Employees' online presence as ambassador

How an organizational transgression can influence employee's reputation

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ABSTRACT

Employees' online ambassadorship behaviour is becoming an important part in developing their own reputation. Being perceived as a knowledgeable professional makes employees the trustworthy source for external stakeholders to obtain information about the company. This influential position can be of interest for employees who hope for a positive spillover effect from the perceived organizational reputation. At the same time, organizations can also find themselves in crisis when being outed for a transgression. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can then become a threat for the employee and incite a negative stigma. The influence an organizational transgression can have on the reputation from employees' participating in online ambassadorship, however, remains understudied. This study will provide an elaborate description to understand whether employees' online ambassadorship on Facebook and LinkedIn is still advisable when an organizational transgression occurs.

To answer the research question, an online survey experiment has been conducted with a 2x3 factorial design amongst 222 respondents. Additionally, previous literature showed the important role negative emotions can have in creating blame and judgement of an individual. Within this study negative emotions were, therefore, researched for its mediating role. Furthermore, since the survey consisted of an environmental transgression, the level of environmental concern was also measured for its possible moderating contribution. The study demonstrated that employees' reputation will be negatively affected if they participate in online ambassadorship when the organization is undergoing a transgression. The negative spillover effect from the organizational transgression can be fully explained by higher levels of negative emotions the receivers experience. However, no significant moderation effect was found for environmental concern for the judgement of the employees. Thus, it is recommended for employees to maintain unobtrusiveness as an online ambassador when an organizational transgression happens.

KEYWORDS: *Employees online ambassadorship, EWOM, Social media, Reputation, Organizational transgression*

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1. Introduction

In recent years social media has blurred the lines between work and private life, increasing employees' usage to share information with people in their networks about the organization they work for (Lee et al., 2020; Van Zoonen et al., 2018). Technological developments have created an interactive environment where people can share and express their perceptions, thoughts, and evaluations with, for instance, social interactions. These online activities can lead to online ambassadorship behaviour from employees regarding the organization they work for. For instance, employees talk about their company with people like friends or family members on Facebook and with their professional network on LinkedIn (Lee, 2020; Van Zoonen, 2018).

Social media has become an opportunity for employees to use as an outlet for voicing their views and beliefs about their employers (Batenburg & Bartels, 2017). Their visibility makes them an influential source for external stakeholders for receiving organizational information (Dreher, 2014; Miles & Mangold, 2014; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). By acting as an online ambassador on social media they can build on or alter an already existing reputation from the organization (Dreher, 2014; Helm, 2011). Research has argued that employees participating in this behaviour hope for the possibility of a positive spillover effect between how the organization is perceived and their own identity as members of that organization (Van Zoonen et al. (2018). Suggesting that employees use social media messages so their own reputation will align with the company's reputation. To date there are a variety of studies concentrating on employee's social media behaviour. Often focusing on one or multiple platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) (Skeels and Grudin, 2009; Utz, 2016; Van Dijck, 2013; Van Zoonen et al., 2018). Within the study from Van Zoonen et al. (2018) they proposed that positive judgements of an organization can spillover to employees' identities. Since their findings are explained for online ambassadorship behaviours on Facebook and LinkedIn this research aims to continue on their expectations that organizational reputation can spillover onto employees' reputation.

Employees online ambassadorship creates an interaction that is shaped with electronic worth of mouth (eWOM) (Xu & Lee, 2020). Hennig-Thurau et al. defined eWOM as "any positive or negative statement(s) made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (2004, p.39). However, this research focuses on employees. Therefore, building on previous studies (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Rafaeli & Raban, 2005; Walsh et al., 2016;

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Weitzl, 2014), this research defines eWOM as a positive, neutral, or negative information shared message about an organization and made publicly available by employees and external stakeholders.

Van Zoonen et al. (2018) already discovered that employees are most likely to participate in positive or neutral eWOM actions. Therefore, within this study the concept of employee ambassadorship is when the employee participates in eWOM on social media platforms, like Facebook and LinkedIn, by voicing the organizational values, experiences, or thoughts from their employer to others in their online network. The employee's voice is defined by Miles and Mangold as 'an employee's attempt to use either organizationally sanctioned or unsanctioned media or methods for the purpose of articulating organizational experiences and issues or influencing the organization, its members, or other stakeholders' (2014, p.403).

