

The effect of employees' hierarchical position and the type of social networking site on outsiders' social evaluation of employees who engaged in online ambassadorship for a criticised organisation.

A quantitative study.

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ABSTRACT

The increase of digital technologies has led to a rising number of employees using social media for work-related purposes, for instance, by performing electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and talking about their company online. Thereby, they act as online brand ambassadors representing their company to their followers. Consequently, employees – who are seen as highly authentic and trustworthy ambassadors of companies – play an important role in companies' social media strategies and reputation. However, such behaviours can have negative consequences as online ambassadorship behaviours by employees are likely to be socially evaluated by outsiders. The perceived morality, sociability, and competence of employees is rated and especially, employees who perform eWOM for a criticised company are likely to be evaluated harshly. When a company is behaving unethically and thereby transgressing moral norms, these negative values can spill-over to the employees who identify with their company online and affect their social evaluation by outsiders.

This research aims to add clarity to this topic by studying the influence of two variables on the social evaluation of employees who perform eWOM for a criticised organisation: the level of hierarchy and the social networking site (SNS). Therefore, an experiment with 200 participants has been conducted which compares how a CEO and a subordinate are evaluated and if the platform on which the eWOM has occurred influences the social evaluation. The results demonstrate that the hierarchy level does not significantly influence the social evaluations of morality and sociability but show a significant positive effect of hierarchy on competence. More precisely, CEOs who engaged in online ambassadorship for a criticised organisation are assigned more competence than subordinates. Moreover, the type of SNS does not have a significant influence on morality and sociability but on competence, as employees who posted on Facebook are assigned less competence than on LinkedIn. Last, the interaction effect of hierarchy level and type of SNS was tested but did not show any significant effects on morality, sociability, or competence.

Keywords: online ambassadorship, hierarchy, SNS, social evaluation, transgression

List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ANCOVA	Analysis of covariance
eWOM	Electronic word-of-mouth
SNS	Social networking sites
WOM	Word-of-mouth

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1. Introduction

1.1. Influence of Transgressions on the Social Evaluation of Online Ambassadorship

An organisation committing unethical behaviour – more specifically a transgression of moral norms – will be criticised by outsiders (Singh & Twalo, 2015). Often, companies perform unethical acts to withstand the competition (Fraedrich, 1992) and this can, for instance, result in long-term losses for their reputation (Brunk, 2012). However, not only does a transgression have negative consequences for companies but also for their employees. Employees have been found to be judged for transgressions by their company (Effron et al., 2015) as they are connected to the company. This effect is likely to be heightened in the digital age as the use of social networking sites (SNS) in a professional context is rising (Chu, 2020), which opens more opportunities for communication and blame (ibid.). This can be explained by increased online ambassadorship behaviour of employees (Cheung et al., 2008) where employees publicly support their company and thereby, outsiders strongly connect them to their employer. Such behaviour makes them prone to being judged for a transgression of the company (ibid.). It is not a surprise that literature on the professional use of SNS is rising (Singh & Twalo, 2015) and differences between various SNS, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, are brought to light. Therefore, it is likely that online ambassadorship behaviours vary between different SNS as the various characteristics are likely to affect the connections between employees and employers as well as blame attribution. Thus, the consequences of using SNS for work-related purposes – especially the negative ones following a transgression – should be known and avoided.

When employees share information about their company on any SNS, they practice electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Korzynski et al., 2019) and present themselves as organisational ambassadors (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Thereby, social evaluations of the company and employees by outsiders are influenced (Cheung et al., 2008). As employees are seen as highly authentic, credible, and trustworthy sources (Korzynski et al., 2019), they can increase the reach and reputation of a company through eWOM (Dreher, 2014) which makes employees highly important for a company's social media presence (van Zoonen et al., 2018). In return, the created reputation of the company possibly could transfer to employees as outsiders socially evaluate employees by considering a transgression of the company (Effron et al., 2015). More precisely, it is suggested that the transgression of the company could spill-over to the employee, potentially leading to negative social evaluations by outsiders. Such a violation of moral norms can damage reputations and relationships (Singh & Twalo, 2015) and lead to legal consequences as well as the delegitimisation of the company and employees

(Grzesiuk, 2016). Often, unethical behaviour is framed and spread by SNS (ibid.). This thesis dives into the relation between online ambassadorship behaviour of employees on different social networking sites (SNS) and their social evaluation by outsiders in case of a transgression by the company.

Online ambassadorship behaviour is likely to create social evaluations by outsiders which can be measured through the three main dimensions that people use to form impressions of others: morality, sociability, and competence of the employee which are the outcome variables of this experiment (Brambilla et al., 2012). More specifically, the dimensions of morality, sociability, and competence are the basis for people's judgements of others, for instance, of the judgement of someone's social behaviour (ibid.). Furthermore, Fiske et al. (2006) explain that these dimensions are used to understand social interactions between humans. The first, morality, relates to the correctness of someone's social behaviour and the second, sociability, reveals a person's ability of building social relations with others (Ellemers et al., 2013). Lastly, competence is based on a person's skills and capabilities (Fiske et al., 2006). In this thesis, these three dimensions are used to measure the social evaluation of employees on SNS as these channels open opportunities for such perceptions. More precisely, employees are evaluated after their company has been criticised for a transgression, by measuring whether unethical behaviour spilled over onto the employee.

This thesis also specifically analyses hierarchical differences of employees and compares social evaluations to find out whether the transgression of a company has a larger or smaller spill-over effect on an employee with a different organisational role. Therefore, the CEO with high hierarchy is compared to a subordinate with less power. A CEO's role and status largely affect judgements (Fiske, 1993) and literature suggests that CEOs are evaluated harsher as they are associated with more responsibilities, expectations, and anticipations (Gibson & Schroeder, 2013). This can be explained by the CEOs' tasks, such as having the responsibility for their subordinates' growth, offering them support, being a role model, and setting a good example (Carless et al. 2000). Thereby, CEOs are seen as highly responsible for the ethicality of their company and the ethical behaviours of subordinates (Karelaia & Keck, 2013). These obligations are compensated with higher salaries and status (ibid.).

Moreover, the thesis analyses social evaluations between differing SNS. Therefore, Facebook – a personal networking site with loose networks which focusses on personal connections with friends (Papacharissi, 2009) – and LinkedIn – the most distributed professional networking site focussing on professional contacts and information – have been chosen (Chang et al., 2016). As the two platforms differ in many aspects, such as the

separation of work and life and the degree of professionalism (Chu, 2020), they are likely to influence social evaluations, especially in times of a transgression. It is suggested that the professional etiquette on LinkedIn, the platform which focusses on professional experiences and informational benefits (van Zoonen et al., 2018), creates less likelihood for a spill-over effect on the employee after a transgression by the company. Facebook relies more on emotions and storytelling (van Dijck, 2013) and online ambassador behaviours are more likely when employees show higher self-identification with their company (van Zoonen et al., 2018).

Literature presents several gaps which support the analysis of this thesis. For instance, there are controversial opinions on whether the use of SNS by employees is an advantage for the organisation (Cervellon & Lirio, 2017). Researchers often talk about what companies should do about it (Smith et al., 2017) and are mostly based on the scenario of an employee behaving badly (Effron et al., 2015). However, the view of an employee and which consequences develop for employees who work for a criticised company is hardly represented. Moreover, literature suggests further research on the consequences of a gap between what employees are preaching about an organisation and the organisation's actions (Effron et al., 2015). Especially with the increase of eWOM, many new possibilities for social evaluation are created and should be researched. Additionally, van Zoonen et al. (2018) propose that further research on the effects of organisational ambassador behaviour across different organisational roles should be carried out. This argument is supported by Erhardt and Gibbs (2014) who suggest studying the differences in social evaluations between CEOs and subordinates. Last, the interaction effect of SNSs and the hierarchical role has not been studied yet, despite literature suggesting that social media influences a CEOs reputation (Cai et al., 2020) and explaining that CEOs do have preferences in SNS (Digital Strategy Consulting, 2015). And as an increasing number of employees are using SNS for work purposes, more research in this field is in high demand (Lee et al., 2020).

Based on current social trends and several gaps in literature regarding the hierarchical position and the type of SNS as well as their influence on social evaluations of employees by outsiders following a transgression of company, this thesis will add to current literature by answering the following research question:

To what extent does employees' hierarchical position and the type of SNS impact outsiders' social evaluation of employees who engaged in online ambassadorship for a criticised organisation?

1.2. Scientific and Societal Relevance

This thesis offers scientific relevance. As mentioned earlier, authors have not reached an agreement on whether various organisational roles are judged differently as Karelaia and Keck (2013) suggest that deviant CEOs are judged more harshly than subordinates whereas Bowles and Gelfand (2010) suggest the opposite. On top of that, van Zoonen et al. (2018) propose that further research should be undertaken to study the effects of organisational roles. This thesis responds to this demand for further research and can thereby contribute to the literature by elaborating on the affected evaluations of morality, sociability, and competence of employees in different hierarchy levels. Furthermore, Karelaia and Keck (2013) suggest studying how followers react to transgressions by leaders which in this case is converted to studying how social media followers react to posts by employees. In this thesis, it is assumed that the company itself is responsible for a transgression and not the employee or the leader, as suggested by the authors. By studying the reaction to a transgression by a company, more insights in this topic can be found, nevertheless. Moreover, studying social media followers as the followers – suggested by Karelaia and Keck (2013) – is more applicable to today's digital age and increases the relevance of this topic.

In addition, this study contributes to current literature which is mostly based on employees' actions damaging the company and not vice versa (Effron et al., 2015). Dutton et al. (1994) explain that how outsiders perceive and evaluate employees can affect the employee's experiences and behaviours and suggests that such outcomes should be studied. This thesis addresses this demand for further research by studying outcomes for employees who perform online ambassadorship behaviours and thereby provides more insights on what can happen when the organisation's actions fail to meet its members' expectations and on the relating associations of outsiders.

Additionally, this thesis relates to researchers debating whether social media use is beneficial or harmful to employees (van Zoonen et al., 2018). It has been established that employees play an important role for the image of companies which explains why a lot of research focusses on how employees' social media activities influence organisations (Korzynski et al., 2019). What this means for the employee is less studied and thereby this thesis contributes to current literature. In the case that researchers do talk about consequences of social media use for employees, they focus on positive effects, such as building social contacts, and propose that future research should focus on problematic social media use and its effects (Chu, 2020). More precisely, this thesis studies such effects for different SNS whereas most research generalizes SNS.

The societally relevant insights this thesis can offer include insights into the use of social media for work-related purposes and helping employees become aware of potential problems their social media use could cause them. Thereby, employees will be able to use SNS to their benefit which supports them in presenting themselves in the most pleasant way possible (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Moreover, it can offer guidelines for CEOs and subordinates to improve their image and create authentic relationships with stakeholders through SNS (Lee et al., 2020). Especially because every SNS has unique purposes and characteristics, this thesis offers suggestions how employees can benefit best from each one (Papacharissi, 2009).

In addition, this thesis creates connections between the concept of hypocrisy and the effect for employees and thereby addresses implications for job seekers. As group membership can lead to individuals being negatively judged (Effron et al., 2015), this effect is highly relevant for employees who are members of a company. By deciding to work for a certain company, employees may automatically endorse the company's values and outsiders will evaluate them based on these. If the company is being criticised for unethical behaviour, outsiders may connect them to different values which could create hypocrisy perceptions between the values that the employee represents and the values that the company demonstrates. This thesis brings awareness to this connection.

Furthermore, by answering the research question, attention is brought to important consequences of unethical behaviour in organisations for employees – especially, in different hierarchy levels. As literature suggests that CEOs might be evaluated more harshly (Karelaia & Keck, 2013), this thesis can offer more insights on this and provide guidance for CEOs. By elaborating on the negative consequences of online ambassadorship behaviours of employees who work for a criticised company, the thesis can educate about this issue. Thereby, negative consequences, such as psychological distress could be avoided as this could lead to higher times of absence (Hardy et al., 2003). As frequent social media interactions are already related to higher levels of stress (Chen & Lee, 2013) it is even more important to learn about consequences of unethical behaviour in this context.

1.3. Chapter Outline

The thesis consists of five chapters followed by a list of references and the appendix. The first chapter, the introduction, introduced the main concepts and presented the research question. Thereafter, the theoretical framework, describes the concepts based on existing literature and introduces the hypotheses. The third chapter addresses the chosen methods and

research design – an experiment. Then, the steps of the procedure and the sample are described. In addition, the measures and operationalisation are explained. Last, validity and reliability are addressed. The fourth chapter, results, analyses the data from the experiment and draws conclusions. Therefore, two-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) are performed for testing the manipulation checks, potential control variables are tested and finally, two-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) are carried out with various covariates for hypotheses testing. Last, additional findings are presented. The final chapter of this thesis, the conclusion, discusses the findings more closely, addresses implications, and elaborates on limitations of this research which lead to directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Online Ambassadorship and eWOM

The first concept investigated in this study is employees exercising online ambassadorship and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). First, some overall information is presented. Next, drivers for employee online ambassadorship behaviours are reviewed before comparing benefits and risks.

2.1.1. Overall Information on Online Ambassadorship and eWOM

New digital technologies in today's digital age allow eWOM which is carried out through electronic media, for instance, on social networking sites (SNSs) (Cheung et al., 2008). Electronic WOM includes any type of online communication regarding a company's product or service by employees, consumers, and others (ibid.). It can be positive, negative, or neutral and is easily made available and sharable thereby having considerable impacts on purchasing decisions of consumers (ibid.). Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been studied as a more effective marketing measure compared to traditional promotional strategies as consumers tend to assign high trust to such measures (Engel et al., 1969). Not only consumers are influenced by eWOM but also future employees, as current employees share their experiences and insights on working conditions (Korzynski et al., 2019). Employees who share similar values with the company show high degrees of identification with the company and influence stakeholders' thoughts about a company (Dutton et al., 1994). Online ambassadorship behaviours are more likely to occur when the employee shares the same values as the organisation (van Zoonen et al., 2018).

There are several ways how employees can perform branding behaviours on social media, such as employee word-of-mouth which includes mostly positive achievements of the employee and company (Cervellon & Lirio, 2017). Moreover, employee endorsement includes recommending the company to potential consumers and job candidates (ibid.). Last, employee culture involves keeping company values in mind and only posting content that supports the organisation (ibid.). However, this raises the question what would happen if the company – about which employees on social media have been mostly positive about – suddenly acts unethically. This is likely to affect the evaluation of such employees and will be further reviewed below.

