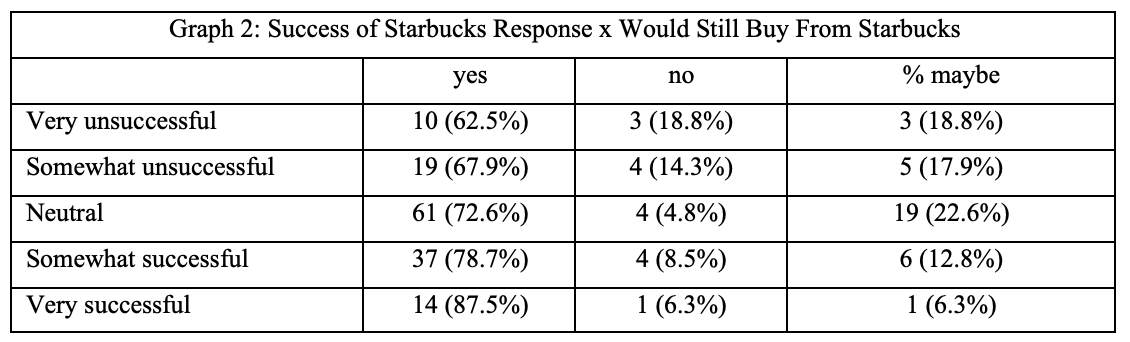


One of the questions in the questionnaire asked participants to rate how successful they felt Starbucks’ response of closing all U.S. locations for ‘racial-bias’ training was (this was in response to two black men at a Starbucks in Philadelphia who were arrested for refusing to leave when waiting for an acquaintance and not purchase anything). When comparing the results for brand preferences with the success rating of Starbucks response to the 2018 crisis (graph 1, above), it was found that respondents who valued brands that had no public stance were most likely to view Starbucks’ response to the 2018 crisis as very unsuccessful, whereas respondents who valued transparency were most likely to view Starbucks response as successful. Although respondents had the option to select multiple preferences, these results still show that audiences who view a brand as transparent, and value this transparency, are more likely to respond positively to an organization’s response during a crisis. When comparing the respondents’ preference for brand characteristics to the success level of Starbucks response (graph 1), it was seen that those who valued transparency (39.2%, 138 responses total), were more likely to view Starbucks response as very successful, with 87.5% stating Starbucks response was very successful. Of the respondents who viewed Starbucks response as very unsuccessful, 75% had stated they preferred brands with no public stance, and only 50% stated they preferred brands that were transparent. This suggests that audiences who value transparency in brands are more likely to view a transparent response to a crisis as successful. However, if an audience values another factor such as no public stance, they may find a response to a crisis as unsuccessful. Although this does not take into consideration other factors, such as pre-existing opinions of brands, the findings of effects transparency have is still important one to note, as it provides support for why it is imperative that brands incorporate transparency into their communication and brand reputation management strategies. These results also support hypothesis three, in which transparency will be helpful in maintaining a positive reputation, especially during a time of crisis.

These findings correlated with what was discussed in the focus groups, where it was again established that transparency can have a positive impact on an audience’s perception of a brand. Multiple participants explained how they viewed organic brands as trustworthy since they are transparent on what and how their products are made. A participant in the second focus group gave a specific example of TenTree and 4Ocean (in the focus group the participant incorrectly referred to the brand as 5Ocean), where he trusted these brands and viewed them as transparent as they showed how much money is being donated, and what these organisations are doing to help the environment.  Conversely, one participant from the first focus group did express their distrust of MAC since they were not transparent on the fact their animal cruelty-free testing only pertained to certain location’s. However, with these discussions, it also raised the concern that transparency does not have one agreed definition among audience members. As Parsons (2016) and Holland *et al*. (2018) explain, the importance is not whether what is being communicated is transparent, but rather if the audience are able to understand what is being communicated. Thus it is required for the researcher to break down the participants in the focus groups perception of transparency in order to better understand how they might perceive a message. One of the first distinctions that should be made is how the participants of the focus group define and differentiate truth from transparency.

For example, the participants who were studying finance and business viewed truth to be black and white, with no grey area (appendix B 2 and 3). Participants who studied a social science such as international relations or public relations, however, tried to explain how truth was subjective. Both members of first focus group (appendix B.1) defined truth as being subjective and transparency as showing what is being done without necessarily having to put it right in front of an audience. An international relations student in the second focus group (appendix B.2), while not using subjective as a way to define truth, did use examples and logic that alluded to his thinking transparency was subjective. For example, when asked how truth differs from transparency, this participant used the analogy of a mirror and window. He explained that truth is representative of a mirror, as the truth only reflects what the subject wants to see, whereas transparency represents a window, being clear and allowing the subject to see what is actually on the other side. This logic was argued by the two finance and business participants in this second focus group, as they tried to explain that with this logic, it would mean that the statement would no longer be fact, but rather opinion. This in turn was argued that, even though something has been proven, it can still be an exaggeration. The arguments used by the financial and business students were similar to what the participants in the third focus group said, with the most important aspect being they all argued that transparency shows what is going on behind the scenes and truth is a rigid construct and tells facts.

When asked what transparency means, participants in all three focus groups (appendix B) explained how it is related to truth. Some, however, went further by explaining that transparency differs from truth because it shows all aspects and perspectives. When asked which they value most, the youngest participant in the second focus group offered one of the most interesting explanations, saying he believed truth can be bent, and therefore does not trust it. On this perspective, the international relations student used the Fyre festival as example, stating everything that was said to promote the festival was technically true, since at the time everyone who was promoting it believed it was true. He further explained that truth can be taken out of context. Despite this perspectives and explanation, the two business participants still argued that this then means it is no longer the truth. When relating this back to the findings from the questionnaire where participants occupation was compared to brand characteristic preferences (graph 2), it further supports Kim et al.’s findings that economical or societal values can impact the way one responds to a situation. Despite this contradictory understanding  of transparency and truth, all agree that transparency was more valuable, once more supporting the hypothesis that transparency is valued and influences the decision on what brand to support.