Employee's online ambassadorship is being acclaimed for the opportunities it can generate for both employee and organization. Research has broadly focused on the opportunities and consequences of social media use in organizational context (Dreher, 2014; Lee, 2020; Opitz et al., 2017). However, this online support for the organization has potential risks as the barrier for society to express negative emotions has become thinner with social media and eWOM (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Therefore, the perceived reputation of the employee is perhaps connected with how they apply their eWOM on platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. Still, little is known on how the public reacts to an employee's online ambassadorship behaviour if the organization has gone through or is dealing with a transgression.

Sometimes an organization finds itself in a situation where they have violated the law or moral rules that then get addressed by the public (Bandura et al., 2000). Fediuck et al. (2010) describe this as a transgression where an organization is in a crisis case because stakeholders identified that the organization has intentionally engaged in an act of wrongdoing, breaching stakeholder values. As a result of this wrongdoing, stakeholders think badly about the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Dufour, 2019). It is not surprising that due to the defiant nature and its disregard to reject moral rules, transgressions are generally regarded with negative connotations (Paleczny & Slawik, 2016).

Often transgressional scandals are regarding environmental violations or ecological impacts that will trigger negative sentiments from society (NOS, 2020; Nu.nl, 2021). It creates a bad reputation and a negative stigma for the organization (Gayatri, 2019). Especially

because of society's growing concerns towards climate change and their call for action, can it influence the organizational reputation and perceptions from external stakeholders (Worland, 2020). According to Effron et al. (2015) transgression is also defined by behaviours that violate an ethical value such as environmentalism. In their study the ethical value outlines the belief, principal, or goal that indicates concern with the interests of individuals or society. For instance, within the environmental transgression the organization has broken environmental protection laws and neglected environmental norms of behaviour (Sharma et al., 2019).

When such a transgression has taken place, it can affect a stakeholder's perception of an organization's reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). However, will there also be consequences for employees who act as online ambassadors? This research will look into whether the negative stigma of a company after environmental transgressions can spillover to the perceived reputation of employees. Specifically, if the employee is active as an online ambassador. What happens when an employee participates in eWOM about their organization and is there a difference between the platforms Facebook and LinkedIn? Also, will it make a difference if this online ambassadorship takes place before or after the transgression? Studies acclaim positive effects on employees' reputations (e.g., professional identities and authority) for online ambassadorship behaviour when there is no transgression. Therefore, the research question is: *To what extent does the timing of employees' online ambassadorship as well as online eWOM presence on platforms, influence the reputation of employees when the organization has gone through environmental transgressions?*

1.1 Academic and societal relevance

A transgression can trigger negative feelings towards the organization (Pace et al., 2010) and perhaps also its employees. Content posted after the transgression can then possibly affect the employee's reputation. In recent literature there is a gap on this aspect. Prior research has investigated the reputation of organizations after a transgression and the company's crisis communication strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Dufour, 2019). However, there is barely any research on the influence an organizational transgression can have on the employees' reputation when it participates in online ambassadorship behaviour. Especially literature on what role the time of eWOM plays in shaping these perceptions is missing. However, condemning an individual has been researched in numerous psychological studies. Yet these do not give insights into how condemning is executed in practice and

affects a person's reputation. Making this research also of importance for psychological academics.

A different perspective is required in order to analyse if online ambassadorship is still advisable if the employees' reputation is threatened by a transgression in the organization or if perhaps a new strategy should be constructed. Particularly as literature encourages online ambassadorship as it can increase their transparency and reputation towards external stakeholders (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Also, employees' online ambassadorships result in increasing importance from organizations to manage employees' social media posting behaviours. An increasing number of organizations facilitate training for its employees to guide them in their social media usages (Miles & Mangold, 2014; Walsh et al., 2016). Therefore, this study can provide insights for organizations on how to advise their employees to use social media as online ambassadors when it is dealing with the aftermath of a transgression

1.2 Chapter outline

The focus of this research is on the influence that the timing of employees' online ambassadorship and the platform where this takes place has on the employees reputation when an organization has been accused of wrongdoing. More specifically, this study will research the effect of an environmental transgression on the employee's reputation. To provide more insights behind the theoretical justification, chapter two discusses relevant insights and empirical recommendations from previous research. Here the different variables will be introduced and discussed. It will highlight what eWOM, online ambassadorship, reputation and the platforms Facebook and LinkedIn comprise of. With the role of self-disclosure, moral cognition, negative emotions, and environmental concern underlined. Also, based on the insights the framework provides, five hypotheses are created. Chapter three discusses the research method. Explaining why a quantitative approach is justifiable. It specifies the strategies involved to gather and research the data collection. This contains the units of analysis, sampling, procedure, stimulus material, measurements, reliability, and validity. Chapter four presents the findings of the statistical analyses that have been conducted with the gathered data. Hereby interpretations are made in relation to manipulation checks and the hypothesis. The results establish the support for whether a hypothesis is accepted or rejected. After the results are established, chapter five will give an interpretation of the results to answer the research question. It entails a thorough discussion on the meaning of the results.