Overall, by combining this personal type of WOM communication with the fast pace and interconnectivity of the Web 2.0., eWOM becomes highly powerful (Cheung et al., 2008). Especially, SNS have created opportunities for employees to distribute their thoughts which

could potentially go viral (Lee et al., 2020). As employees are seen as significant stakeholders (Smith et al., 2017) and outsiders' impressions about a company are created through social media content (van Zoonen et al., 2018), employees are of high importance for companies' social media content and organisations must treat social media strategies with high importance (ibid.). However, literature neglects the influence of outsiders' impressions about a company on the experiences of employees (Dutton et al., 1994).

2.1.2. Drivers of Employee Online Ambassadorship

After establishing the importance of employees as powerful representatives of an organisation (Dreher, 2014), the drivers of employee ambassadorship behaviours are addressed. First, Korzynski et al. (2019) explain that employees whose company posts social media content are more likely to copy this behaviour. In addition, organisational identification can motivate employees to post company-related content on their social media profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) as well as the aspiration to share professional achievements. This could potentially lead to promotions (Erhardt & Gibbs, 2014). Moreover, self-enhancement motives inspire employees to perform company ambassadorship on social media as beneficial opinions about a company could spill over to the employees' professional evaluation (van Zoonen et al., 2018). However, it has not yet been examined whether such positive spill-over effects truly occur for online ambassadorship behaviours, and it also raises the question if spill-over effects could also be assumed for negative opinions and how this would influence the social evaluation of employees by outsiders.

2.1.3. Benefits and Risks of Employee Online Ambassadorship

On the one hand, employee online ambassadorship creates several benefits. According to Dreher (2014), it supports the spreading of the company's corporate character and the shaping of its reputation. Thereby, employees assist reaching organisational goals and companies can increase their engagement rate and visibility which strengthens ties with stakeholders (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Often, employees can improve the perception of a company in an authentic and transparent manner by posting work-related information which tends to be informational and neutral (ibid.). Lee et al. (2020) add that as employees are part of daily procedures and have internal insights, outsiders assign them high knowledge and influence. Their high assigned trustworthiness leads to employees being seen as powerful influencers and ambassadors for their company (Korzynski et al., 2019). On top of that, their content seems more human and thereby heightens credibility and legitimacy (Smith et al.,

2017). Online ambassadorship behaviour can also benefit the employee by increasing organisational membership and proudness (Dutton et al., 1994). Consequently, the overlap of company and personal values is increased (ibid.).

On the other hand, online ambassadorship can have drawbacks. For instance, Dreher (2014) describes that organisations risk losing control and undisclosed information could leak. Moreover, social media has no boundaries – content can easily go viral – and never be deleted (ibid.). As SNS are fast paced, employees might express strong emotions without thinking and frustrations build up easily (ibid.). Lee et al. (2020) support this argument as they explain that if work-related problems are not solved, employees tend to unleash negative comments online. In that case, the company image can easily be weakened through fast distributing comments (Miles & Mangold, 2014). On top of that, companies often lack concrete instructions or pressure employees into posting company-related content which could backfire (Korzynski et al., 2019). From the employee's point of view, risks of online ambassadorship behaviours include stress and negative feelings when the company's image becomes unfortunate (Dutton et al., 1994). Thus, employees feel less engaged with the company or even develop termination intentions (ibid.). In addition, as von Zoonen et al. (2018) explain, outsiders perceive strong connections between employees and organisations when ambassadorship behaviours occur. In a transgression of a company, this could damage the image of employees as they might be associated with it. This suggestion is more closely analysed below.

2.2. Transgression of Ethical Behaviour

The second part of the theoretical framework elaborates on transgressions of ethical behaviour. First, definitions and causes of unethical behaviour are reviewed. Thereafter, examples of unethical behaviour are presented and finally, consequences of a transgression for employees and the company are presented.

2.2.1. Definitions and Causes of Unethical Behaviour

Singh and Twalo (2015) interpret unethical behaviour as a violation of moral norms, such as corruption or antisocial behaviour. By choosing an unethical mean compared to legitimate behaviours, companies and people hope to reach their goals (ibid.). Additionally, Effron et al. (2015) describe a transgression as offending ethical values. Competition plays a major role in causing unethical behaviour as companies constantly aspire to increase their quality while decreasing their prices to withstand competitive pressure (Fraedrich, 1992). To

some degree this pressure is beneficial as it enables innovation but as soon as a company's endurance is on the line, unethical behaviours are likely to be performed (ibid.). Sullivan et al. (2007) explain that any behaviour which is unacceptable in the community's eye is defined as unethical and goes along with the loss of social legitimisation for the company (Jonsson et al., 2009). However, Grzesiuk (2016) mentions that the interpretation of behaviour is subjective and strongly relates to individual and cultural norms. Especially in media, unethical behaviour can be framed and spread easily which might heighten pressure on punishing unethical acts immediately and influence people's perception of the degree of misbehaviour (ibid.).

2.2.2. *Examples of Unethical Behaviour*

Brunk (2012) has introduced the Consumer Perceived Ethicality (CPE) scale which measures a company's or a brand's ethicality and can give insightful examples into the kind of behaviour that people perceive as unethical. According to the author, moral judgements whether something is right or wrong, or good or bad, explain unethicality. For instance, whether a company respects moral norms is considered. This includes a fair treatment towards employees, offering appropriate working conditions, and following guidelines with clarity and uprightness. Furthermore, a company performing illegal endeavours and thereby not abiding to the law is seen as behaving unethically. Next, any socially irresponsible activities, for instance, gaining revenue at the cost of damaging the planet is rated as a transgression. (Brunk, 2012)

2.2.3. *Consequences of Unethical Behaviour*

Last, this section addresses the consequences of unethical behaviour. Singh and Twalo (2015) explain that unethical behaviour can damage someone's reputation as well as the relationships with outsiders. On top of that, an unethical misconduct can create long-term losses not only for reputation but also for competitiveness (Brunk, 2012). Such behaviour can result in punishments by stakeholders and potential legal consequences as well as the delegitimisation of the company (Grzesiuk, 2016). Moreover, a company's sustainability is jeopardized if resources are managed poorly or incorrect behaviours are conducted (Singh & Twalo, 2015). Unethical behaviour of companies also creates psychological agony (Karelaia & Keck, 2013). However, the consequences of unethical behaviours by a company for other stakeholders, such as employees received little attention in current literature. Consequences for employees are highly likely, especially for those who perform online ambassadorship behaviours and publicly support their company through eWOM. This thesis will study

whether employees are affected by a transgression of their company and evaluated harshly as it could be suggested that their followers are likely to connect an employee and the company due to their online ambassadorship behaviours.

2.3. Social Evaluation: Morality, Sociability, and Competence

Third, the concept of social evaluation is addressed as this thesis studies if a company's transgression spills over on the social evaluation of an employee who performs online ambassadorship behaviours. Therefore, social evaluation, its development as well as the three dimensions morality, sociability, and competence are reviewed.

2.3.1. Background Information on Social Evaluation

As mentioned in the introduction, people use social evaluations to form impressions of others by evaluating them on certain dimensions (Brambilla et al., 2012). These dimensions are the fundamental components of social understandings between humans (Fiske et al., 2006). Brambilla et al. (2012) add to this by explaining that people base their judgements of others on dimensions, such as warmth and competence. More precisely, individuals who are perceived with high warmth and high competence are evaluated positively by outsiders which applies to groups and individual communications (Fiske et al., 2006). Furthermore, the two dimensions implicate whether a person likes and respects another (ibid.). Brambilla et al. (2010) add to this research by explaining that the two dimensions of warmth and competence refer to basics of survival. Thereby, the evaluation of warmth supports individuals in predicting someone's intentions through character traits such as trustworthiness, kindness, or friendliness (Brambilla et al, 2010; Fiske et al., 2006). The evaluation of competence helps anticipate someone's abilities to chase such intentions based on their skills, efficacy, and intelligence (ibid.). These dimensions offer important guidance for individual and group behaviours (Ellemers et al., 2013).

Research by Fiske et al. (2006) explains that mostly, the aspects of warmth – which relate to moral and social intentions – are evaluated before those of competence. At one point, research has refrained from talking about only two dimensions of social evaluation, warmth and competence, as later researchers have demonstrated that warmth comprises of morality and sociability (Ellemers et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007). Leach et al. (2007) explain that people with higher perceived sociability skills are more successful and are credited more competence as well as show that morality is the most important dimensions. In their research, the authors relate their reasonings to Aristotle and other meta physicists who emphasis

morality as the most important dimension of social evaluation (ibid.). Thereafter, the three social evaluation factors morality, sociability, and competence were treated as individual factors for evaluating others (ibid.). To measure the perceived behaviour of employees by outsiders in this thesis, the concept of social evaluation comprises of these three dimensions.

Before reviewing the three dimensions more clearly, a brief connection between these dimensions and the previous chapters on online ambassadorship behaviours is made. As explained above, the digital age has created more public opinions and interactions and it could be suggested that the process of social evaluation is different in this new context. SNS create new channels of communication, open engagement, sharing of opinions, and therefore, more opportunities for evaluating others. Moreover, the possibility of posts going viral on SNS could increase the amount and possibly the harshness of social evaluations on SNS in the case of a transgression. These connections will be further addressed below.

2.3.2. Morality, Sociability, and Competence

The first social evaluation dimension, morality, is described as “the degree to which something is right or wrong according to moral principles” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2021a). This indicates that morality is connected to the perception of correctness of someone’s social behaviour (Ellemers et al., 2013). Moreover, Ellemers et al. (2013) define morality as the distinction between correct and false and explain that morality plays an important role in social judgements. Leach et al. (2007) have named sincere, honest, and trustworthy as characteristics that illustrate morality. In addition, the researchers state that morality is the most important dimension of positive opinions in a group (ibid.). A few years later, Brambilla et al. (2010) have added the two characteristics righteous and respectful to the dimension of morality and agree that morality is more significant than the other two dimensions when individuals aim to classify someone as a favour or a risk to their own well-being. For the scope of this thesis the social dimension morality comprises of the five character traits: sincere, honest, trustworthy, righteous, and respectful.

The second dimension of social evaluation, sociability, is defined as “the quality of enjoying spending time with other people” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2021b). Ellemers et al. (2013) describe sociability as a person’s capability to build up social relations with other people. Therefore, characteristics such as likeable, friendly, and warm are important (Brambilla et al., 2012; Brambilla et al., 2013; Leach et al., 2007). Moreover, Brambilla et al. (2010) add the traits of kindness and helpfulness to the dimension of sociability. For this thesis, the social dimension sociability consists of likeable, friendly, warm, kind, and helpful.

The third social evaluation dimension in this thesis, competence, is defined as “the ability to do something well” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2021c). Compared to the previously mentioned dimensions, Fiske et al. (2006) explain that competence is linked to a person’s capabilities and not their social demands. Moreover, a competent person might show some incompetent actions – that might be out of their control – which do not immediately create the general perception of incompetence (ibid.). Leach et al. (2007) illustrate that competence can act as the foundation for evaluations in a group and offers explanations for a group’s success. Furthermore, the researchers have assigned the following character traits to competence: competent, intelligent, and skilled (ibid.). In newer studies, efficient and capable were added (Brambilla et al., 2010). These character traits are used for the dimension of competence in this thesis.

2.4. Hierarchy level: CEO vs. Subordinate

As the fourth concept and an independent variable of this thesis, hierarchical position is reviewed. Therefore, the term CEO is used as the collective term for people in leading positions and the term subordinate for people in lower hierarchy roles. This section elaborates on the characteristics and social evaluation of CEOs compared to subordinates as well as introduces the first hypothesis.

2.4.1. Characteristics of CEOs compared to Subordinates

According to the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary (2021d, 2021e), a CEO is the person with the highest rank in a company and a subordinate is someone with inferior power. Grojean et al. (2004) have described CEOs as being essential for every organisation as their actions highly influence a company’s success. Moreover, Karelaia and Keck (2013) explain that CEOs are individuals with high power and status if their legitimacy is given. The authors assign character traits such as fairness, trustworthiness, and honesty to an ideal CEO who is interested in their subordinates (ibid.). In return, CEOs are rewarded with high salaries and social standing (ibid.). The heightened financial compensation is linked to high power in decision makings which can potentially lead to unfavourable opinions from stakeholders and decreased trust when CEOs exploit their power (Wiggenhorn et al., 2014).

Carless et al. (2000) have conducted a factor analysis of further characteristics of CEOs which indicated that CEOs communicate and follow clear visions. On top of that, CEOs are responsible for the growth and development of their subordinates by using their skills as well as showing them support and acknowledgements (ibid.). Next, CEOs empower

their employees and support innovation and cooperation amongst them (ibid.). CEOs are expected to clearly follow announced values and behaviours to set a good example for their subordinates while at the same time treating the people around them with respect and competence (ibid.). The latter, competence, can be linked to one of the three dimensions of social evaluation explained above. Langford et al. (2016) add to the list of CEO character traits and mention open-mindedness and extroversion. Furthermore, in their opinion, CEOs should be forgiving, friendly and emotionally stable as well as organised (ibid.). Last, Fragale et al. (2008) state that due to the social standing and other factors that make a CEO, communal and media interest tend to be high.

2.4.2. The CEO's Role for Ethical Conduct

By influencing their subordinates as well as presenting actions, CEOs act as role models who affect the ethicality of a company (ibid.). Other authors agree that subordinates tend to seek inspiration from their leaders which shapes their way of thinking and behaving (Sims & Brinkmann, 2002). Leaders are supposed to behave in an ethical manner and set a good example (Karelaia & Keck, 2013). Not only do CEOs inspire their subordinates to act ethically, but a CEO also has the means to impose punishments for those who do not behave correctly (ibid.). As two of the essential characteristics of a leader are integrity and trust, CEOs must be dedicated to ethical and moral norms as well as adjust the values and processes of their company accordingly (Sankar, 2003). Not only should they be dedicated to it but sustaining an ethical way of working is a CEO's responsibility (ibid.). In case the CEO does not do justice to this responsibility, unethical behaviour can quickly be copied by subordinates at a lower hierarchical level of the company (ibid.).

2.4.3. Social Evaluation of CEOs vs. Subordinates

Literature proposes that a person's organisational role affects blame attributions (Gibson & Schroeder, 2003). More specifically, Karelaia and Keck (2013) suggest that leaders are more likely to receive blame compared to non-leaders as outsiders associate leaders with more responsibilities when determining punishments. This is supported by Gibson and Schroeder (2013) who explain that leaders are responsible for more actions as well as face higher expectations and obligations which increases the amount of attributed blame and credit. The role schema theory by Fiske (1993) further states that expectations of appropriate behaviour of leaders influences their evaluation by others. This is explained by the respect and characteristics that are assigned to a leader due to their role in a group (ibid.).