In graph 2, it can be seen that of the participants who responded the Starbucks’ response on the 2018 crisis was very unsuccessful, where 62.5% claimed they would still buy from Starbucks. Of the 2 (18.8%) who responded maybe, one explained their reasoning that they “prefer other brands regardless.” Another respondent explained that while they “avoid buying from Starbuck’s where possible” they felt “the response was inconsistent with the incident and has resulted in more incidents at Starbucks where the employees do not know what to do.” One participant gave an interesting perspective when they mentioned the political stances they believed Starbucks make:

“I do not agree with all of Starbucks’ political stances but when it is  convenient I do purchase coffee from Starbucks. Most of this is due to cost. I personally do not support boycotting businesses just because I do not agree with the brand politically. Though, I do not respect the brand as much over these controversies from racial profiling to denying service to our nations police officers. For all of these reasons, this is why I would prefer a brand to not be so political.”

One participant who responded that Starbucks response was very unsuccessful, but would still buy from the brand said “Starbucks has enough money and notoriety to get enough with not even responding to these events. The fact they made the US employees undergo racial bias training is a bigger statement than most PR responses.” They further clarified that their “only problem with Starbucks is that they [are] so expensive.” They continued by explaining they are “more likely to go for a cheaper brand if one’s available, however [it is] nice knowing my money is going toward an ethical brand.” This relates to what was mentioned in both focus group one and three. In focus group one, one participant mentioned that Starbucks has enough money that a reaction to the 2018 incident in Philadelphia was not necessary.

When asked in the focus groups what companies they think are transparent, each participant gave a unique perspective. A participant from the first focus group suggested Starbucks due to its fair-trade coffee and that it is not just “implied on us for marketing purposes.” Another participant listed ‘organic’ organisations as transparent, since they are more likely to show more how a product is made or what is in it. This participant also stated that, “the more [he] knows [about an organisation], the more [he] trusts.” This statement becomes vital to note as it gives a perspective on how audiences perceive and understand the relationship between truth and transparency. Another participant listed luxury brands as transparent since “consumers know what they are getting,” rely on them, and are willing to spend money on them. With that statement, another participant brought up his perspective on how consumers do not care about transparency when it comes to the price of the product. He listed Primark (an Irish fast-fashion store) as an example for his statement, explaining that despite the work conditions many employees have to go through, people still buy from there because of its cheap price. Two other participants agreed with the statement, saying that their perception on other consumers is that the cheaper an item is, the less the consumer will care about the brands social responsibilities. While this could potentially contradict the original findings that

An interesting example the Indian participants gave on brand transparency was a campaign that was launched by FKC that tried to combat the crisis of Indian consumers not trusting the food. In order to solve this issue, the participants explained how KFC started a campaign that allowed consumers to tour the facility and see how the food items were made. One participant, who had taken this tour, explained that the issue with this was that the meat they showed during the tour had been pre-cut. He used this example to explain why he thought organisations, especially big ones, make you think you are transparent, and actually need to show more. Two participants also stated they believed truth holds more value when what is being said is also transparent.

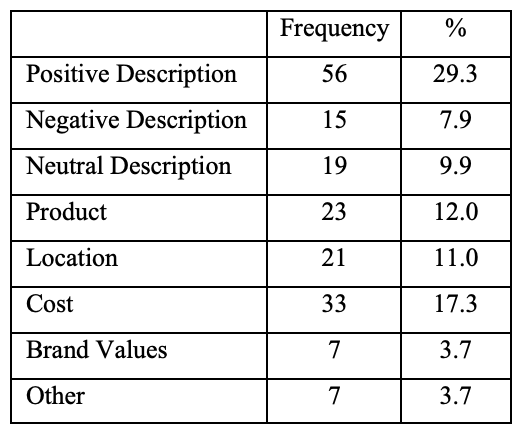
Since the examples of organic brands were brought up as being transparent, the participants were asked to explain if and why they thought corporate social responsibility was important. All of the business students stated they interpreted corporate social responsibility as a way an organisation gives to charity or back to the community and do so as way to reduce guilt. One engineering student stated his interpretation of corporate social responsibility is it forces the consumer to trust the brand. One participant said Starbucks was a great example of organisations who takes on social responsibility, as they not only support local communities, but take responsibility for their impacts as well. When discussing the necessity of corporate social responsibility, one participant stated he believed consumers are aware of the impacts an organisation have, but do not care. Another participant clarified that he felt it was not so much that consumers do not care, but rather they underestimate the power they have.

When asked to describe and explain what they thought about Starbucks, the participants focused most on described the culture of the organisation. While one participant felt that Starbucks was not transparent, others felt that Starbucks was incredibly transparent when it came to employment. One participant also explained that, while Starbuck’s does not advertise their transparency, they are. Another participant also stated that Starbucks is “at the top of [the coffee] business,” so transparency is not necessarily needed. The previous participant agreed, but explained his reason for thinking this was because Starbucks is more of a “lifestyle.” Similar to the previous focus group, one participant felt that Starbucks was not transparent because he did not know much about the brand. Another participant questioned this reasoning though, asking “what more do you need to know?” When asked what their thoughts on the 2018 crisis Starbucks response were, and whether this incident impacted their perception of the brand, multiple participants agreed they still trust Starbucks, and that the incident was specific to a location or environment only, and is not representative of the brand as a whole. One participant expanded on this, stating that his loyalty and trust of Starbucks would go down if the crisis where to involve a decrease in quality [of products]. The reasons for these participants opinions and explanations can be explained by Hatch and Schultz (2000, pp. 15) three key alignments for a successful corporate brand: strategic vision, organisation culture and stakeholder images. Since multiple participants stated this incident was a one time event or location specific, it shows that Starbucks has a clear strategic vision and that this one event is not representative of the brand or other employees.