Implications drawn from previous theoretical research is used to attempt an explanation on why certain hypotheses are accepted or rejected. Besides the key findings this chapter consists of practical implications, research limitations, and recommendations for future research. The final chapter includes a small recap concluding the entire research.

2. Theoretical framework

Within the theoretical framework the concepts will be defined and discussed in order to understand their importance. This includes the concepts eWOM and online ambassadorship. Followed by the impact a transgression can have on organizational reputation. Then the employee's reputation will be highlighted and how moral cognition can contribute to shaping peoples' judgments of employee's online ambassadorship. These insights will also be looked at more deeply for the two platforms Facebook and LinkedIn. Ending this theoretical framework with observations of what role negative emotions and environmental concerns could play into forming judgement of an employee's reputation.

2.1 Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

Employees can generate an electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) effect (Xu & Lee, 2020) which then can have an impact on the reputation of both the employees and the concerning organization (Helm, 2011; Van Zoonen et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2016). EWOM is a form of communication that is beyond the control of a brand or organization. Yet, it can still impact and shape people's attitudes towards an organization, affecting its image (Pasternak et al., 2017).

EWOM can take different shapes, from private messages, comments on SNS, online reviews, to blog posts (Wang et al., 2015). But also, the voices of the message can come into a variety of forms, it can involve both textual and visual elements. Within the study from Pasternak et al. (2017) they established that eWOM can contribute to stakeholders' attitudes, loyalty, trust, and even purchase intentions towards a company. The role of eWOM heavily influences people's decisions (Khobzi & Teimourpour, 2014). People tend to have higher trust in eWOM because it denotes more authenticity and credibility in comparison with organizational communication. Organizational communication is often received sceptically as it only promotes the positive aspects of a company. Whereas eWOM by external stakeholders can communicate both the good and the bad stories (Kaul & Chaudri, 2017; Pasternak et al., 2017). Research from BrightLocal even portrayed that 88% of consumers trust eWOM as much as personal recommendations (Anderson, 2014).

The advantage of eWOM by employees on SNS extends from the ability to facilitate conversation and dialogue, to engagement, and obtaining a fast-wide reach of an audience (Bal et al., 2017). Employees are increasingly seen as trustworthy sources for organizational information, caused by their eWOM presence on social media (Dreher, 2014). It is a reason

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that organizations stimulate employees to partake as online corporate advocates. Because their positions within the organization makes them credible and sincere sources for outsiders. However, within the research from Dreher (2014) there are also risks highlighted with employees' eWOM usage. So have organizations lost online control concerning what is written about them, as the employees' content cannot be completely regulated, nor can its impact be stopped or made undone. Especially since the employees' eWOM intentions do not have to be in line with the corporate communications strategies. Also, social media is everywhere and can be amplified by viral effects. Data on social media can last forever and be accessible for everyone (Lesaffer, 2017). Negative eWOM can then hold a long and wide-reaching effect on the concerned party.

The use of eWOM does not only have risks for organizations it can also affect the employee who took part in it. EWOM can follow an employee for a longer time. Which can decrease chances in finding other work opportunities, when an individual has been condemned for previous online ambassadorship for an organization that has been accused of wrongdoing (Effron et al., 2015). Another risk for the employee is that negative eWOM can generate the impression of being less credible (Lee et al., 2020). In general, negative eWOM is, of course, never good for a reputation. When people have read negative information online which also aligns with their own beliefs, they tend to disseminate it faster (Liu & Keng, 2014). It is that people gravitate to be more attentive of negative news and weigh this more heavily in their evaluation of something in comparison to positive news (Solomon, 2018). However, the study from Martin (2017) counters that by indicating that people judged positive sources as more trustworthy than negative sources. They found that their recipients believed news to be more genuine and accurate when it contained positive content. Employees who posted positive posts generate more positive eWOM like comments, likes, and shares (Lee et al., 2020). Also, senders from positive content were perceived as having greater knowledge. Martin (2017) thought it could be that the recipients believed that negative content is based on secondary news rather than having encountered the negative aspects themselves. These studies (Martin, 2017; Solomon, 2018) give a somewhat contradicting intelligence on how people tend to deal with negative and positive messages. However, the impact of negative eWOM can have greater consequences for an organization as people are more prone to share negative content and experiences than good content or experiences (Solomon, 2018).