For instance, leaders face expectations of fairness and responsibility which becomes the basis of judgements (ibid.). Karelaia and Keck (2013) mention other studies in their research which contradict the previously reviewed blame attributions. For instance, researchers describe that CEOs are judged more nicely for the same unethical behaviour compared to subordinates (Bowles & Gelfand, 2010 in Karelaia & Keck, 2013). Bowles and Gelfand (2010) explain this based on social identities that evaluators link to status, such as gender or tenure which Karelaia & Keck (2010) explain as bias in the evaluations. Such findings are rather a minority.

Earlier research has concentrated on the affected person's intentions when studying their social evaluation (Gibson & Schroeder, 2003). Blame attributions were based on expectations that outsiders had on the actors' behaviours related to their role in a company (ibid.). Often, CEOs are even blamed for transgressions of their subordinates as they are seen responsible for them (ibid.). Gibson and Schroeder (2003), describe that a higher-level employee is faced with increased anticipations to behave ethically and act as a role model to their subordinates. Furthermore, Karelaia and Keck (2013) indicate that for less severe transgressions, CEOs are often spared from serious punishments – compared to severe transgressions which resulted in harsh evaluations and sanctions. Further researchers, such as Fragale et al. (2008) describe that outsiders relate more intentionality to actors of higher-level hierarchies and consequently, assign higher punishments to them. They explain this by saying that leaders tend to be less concerned with the well-being of others compared to their own which relates to social motives and their status (ibid.). Thereby, if outsiders are unsure how to penalise a transgressor, the high status of a CEO leads to high perceived intentionality and affects the social evaluation negatively (ibid.). Stereotypes are often used as a basis for these perceptions (ibid.). Kaspar and Newer (2016) elaborate further and explain that hierarchical roles influence decision-making in companies and thereby, more blame tends to be attributed to CEOs which was proven in their study with German and Arab participants. However, as a good CEO includes the opinions of their subordinates in their decision-making processes, it could be suggested that subordinates are also assigned partial responsibility for transgressions (ibid.). Although, the hierarchical differences still offer a buffer which protects the subordinates from harsh social evaluations (ibid.).

Further researchers study differing blame attributions between CEOs and non-CEOs such as Efron et al. (2015) who relate hypocrisy to this topic. The authors explain that judgements of employees are related to ethical values and transgressions were evaluated more harshly when those actions were contradicting the ethical values of the company. In that case,

an additional hypocrisy punishment was added to the evaluation: punishments consequently increased, and reputations suffered. This is closely related to organisational membership as employees are expected to implement the company's values in their actions and online ambassadorship behaviours strengthen this view as employees publicly support their company. This kind of moral obligation for employees is included in outsiders' social evaluations. Moreover, Effron et al. (2015) conducted a study which presents differences in social evaluations between low and high hierarchy-levels and indicates higher assigned punishments for higher-level employees by participants. (Effron et al., 2015)

Although the differences in social evaluations between CEOs and subordinates are already being discussed in literature, several researchers suggest further research in this area as some insights are still contradictory. For instance, Erhardt and Gibbs (2014) propose future research differentiating between hierarchical levels. In addition, Effron et al. (2015) mentions that literature often focusses on employees behaving unethically and thereby damaging the company they work for. However, literature neglects what happens if the employee behaves in a supportive way for their company, but the company's actions contradict their original values which are shared by the employee. This would be the case during a transgression of the company. It is highly plausible that the evaluation of the employee by outsiders would be affected by such a situation due to the connections that outsiders make between employees and their company. Such connections can cause spill-over effects which could be explained by the stigma-by-association effect. Pryor et al. (2011) describe that stigma can spread from the party concerned to companions around them, associating them with the stigma. This effect can occur in diverse types of social settings, but especially in workplaces (Kulik et al., 2008). In this study, employees who engage in eWOM are highly likely to share similar values as the company (van Zoonen et al., 2018) and it could be suggested that when organisational values are changing, outsiders automatically adjust their image about employees accordingly even if it was not a positive change. Consequently, the stigma by the company would transfer to the employees. Such spill-overs can be highly powerful, as the VW case has shown. The emissions scandal of one German car manufacturer caused by a small number of employees affected the whole industry and spilled over to employees all around the world (Rhodes, 2016). As social media creates high engagement, such an environment is a great breeding ground for spill-overs due to the interconnectivity between employees and companies. Thus, researchers describe that organisational roles affect social evaluation behaviours due to different characteristics and responsibilities of CEOs and subordinates explained above and

suggest further research in this field (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Therefore, the first hypothesis of this thesis is presented:

Hypothesis 1: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively by outsiders when they are a CEO rather than a subordinate.

As previous parts of this literature review have defined three dimensions of social evaluation – morality, sociability, and competence – the first hypothesis is further divided into three sub-hypotheses. The first takes a closer look at morality. For instance, honesty and trustworthiness (Karelaia & Keck, 2013) as well as respectfulness (Carless et al., 2020) have been listed as characteristics of a good CEO. At the same time, these three characteristics represent morality evaluations (Brambilla et al., 2013). When a company engages in a transgression, it has most likely intentionally done something wrong, and this intention is linked to morality perceptions (Brambilla et al., 2010). Therefore, if harmful intentions are present, CEOs – who are expected to behave morally and are seen as responsible for the company’s actions (Karelaia & Keck, 2013) – are likely to be judged harshly for such actions. Therefore, the first sub-hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1A: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively in morality by outsiders when they are a CEO rather than a subordinate.

The second sub-hypothesis addresses sociability. This social evaluation dimension comprises of friendliness, kindness, and helpfulness amongst others (Brambilla et al., 2013). The literature review above has explained that a good CEO helps their employees grow and develop (Carless et al., 2020) as well as is friendly and forgiving (Langford et al., 2016) which can be seen as a representation of a sociable person. Engaging in a transgression can be seen as unkind and unfriendly which could lead to outsiders evaluating CEOs lower on sociability compared to a subordinate for whom such characteristics are nice to have but do not get as much attention. Consequently, the second sub-hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1B: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively in sociability by outsiders when they are a CEO rather than a subordinate.

Last, the third sub-hypothesis is related to competence. Again, the competence evaluations of a CEO who engages in eWOM after a transgression are expected to be harsher than for subordinates due to the expected characteristics of CEOs. For instance, Carless et al.,

2020 present CEOs as skilled and competent to support their subordinates. This description resembles the characteristics of a competent person by Brambilla et al. (2013) who include competence, intelligence, and skilfulness as dimensions of a competent person. Therefore, it is likely that CEOs – whose company is involved in a transgression – are evaluated more harshly and assigned less competence compared to a subordinate who this is not expected from. Consequently, the third sub-hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 1C: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively in competence by outsiders when they are a CEO rather than a subordinate.

2.5. Social Networking Sites: Facebook vs. LinkedIn

In the following section, the second independent variable, social networking sites (SNS) is explained. This section elaborates on the use of SNS for companies and employees. Then, the two chosen SNS – Facebook and LinkedIn – are more closely interpreted from an employee's point of view. Last, implications of different motives for their use are compared and the second hypothesis is introduced.

2.5.1. Characteristics of SNS and their Professional Use

SNS are increasingly seen as beneficial to organisations for communicating with stakeholders or presenting themselves to applicants (Chang et al., 2016). SNS are web-based platforms where millions of users have created a profile and connect with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). These connections are either made with existing friends or through new relationships (Kim et al., 2013). Increasingly, these sites are incorporated into the users' daily lives (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Chang et al. (2016) explain that users can create and share their own content as well as comment on the posts of others. The various SNS are used differently by employees based on their marketing strategies (Kim et al., 2013). SNS share characteristics such as being able to use them on various devices, sharing and receiving real-time information, interacting with user-generated content as well as the possibility of content going viral (ibid.). These characteristics allow employees to build relationships and engage in dialogic communication with stakeholders (ibid.). Thereby, SNS are a channel for the exchange of ideas and opinions which explains why the number of companies using SNS is expanding (ibid.). However, the degree of corporate communication on SNS depends on various factors, such as the level of interactivity and disclosure, the social settings, layouts,

and the type of industry (Kim et al., 2013; Papacharissi, 2009). Mostly, users are active on several SNS and make use of the differing advantages they can offer (ibid.).

As SNS are increasingly used in work-related contexts, they can influence job performance of employees using social media for work (Chu, 2020). Boundaries between working and leisure hours are becoming less distinct which is enhanced by the loss of space and time (van Zoonen et al., 2017; van Zoonen et al., 2018). On the one hand, this could lead to heightened social connections and increased access to resources (Chu, 2020). On the other hand, it can create psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, or distractions (van Zoonen et al., 2017; Chu, 2020). Still, employees and companies use SNS for marketing purposes to promote themselves or their company as these platforms offer great opportunities to highlight skills as well as network with contacts or customers, as mentioned above (van Dijck, 2013).

2.5.2. *Characteristics of Facebook vs. LinkedIn*

Now that the main characteristics and uses of SNS have been established, the individual characteristics of the two chosen platforms Facebook and LinkedIn are further analysed. These two platforms have been chosen based on their dominance in their corresponding field. Facebook has over one billion created profiles whereas LinkedIn is the largest professional SNS in the world (Chang et al., 2016). Moreover, both SNS are extensively used by companies as well as individuals who aim to create and grow relationships (ibid.). Therefore, the two platforms Facebook and LinkedIn are highly representative for, on the one hand social SNS and on the other hand, professional SNS (ibid.). A comparison between Facebook and LinkedIn allows a good representation of the respective SNS type (ibid.). The SNS differ in several aspects as Facebook is mostly used to share personal information and its playful environment creates more interaction (Papacharissi, 2009), whereas LinkedIn is beneficial for professional purposes (Chang et al., 2016). In many cases, people are users of both SNS to present their personal interests and professional contents adequately (van Dijck, 2013).

More precisely, Papacharissi (2009) describes Facebook as a SNS for users finding and communicating with new and old friends as well as looking at each other's profiles. This setting leads to looser networks which generally allow increased interaction (ibid.). Moreover, reviews have stated that Facebook does not benefit professional connections (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). This could be explained by the self-presentation of personal characteristics of users who have a profile on Facebook which is further supported by the structure of the network (van Dijck, 2013). By presenting all content in a picture-heavy timeline on Facebook,

self-presentation is benefited through showing memories and emotions that create story telling (ibid.). Furthermore, the SNS Facebook allows the creation of communities and group interactions which further support engagement and the creation of new relationships (Chang et al., 2016). Van Zoonen et al. (2018) state that Facebook might be more useful in communicating with stakeholders as spontaneous interactions are facilitated and users are more open to share personal interests. Moreover, users on Facebook are generally connected with people from various domains such as family, friends, or colleagues (ibid.).

In comparison, research explains that users on LinkedIn are interested in creating connections with their colleagues or business contacts (Papacharissi, 2009). Overall, the professional platform is rather static which supports a professional etiquette (ibid.). This etiquette is created by the implementation of similar behaviours and communication norms that are used in the professional workplace (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Thereby, LinkedIn supports career growth for employees as well as the application process for companies who conduct research on potential new employees (Caers & Castelyns, 2011). Consequently, users on LinkedIn aim to self-promote themselves on the platform (van Dijck, 2013). LinkedIn uses clearly structured interfaces which lean towards CVs highlighting most important experiences, skills, and the education of users (van Dijck, 2013). The SNS is not intended for presenting self-expressional content, or a users' emotional life story to obtain a focus on professional connections (ibid.). Chang et al. (2016) describe that LinkedIn intends to facilitate professional networking and other work-related purposes, such as job markets or workshops. On top of that, users state that LinkedIn allows a higher informational benefit for professional topics than Facebook (van Zoonen et al., 2018).

2.5.3. Social evaluation of ambassadorship behaviours on Facebook vs. LinkedIn

To connect the characteristics of Facebook and LinkedIn to the research topic of this thesis, implications for the social evaluation of employees who perform online ambassadorship behaviours on SNS are reviewed. As explained above, LinkedIn is known for a professional etiquette (Papacharissi, 2009; van Zoonen et al., 2018). This suggests that users are expected to incorporate organisational information (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Not only that, but often companies push their employees to create an active profile on LinkedIn for corporate communication purposes (van Dijck, 2013). From an outsiders' point of view, it could therefore be suggested that outsiders expect people to talk about their company on LinkedIn and do not necessarily signify an employee's post as strong support for the organisation. On Facebook, however, it is more common to focus on leisure, and

organisational information is less likely to be shared (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Consequently, eWOM on Facebook is closely related to organisational identification and self-presentation ambitions which means that employees talk about their company because they truly support it and identify strongly with the company values (ibid.). This relation between organisational identification and online ambassadorship behaviours is not the case for LinkedIn which suggests that employees post company-related content on LinkedIn even if they do not necessarily stand behind the company (ibid.). Posting work-related content on Facebook really is an active decision by an employee (Utz, 2015). Therefore, from an outsiders' point of view, it is possible that employees are perceived as supportive of a company when they engage in eWOM on Facebook – a leisure-oriented platform – which could make them more prone to spill-over effects.

In addition, LinkedIn highly segments between the private and professional lives of users which could suggest that a spill-over of a work-related issue to the private life is less likely as these segmentation preferences influence the choice to engage in ambassadorship behaviours (van Zoonen et al., 2018). Moreover, the general tone on LinkedIn is more professional which further suggests less spill-over of a transgression by the company to the employee (ibid.). This could be explained by users on LinkedIn being interested in their own professional benefit and being involved in any sort of scandal could limit this benefit. Moreover, as employees on LinkedIn are less prone to make a strong statement about their company (Utz, 2015), the development of arguments is less likely. Papacharissi (2009) supports this argument by explaining that users assign more thought into content they post on LinkedIn leading to more respectful and friendly conversations. As users would not just publish any content on their professional SNS, they reduce the risk of taking part in a transgression as this could reduce their chance of professional benefit (ibid.). On top of that, the engagement and interaction are lower on LinkedIn than on Facebook which implies that a transgression would not receive as much attention, is less likely to develop, and the spill-over effects would not be as extreme (Chang et al., 2016).

As explained above, a company transgression is less likely to spill-over on employees on LinkedIn than on Facebook. This can be analysed through the effect of a transgression on the social evaluation dimensions. As a transgression can ruin an employee's image by outsiders, it is likely that the evaluated person is perceived as less honest, friendly, or intelligent. As the two SNS show different characteristics, differences in morality, sociability as well as competence perceptions could be expected. Research suggests further studies on the issues of work-related social media use of employees and potential outcomes (Chu, 2020) –

which can be measured through social evaluations – and therefore, the second hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 2: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively by outsiders on Facebook than on LinkedIn.

As social evaluation was previously divided into three dimensions, three sub-hypotheses are introduced. The first relates to morality. The professional etiquette on LinkedIn (Papacharissi, 2009) could suggest a more respectful and righteous way of communicating and behaving that creates trust. As this is not the case for Facebook, a transgression is likely to lead to more negative morality evaluations of employees. Therefore, the first sub-hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2A: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively in morality by outsiders on Facebook than on LinkedIn.