To get a better understanding of how transparent Starbucks is, based off of the key findings from the focus groups and interviews, the Starbucks website was analysed to see how accessible and how much information can be found on its website ([www.starbucks.com](http://www.starbucks.com)). What is interesting to note is the difference in structure of the Starbucks website for different countries. For example, Starbucks has a menu with sections titled: Coffee, Tea, Menu, Coffeehouse, Social Impact, Starbucks Reward, Stories, Gift Card. Under the Social Impact tab, the main sections include: community, ethical sourcing, environment, global responsibility report goals and progress, learn more. What is interesting to note is that under the category for global responsibility, there is a section where report goals and progress can be found (<https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/global-report>). Under this section a report can be found since 2001. While these reports do not provide insight to how much of their money is going where, it does provide detailed insight to what progress is being made in the organisation. In the second focus group, one participant (S) mentioned that if an organisation was transparent, it would give easy access to information such as what they are doing to help the community, how they are doing it, and if the goals are being met. He used the example of 4Oceans, where the organisation shows on their website how much of proceeds go to cleaning up the ocean. If this perspective that brand transparency means publics access to information is a common one, it would mean Starbucks is a transparent brand, since they provide information on what is being done to be socially responsible, and what still needs to be improved, directly on their website.

Starbucks UK website (<https://www.starbucks.co.uk/>), however, has a menu tab only listing: coffee, menu, coffeehouse, careers, responsibility, card. The responsibility section has options to find out more about: social impact, environment, ethical sourcing, health and wellness, learn more. Despite there not being a section for responsibility report goals and progress, there is still a lot of information that can be found regarding what Starbucks is doing to give back to the communities and environment. All other Starbucks websites from various countries all list responsibility or social impact on the home page. While this shows Starbucks as being transparent based off of what was discussed in the focus groups. However, there are still answers needed on how transparency is portrayed and responded to on social media.

Participants for the questionnaire were asked to describe Starbucks in one word or phrase. Although this question was open-ended, the responses were categorized into: positive description; negative description; neutral description; product specific; location specific; cost; brand values; other. From these categories, it was found that the majority of participants described Starbucks in a positive way that did not relate to a product, location or cost. Some examples of the positive descriptions include consistent, desirable, customer satisfaction and successful. Negative descriptions were the least mentioned and include examples such as “not always customer friendly”, Examples of words and phrases that were used in the brand values category include sustainability and friend of military.



Although only 3.7% of participants used a word or phrase that directly pertained to Starbucks mission statement (“To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time”<https://www.starbucks.com/about-us/company-information/mission-statement>), many still aligned with or supported Starbucks values of “Creating a culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome.” These findings are consistent with what was discussed in the focus groups, where it was agreed that Starbucks is a transparent organisation because of the consistency in their products. It is interesting to note here that one’s occupation did have an impact on who Starbucks was described, while brand preferences such as transparency did not. The arts occupation had the highest percentage of positive descriptions at 44.4%. The occupation with the lowest percentage of positive descriptions was social sciences, at 21.7% (this excludes trade and computer science / engineering, as both occupations had 0 positive descriptions). While this alone is inconclusive, it does suggest that more research can be done on how much one’s occupation does influence brand and transparency perception.

While many participants in both questionnaire and focus groups agreed that the 2018 crisis (where two men were arrested in a Philadelphia Starbucks location) was an isolated incident, and did not necessarily warrant a response, they agreed that the way Starbucks handled the situation was one of the better responses Starbucks could have done. Participants in the third focus group felt that this situation is not enough to cause distrust of the brand, no matter how Starbucks responded. They elaborated that the only thing that would lead to them distrusting Starbucks was if the quality of products when down. Similarly, one participant in the first focus group stated her trust in Starbucks would diminish if it was found out that Starbucks sustainability regulations only pertained to certain locations, and was not a global regulation.

Some participants from the questionnaire also expressed their perception on Starbucks response to the 2018 crisis as “showing commitment,” and “was clear and [that] they need to ensure their politics are known in the company around the world to align and show one face only towards the public [*sic*].” However, other participants from the questionnaire also mentioned how they “Haven’t heard about the aftermath” and therefore could not say whether they felt the response was successful or not. A quick search on Starbucks social media (Instagram, Twitter and Facebook) shows it did not post anything pertaining to the incident or the response. Any information pertaining to the closure of U.S. stores were found through individual accounts or news media. While Starbucks not publishing information relating to the crisis on social media accounts could be justified by the incident pertaining only to U.S. audience, it could still suggest why some participants felt neutral or negatively about the response.

One observation from the focus groups, that should be noted, was how every participant used a story to explain their opinions. Participants in focus group three gave personal anecdotes to explain why they thought complete transparency was not feasible. A participant from focus group two gave an example that from a class taken to make a point. Participants from both focus group one and two used storytelling elements (in this case metaphors) to explain their perception. In two instances, the analogy of transparency being a window was used. Likewise, when describing Starbucks, many participants from both the focus groups and questionnaire, did so by describing the stereotypical customer, or described the culture of the brand. Although a thorough analysis of Starbucks’ story was not conducted, there is still evidence from the way participants explain the brand that suggest Starbucks does have a strong and recognisable brand.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

While a lot of research has already been done on the importance of transparency and the role it has in brand reputation management, not a lot has been done in understanding how important it is to incorporate transparency into an organisation’s public relations strategies. This is important as it affects the ethical dilemmas public relation professionals face. Equally important is how it affects transparency on a brands reputation.  This dissertation therefore has found how transparency in brands is perceived, recognised and valued by the publics, and how their perceptions affect the brands ability to maintain its reputation even during a time of crisis. Through this dissertations research it has been concluded that the definition of transparency is not set nor clearly defined across cultures and disciplines but is key to public loyalty.

The first hypothesis stated how one defines transparency will be largely influenced by factors such as occupation and personal experiences. This was proved through the findings from the questionnaire and focus groups (Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion) where occupations such as trade and computer science / engineering had lower percentages of values for brand transparency compared to occupations such as stay-at-home parent or arts, valued transparency the most while social science occupations were inconclusive.  It would be suggested that transparency should be further studied, and anthropology and/or sociology disciplines would be beneficial to incorporate in the research.

The second hypothesis proposed that, despite these varied definitions, transparency will still be highly valued by the audiences and will be a key influence for their decision on what brands to support. Again, the findings from the questionnaire and focus groups (Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion) supported this hypothesis. Yet these findings also showed the importance of transparency as each stakeholder sees which part needs to be communicated for the area they are responsible for.  Therefore, transparency will be different for the finance stakeholder versus the marketing stakeholder and the public’s stakeholder which includes cultural differences and so on.