2.2 Online ambassadorship

The development of Web 2.0, and currently even Web 3.0, technology has led to revolutionizing techniques of communication (Sakka & Ahammad, 2018). It has given people opportunities to create and upload content through interactive tools (Choudhury, 2014). Social networking sites (SNS) have intertwined and dominated as a method of communication into the daily personal lives of society and the workplace. At the workplace these technologies and especially SNS became an important tool for organizations to take advantage of. For instance, to create opportunities to communicate with stakeholders in order to optimize the relationships with them. Especially since people tend to increasingly put much weight on opinions available online (Sakka & Ahammad, 2018).

These technological developments have created an interactive environment where stakeholders share and express their perceptions, thoughts, and evaluations with, for instance, social interactions. In addition, on SNS, users can create content that does not have to be made for professional reasons and publish it on various platforms (Sakka & Ahammad, 2018). Especially social media platforms offer tools for its users to connect with others. Therefore, as a result it is easy for people to create, share, distribute, and spread content for both personal and work-related purposes. As a consequence of these opportunities the organization's stakeholders are also searching for information regarding the company on these SNS platforms thereby making it an important source in how a stakeholder's perception of an organization is being shaped and influenced.

When employees engage in online activities on social media regarding the company it can be classified as online ambassadorship. Online ambassadorship behaviour occurs when employees participate in liking and sharing publications from or about the company, or when they distribute company-related information (Lee, 2020; Van Zoonen et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2016). Employees' online ambassadorship is often treated as knowledgeable and therefore an influential source of organizational information for outsiders (Lee, 2020; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). On the SNS platforms eWOM can be used as a positive trigger to engage with stakeholders. For that reason, researchers also identified that in order for organizations to generate a good reputation with its external stakeholders the use of online ambassadors is highly advisable (Bal et al., 2014; Dreher, 2014; Lee, 2020; Miles & Mangold, 2014; Xiong et al., 2013).

Employee ambassadors are according to Xiong et al., (2013) the employees who are expected to behave loyal in agreement with the organization or brand values. When the

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organization and employee reach the stage of oneness and identities have intertwined it can be implicated that the organization has become a part of the employees' online identity (Fieseler et al., 2015; Van Zoonen, 2018). As mentioned before, an employee can also engage with negative eWOM intentions. However, Van Zoonen et al. (2018) already discovered that employees are most likely to participate in positive or neutral eWOM actions.

2.2.1 Disclosing the self

In order to understand the employee's eWOM behaviour on Facebook and LinkedIn it is first important to take into account the relation between social media and the disclosure of the self (Van Dijck, 2013). Self-disclosure is the behaviour of revealing personal information about oneself to others (Archer & Burleson, 1980). Typically, that person is intentionally describing his or her experiences, and feelings (Bazarova & Choi, 2014). This behaviour is often present on social media platforms as the users often display the self on these sites. Often this self-disclosure is to display information about what is going on in someone's life and also to share this information with acquaintances (Aharony, 2016). The willingness of sharing their personal information can be explained by the aspect that individuals search for a feeling of belonging and connectedness. Individuals are prone to provide and share personal information about oneself on SNS as this sharing is a tacit element of self-promotion in an online community (Lutz & Strathoff, 2014; Van Dijck, 2013).

Where social media platforms were in the beginning used for (personal) self-expression it has gradually shifted to online self-presentation with a priority for self-promotion. Van Dijck (2013) explains that over time disclosing oneself on SNS started to become a more conscious act of self-staging. This is because an individual's presence and popularity are being measured by their online appearance. Self-disclosure could therefore eventually turn someone into a tool for marketing purposes. The online self-promotion by disclosing yourself on SNS can be applied by a variety of people. Think of for instance influencers, celebrity endorsement, and also employee ambassadorship. Professionals of all ages express themselves online to highlight their skillfulness and knowledge to attract connections.