Second, the sociability perception of employees on SNS is likely to be affected by a transgression as conversations on Facebook are more thoughtless (Papacharissi, 2009) which could decrease the friendliness of communication. Moreover, the informational benefit is higher on LinkedIn (van Zoonen et al., 2018) which suggests that the characteristic of helpfulness is more strongly related to the professional SNS. Last, Utz (2015) suggests that more neutral tones are used on LinkedIn which increases the perception of kindness and warmth. Overall, the named characteristics all represent the perception of sociability and as they are expected to be higher on LinkedIn than on Facebook, the second sub-hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2B: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively in sociability by outsiders on Facebook than on LinkedIn.

Last, it can be assumed that the competence evaluations of employees may differ between the two SNS. LinkedIn is known for its professional environment where users present their skills, capabilities, and professional experiences (van Dijck, 2013). This increases the perception of intelligence and competence and suggests that employees are more negatively evaluated in competence on Facebook than on LinkedIn. This effect is likely to be visible after a transgression as explained above. Therefore, the third sub-hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 2C: Employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company are evaluated more negatively in competence by outsiders on Facebook than on LinkedIn.

2.6. Interaction Effect of Hierarchy and SNS

The last section of this theoretical framework reviews the combined effect of hierarchy level and SNS on social evaluation. Therefore, some arguments by the researcher are introduced backed up by the connection of the two concepts, and more literature is introduced which supports this idea. Based on that a third hypothesis is introduced.

Individually, research suggests that CEOs are evaluated more negatively after a transgression of their company compared to subordinates. At the same time, blame attributions for employees who perform eWOM for their company are likely to be increased on Facebook compared to LinkedIn. The reasons for this were explained above. However, literature is lacking studies that have researched the combined effect of these two which could be insightful. It could be suggested that CEOs on Facebook are attributed the highest amount of blame out of the four possible connections (see experimental groups, page 31). First, this could be explained as outsiders assign more responsibility to CEOs (Karelaia & Keck, 2013) which means that more is at stake for a CEO than a subordinate leading to CEOs being more intensely examined online. This effect is likely to be heightened on LinkedIn, the platform that is focussed on professionalism, which leads to even higher expectations on seeing positive professional achievements of CEOs by outsiders. Moreover, as CEOs are facing higher anticipations and expectations (Gibson & Schroeder, 2013), LinkedIn could be a supportive platform. The clear structures and the lack of personal distractions on LinkedIn could make it easier for followers to observe the actions and statements by a CEO to find out if their expectations are met. The professional etiquette on LinkedIn (Papacharissi, 2009) allows informational communication of ideas and values which increases transparency for outsiders. Consequently, unreasonable, harsher evaluations could be avoided. On Facebook important professional content by employees might be overseen by outsiders and covered by personal posts concluding in employees being wrongly blamed, for instance due to a lack of transparency. The separation of personal and private life on LinkedIn (van Zoonen et al., 2018) further supports this argument as important professional content is not lost and private content does not distract avoiding false blame attributions by outsiders.

Furthermore, the content users post on LinkedIn is neutral and well thought-out (Utz, 2015) which could be further related to outsiders seeing the most positive representation of CEOs possible. Often, CEOs might have their own social media managers making sure that no thoughtless posts would be shown to outsiders which could decrease a CEOs professional image and increase judgement. Generally, it is highly plausible that there is less at stake for subordinates on LinkedIn and even less on Facebook which further supports the argument that

CEOs are facing the highest expectations – and therefore, are more likely to be targeted. Last, outsiders relate work-focussed content on Facebook to organisational identification (van Zoonen et al., 2018). It could be suggested that this effect is higher for CEOs as they most likely became CEO because they are enthusiastic about the company. This means that there is a lot at stake for CEOs and consequently, when CEOs post work-related content on Facebook represents high degrees of organisational identification to outsiders which makes them more prone to spill-over effects and blame attributions.

Therefore, it would be highly interesting to analyse the interaction effect of the two previously explained individual effects of hierarchical levels and the type of SNS on the social evaluation of employees who performed online ambassadorship behaviours. This idea is further supported by literature: CEOs prefer LinkedIn over Facebook (Digital Strategy Consulting, 2015) which could be interpreted by LinkedIn's professional environment that leaves less room for scandals. In addition, Cai et al. (2020) have explained that CEOs can lose their board seats in the case of negative media exposure. This could suggest that SNS influence decisions about blame – especially in the top level – and as the effect is proposed to be stronger on Facebook than on LinkedIn, this combination of CEOs and Facebook could create the worst spill-over effect. Moreover, Cai et al. (2020) describe that CEOs' judgements on labour markets are influenced by the social evaluation of their company which further suggest an interaction between the role of a CEO and social media.

Rising numbers of CEOs and subordinates are using SNS to improve their image and create more authentic relationships with stakeholders (Lee et al., 2020; Men & Tsai, 2016; Smith et al., 2017). In addition, personal SNS profiles tend to become a channel for stakeholders to interact with an employee as this way they seem more approachable (Men & Tsai, 2016). Therefore, more research is in high demand to explore the dynamics influencing the effects of CEO social media communication to build meaningful relationships with today's digitally savvy stakeholders. Based on the reviewed literature and reasonings explained in this section, the third hypothesis is introduced suggesting an interaction effect between the hierarchical level and the SNS on which eWOM was performed by employees:

Hypothesis 3: The effect of hierarchical position on social evaluation of employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company is moderated by the type of SNS: CEOs are more negatively evaluated, and this effect is stronger on Facebook than LinkedIn.

As mentioned before, social evaluation is divided into the three dimensions morality, sociability, and competence and the corresponding sub-hypotheses are also created in this case as the need for this separation has been highlighted above:

Hypothesis 3A: The effect of hierarchical position on morality of employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company is moderated by the type of SNS: CEOs are more negatively evaluated, and this effect is stronger on Facebook than LinkedIn.

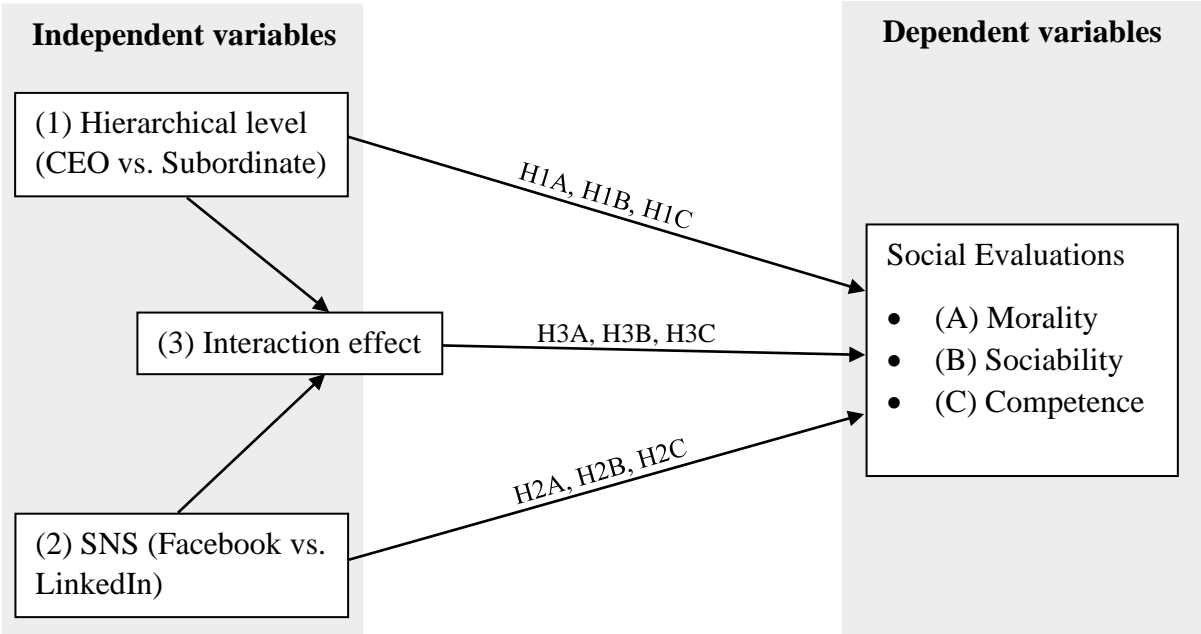
Hypothesis 3B: The effect of hierarchical position on sociability of employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company is moderated by the type of SNS: CEOs are more negatively evaluated, and this effect is stronger on Facebook than LinkedIn.

Hypothesis 3C: The effect of hierarchical position on competence of employees who engage in eWOM after a transgression of a company is moderated by the type of SNS: CEOs are more negatively evaluated, and this effect is stronger on Facebook than LinkedIn.

2.7. Conceptual Model

To illustrate the relationships between the dependent and independent variables a conceptual model is displayed based on the proposed hypotheses (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



3. Method

Now that the theoretical framework and the hypotheses have been laid out, the methods section follows. This part first introduces an experiment as the choice of research method as well as the chosen analysis to test the hypotheses. Then, the procedure, design, and sample of the experiment is addressed before moving onto the operationalisation. In this step, the control variables, stimulus material, manipulation checks, and the outcome variables of social evaluation are explained. Thereafter, steps for data preparation are described. Last, the validity and reliability of the experiment is addressed.

3.1. Choice of Research Method

To investigate the research question, a quantitative approach is suitable as it aims to test relations between several variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). More precisely, an experiment was chosen as the adequate research method to answer the research question and to test the hypotheses addressing outsiders' social evaluations of employees who engaged in online ambassadorship for a criticised organisation and the influence of the employees' hierarchical position and the type of SNS on this relation. According to Neumann (2014) an experiment detects causal effects and is conducted to find out if – in this case – two independent variables affect a dependent variable. In this thesis, the dependent variable was the social evaluation of employees by outsiders and the two independent variables were the employees' hierarchical position and the type of SNS. A between-group experiment was conducted by modifying the hierarchical level and the SNS and then the outcomes of the different groups who received different treatments – in this case different social media posts were compared (Neuman, 2014). Thereby, the interaction effect between the independent variables individually and collectively on the chosen dependent variable could be tested (ibid.). As this type of empirically based experiment allowed the researcher to document and interpret an effect in a controlled setting, the results can be generalised (ibid.). The experiment is a highly suitable research method as hypotheses can be tested with limited resources in a short time (Neuman, 2014). Moreover, the measured social phenomena can be quantified, easily analysed, and replicated (ibid.).

To test the hypotheses, a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was chosen as the main method. Overall, the ANCOVA studies different means for various experimental group outputs while at the same time controlling one or several covariates which could possibly affect the dependent variable output (Gaddis, 1998). By randomly assigning participants to different experimental groups, the influence of the confounding variable – the

covariate – can be measured by studying the differences in variances between groups (ibid.). In comparison with an analysis of variance (ANOVA), the ANCOVA can reduce error variance and bias which is created by existing differences between groups before the start of the experiment (Frigon & Laurencelle, 1993). In this thesis, the experiment focuses on a transgression situation by the chosen company IKEA. As the prior opinion that participants might have about IKEA could influence their responses, the prior IKEA opinion is included as a covariate to control the influence of this confounding variable on the dependent variable of social evaluation. Further potential covariates were tested and included in the results section.

3.2. Sampling and Procedure

3.2.1. Procedure and Design

The experiment was created in Qualtrics which allowed random sampling and randomly assigning participants to one of the four experimental groups. Thereby, the process is unbiased, and the different groups can be treated and compared equally (Neumann, 2014). Overall, the experiment consisted of four different groups which were designed in a two (hierarchy: CEO vs. subordinate) by two (SNS: Facebook vs. LinkedIn) between subjects-design (Table 1). Each group had about 50 participants which added up to a total of 200 participants. The participants required between 1:31 minutes and 11:54 minutes to complete the survey and received £1.20 on average as compensation.

Table 1

Experimental groups

		Social Networking Site (SNS)	
		Facebook	LinkedIn
Hierarchy	CEO	Experimental group 1 (N = 49)	Experimental group 2 (N = 52)
	Subordinate	Experimental group 3 (N = 49)	Experimental group 4 (N = 50)

3.2.2. *Sample*

The online platform ‘Prolific’ was used to gather the participants as this allowed less bias in sampling by selecting certain characteristics of the participants. The platform Prolific is highly suitable for collecting samples for social science experiments (Palan & Schitter, 2018). On top of that, it offers high transparency for participants regarding the payment and time required (ibid). One disadvantage of Prolific is the slower completion time compared to other subject recruitment platforms (ibid). However, as this experiment only aimed to collect a rather small sample ($N = 200$) this was not an issue, and the sample was collected within a few hours. The participants’ demographics included the UK as country of origin. Moreover, only participants who used Facebook and LinkedIn on a regular basis were able to enter the experiment. This type of pre-screening is another advantage of using Prolific (Palan & Schitter, 2018) and led to a heightened chance that participants would recognize the type of SNS which hopefully increased the attention to the conditions tested. Before downloading the data, the answers of participants who took less than 1:30 minutes were checked to make sure that these were not bots. Therefore, the answers to the open question were a good indicator. Two participants were deleted from the sample as their response time was too short for them to truly have read the instructions and questions carefully. Thereafter, an overview of the age and the gender was run to obtain more concrete demographics of the sample (Table 2). This confirmed the total amount of 200 responses and showed no errors or missing values. The sample comprised 68.5 percent women ($n = 137$), 29.5 percent men ($n = 59$), and 2.0 percent non-binary/ third gender ($n = 4$). The age analysis of the participants revealed an average age of 33.59 ($SD = 10.38$) with values ranging from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 65. Last, the average age of each gender group was displayed. This revealed an average age of 34.17 for men and 33.37 for women.