Hypothesis three proses that transparency will be helpful in maintaining a positive reputation, especially during a time of crisis. While this hypothesis did not set out to propose ways a brand can avoid a crisis, it did propose that, when implemented on levels and aspects of a corporation's public relations strategies, transparency will aide in maintaining a positive reputation that could be upheld during a crisis situation. By using Starbucks as a case study, it was shown that transparency does, in fact, aid in maintaining a positive reputation. Participants from both the case study and questionnaire expressed their loyalties to Starbucks would not change simply because of one issue that was specific to a location, and not a national or global issue. Starbucks’ story is that they create a “culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome.” Participants described Starbucks in a similar way, expressing that their products and environment consistently made them a trustworthy brand, and that because the response to the crisis at a national level was swiftly and non-defensively, handled it did not alter their loyalty.

The fourth hypothesis proposes that Starbucks is a strong example of how transparency can be implemented into a reputation management strategy in order to maintain a positive reputation. While an analysis of the Starbucks website and the response to the 2018 crisis in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA, showed that there are strong elements of transparency, more research can be done on the extent of this. For example, multiple participants in the focus groups and questionnaire referenced Starbucks’ logo, name and ability to be easily recognised. While semiotics was not an element that was considered for this dissertation, one participant from focus group one did mention how the Starbucks logo was easily recognisable. Thus, this could be incorporated in future research to see how semiotics might impact how narrative theory can be used to portray transparency in an organisation.

In researching transparency through literature reviews as well as the research methods used for this dissertation, it was observed that consumers seem to have a conflict when it comes to trusting brands. While the questionnaire and focus groups have shown that consumers value transparency over truth, there still seems to be a lot of confusion and contradiction when it comes to defining what transparency means. While the evidence suggested brands should do more to advertise their transparency, and a clear definition of what transparency is, will be necessary. Furthermore, it is not enough to simply claim an organisation is transparent, the organisation must act accordingly in all aspects and all departments. Factors such as cultural norms must also be taken into consideration when developing brands or showing transparency.

While this dissertation began with the thought that transparency would be most successful when incorporated into a narrative for the brand, the findings from the research did not inherently prove this, as there was no clear understanding of what brand transparency meant to an individual. Instead, the findings showed that occupation and consistency are most important for a brand showing transparency. More research should be conducted to evaluate ways brands create stories to show their transparency and see how audiences respond. This is important due to the lack of a clear and concise definition of what transparency means in general, and especially in brand reputation management.

It can be argued at the end of this dissertation, transparency is a way to communicate not just to a whole, but rather individuals as well, taking into consideration their needs and values.  It should be noted it can be confirmed through the literature review and research methods for this dissertation that transparency is not just a blanket strategy but rather a case by case and stakeholder to stakeholder methodology to be used.

The definition of transparency does not “consider the needs and concerns [that drives] the public’s desire to have access to this information (Holland *et al.* 2018). Subverting a potential crisis can be managed to a degree by being transparent to the public of what is available so as to not open the door for interpretation during a potential crisis where publics through social media can misinterpret what the truth is.

Transparency is a loose definition in its interpretation from various disciplines, ages, cultures and perspectives.  This researcher would suggest that through interpreting literature review and various methods of research, transparency is key to success of branding.  In order to start with the trust of the public it is suggested through the research of this paper, that allowing all stakeholders, from finance to marketers, public relations professionals and the publics, allow each to see what is available, without the need to disclose everything.  Transparency in its definition needs to be further researched to include cultural mores so as to allow less interpretation.

While people value transparency, and some element of truth does need to be included in transparency, it has no value unless the individual or audience member is able to understand or connect with what is being said and shown.  In other words, a company that does not tell the audience what to think, but rather lets the audience figure it out for themselves, has the potential to gain more trust. Even during a time of crisis. It can be seen through the literature reviewed in chapter two, and the findings from the questionnaire and focus groups in chapter four, that transparency is a topic that needs to be addressed by public relations professionals as it is the foundation for how publics will react to change within a brand, both good and bad.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

1. What is your gender?
   * Male
   * Female
   * Prefer not to say
   * Non-binary
   * Other
2. What is your age?
   * 16-20
   * 21-25
   * 26-30
   * 31-35
   * 36-40
   * 41-45
   * 46-50
   * 51-55
   * 56-60
   * 60 +
3. What is your nationality?
   * Open answer
4. What is your level of education?
   * Secondary school
   * Undergraduate
   * Postgraduate
   * Trade school
   * Prefer not to answer
   * Other
5. What is your occupation / area of study (please choose the closest option)?
   * Arts
   * Business
   * Computer Science / Engineering
   * Medicine
   * Social Sciences
   * Trade
   * Stay-at-home parent
   * Not currently working or studying
   * Other
6. When looking for a new brand to buy or follow, what factors do you find most important to consider? (Select up to 3)
   * Friends opinion
   * Family’s opinion
   * Public figures opinion
   * Social media reviews
   * History of brand
   * What the brand says
   * Who is associated
   * Other
7. Do you prefer brands that (select up to 3):
   * Have strong public stances for social issues (such as LGBTQ, race, environmental, political) regardless of if they align with my views
   * Have a strong public stance for social issues only if they align with my views
   * Tell a clear story
   * Have no public stance
   * Are transparent
   * Other
8. One a scale of 1-5, how familiar are you with the American coffee-chain Starbucks?
   * 5 – very familiar
   * 4 – somewhat familiar
   * 3 – neutral
   * 2 – somewhat unfamiliar
   * 1 – very unfamiliar
9. What one word or phrase would you use to describe Starbucks?
   * Open answer
10. Do you believe Starbucks has clear views and/or objectives?
    * Yes, it is very clear
    * Somewhat, they do have clear views, but it is not always evident
    * Maybe, not sure / never thought about it
    * No, I do not think their views/objectives are clear
    * No, I think they have no views/objectives at all
11. Have you heard about the Starbucks incident on April 2018 in Philadelphia, where two black men, who were waiting for an acquaintance before making any purchases, were arrested?
    * Yes
    * No
    * Maybe, or I don’t remember
12. Starbucks responded to this event by closing down all the U.S. locations for all employees to undergo ‘racial-bias’ training. On a scale of 1-5, how successful do you think this was?
    * 1- Very unsuccessful
    * 2 – somewhat unsuccessful
    * 3 – neutral
    * 4 – somewhat successful
    * 5- very successful
13. Please describe your response or thoughts to this:
    * Open answer
14. Despite issues like the one mentioned above occurring, would you still buy from Starbucks?
    * Yes
    * No
    * Maybe / depends (I will explain in the comment section below)
15. Comments (to the last question or anything else)
    * Open answer

## Appendix B

## B.1

Focus Group 1

Two participants aged 12-25.