In the research from Van Zoonen et al. (2018) it is described that when employees identify themselves more with their organization, they are also more triggered to express the self with others on for instance SNS. The self is then often aligned with a supportive attitude towards the employer and consistent with the organizational objectives (Smidts et al., 2001;

Utz, 2013). Yet Lee (2020) mentions that employees' intentions to share information is indifferent to what the organization's external reputation is. Within this research they assume that employees believe that they are perceived as credible regardless of the organization they work for. However, Van Zoonen et al. (2018) argue that employees who share organizational information through online ambassadorship on social media hope to create a positive spillover effect between how the organization is perceived and their own identity as members of that organization. Feelings like being proud of working for a well esteemed organization can sustain their feelings of self-worth (Smidts et al., 2001). Hoping that the positive reputation of the company will also affect their own reputation positively. It, however, still maintains an unexplored issue whether this positive spillover effect from organization on employees exists. Similarly, it's also unknown if the effect of a transgression spills over on the employee's self-disclosure through online ambassadorship and if this differs between social media platforms, like Facebook and LinkedIn

2.3 Reputation

According to Coombs and Holladay (2002) the reputation of an organization is how the public evaluates them. Coombs (2007) expanded this definition by explaining reputation as how well stakeholders' expectations were carried out by an organization's former actions. In order to achieve and maintain a good reputation, it is important that stakeholders perceive that the organization's promise and its performance are aligned (Stamsnijder, 2016). This is developed through the information stakeholders receive. They obtain information by interactions through mediated reports such as news media and advertising (both online and offline) and second-hand information from other people like (e)WOM (Coombs, 2007). Second-hand information is in today's network society faster obtainable (Aarnoutse, 2016). Social media on the internet is critical to how stakeholders think about an organization, individual or group (Coombs, 2007).

Reputations are evaluative (Coombs, 2007; Stamsnijder, 2016). Therefore, one compares what they know about an organization to a certain standard to conclude if an organization meets their expectations of how it should act. When the expected behaviour is not met, due to wrongdoing of an organization, an issue can occur. Stamsnijder (2016, p.43) defines this issue as 'an urgent problem with proponents and opponents who are waiting for a resolution and something that through the media becomes a topic of discussion among a broad audience'. When an organization is undergoing a transgression, it can affect their reputation

negatively as stakeholders can judge and hold them accountable. It can cause deep frustrations, which can turn into growing distaste for the company (Malle, 2010). This might also leave an impact on the employees from the organization in transgression. Because the negative reputation from organizational transgression can possibly spillover to the employee.

2.3.1 Employee's reputation impact

Even though the employee's online ambassadorship is perceived as knowledgeable and credible before the transgression (Lee, 2020), when society's collective perception has changed after a transgression, they can turn against the online ambassadorship affecting one's trustworthiness, likeability, expertise, and credibility (Doss, 2011). Suggesting that, besides the organization, the perception of the employee's reputation might suffer similarly. Making the connection between dishonesty as an immoral person (Ellemers et al., 2013). For instance, Kulik et al. (2008) describes the stigma spillover effect that can occur when employees are negatively evaluated because of association with another stigmatized individual. In this context stigma is described as a feature that is disapproving and therefore reduces an individual's estimation of wanting to be associated with (Goffman, 1963). An individual can stimulate condemnation from others as an effect of interacting or being associated with stigmatized individuals, groups, or organizations. Resulting in that the negative treatment towards the stigmatized will spill over to the individual (Kulik et al., 2008).

Being associated and condemned for one's relation to a stigmatized individual or organization can negatively affect an employee's work performance. In the long term, it will damage the employee's reputation (White & Harary, 2001). Possibly this might also be in relation to how an employee's reputation is negatively affected by stakeholders due to their affiliation with an organization undergoing a transgression. People judge others negatively when they are associated with groups that are responsible for wrongdoings (Denson et al., 2006). Employees are then seen as less moral, less social, and less competent (Effron et al., 2015).

Being less moral refers to the employees' decrease of correctness, like being less honest and trustworthy. Whereas being less social refers to qualities forming connections with others, as being perceived as less friendly and likeable. Employees' competence are the skills for task functioning such as efficiency and capability (Brambilla et al., 2011). These three dimensions - morality, sociability, and competence - can be seen as the foundation of how peoples' perceptions about someone are created. Hence, being important pillars on how an

individual's image of reputation is constructed. Especially morality is an important guide on how people judge others (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002). Brambilla et al. (2012) describe morality and sociability as warmth traits. They describe that a person's warmth is more important to form conclusions about an individual than knowing how competent that person is. Making morality and sociability most interesting for explaining how judgement of an employee's online ambassadorship is being constructed. For instance, to what extent the trustworthiness and likeability affects the employee's reputation. Because trustworthiness is largely identified with the correctness of the employee and likeability being associated with cooperation and forming connections with others (Brambilla et al., 2012). However, whether a negative reputation caused by an organizational transgression leaves a spillover effect on how stakeholders perceive the employee's reputation, based on trustworthiness and likeability, is not researched yet.