Table 2

Age and gender distribution of sample

Gender	N	Mean Age	Std. Deviation Age
Male	59	34.17	11.23
Female	137	33.37	10.08
Non-binary/ third gender	4	32.25	9.43
Total	200	33.59	10.38

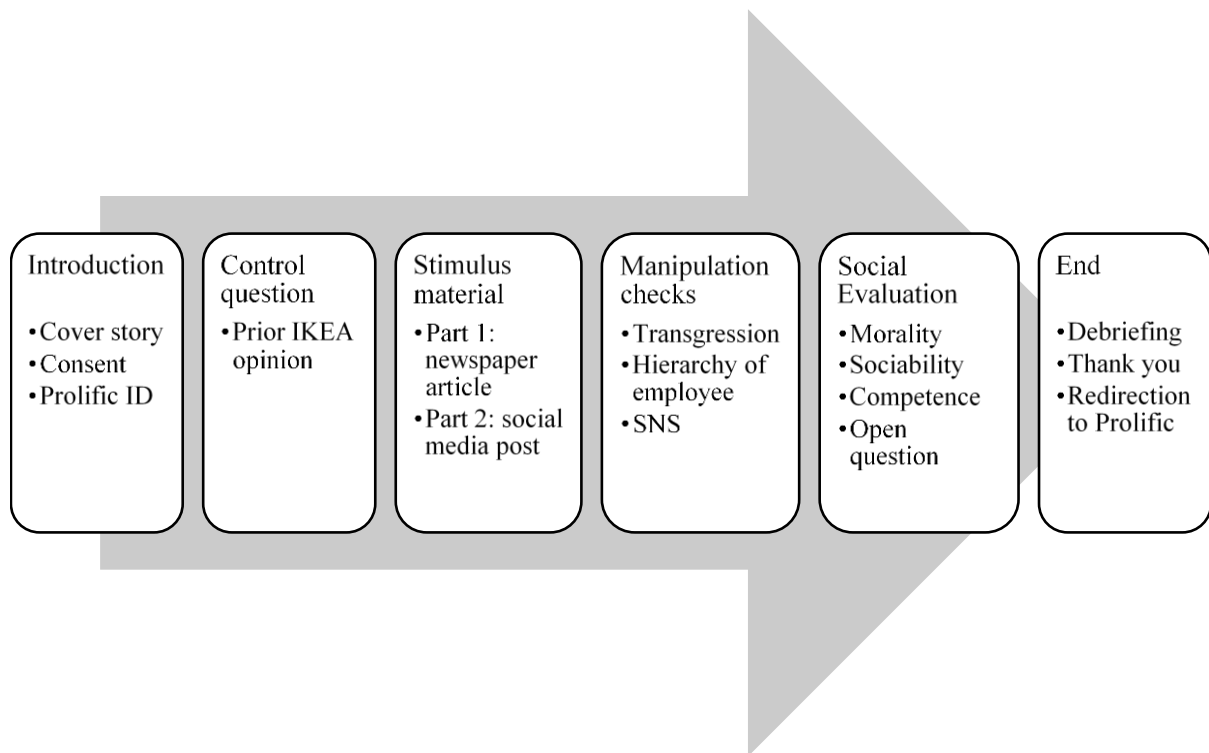
3.3. Measures and Operationalisation

3.3.1. Operationalisation

The operationalisation and the measures of the experiment are presented now (Figure 2). The complete experiment can be found in Appendix A. The experiment was created in Qualtrics and started with an introduction and a cover story. Thereafter, the participants were informed about the confidentiality of the data and anonymity of their personal information. Moreover, the voluntary participation and the possibility to terminate the cooperation at any time as well as to withdraw the submission within 24 hours after finishing the experiment was highlighted. Participants could only proceed to the experiment if they understood and gave their consent to this. Then, the participants had to fill in their Prolific ID to be able to trace back their responses for payment reasons.

Figure 2

Order of measures of the experiment



3.3.2. Control Variable

A control variable about the participants prior attitude towards IKEA was included. More specifically, the participants had to indicate on a seven-point Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to what extent they agreed with four statements about their opinions about IKEA before seeing any manipulation parts. The four items which were Likert-scale based were entered into a factor analysis to refine the information (Pallant, 2007).

A Principal Components extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .81$, $X^2 (N = 200, 6) = 527.30$, $p < .001$ was carried out. The resulting model explained 75.2% of the variance of the participants' prior IKEA opinion. The factor found was prior IKEA reputation and included four similar weighted items all related to the participants' opinion about IKEA. This included IKEA as a sustainable company, IKEA having a good reputation, IKEA being well respected, and IKEA being well thought of. Thereafter, a reliability analysis of this factor was conducted, and the output showed a preferable Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .83$). Deleting the item: IKEA as a sustainable company increased the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .92$). Therefore, a new variable was computed based on the means of the other three items. The factor and reliability analyses can be found in Table 3. The newly computed variable for prior IKEA reputation functions as the covariate in the two-way ANCOVA explained below.

Table 3

Factor and reliability analyses for 'Prior IKEA reputation' (N = 200)

Item	Prior IKEA reputation
IKEA is well respected.	.92
IKEA has good reputation.	.91
IKEA is well thought of.	.91
I think of IKEA as a sustainable company.	.71
R ²	75.2%
Cronbach's α	.83

3.3.3. *Stimulus Material*

The manipulation part of the experiment included a newspaper article about IKEA behaving unethically. Therefore, a case by IKEA from June 2020 was chosen. IKEA is a large furniture company which is known for their sustainability efforts (Mukpo, 2020). However, last year it came to public attention that IKEA was performing illegal deforestation in Ukraine (ibid.). The headline from this article was inserted into the layout of the English newspaper TheGuardian. By using the adequate colours and fonts of a U.K. based newspaper, the participants were highly likely to recognize it and believe in its truthfulness. This real case was chosen as participants would have been likely to recognize the brand IKEA and be more

attentive. Afterwards, the experiment included one social media post that was supposedly written by an employee of IKEA. This post is inspired by Cervellon and Lirio (2017) who summarized different behaviours of employees on social media: “Proud to be part of the amazing company IKEA. We are currently working on a new and more sustainable furniture range. Take a look! www.ikea.com/gb/”. The post directly linked to the domain of the transgression of the company – sustainability. Moreover, the layout of the posts differed for each experimental group. The instructions in the Qualtrics survey highlighted the level of hierarchy of the employee – either CEO or subordinate – and the SNS – either Facebook or LinkedIn – to increase the attention of the participants to the two chosen independent variables of the experiment. Moreover, the participants were reminded to look at the article and post carefully.

3.3.4. Manipulation Checks

Next, manipulation checks were implemented to test whether the participants noticed the manipulations. First, if they thought of the transgression as unethical behaviour. Therefore, the Consumer Perceived Ethicality (CPE) scale by Brunk (2012) was used. The basis for the CPE scales were consumer interviews which analysed how individuals understand and describe ethical behaviour. As a result, the researcher has come up with six key themes characterizing whether someone was perceived as being ethical (ibid.). Based on these themes, six scale indicators were created and assessed with a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). As the CPE scales by Brunk (2012) were regarded reliable and valid they are a good indicator for measuring unethical behaviour by a company. For the scope of the manipulation check of this thesis, specifically the check whether participants found the actions of the company to be unethical, three of the indicators by Brunk (2012) were chosen addressing moral norms, social responsibility, and adherence to the law. A one-sample t-test ($t = .79, p = .432$) was performed to analyse the average score of the transgression. The output showed that the average was slightly above 4 (neutral): $M = 4.07, SD = 1.20$ which explains a slight tendency that the transgression was picked up by the participants.

Before the manipulation check for transgression can be performed in the results chapter, a factor and reliability analyses had to be conducted first (Table 4) as transgression was measured through three items. The three Likert-scale based items were entered into Principal Components extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .68, X^2(N = 200, 3) = 318.74, p < .001$. The factor found was MCTransgression and

included the three similar weighted items IKEA as a socially responsible company, IKEA respecting moral norms, and IKEA adhering to the law. Thereafter, a reliability analysis was conducted for this factor, displaying a preferable Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .87$). Deleting the last item would improve the item only slightly and therefore, the variable NewMCTransgression was computed based on the means of all three items.

Table 4

Factor and reliability analyses for NewMCTransgression

Item	Transgression
I believe that IKEA is a socially responsible company.	.93
I believe that IKEA respected moral norms.	.89
I believe that IKEA generally adheres to the law.	.85
R ²	79.16%
Cronbach's α	.87

Additionally, a manipulation check tested if the participants recognized the hierarchical position of the employee by asking if they perceived the employee to have a lot of influence on decision making (Wiggenhorn et al., 2014). Therefore, a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was included. The last manipulation check analysed whether the participants were aware of the type of SNS of the post. Another seven-point Likert-scale was incorporated therefore, stating that the participants thought of that platform as being oriented towards a professional network. The manipulation checks will be tested in the data preparation section.

3.3.5. Social Evaluation

Thereafter, the experiment asked participants about their social evaluation of the employee – which was the chosen dependent variable of the experiment. Therefore, the scales for social evaluation – more specifically for morality, sociability, and competence – by Brambilla et al. (2010) and Leach et al. (2007) were used. The authors have used five items to define morality, sociability, and competence in each case (ibid.). Morality is comprised of sincere, honest, righteous, trustworthy, and respectful (ibid.). Sociability is comprised of kind, friendly, warm, likeable, and helpful (ibid.). And finally, competence is comprised of

intelligent, competent, efficient, skilful, and capable (ibid.). In the research by Brambilla et al., (2012), the participants evaluated targets on a seven-point-scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high). This thesis used these scales and items but adapted the phrasing to this experiment. More precisely, the participants were asked “How would you estimate the sincerity of the employee?”. This layout was used for all 15 items.

Next, an open question asked the participants for their overall opinion of the employee. By including an open question, it allowed the researcher to detect bots more easily. Thereafter, the participants were asked to indicate their gender and age. Last, they were informed about the true aim of the experiment and were thanked for their participation. Moreover, it was highlighted that the experiment was not a collaboration with IKEA. Finally, the participants were redirected back to Prolific. Once 200 complete responses were reached in Prolific, the results from Qualtrics were transferred to SPSS.

3.4. Data Preparation

3.4.1. Normality

Before conducting the hypothesis tests, the data was prepared in several ways. First, the normality was analysed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics was significant for age ($p < .001$) which creates a violation of the assumption of normality. Moreover, the skewness of age of .88 indicates a positive skew clustering values at the lower side and the kurtosis of .32 represents a slightly peaked graph. However, as age was not the main variable of the experiment, this does not affect the further analysis but should be kept in mind as a possible limitation of the study.

3.4.2. Social Evaluation

Another step of data preparation was computing three new variables measuring the social evaluation of the employees. Social evaluation was divided into three scales for morality, sociability and, competence and each were measured through five items. To conduct a two-way ANCOVA in later steps, a factor analysis was conducted on the three measures, followed by reliability analyses for each measure. The factor analysis allowed testing the scales and items but before the prerequisites for a factor analysis were controlled (Pallant, 2017). First, every scale had five items which exceeds the minimal number of three items. Second, the items involved are all continuous. Last, the sample size of 200 participants exceeded the necessary sample size of 150. Therefore, the factor analysis could be conducted.

The fifteen Likert-scale based items were entered into Principal Components extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .93$. $X^2(N = 200, 105) = 2340.96, p < .001$ (Table 5). Three factors were found based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00) which were further analysed in the Pattern Matrix confirming the original allocation of five items per scale. The first factor found was morality and comprised of the five similarly weighted items sincerity, honesty, trustworthiness, righteousness, and respectfulness. The second factor found was sociability which included the five similarly weighted items intelligence, skilfulness, efficiency, capability, and competence. The last factor found was competence which was comprised of friendliness, warmth, likeability, kindness, and helpfulness. These results were expected as the scales were validated in the research by Brambilla et al. (2012) and therefore, were reliable.

Thereafter, a reliability analysis was conducted for each of the three factors to make sure the scales were internally consistent (Table 5). First, morality showed a preferable Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .92$) and deleting any of the five items did not improve the Cronbach's alpha. Consequently, the new variable for morality was computed based on the means of all five items. Second, sociability also received a preferable Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .90$), and the new variable sociability was computed based on the means of all five items as the deletion of any of them would not have improved the Cronbach's alpha. Last, the reliability analysis for competence was conducted and resulted in a preferable Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .92$). As the deletion of none of the items would have improved this value, the new variable competence was computed based on the means of all five items.

Next, the average impressions of these three variables were measured which resulted in morality having the lowest mean ($M = 4.13, SD = 1.11$) which is close to 4 (= neutral) on the seven-point Likert-scale it was measured through. Second, sociability had a slightly higher mean ($M = 4.59, SD = .86$) and third, competence had the highest mean ($M = 4.66, SD = .93$). What also stood out were the minimum and maximum values as morality and sociability had a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 7 whereas competence had a minimum of 1.8 instead.

Table 5*Factor and reliability analysis for Morality, Sociability, and Competence*

Item	Morality	Sociability	Competence
Sincerity	.90		
Honesty	.89		
Trustworthiness	.88		
Righteousness	.77		
Respectfulness	.75		
Intelligence		.91	
Skillfulness		.90	
Efficiency		.81	
Capability		.80	
Competence		.79	
Friendliness			-.96
Warmth			-.94
Likeability			-.71
Kindness			-.68
Helpfulness			-.60
R ²	55.07%	12.12%	8.13%
Cronbach's α	.92	.90	.92

3.5. Validity and Reliability

The last section of the methods part of this thesis will cover the validity and reliability of the experiment. To ensure that the operationalisation is done well, manipulation checks were included. The manipulation checks for hierarchy and platform were successfully proven as explained above. Consequently, internal validity could be increased which made sure that only the independent variable influenced the dependent variable (Neumann, 2014). Moreover, random assignment of participants to the four experimental groups increased the validity as there should have been no other factors that could have created difference in groups. As the

experiment was only conducted at one point in time, history effect, maturation, or experimental mortality was not an issue (ibid.). In addition, it is possible to generalise the findings of the experiment due to random sampling. Thus, the random sampling prevented personal factors influencing the sample which increased the representativeness of the sample (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the experiment included existing scales which have been developed and tested by researchers and increased the reliability of the experiment. However, the chosen nationality of participants does affect the generalisability of the experiment as culture is likely to influence the findings as for instance, the definition of morality depends on cultural values and thereby could impact the social evaluations of participants (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Overall, the reliability analyses of several variables used in the experiment showed preferable Cronbach's alpha's: Morality ($\alpha = .92$), Sociability ($\alpha = .90$), Competence ($\alpha = .92$), Manipulation Check Transgression ($\alpha = .87$), and Prior IKEA Reputation ($\alpha = .83$). This supports the reliability of the experiment. Moreover, as the participants' pre-knowledge or attachments to IKEA could affect the findings, a control question was included as mentioned above.

4. Results

After introducing the chosen method of this thesis and preparing the data, the results are presented. First, the correlations of continuous variables are interpreted which supports the adding of covariates. Second, the manipulation checks are conducted for the two conditions and the transgression of the company. Thereafter, two further potential control variables, gender and age, are analysed before moving on to testing the hypotheses. Therefore, two-way ANCOVAs are performed for each of the three social evaluation dimensions: morality, sociability, and competence. Last, additional findings are presented.