Participants are asking to go around the room and verbally agree to being recorded and acknowledge that anything being said on the recording can be used in the dissertation.

R is referred to as the researcher. C and D relate to the participants.

**R: How do you define truth:**

C: Well I think, especially in today’s world, it is very subjective

D: It tells an event or situation without holding anything back

C: Real to you, but it may not inherently the truth. Say for example, if someone was colour blind, they still see a certain colour that, from their perspective is correct, but to someone else they see something different. Its more personal beliefs and the reasoning behind that

D: I agree, truth is very subjective. It’s telling your version of what happened

**R: How would you define transparency?**

C: It’s hard to say with that one, because it’s letting people see what you do, but not putting it in front of them. You show them through active communication on social media. But they are not saying “we’re doing this, we’re doing this charity work.” Because you be obvious about the work you are doing, but if its then it’s not transparent if you are putting yourself in a positive light. I’d say it’s the difference of mirroring and transparency. So mirroring would be showing what the audience wants to see where as transparency works more like a window, and lets you see what the businesses are doing and make up your own mind.

D: It’s not giving all the details, but having it if needed. It’s like if you’re hosting an event. You tell your guests what to expect, but don’t tell them the outcome because you don’t know it.

**R: Would you value truth or transparency most in a brand:**

C: I guess I would value transparency most, because the reality is things can go wrong in business, and sometimes it’s the fault of someone else, but other times they just so happen to get unlucky. But I would rather a brand be transparent about what is happening instead of trying to create a truth.

D: I agree, I value transparency more because a truth or story can differ from person to person

**R: What brands do you consider transparent:**

C: I do think Starbucks are quite good, especially with their fair trade. It doesn’t feel like its been sold and implied on us for marketing purposes, they maintain it very well and promote fair trade to other businesses as well. They did have that racism incident [2018], and they were very quick to fix that, but they’ve got enough money now I don’t believe they would need to fix it, or actively try to fix it. Especially considering it was just two disgruntled customers, but they went out of their way to do it. But other brands? It’s kind of hard to say because there aren’t many brands that do it now a days

D: I agree Starbucks is transparent, they place their value on coffee and don’t take a stance. Another example of a transparent brand is Planned Parenthood because they stand behind their mission statement. So like when the government started controlling what they can do, Planned Parenthood stopped taking federal funds to not let these restrictions impact them.

. . .

D: One brand that I think is not transparent and that I do not trust is the NRA. I think they have too much power and if a company supported the NRA, I would stop supporting them.

C: Yeah, there aren’t many I trust anymore. For example MAC, they very much try to promote themselves as non-animal testing and animal-cruelty free, but that was only in the British chain stores. They have expanded to Chinese markets where it is actually still a requirement to test on animals. . . they are being truthful and they are being honest to both . . . they are doing what is technically right, but in terms of being transparent and being honest, I actually think they are quite deceptive. It’s tricky ‘cause even with those, its not to say I wouldn’t necessarily buy from them, because they still do have good products.

. . .

C: If was found out that Starbucks was fair-trading in one area, but had been doing the opposite in others, that would lose a tremendous amount of my respect.

D: I agree, if a company says they are going to do something, I expect them to do it. And do it in all sectors or all areas

C: Samsung handled their phones blowing up in peoples faces very well. They took responsibility even though it was a different manufacturer that made the parts that were blowing up.

D: They took responsibility because it was their phones, and were transparent on what they were doing to fix the issue.

C: Exactly. Pret and Manger, they keep going back and saying “oh, it was the sandwich company” but the reality is the girl went to your store to buy your sandwich and trusted you, and you epically let her down. And Pret and Manger are doing loads of free stuff at the moment, but I wouldn’t even go for those

D: Boeing keeps trying to place the blame of the airplane not working on everyone else. And because of this, because they are not transparent, I don’t trust them anymore. Transparency is key on all levels, and it’s becoming more and more important

. . .

C: Starbucks has very much developed an image. . . the white girl walking into lecture late with her Starbucks latte. This has taken away from the image of, say, workers in parts of Africa where Starbucks is helping out. But at the same time I think it is a good example of transparency, as they are not constantly flogging the fair-trade, they are allowing it to develop its own connotations.

## B.2

Focus Group 2

All participants are male and aged 18-20.

Participants are asking to go around the room and verbally agree to being recorded and acknowledge that anything being said on the recording can be used in the dissertation.

S, N, T, B are the initials of each participant and how they will be referred to; R is referred to as the researcher.

**R: How would define truth**

N: Honesty

T: Be real with me

B: Facts

T: yes!

B: A response based on facts

T: Response where you are being honest and telling the person face to face

N: something that has actually happened or has actually been thought… now the tricky part with truth is thought, because thought is all subconscious

*Other members begin snickering*

N: No! this is good… thought is subconscious so there is really no way to tell if what you say you are thinking is true or not

Researcher: so would you say it is subjective, meaning it can be based on your own opinions and experiences?

N: yes, because opinions!

S: no!

N: if you quoted someone’s opinion, you can bend that, and then that’s not the truth anymore

S: exactly!

B: yeah, but at that point their opinion is…

N: opinion isn’t a fact, is it?

S: But if you’re quoting it, it is a fact

B: There is one thing that is true, and it’s the fact

S: it is not subjective

N: I disagree. What I am saying is, depending on what you are talking about what truth is… hold on, let me think for a sec so I don’t ramble…

Researcher: okay, then S, why do you disagree with N?

S: it’s the facts, its what actually happened

Researcher: what do you mean by facts though?

S: like, what actually happened.

N: so in order for something to be a fact, it needs to be documented.

S: no….

N: yes.

S: no… is it documented that that pillar over there is orange?

N: yes

S: where?

B: okay, so if you’re playing soccer, and someone scores a bicycle kick, no ones going to document that the goal was a bicycle kick, it’s a fact that the goal was scored by a bicycle kick

N: how do you know that though?