4.1. Correlations of Continuous Variables

To gain insights into which variables have a significant influence on the outcome variables morality, sociability, and competence, a correlation analysis was conducted with the prior IKEA reputation, the transgression and the three dimensions of social evaluation (Table 6). The testing for control variables allowed controlling external factors as much as possible by including them as covariates in the main analysis. In the case of significance, these concerning variables would be added as a covariate in the two-way ANCOVA analyses for hypotheses testing further below. First, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients with prior IKEA reputation are reviewed. The output shows a small, positive correlation between prior IKEA reputation and morality and this association was significant ($r = .19, p = .009$). This means that a more positive opinion about IKEA at the beginning of the experiment is associated with a higher morality evaluation of the employee. Next, prior IKEA reputation also shows a small, positive, and significant correlation with sociability ($r = .26, p < .001$) and a medium, positive correlation with competence which is also significant ($r = .32, p < .001$). As the prior IKEA reputation shows significant associations with all three social evaluation dimensions, it is included as a covariate in further analyses.

Moreover, the correlations with transgression were reviewed. The output shows that the significant association between transgression and morality is medium and positive ($r = .47, p < .001$). This means that participants who perceive the company as more ethical rate the employee with higher morality. Next, the significant association with sociability is also medium and positive ($r = .39, p < .001$) and last, the significant association between transgression and competence is medium and positive too ($r = .34, p < .001$). As the perceived transgression significantly influences the participants social evaluation of morality, sociability, and competence, transgression is included as a covariate in the two-way ANCOVA.

Table 6*Correlations of prior IKEA reputation, transgression, morality, sociability, and competence*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Prior IKEA reputation	-				
2. Transgression	.35**	-			
3. Morality	.19**	.47**	-		
4. Sociability	.26**	.39**	.67**	-	
5. Competence	.32**	.34**	.55**	.59**	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.2. Manipulation Checks

Thereafter, the manipulation checks were examined by performing a two-way ANOVA for each of them. The two-way ANOVA offers insight into the effect of the two conditions, SNS platform and hierarchy, on the dependent variable which is in this case the manipulation check (Pallant, 2017). Moreover, an interaction effect of the two conditions could be examined. Testing the manipulation checks made sure that participants recognized whether they were shown a post on Facebook or LinkedIn, and whether the post was written by a CEO or a subordinate.

First, the two-way between-group analysis of variance for the manipulation check of level of hierarchy was performed. A main effect of hierarchy on perceived importance of the employee on decision making shows a statistically significant effect $F(1, 196) = 52.43, p < .001$, and an effect size of .21. This means that participants who receive a social media post of a CEO, who has a higher level of hierarchy, assigns more power to the employee ($M = 4.14, SD = 1.89$) compared to participants who receive a social media post of the subordinate ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.43$). Next, platform does not have a significant main effect on the power evaluation of the employee, $F(1, 196) = .01, p = .940$, partial eta squared = .00. Last, the interaction effect of hierarchy and platform shows no significant influence on the power evaluation $F(1, 196) = .02, p = .900$, partial eta squared = .00. To sum this up, the manipulation check on hierarchy was a success as participants relate a higher level of hierarchy with more power in decision making without any significant connections between the SNS and power.

Second, the two-way between-group analysis of variance for the manipulation check of SNS platform was performed. The main effect of the platform on perceived professionalism shows a statistically significant effect $F(1, 196) = 86.17, p < .001$, partial eta squared = .31. Consequently, the participants who receive a LinkedIn post assign higher professionalism to the platform ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.56$) compared to Facebook posts ($M = 3.22, SD = 1.54$). Next, the effect of hierarchy shows a significant influence $F(1, 196) = 6.20, p = .014$, partial eta squared = .03 allocating less professionalism to the platform for posts by a subordinate ($M = 3.97, SD = 1.84$) compared to posts by a CEO ($M = 4.52, SD = 1.81$). This means that CEOs are received more professionally which transfers to the perceptions of the platform. However, as the effect size of hierarchy is low (partial eta squared = .031) – compared to the platform making up 31% of the variance (partial eta squared = .31) – this can be overseen as the intended effect of platform is stronger. Last, the interaction effect of platform and hierarchy is not significant $F(1, 196) = .52, p = .473$, partial eta squared = .00. Overall, the manipulation check on platform was also a success as people perceive LinkedIn as a more professional platform than Facebook. However, the hierarchy does have a minor influence.

Third, the two-way between-group ANOVA for the manipulation check of the transgression was performed with the newly computed variable (MCTransgression) which was created through a factor analysis as explained in the methods chapter. The analysis shows no significant effects of platform $F(1, 196) = .00, p = .952$, partial eta squared = .00, hierarchy $F(1, 196) = .50, p = .481$, partial eta squared = .00, or the interaction effect of platform and hierarchy $F(1, 196) = .24, p = .623$, partial eta squared = .00. This could be expected as the transgression was the same regardless of where the received post was published and by whom.

4.3. Randomization Check

4.3.1. Gender

To test further potential control variables, the researcher examined whether there were gender differences between the conditions hierarchy and platform to see if their connection was random. First, a Chi-Square test for independence was conducted to test whether gender was connected to differences in the conditions hierarchy and platform used in the experiment. The Chi-Square test shows that there is no relation between gender and the hierarchy condition, $\chi^2 = 2.69, p = .260$. Consequently, gender does not show a significant difference in the condition of hierarchy. Next, the Chi-square test between gender and the platform

conditions does not indicate a significant relation, $\chi^2 = 1.08$, $p = .583$. Therefore, gender also does not present a significant difference in the condition of platform and consequently, is not included as a control variable.

Second, an independent samples t-test was conducted to check if gender impacted the social evaluations of participants. Therefore, morality, sociability, and competence were included in the test variable box and gender was added as the grouping variable. In this case, only men (group 1) and women (group 2) were included in the text, as the third gender group was too small ($n = 4$). The output of the t-test for morality, sociability, and competence indicates that the Levine's Test for Equality of Variances is larger than .05 and therefore, equal variance is assumed in all cases. Gender does not have a significant influence on the evaluation of morality, ($t(.83) = 194$, $p = .409$). Moreover, gender also has no significant influence on sociability, ($t(.63) = 194$, $p = .527$) and on competence, ($t(.14) = 194$, $p = .888$). To conclude, gender does not have a significant influence neither on the conditions: platform and hierarchy, nor on the social evaluations: morality, sociability, and competence and including it as a control variable is not necessary.

4.3.2. Age

Another potential control variable is age. To test whether age impacted the social evaluations of participants, a correlation analyses was conducted by using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient. Calculating the coefficient of determination shows that the age and morality are not significantly associated with each other ($p = .446$). Next, the output between age and sociability indicates a small, negative correlation ($r = -.17$) which means that higher ages are associated with lower sociability evaluations. Moreover, age helps explain 3% of the variance in the participants' sociability evaluation and the two variables are significantly associated with each other ($p = .014$). Last, the relation between age and competence displays a small, negative correlation ($r = -.140$) with higher ages being associated with a lower competence evaluation. Furthermore, 2% of the variance in the participants' competence evaluations is explained by age and the association between the two variables is significant ($p = .048$). To conclude, age indicates negative associations with sociability and competence which means that age is included as a covariate for further analyses with the two social evaluation dimensions.

4.4. Two-way ANCOVA for Hypothesis Testing

A two-way analysis of covariance was chosen to test the three hypotheses and their sub-hypotheses. As explained above, an ANCOVA allows studying the means of the different experimental groups and controlling the covariate – in this case the prior IKEA reputation (Gaddis, 1998). Moreover, transgression was added as a covariate as it showed a significant effect on all three variables of social evaluation. Additionally, age was added as a covariate for the two-way ANCOVA with sociability and competence as previous analyses showed significance. Thereby, the three hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are tested separately for the three variables of social evaluation: morality, sociability, and competence by including the corresponding covariates.

4.4.1. *Morality*

First, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted with morality as the dependent variable and the two conditions, hierarchy and platform, as fixed factors. Moreover, the prior IKEA reputation and the transgression were included as covariates. The output presents no significance for the effects of platform $F(1, 194) = .08, p = .782$, partial eta squared = .00; hierarchy $F(1, 194) = .17, p = .684$, partial eta squared = .00; the interaction between platform and hierarchy $F(1, 194) = 1.32, p = .252$, partial eta squared = .00, or of the prior IKEA reputation $F(1,194) = .08, p = .774$, partial eta squared = .00. This means that the conditions or the prior opinion that participants have about IKEA does not impact morality evaluations. However, the transgression indicates a significant effect, $F(1, 194) = 48.81, p < .001$, partial eta squared = .02 and thereby, shows that whether the participants think of the IKEA behaviour as a transgression affects their evaluation of morality of the employee significantly by a large, positive correlation ($r = .47$). More precisely, participants who rate the company more positively – so rate the transgression as more ethical – assign higher morality evaluations to the employee. However, as morality is not significantly affected by the hierarchy of the employee, the SNS or the combined effect, the hypotheses H1A, H2A, and H3A are rejected.

4.4.2. *Sociability*

Second, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted for sociability. The fixed factors were platform and hierarchy, and the covariates were prior IKEA reputation, transgression, and this time age was also added as previous analyses showed a significant effect of age on sociability. The output of the two-way ANCOVA again indicates no

significant effect of the two conditions and their interaction effect: platform $F(1, 194) = .20, p = .655$, partial eta squared = .00; hierarchy $F(1, 194) = 2.55, p = .112$, partial eta squared = .01; and platform * hierarchy $F(1, 194) = .58, p = .449$, partial eta squared = .00. So, the conditions do not influence the sociability evaluations. However, the main effect of prior IKEA reputation $F(1, 194) = 4.15, p = .043$, partial eta squared = .02 shows significance. More specifically, the prior IKEA reputation of participants presents a small, positive correlation with sociability ($r = .26$). This means that participants who had a more positive opinion about IKEA before the manipulation part of the experiment evaluate the employee with more sociability. Moreover, the main effect of transgression on sociability is significant $F(1, 194) = 25.45, p < .001$, partial eta squared = .12 which means that a significant relationship between the transgression and sociability exists while controlling the independent variables platform and hierarchy. More precisely, the effect between the two variables is medium, positive ($r = .39$). This means that participants associate higher sociability with a perception of the company being more ethical. However, as the two conditions and their interaction effect do not show significance for sociability, the hypotheses H1B, H2B, and H3B are rejected.

4.4.3. Competence

Third, the two-way analysis of covariance was carried out for competence, the last variable of social evaluation. The same fixed factors and the covariates as for sociability were used as age and transgression showed significant influences on competence. The main effect of platform turned out to be significant $F(1, 194) = 4.20, p = .042$, partial eta squared = .02. This means that the platform has a significant effect on the participants evaluation of competence. Specifically, participants who receive a social media post from Facebook ($M = 4.54, SD = .80$) assign less competence to the employee than participants who receive a LinkedIn post ($M = 4.77, SD = 1.02$). Consequently, the hypothesis H2C is supported. Additionally, the output indicates a significant main effect of hierarchy $F(1, 194) = 7.11, p = .008$, partial eta squared = .04. This means that the hierarchy of the employee has a significant effect on the participants evaluation of competence. More precisely, social media posts by a CEO ($M = 4.84, SD = .85$), with a higher level of hierarchy, are associated with a higher level of competence than subordinates ($M = 4.47, SD = .97$). However, this shows an opposite effect of what was expected and therefore, the hypothesis H1C is rejected. The interaction effect of the two conditions, however, is not significant for the evaluation of competence $F(1, 194) = .55, p = .458$, partial eta squared = .00. Therefore, hypothesis H3C is rejected.

Furthermore, both covariates are significant. First, the prior IKEA reputation: $F(1, 194) = 10.67, p = .001$, partial eta squared = .05 which explains a medium, positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .32$). This means that participants with significantly more positive opinions about IKEA before taking the manipulation part of the experiment associate the employee with more competence. Second, the transgression also significantly influences competence evaluations: $F(1, 194) = 14.22, p < .001$, partial eta squared = .07. This reflects a significant relationship between the transgression and the competence evaluation while controlling the independent variables for platform and hierarchy. More specifically, higher amounts of perceived ethicality of the company – which is represented by a higher score on the transgression scale – has a medium, positive effect on competence ($r = .34$).

4.5. Additional Findings

4.5.1. Open question: Overall Impression of Employee

An open question was included in the experiment to detect answers from bots more easily. As the open question asked for the participants overall impression of the employee, the output could be analysed to receive more insights into the perceptions of the participants. The aim was to find out, if the overall impression differed between the conditions, hierarchy and platform, and how this related to the perception of transgression. Therefore, the answers were coded from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive), with 3 (neutral) by the researcher. For instance, the overall impressions “Untrustworthy”, “They probably know little about the company in reality and aren’t the most sensible of people. It wasn’t a good impression”, or “Bootlicker” were rated as 1 (very negative). For this rating, quotes were included that used highly negative words and no positive vibes at all. Next, “Not very high as they must have known about the source of their material used beforehand”, “I think the message was a wee bit too friendly given the accusation in the article. It seemed a bit flippant, and Facebook was probably not the best medium to post on”, and “That he was probably just doing it because he had been told to or wanted to look good to management. Not particularly favourable” were rated as 2 (negative). Quotes were rated with a 2 when the overall sentiment was negative, but participants often included some sort of explanation for the employee’s behaviour which was interpreted as sympathy for the employee. Thereafter, some examples of impression that were ranked as 3 (neutral): “Neutral. Doesn’t seem like an overall bad person”, “Kind and friendly but not always truthful”, and “Fairly neutral overall, the post seemed relatively informative and respectful, but more context would be needed to give me a better opinion”. Quotes that were ranked as neutral often included the word “neutral” or the positive and negative

sentiments cancelled each other out. Next, the following answers are examples for 4 (positive): “Seems to be nice and respectful, cares about sustainability”, “Company monkey, not in a bad way. Trying his best to make the bosses happy. Probably a decent type.”, and “Good, I doubt they would have known the exact source of the timber, so I believe their post was honest”. These and other impressions were ranked with a 4 as they were mostly positive but sometimes included some neutralising terms, such as “probably” or “trying”. Last, some examples for answers that were ranked with 5 (very positive): “Positive, engaged, and motivated”, “A very capable, competent individual who knows everything about his job”, and “He is an overall positive person who brings it to the job and does the best he can to provide exceptional service”. Impressions that were overall very positive and included several terms to express this feeling were ranked with 5 (very positive).

After coding the responses of the open question on overall impressions and transferring this to a newly created variable in SPSS, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted. Therefore, the manipulation check of transgression was used as the independent variable and the newly created variable for the overall impression was set as the dependent variable. The test of between-subjects effects indicates no significant effect of the perceived transgression on the overall opinion participants have about the employee $F(17, 182) = 1.17$, $p = .293$. The same analysis was conducted with the four conditions as independent variables and showed no significant effect of hierarchy $F(1, 196) = .16$, $p = .686$; platform $F(1, 196) = .02$, $p = .89$; or the interaction effect of hierarchy and platform $F(1, 196) = .52$, $p = .472$ on the overall opinion.

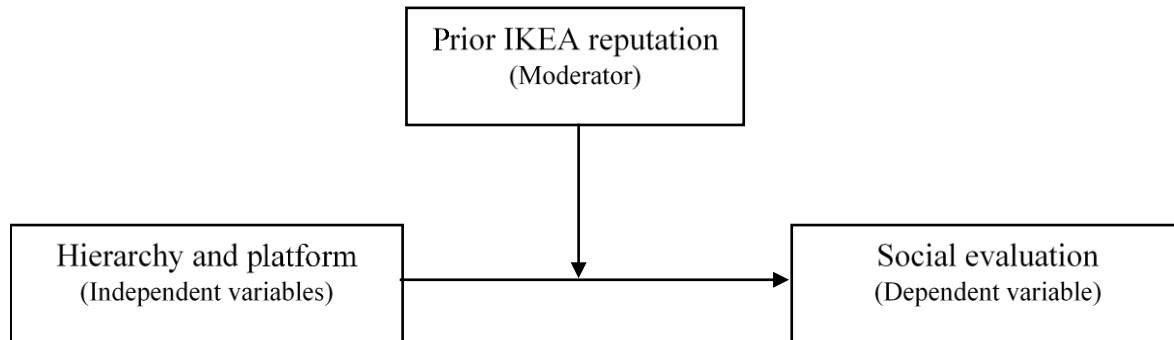
4.5.2. Moderation Effect: Prior IKEA Reputation

Moreover, as a further additional analysis, a hierarchical regression with a moderator was conducted to study if the effect of hierarchy and platform on social evaluation differs between participants who had a low prior opinion about IKEA compared to participants with a higher prior opinion. Therefore, three regressions were conducted with the social evaluation variables as dependent variable, the hierarchy and platform as independent variables, and the prior IKEA reputation as moderator (Figure 3). This analysis allowed testing whether the interaction between the independent variables and the moderator resulted in a significant effect. Therefore, the continuous variable for prior IKEA reputation was standardized and the interaction term between hierarchy and prior IKEA reputation as well as between platform and prior IKEA reputation were computed as new variables. Now, the multiple regression could be performed by including these newly created interaction variables as independent

variables, the platform and hierarchy as dummy variables, and analyse the significance of these interaction effects for evidence of moderation.

Figure 3

Moderation analysis



First, the regression was conducted for morality. 3.9% of the variance in morality can be explained by independent variables in this model ($R\ square = .039$). The model is not significant $F(7, 192) = 1.12, p = .352$. Neither the individual independent variables of hierarchy ($p = .512$) and platform ($p = .811$), nor the standardized variable for prior IKEA reputation ($p = .370$) are significant. Furthermore, none of the interaction effects are significant either as all p 's $> .547$ and consequently, there is no evidence for a moderation effect of prior IKEA reputation on morality.

Second, the regression was conducted for sociability. The independent variables explain 8.2% of the variance in sociability ($R\ square = .082$). The model for sociability indicates significance $F(7, 192) = 2.44, p = .021$. The coefficients table presents no significant effects for hierarchy ($p = .182$), platform ($p = .989$), or prior IKEA reputation ($p = .172$). Also, none of the interaction effects show significance as all p 's $> .403$ and therefore, no evidence for moderation is found.

Last, the moderation analysis was performed for competence. In this case, 18.6% of the variance in competence can be explained by the independent variables ($R\ square = .186$). The output shows significance of the model $F(7, 192) = 6.28, p < .001$. Same as the previous two regressions, the main effects of hierarchy ($p = .128$), platform ($p = .214$), and prior IKEA opinion ($p = .672$) did not influence competence significantly. The interaction effect prior IKEA opinion*hierarchy was also not significant ($p = .199$). However, the interaction effects of prior IKEA opinion*platform ($p = .009$), hierarchy*platform ($p = .043$) as well as

hierarchy*platform*prior IKEA opinion ($p = .047$) are significant. Consequently, some evidence for a moderation effect can be found.

As only the interaction effects between the prior IKEA opinion*platform, hierarchy*platform, and hierarchy*platform*prior IKEA opinion on competence were significant, a partial moderation effect of prior IKEA opinion on competence but not morality or sociability can be found.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion covers the key findings of this thesis with a focus on the three hypotheses. Thereafter, theoretical and practical findings are described before addressing the limitations as well as avenues for future research in this field.

5.1. Key Findings

Research has established that an increasing number of employees are using SNS for work purposes (Lee et al., 2020) and online ambassadorship behaviours are rising (Cheung et al., 2008). With more employees performing eWOM for their company (Korzynski et al., 2019), negative consequences that could develop for employees – more precisely after a transgression of the company – must be studied more closely (Effron et al., 2015). Therefore, the three dimensions of social evaluation morality, sociability, and competence can be useful. This thesis has especially focused on differences in social evaluations between two contrasting hierarchy levels: CEO vs. subordinate, as these two roles are facing varying expectations and responsibilities (Gibson & Schroeder, 2013). Moreover, differences in social evaluations between two SNS, Facebook and LinkedIn, were analysed as the contrasting characteristics of these two platforms should not be generalized in studies (Chu, 2020).

5.1.1. First Hypothesis

Now, hypothesis testing is discussed. The first hypothesis addressed differences between hierarchy levels of employees who engaged in eWOM and evaluations by outsiders after a transgression of their company. First, the morality and sociability evaluations were both not significantly affected by hierarchy, meaning that CEOs are not significantly evaluated more negatively than subordinates. Therefore, H1A and H1B are rejected. This contradicts what was predicted in the theoretical framework and might be explained as the main concepts of morality, sociability, and competence were introduced before the digital age (Brambilla et al., 2010; Leach et al., 2007). In both, traditional and digital forms of communication, people back up their social evaluations with certain dimensions and items as presented above. However, these items might vary between traditional and digital forms which could explain why no significance was found as the traditional items for the three dimensions might not be accurate for forming impressions in the digital age. Now, social media is a fixed component for employees, and it is likely that social evaluations of eWOM influence the three dimensions and disrupt the predicted effects. In addition, the proposed differences between CEOs and subordinates in this study were mostly backed up by the

characteristics of the organisational roles in a neutral setting (Fiske, 1993; Karelaia & Keck, 2013; Kaspar & Newen, 2016). However, the referred research did not include other factors, such as the influence of a transgression by the company, that could additionally influence organisational roles and their characteristics. Moreover, research mostly looked at the general social evaluation or referred to blame attributions (Gibson & Schroeder, 2003) but not at morality, sociability, and competence evaluations individually. Perhaps testing the dimensions individually in this thesis changes the output, and therefore does not show a significant effect. In addition, as the experiment included a known company, people's positive associations with IKEA could have influenced their morality evaluations as they might have heard of ways how IKEA is engaging in CSR, and this could have created a reputational buffer which would not have been influenced by the hierarchical level. This argument could be supported by the relatively neutral transgression perceptions in the experiment ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.20$).

Last, the same analysis was conducted for competence and presented a significant effect. More precisely, CEOs are evaluated with significantly higher competence than subordinates, meaning that CEOs are evaluated more positively when conducting eWOM. This is the opposite of the expected effect as the hypothesis H1C predicted that CEOs are evaluated more negatively in competence and H1C is also rejected. This unexpected effect might be explained by the small sample size which could have been unreliable. Furthermore, in relation to the status that comes with the role of a CEO, competence was assigned an important characteristic of a CEO compared to a subordinate (Carless et al., 2000) which means CEOs are most likely already ascribed more competence. Now, in case of a transgression, the assigned competence is likely to decrease for both roles but as subordinates already had less perceived competence to begin with, it makes sense that CEOs are still evaluated with higher competence. This should be tested with pre- and post-tests – before and after the transgression – for instance, to measure for which organisational role, the difference between competence levels was larger. Additionally, it was a surprise that only one of the three social dimensions showed a significant influence presenting differences between morality, sociability, and competence. Perhaps, this could be interpreted based on their characteristics described by Fiske et al. (2006). The authors indicate that warmth – which later comprised of morality and sociability (Ellemers et al., 2013) – is related to perceived intentions whereas competence relates to perceived abilities. Possibly, these dissimilarities could disclose the differences in the hypothesis testing. As all three sub-hypotheses were rejected, overall, the first hypothesis is rejected. CEOs are not evaluated more negatively than subordinates when practicing eWOM after a transgression of their company.

5.1.2. *Second Hypothesis*

Next, the second hypothesis, which relates to differences between the SNS Facebook and LinkedIn, is addressed. The tests showed no significant effect for platform on morality or sociability. This means that SNS do not significantly influence the social evaluation of morality and sociability, and employees on Facebook are not evaluated more negatively than on LinkedIn as the hypotheses predicted. Consequently, H2A and H2B are rejected. As mentioned above, this could be explained by the items used for social evaluations of traditional communication not being adequate for people socially evaluating others on SNS in the digital age. Moreover, perhaps eWOM by employees already heightens morality and sociability perceptions as such an open support of the organization – regardless of the SNS – is valued by outsiders and provides an indication of warmth. Next, the tests for competence showed a significant effect for platform meaning that employees who posted on Facebook are evaluated significantly less competent than employees on LinkedIn. This reinforces the predicted effect and hypothesis H2C is supported. However, it was a surprise that competence was affected differently than morality and sociability. As above, this could be justified by the differing characteristics of those dimensions by Fiske et al. (2006). Perhaps the perceived intention of an employee – which explains the morality and sociability evaluations – is more difficult to evaluate on SNS as outsiders are not able to see mimic and gestures as compared to traditional communications. This could justify why no significant effect for morality and sociability was found. Overall, hypothesis H2 is only partly supported for the evaluation of competence but not for morality and sociability.

5.1.3. *Third Hypothesis*

Last, the third hypothesis predicted an interaction effect between the SNS and the hierarchy of the employee. This effect was tested for morality, sociability, and competence and no significance was found. This means that CEOs are not evaluated more negatively, and this effect is not stronger on Facebook than on LinkedIn. Consequently, all three sub-hypotheses H3A, H3B, and H3C are rejected which disagrees with the predicted effects. However, after testing the first two hypotheses which indicated no significant influence of either platform or hierarchy on morality and sociability, it is a logical implication that the interaction effect of the two also would not be significant. Nevertheless, platform and hierarchy individually had a significant effect on competence and perhaps the sample size was too small to find an interaction effect. Overall, the third hypothesis is rejected.

5.1.4. Addressing the Research Question

Coming back to the research question of this thesis: to what extent the employees' hierarchical position and the type of SNS impacts outsiders' social evaluation of employees who engaged in online ambassadorship for a criticised organisation. The results indicated that neither the main effect of SNS and hierarchy nor the interaction effect showed a significant influence on morality and sociability. Therefore, the research question is answered: the type of SNS, the hierarchy of the employee, and their interaction effect do not impact the social evaluation of morality and sociability by outsiders. Moreover, the interaction effect did not significantly influence competence evaluations which concludes that the interaction effect of platform and hierarchy did not have a significant influence on social evaluation. However, the influence of hierarchy and type of SNS individually affected competence evaluations: first, the hierarchy level of the employee indicated a significant, positive effect on perceived competence as CEOs were evaluated with more competence than subordinates. Second, the type of SNS indicated a significant effect on competence evaluations as predicted. More precisely, employees on Facebook were evaluated less competent than on LinkedIn. Summing these two influences up, the research question can be answered: the hierarchical position and the type of SNS individually impact outsiders' competence evaluations of employees who engaged in online ambassadorship for a criticised organisation.

5.1.5. Further Findings

The study leads to further findings which result from the additional analyses. First, the prior opinion that participants had about IKEA – the example company used in the experiment – significantly influences sociability and competence evaluations meaning that participants with a positive opinion of IKEA beforehand evaluated the employee with higher sociability and competence, however, not morality. This difference between the three dimensions was a surprise but might be interpreted based on research by Leach et al. (2007). The authors indicate a connection between sociability and competence as they describe that people with high sociability are more successful and are assigned higher competence. In addition, morality is described as more significant than sociability and competence when developing positive opinions of someone (Leach et al., 2007, Brambilla et al., 2010). As the prior IKEA opinion of the participants was neutral, morality might not be significantly influenced. Furthermore, how the participants perceived the transgression of the company significantly influenced morality, sociability, and competence. This effect confirmed the manipulation check, and this variable could be controlled when analysing the differing

perceptions of social evaluations. The effect is not a surprise as a transgression breaks ethical values which is closely linked to morality, sociability, and competence evaluations (Singh & Twalo, 2015). The results chapter of this thesis proves this point as the transgression had a significant, positive effect on morality, sociability, and competence which means that more ethically perceived companies were evaluated more positively.

5.2. Implications

First, the theoretical implications of this thesis include that the research question addresses present topics and gaps of media and business as elaborated in the introduction. For instance, the research addresses a less studied scenario in which the company is behaving negatively and thereby harms the employee. Often research focusses on employees' negative behaviour damaging the company and applicable social media strategies of companies to avoid such a scenario (Efron et al., 2015). However, literature almost never looks at the opposite scenario of the company's behaviour potentially damaging the employee's reputation. For instance, by breaking ethical norms, the negative image of the company can spill-over to the employee who might not even be aware of this issue. Moreover, Karelaia and Keck (2013) suggest studying how followers react to a transgression of their leaders. This thesis does so by studying how outsiders react to transgressions by companies, more precisely, by evaluating the company's employees. Even though most effects studied in this thesis were not significant, this study raises awareness for these issues and adds to literature by focussing on connections that were less studied, such as social evaluation scales in online communication. Additionally, this thesis studied the three dimensions of social evaluation – morality, sociability, and competence – individually. This adds to theory by showing that the three dimensions are affected differently by the variables in this thesis which could be explained based on their differing characteristics (Fiske et al., 2006). Therefore, it adds to literature by presenting the need to treat the three dimension as separate ones. Furthermore, several researchers have proposed studying the differences between organisation roles and their connection to social evaluations (van Zoonen et al., 2018) and this thesis responds to that, and contributed by presenting that morality and sociability evaluations are not affected by different organisation roles. However, the hierarchical level did influence competence evaluations as CEOs were evaluated more competent than subordinates after a transgression of a company.