B: because people are saying it, people have seen it

N: that’s not the same

B: it’s the truth

N: I don’t know what the truth is though. Because it could be an exaggeration, can’t it? If I haven’t actually seen it

S: but that’s not the truth then if it’s exaggerated

B: but then that’s on you because you’re doubting the truth

N: but there’s no proof. If there’s proof and documentation it becomes a fact

S: but then if they’re not telling the truth then they’re lying, and that’s …*inaudible*

T: I disagree with N and think he’s not actually thinking through what he’s actually saying. I agree with S and B that truth is just something that is being told exactly like it happened and you’re not adding extra material.

**R: How would you describe/define transparency**

S: showing everything that’s happening behind the scenes

B: agreed

S: but if you’re talking about a company, 90% of what’s happening in a company is not actually shown

B: yeah, so then it’s a non-transparent company. Transparency is where they will see all parts

S: yeah, transparency is being able to see everything that’s going on

N: when I think of transparency I think… okay so I’m going to use a little bit of imagery so you can quote me for your paper if you want to, imagine there is like a clear window and you can see everything going behind there, as if the window is not there. You know everything that is going on and there is no ifs, ands or buts. That is good transparency. Whether or not that happens all the time? I don’t think so. Imagine taking the window and altering it to the way you want it to be seen, in order to make you look like the good people, I feel that happens a lot with major companies because they can.

S: uh, yeah… but that’s the truth cause its not an opinion, it’s the fact

T: well, then transparency is good ‘cause if people saw what was happening behind the scenes then they wouldn’t want to eat it

N: so transparency is good for the company, or is it? Is it good for the consumers?

*Focus group members begin arguing what should or should not be discussed, researcher reminds them that if they feel something relates they can talk about it*

S: okay, so yeah, business… when I talk about my finance class, only 10% of what you see, like in the numbers behind a company is only 10% of the whole story. You barely get to see anything

N: part of transparency too, is rumours, and that goes back to facts, doesn’t it

S: What?

N: Exactly! Think about it, if false news, which as of recent times been hot topics, *… inaudible*

**R: Do you think transparency and truth is the same?**

N: yes! Cause the truth is always clear…

Researcher asks N to clarify as previously he had stated truth is not necessarily clear

N: Transparency deals with point of view, truth does not. Truth is universal, transparency is technically is not

S: Yes, that is correct

N: so actually, I change my mind, truth and transparency are not the same thing. I’d say that transparency more deals with point of view and where you’re coming from. Which comes back to the window, which way are you looking. Are you looking in, or are you looking out?

B: I think that truth leads to transparency, because if you are transparent, you should not be able to tell anything but the truth. Same with companies, if a company is transparent, they shouldn’t be able to tell, like, the media or anything, anything other than the actual truth.

T: What I thought [on transparency] when S defined it were food companies, where people don’t really know, they’re not transparent, so people don’t really know how the stuff is made. Like when that video came out for McDonalds cooks their food and they became transparent, and then people didn’t eat there as much . . . but, companies that don’t show how they make food and its just disgusting then its, they’re not telling the truth.

**Researcher: So then what would you value more in a brand, truth or transparency?**

B: if they told the truth, because then you could ask a bunch of questions

T: No, I think people can bend the truth, people can make the truth not be. . .

S + B: but then that’s not the truth

N: no because you can use truth out of context, which is bad transparency

B: if you ask a company, like if you say what are your numbers from the last six months, they can’t bend that, ‘cause then its not the truth

T: okay, well certain things aren’t transparent

N: oh, holy cow! Did anyone see the Frye festival documentary thing?

S: no…

N: holy cow, this is crazy stuff… and it leads right into this stuff. So the truth is, one, it is a big music festival in the Caribbean. . . *inaudible*. . . and it did happen! Everyone was there and it was cheaper than what it seemed like it should be, all of that happened, but what they made it seem like, sound like, was they made it sound like it was going to be completely luxurious, there were going to be all these famous people there. But that was not true, because of the little video that they used, and they scammed everyone into it. The truth was it was a music festival, it just sucked.

T: yeah, exactly

N: so you can use truth out of context

T: yeah, so you’re agreeing with me.

N: yes

B: yeah, but did they say that there were going to be a bunch of people there?  
N: yeah, cause in the advertisement they had all the famous people there

S: but then that’s not the truth

N: no, it’s implied. Truth can be implied

S: Why did they go to court? Why are there lawsuits against them? That’s not the truth then, because they lied.

N: how did they get thousands of people to go there?

S: because they lied, and people thought it was the truth

N: they sort of had the truth though

S: but its not the truth and that’s why they’re going to prison

N: well it was an exaggeration

Researcher, so S I want you to elaborate a little more on when you said people thought they were telling the truth

N: yeah S, we are agreeing but you’re just arguing with me

S: . ..

**R: so what brands do you think are transparent?**

S: None

B: None

T: very little

N: uh, google?

S: no.

N: yes!

T: no, not transparent, they’re windows are tinted very much

S: Google’s mirrors are the one sided mirror and you’re looking at yourself, when you think you’re looking out

N: no, when I said that, I was thinking, cause of their little commercials, like end of the year commercials, google in 2018 and its just so powerful

T: yeah, but they’re showing you exactly what you were saying earlier

**R: how important do you think it is to have transparency in a brand**

B: very important, but I think that it is impossible

S: I agree it’s impossible

T: It’s important, but I would say it’s not completely necessary, because people still need to make a living. It’s not necessary in this world. Obviously a lot of us would want it, but we’re not going to have it

S: there’s too much that goes on inside a company to reveal everything. And people don’t want to know everything

N: the whole point of a company is to get as many people as possible

T: that’s what I was saying!

N: and if you’re that transparent about everything that goes on, you’ll eliminate a whole bunch of people who wouldn’t want to associate with you

S: the whole thing about a company is making money no matter what, and obviously they’re going to do stuff that’s unethical

B: well did you hear about the amazon warehouse? Were they didn’t let the employees go to the bathroom

T: and then . . . there’s also Sea World, you know when that came out how they treated the Orcas, no one wants to go there

S: a lot of companies say they recycle clothes actually don’t, they just toss or burn them

T: where are your facts from, please? Cite your facts

S: It was talked about in one of my classes

. . .