Second, the practical implications of this thesis are reviewed. Answering the research question can offer guidelines for the use of SNS for companies and managers. Moreover, the

consequences of unethical behaviour by organisations are clarified and the influence of organisational roles on social evaluations are illustrated. Thereby, the results raise awareness that employees who publicly communicate about their company might be related to the company's values which could influence job seekers who want to join an organisation. On top of that, whether social media use for employees is beneficial is still highly discussed and this thesis offers more awareness for this topic. It is important for employees and companies to become aware of potential negative effects for employees and come up with strategies and solutions beforehand to avoid larger damage. Such damage could arise from the distribution of negative comments by the employee, hurting the company even more (Lee et al., 2020) as well as increased stress and negative feelings for employees (Dutton et al., 1994). More precisely, this thesis offers guidance on how to benefit best from different social media platforms and what organisational roles should keep in mind for each of them. This thesis only found significant differences in competence evaluations which were more positive on the one hand for CEOs and on the other hand for employees on LinkedIn. Competence evaluations on LinkedIn were higher than on Facebook and this could also suggest that – perhaps due to the professional etiquette on LinkedIn – outsiders are less inclined to question someone's competence on the professional SNS. This could offer implications for employees who should focus their social media strategies on LinkedIn and for companies who should drive the social media presence of CEOs more than of subordinates. However, morality and sociability evaluations were not affected by the hierarchical level of the employee nor the type of SNS which limits these practical implications. Nevertheless, this could be explained by the outdated scales of social evaluation and should be included in future research to guide employees how to benefit from SNS, improve their image, and create authentic relationships with stakeholders (Lee et al., 2020).

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Last, the limitations and directions for future research are presented. First, the experiment did not include a control condition. Excluding this was an active choice due to the scope of this thesis. Consequently, the experiment did not include a neutral or positive condition which means that all participants received a transgression by the company and this output could not be compared with participants with a neutral or positive condition. By including a control condition, researchers could find out if the responses truly were based on the transgression – a negative condition – and perhaps lead to more significant findings. Second, the experiment in this thesis only included one nationality: English. However,

cultural differences are likely to impact the social evaluation as the definition of morality depends on cultural values (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Grzesiuk (2016) also explains that perceptions on whether a company breaks the rules could be based on subjectivity which once again is related to cultural values and differences. Therefore, future research should include participants from different origins. Third, the sample size of 200 was relatively small and could be increased in further studies. Fourth, the sample consisted of more women than men and Karatsoli and Nathanail (2020) describe that gender potentially influences how and if users distribute information on SNS and how SNS affects their decision making. For instance, women are more concerned with keeping personal relations and privacy as well as are more affected by reviews on SNS (ibid.). Consequently, the higher number of female participants who might be differently affected by the posts presented in the experiment could have influenced the outcomes. Future research could look more into the effect of gender on social evaluation. Fifth, the normality for age was not given in the experiment, which was neglected in this study as this variable was not the main variables. However, this could be a possible limitation of the sample. Sixth, the chosen company, IKEA, could be seen as another limitation. The participants who like IKEA might be biased which influences their results. By including a question at the beginning of the experiment which measured the prior opinion on IKEA of participants, this bias was reduced, however, further research could focus more on this, for instance by evaluating the social evaluation dimensions based on prior IKEA opinion before and after the manipulation part. Such pre- and post-tests would allow comparing whether prior opinion had an effect. Seventh, the experiment in this thesis only included Facebook and LinkedIn as the two platforms representing SNS. Future research should include different platforms, such as Twitter, as this platform offers different characteristics including a lower rate of exchanging opinions than Facebook but high spreading of information (Kim et al., 2013). Overall, the experiment offers almost endless ways of further developing the research by including different characteristics as control variables, such as race, education, age, or observable characteristics such as appearance (Fragale et al., 2008).

Moreover, future research could focus on studying the three individual social evaluation factors more closely as the dimensions were affected unexpectedly and differently by variables in this experiment compared to previous research which often generalized social evaluations. In this context, the scales could be adjusted to new forms of online interactions. Communication values have changed on SNS compared to traditional forms and it is only logical, that social evaluations would change accordingly and therefore, the need for updated items in the social evaluation scales is given. Xu (2020) has studied the differences between

traditional and social media communications during a crisis and supports this idea. The author explains that communicating about a crisis on social media can reduce the perceived responsibility for the crisis compared to traditional communication (ibid.). Such a difference supports the argument that evaluations and perceptions can vary between traditional communication and the digital age and therefore, adjusting the scales of social evaluation used in this thesis could be an asset in future research. Further studies could also focus on the sub-hypotheses that showed a significant effect of hierarchy on competence – in the opposite direction to which was expected based on literature. This could be studied in more detail with a bigger sample and the inclusion of a neutral condition without a transgression to be able to compare whether the higher perceived competence of CEOs truly was due to the transgression – or if this effect would happen nevertheless. In addition, the significant effect of SNS on competence could be further tested by more research including a larger sample and different cultures. Furthermore, the findings showed other significant effects that did not necessarily relate to the hypotheses. For instance, the prior IKEA reputation had a significant effect on competence and sociability and could certainly be researched further. Last, the overall impression of participants about the employee was measured by an open question but showed no significance. This could be due a bias in the coding by only one researcher and should be conducted again in future research with several researchers.

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Appendix A: Online Survey

1. Introduction

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. In this questionnaire, the aim is to examine opinions about employees' posts to support their organisation.

The questionnaire will take approximately X minutes to fill in. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each question carefully and honestly.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

All research data remain completely confidential and are processed anonymously. The personal data we collect (e.g., age, education), will be stored in a coded way. The research data will not be made available to third parties without your explicit permission and only in anonymous form.

VOLUNTARY

If you now decide not to participate in this survey, this will not affect you. If you decide to cease your cooperation during the research, this will in no way affect you either. You can also withdraw your permission to use your data within 24 hours after finishing the questionnaire. You can cease your cooperation at any time during the research without giving reasons. If you terminate your cooperation during the research, or afterwards, within 24 hours, or if you withdraw your consent, your data will be removed from our files and be destroyed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions about this research, in advance or afterwards, you can contact the responsible researcher, Lara Kaiser, email: 578001lk@eur.nl.

If you understand the information above and freely consent to participate in this study, click on the "I agree" button below to start the survey.

Please fill in your Prolific ID for payment reasons:

2. Control question

You will see a newspaper heading from IKEA in the next section and before, we would like to learn more about your opinions about IKEA. Therefore, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	1 = strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 = slightly disagree	4 = neutral	5 = slightly agree	6 = agree	7 = strongly agree
I think of IKEA as a sustainable company.							
IKEA has good reputation.							
IKEA is well respected.							
IKEA is well thought of.							

3. Manipulation part

In the following section, you will first look at a newspaper headline from “TheGuardian”. Please read this carefully.

Thereafter, you will see a social media post written by an employee of IKEA. Please look at this carefully.

- a. Newspaper headline about IKEA behaving unethically

Search jobs Sign in Search **The Guardian** International edition

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle More

Business Economics Banking Money Markets Project Syndicate B2B Retail

Trees and forests

Ikea using illegally sourced wood from Ukraine

The report provides evidence that some of the beech wood used in Ikea's flagship Terje chair and other products came from a state-run forestry enterprise in Ukraine that was violating the law.



Tue 23 Jun 2020 20.00 BST

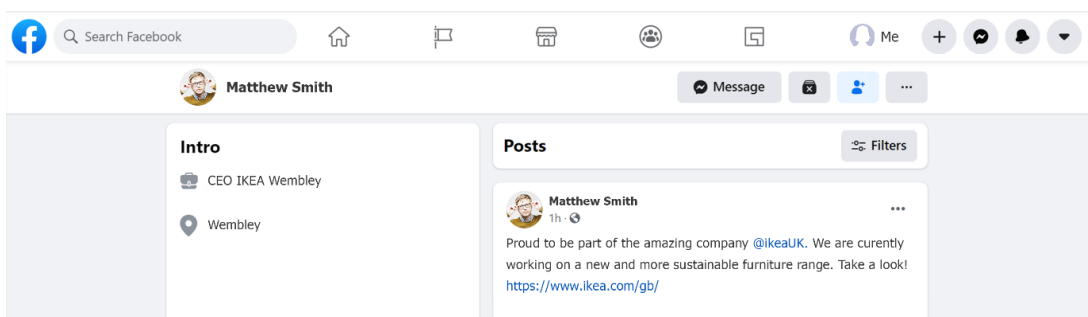
Source of content: Mukpo, A. (2020, June 29)

Source of layout: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/23/timber-unsustainable-logging-allegedly-sold-eu-ethical> (Retrieved 2021, February 05)

b. Social media post

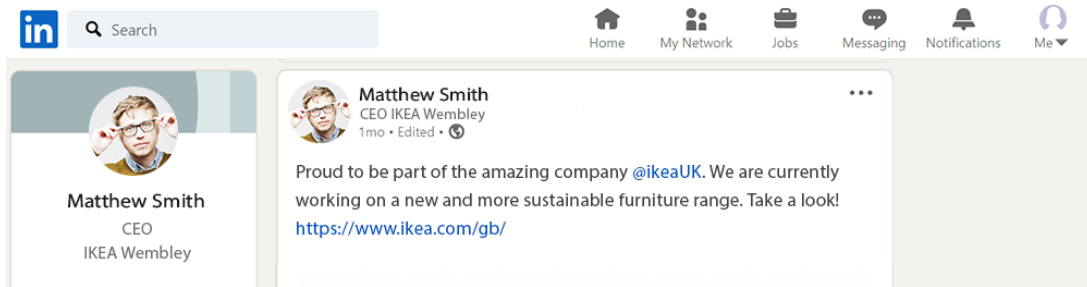
i. Group 1: CEO on Facebook

Please carefully read the following post on Facebook. This post was written by the CEO of IKEA Wembley.



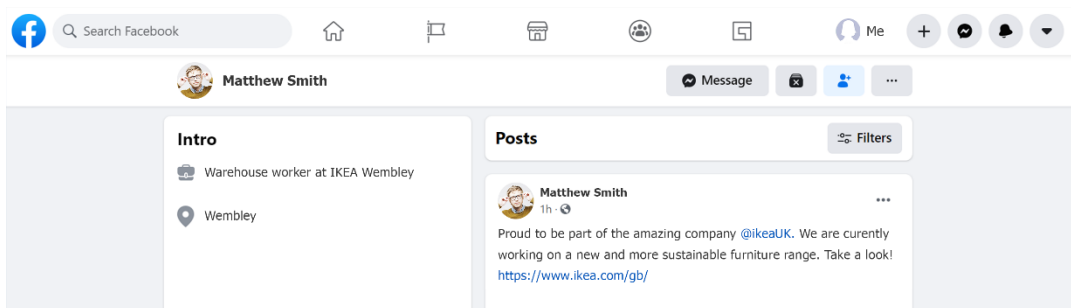
ii. Group 2: CEO on LinkedIn

Please carefully read the following post on LinkedIn. This post was written by the CEO of IKEA Wembley.



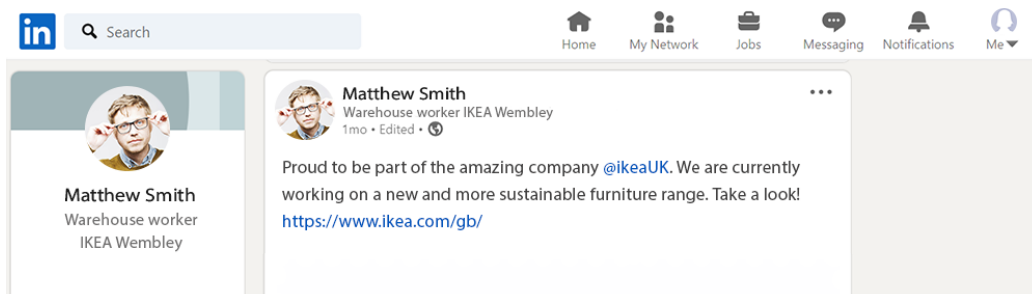
iii. Group 3: Subordinate on Facebook

Please carefully read the following post on Facebook. This post was written by a warehouse worker at IKEA Wembley.



iv. Group 4: Subordinate on LinkedIn

Please carefully read the following post on LinkedIn. This post was written by a warehouse worker at IKEA Wembley.



4. Manipulation checks

a. Transgression:

You have just read a news article about IKEA and in this section, we would like to ask you to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	1 = strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 = slightly disagree	4 = neutral	5 = slightly agree	6 = agree	7 = strongly agree
I believe that the company respected moral norms.							
I believe that the company is a socially responsible company.							
I believe that the company generally adheres to the law.							

b. Hierarchical position:

You have also just read a social media post by an employee of IKEA and now, we would like to ask you to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	1 = strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 = slightly disagree	4 = neutral	5 = slightly agree	6 = agree	7 = strongly agree
I believe that the employee has a lot of influence on the decisions that are made at IKEA.							

c. SNS type:

	1 = strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 = slightly disagree	4 = neutral	5 = slightly agree	6 = agree	7 = strongly agree
I believe that the platform (on which the post was published) is oriented towards a professional network.							

5. Social evaluation of the employee

Scales for morality, sociability, and competence by Brambilla et al. (2010) and Leach et al. (2007)

After reading the news article about IKEA and a social media post by one of their employees, please indicate your answers do the following questions.

a. Morality

	1 = very low	2 = low	3 = slightly low	4 = neutral	5 = slightly high	6 = high	7 = very high
How would you estimate the sincerity of the employee?							
How would you estimate the honesty of the employee?							
How would you estimate the							

righteousness of the employee?							
How would you estimate the trustworthiness of the employee?							
How would you estimate the respectfulness of the employee?							

b. Sociability

	1 = very low	2 = low	3 = slightly low	4 = neutral	5 = slightly high	6 = high	7 = very high
How would you estimate the kindness of the employee?							
How would you estimate the friendliness of the employee?							
How would you estimate the warmth of the employee?							
How would you estimate the likeability of the employee?							

How would you estimate the helpfulness of the employee?							
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

c. Competence

	1 = very low	2 = low	3 = slightly low	4 = neutral	5 = slightly high	6 = high	7 = very high
How would you estimate the intelligence of the employee?							
How would you estimate the competence of the employee?							
How would you estimate the efficiency of the employee?							
How would you estimate the skillfulness of the employee?							
How would you estimate the capability of the employee?							

What was your overall impression of the employee?

6. Demographics

a. What is your gender?

- i. Male
- ii. Female
- iii. Non-binary / third gender
- iv. Prefer not to say

b. What is your age? _____

7. Conclusion

I want to thank you for your time and willingness to take part in this experiment. The aim of this research is to explore the influence of a company's transgression on how an employee is evaluated on social media. Moreover, I want to study, if this social evaluation differs between Facebook and LinkedIn as well as between CEO's and subordinates. I would also like to inform you that this experiment was conducted independently from IKEA. The news headline was posted by a different newspaper and copied into the layout of the U.K. newspaper "The Guardian". The social media post was fictitious and created for the sole purpose of this experiment.

In case you would like to contact me, my contact details are:

Lara Kaiser: 578001k@eur.nl