T: well… I don’t even know why I said that… it’s not necessary because there are business who are not transparent and who are already making money, and people are going through their lives not caring how it happens. They’re just getting the product. So it’s not necessary because people are still doing it, no ones pushing them to become transparent

S: I think it’s not important because it’s going to be too much information and people won’t care about all that stuff. They only need to reveal the information the customers care about

**R: what are your thoughts on corporate social responsibility? Is it important?**

S: yes

N: yes, cause that’s where all the money is

S: cause the world revolves around money, and the money goes through all the companies, especially the big ones

S: its important for them to take on social responsibilities because that’s what the world revolves around. And the bigger the company the more clout they have

**R: so they’re the ones that can make the difference?**

S: yeah. You close down Amazon for example, and there are so many people who are losing jobs, and money is gonna stop, its going to cause big problems

B: it’s like athletes, if you switch from one brand to another, more people follow them, so it’s their social, it’s the impact they have on society, just because of other customers

**R: so is this something you take into consideration when you’re trying to decide between two brands?**

B: oh yeah

S: nah, its too much work. If it’s not easily available to see what they do

B: whichever one has more clout

S: well, its not how they interact with environment, politics, stuff like that, its not easily available to see what they do, you have to do a lot of research and when you’re trying to buy something, you’re not going to

T: no, because you’ll see celebrities wearing their stuff

S: but that’s endorsements, that’s advertisements and has nothing to do with how they interact with politics, how they interact with the environment

S: I wouldn’t do research on it if I saw, for example 5Oceans, if I saw how they’re using the money they’re getting from the bracelets to clean up the oceans then I’ll be like, hey, it looks pretty cool, maybe I’ll get one. I wouldn’t go out of my way to look up. . . they would need to advertise what they’re doing. But that’s when people can lie and say what they’re not actually doing

**R: If I understand correctly, what you are saying is transparency of the brand is if they are making it so that you do not have to do research or extra work on what they’re doing**

S: well I wouldn’t really say that’s complete transparency. You can be transparent without advertising what you’re doing. They have to go out of their way to show what they’re doing, they need to take it a step further than just being transparent

**R: How do you think a company can do that?**

S: like 5Oceans, putting advertisements up on Instagram, Facebook, showing that they’re cleaning up oceans with the money they’re getting, or like Toms, showing how every shoe bought, one pair is donated to kids in Africa.

**R: So it’s not enough to just do it, you need to actively be saying it as well?**

T: It’s not the same

N: well, if you’re actively doing it, the word gets out

S: not necessarily, ‘cause if you don’t know about it, how do you know its happening?

N: I’ve never actually seen Tom say that he was going to donate the shoes…

S: I’ve seen so many ads

T: I didn’t know that till now

S: what about 5Oceans? Have you seen an ad for that?

T: TenTree too…

N: ah, okay. TenTree I did know…

**R: so the next question is what brands do you think are transparent?**

S: I wouldn’t say any company is completely transparent

T: well, I’m saying sort of, cause to be completely you would need video cameras of what they’re doing all day

S: you can’t be completely transparent, you can reveal the next step you’re going to be doing, because you don’t want your competitors to know. Being completely transparent will set you behind

**R: Is it important for brands to be somewhat transparent then?**

S: it’s beneficial to doing good. . . its beneficial if you’re doing good stuff

N: so the face app thingy… when you download it, it tells you what they’re going to do with their date. So does that make them transparent?

T: is it transparent or truth?

S: yeah, its not really being transparent

B: its just telling the truth

S: its like a tiny window

T: yeah, you have to find the tiny hole and look through it

**R: Then what brands show enough transparency that you would want to be loyal to them?**

S: I don’t do enough research to know

T: TenTree

S: do you know what they do with their money? Do how know how much of it they use and for what?

T: I have not seen the graphs of the revenue, so…

S: Exactly, you just know what they put out

**R: S, so in your opinion, is a brand transparent if they have to put out what they do?**

S: well they can’t just put out numbers to just anybody, you’d have to look it up. To be transparent you have to have it available. But nothing can all of a sudden be up on your screen, you have to look it up. They would need to have this information available on the companies website. And they don’t need to include everything, just what percentage is going to what

**R: So what are your thoughts about Starbucks? Do you think they are transparent?**

T: no…

N: I don’t know who their CEO is…

S: that’s your own fault

N: I’ve never seen a Starbucks commercial

T: that has nothing to do with…

N: To be transparent means you’re making yourself as clear as possible

S: well it’s like you’re giving a window for people to see, you can’t make the person stand in front of the window and see it. They have to go there to look through the window. And I don’t know, I’ve never actually looked up to see if Starbucks is transparent or not.

B: I’ve never seen an Ikea commercial. But I don’t need to because I know they are transparent

. . .

T: They are a food company, so if they are transparent about their products, then I guess they are

S: I feel like they’re decently transparent, especially after the 2018 incident. But it was probably because they wanted to make sure people would come back… talking about everything they were doing.

N: this response wasn’t transparent, it was just a reaction. Because if it didn’t get national headlines and nobody cared, they would not have done anything.

S: They didn’t lose that many customers over the situation because they have strong customer loyalty.

N: People know what they’re going to get at Starbucks

T: Okay! So you’re saying they are transparent

. . .

B: People keep going back to Starbucks because its accessible

T: I think they make smart decisions with like their new cups and lids [referencing the straw-less lids]

S: despite issues happening at one specific location, Starbucks reacts as a whole

N: yeah, so like if I lived in that location, I would probably stop going there because I know there were racist people

S: Too me, I’m like, oh the people at this location are really nice to me, and yeah this incident happened and that location, but that doesn’t represent the people who work at this location

N: Even with their response, it was just what everyone wanted to hear, so that’s what they did

S: they stay up to date with all the issues people care about

## B.3

Focus Group 3

All participants are students aged 22-25, studying in business or engineering.

Participants are asking to go around the room and verbally agree to being recorded and acknowledge that anything being said on the recording can be used in the dissertation.

The participants will be referred to as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. R is referred to as the researcher.

**R: How would you define truth?**

3: Facts.

4: Truth means reality?

5: Honesty

2: Positive feeling

1: Not absolute, is flexible and depends on the point of view. . . sometimes I have the feeling . . . facts are always open for interpretation. For example three people can interpret what the objective facts are differently . . . but I would say for a lot of people, like truth is something that is true or not, [but] based on facts, there can be a lot of middle ground

4: Truth is [based] on common things. I personally feel, should not differ among people. Truth is truth. It should be a common thing.

**R: How would define transparency?**

4: showing what exactly the real ground it.

5: there should not be layers

4: opening up the curtains, showing what exactly it is

4: transparency is something. . . transparent about what my schedule is. Not exactly the truth, it might be the truth or something

5: transparency with somebody or some person, allowing him/giving him the opportunity to know you. Truth depends on you, you have the ability to tell [someone] the truth, if you want

1: transparency is also showing, so like if you made a statement, showing . . . the thinking behind, how you came to [the thinking/statement]. Sometimes there can be a truth even though there is no transparency.

2: truth is something that is common, but transparency depends on how comfortable I am, so being me.

1: but with [that], there can never be any discussion because two people can never be right about it. [But with] transparency, you can see how someone came to the conclusion.

. . .

**R: What do you value more from a brand** (transparency or truth)

3: More openness, accountability. Showing what the customer wants to see, but [also] being transparent.

4: I want a brand to be transparent. Let me be the judge of what is truth

*(2, 3, and 5 are all nodding heads in agreement)*

3: If [a brand] tries to hide something, it might backfire in the future

1: For companies there can also be a problem [of being] too transparent. In the end, for me, it is also important for companies to tell the truth, because they can’t be transparent about everything.

3: Companies are held accountable to their customers . . . for example, the food industry, they’ll try to hide something . . . [by] using some scientific name

4: I agree, you cannot expect any company to be 100% transparent with you

3: What may be in the best interest of customers won’t be in the best interest of stakeholders

2: Exactly, there needs to be a balance

*Long pause*

1: I think for a company, the more transparent they are. . . for example, if [a company is] very transparent, its harder to be angry about it. For example if a company is not very transparent and then they don’t tell the truth, that has a higher impact that a company who is always transparent and then one time didn’t tell the truth

. . .

**R: What brands are transparent?**

3: Organic companies, they are more transparent about all their operations and all their ingredients

4: The more you know about something, the more confident you are about it, the more you connect . . . [or] trust it

5: for me, luxury companies, are more transparent because they have people relying on them. People know how they are assembled, where the materials are coming from. Helps create customer satisfaction

2: What I feel is that there is a lot of talk about [what is going on], even though what they are projecting as true, I feel there still needs to be more transparency. What I feel is that major companies are making us believe that its true

1: I think that often even transparent companies, transparency doesn’t mean that everything they are showing is good. I also think people often do not care about transparency. So for example, fashion. This is a good example where people know the working conditions of people who are manufacturing the things is horrible. But people still, even though people are transparent about it, people still go [there]. So people care about transparency, but the better price wins

*Other members continue to give examples on why and how they agree with the above statement*

. . .

2: companies are just using the labels such as organic to get people to trust them. . . organic companies in India have videos and give tours of their facilities to show how everything is done

3: Yeah, we have faith in the certifications. But I have seen shops where they continuously show videos of how they harvest, of how the production is

2: There are tours, like whiskey tours, where you can see the facility and see how everything is made

3: yeah exactly, like with the KFC issues [in India], they started a think where people could take tours

2: It had issues though because, for example, the chicken were already cut up for the tour, you didn’t see where it came from

1: the truth has less worth if it is not transparent

*Group discusses KFC example and tours of facilities more*

5: manipulation can be done in transparency

. . .

1: certificates have little value because, for example, if a company says it was tested by a doctor, what does that mean?

. . .

3: Bodyshop is a transparent company. They have social projects, like when you go to the shops, they always have something where they are giving back to the community or back to the environment.

4: If I buy something that I know a portion will go to charity, then I will definitely buy it because I will feel good

1: One can think a company is doing enough with the reach, and if they give those people the jobs, technically the company is already providing enough [with their employees]. . . the thig with the charity is, technically, what bugs me about it, technically it means my product is more expensive. And I have to trust that they will [donate] the amount they said, and they are acting in my name.

. . .

2: What I would like to see companies do is, for example with plastic, use biodegradable, that does not harm the environment instead of just donating to charity.

*Group member continue to discuss how companies need to take responsibility for the impacts they are creating*

**R: What are your thoughts on Starbucks and is it transparent?**

1: It is a very standardised product, which is good. You know what to expect

5: Starbucks has created a brand for the customers, so now the customers can rely on the brand

3: I love that they offer free wifi . . . makes you want to stay there longer

5: Some of their marketing strategies, like writing your names on the cups, make it more personal

2: they also always come out with new products

. . .

*Multiple participants agree that Starbucks is not transparent*

5: somethings are transparent, for example, the operations they are doing, where the materials come from, how they treat and provide employment. . . so yeah, in a few aspects, there is transparency

2: Starbucks are not transparent, but they have their own standards. . . Starbucks is a good place

1: I think they are not advertising that they are transparent. . . the thing is I think some companies are transparent where you don’t expect they are.

2: I feel that, right now, Starbucks is in a very good place. They are in the top for cafes. So they are not using transparency right now. But in the future, if there is more competition, they might use [transparency]

1: well in the end it is important to the customer. For example, I remember McDonalds did a campaign in Germany about “oh, we know the farmers” but everyone was like “it’s McDonalds! Guys don’t even try”. . . but I think people don’t buy Starbucks because they think it’s the best coffee ever, in the end its more lifestyle.

*All members agree that they trust Starbucks*

1: Despite the [2018] incident, it doesn’t change my opinion, because what does the behaviour of one worker say about the brand? It was just one incedint.

3: It was more personal issue

5: Starbucks took the responsibility, so mistake was made but they took responsibility and did something

1: I’m sure some people say Starbucks over reacted [by closing the stores for a couple hours]

*All members agree how Starbucks response could be seen as an overreaction since it was only one person’s problem, but not the brands, but regardless it was a good response and sent a good image*

1: One employee cannot ruin a brand. But the quality of a brand can ruin it

*All members agree*