2.3.2 Judging ambassadorships timing on moral cognition

The, possible, negative reputation impact from a transgressed organization can be spilled over to the employee according to the stigma spillover effect from Kulik et al. (2015). However, how can an individual (employee) be judged on whether his or her behaviour as an online ambassador is moral? Within the study from Malle (2010) he points out that in order to judge someone's morality it needs to be decided what the intention is and if this is aligned with the desire. Because people tend to appear to use intentionality to judge behaviours. He describes intentionality as 'it means that the person had a reason to do what she did and that she chose to do so' (p.100). Malle and Knobe (1999) explain that for intentionality the individual has a desire for a certain outcome and is aware of fulfilling this intention while performing the behaviour. For instance, previous researchers indicate that high levels of employee's identification with the employer's organization triggers a supportive attitude (Smidts et al., 2001; Utz, 2013; Van Zoonen et al., 2018). Loyalty to the organization can then be a reason for the employee to intentionally continue as online ambassador after a transgression.

However, the judgements on if certain behaviour is intentional are made very fast and separate from how, for instance, personality and beliefs are judged. When in contrast, intentional behaviour is far more complicated involving assumptions of awareness and rationality. Because there is no assumption that an employee rationally considered the organization's transgressional behaviour in the reasoning for his or her online ambassadorship

behaviour when one is uninformed and unaware of the organization's wrongdoing (Malle, 2010). Can external stakeholders, for instance, assume that all employees know what goes on in every department of the organization. It can be argued that perhaps in smaller companies the complete staff has knowledge about the state of affairs. Whereas in bigger organizations the transparency of company practices is less evident to all employees (Stamsnijder, 2016).

Extending the blame beyond the accused individual or organization can be described as collective responsibility (Lickel et al., 2012). People are capable of blaming individuals other than the wrongdoers. The study from Effron et al., (2015) suggests that external stakeholders assume that employment is aligning oneself with the organization's behaviour, even when the employee did not explicitly act on the organization's endorsement of values or literally spoke publicly about it. Therefore, it can be speculated that external stakeholders will also suspect that employment is agreeing with the organization's wrongdoings and therefore hold the employee also accountable. Sanders et al. (1996) already verified that superiors were held more responsible for a transgressor's actions than the peers of the transgressor. Within the study from Lickel et al. (2012) they also found this outcome when looking into the Columbine High School shootings. They discussed that close contacts from the killers (e.g., their parents) were held more highly responsible than groups with weaker ties to the killers (e.g., neighbours, local community leaders). Collective responsibility was rated high for close and strong ties to the wrongdoers. It is the position in the hierarchy that determines the severity of blaming (Effron et al., 2015). However, just being employed by the wrongdoing organization can lead to the risk of being seen as partly responsible, even if they may have had nothing to do with the decisions or were not even aware of them.-

This blaming and condemning of an employee has become easier with eWOM (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). Because eWOM is fast and accessible for most external stakeholders resulting in more online voices and interactions. Online people can react on posts from non-personal relationships, therefore making their opinion about something or someone known faster publicly(Kaul and Chaudhri, 2017). However, the impact of negative eWOM can have greater consequences for an organization as people are more prone to share negative content and experiences than good content or experiences (Solomon, 2018). Also, the negativity effects, when negative information weighs more than positive information in forming an impression of someone, are especially evident for behaviours related to judging someone's morality (Ellemers et al., 2013). Yet, criticizing an employee for an organization's transgression should not be thought of too easily (Malle, 2010; Sheehy, 2006). Considering

that the employee's motivation or justification for performing the online ambassadorship behaviour should also be assessed. Efforts to distance oneself from the company's actions should also be deemed in the employee's favour. Whereas, going along with the company's actions, when dissociating oneself from it was possible, will work against the employee (Mall, 2010). Like when the organizational transgression is publicly known yet the employee remains active as an online ambassador will impact the employee's reputation negatively.

The more the employee's identity is aligned with the organization the more the employee can try to find rational justifications for the organizational behaviour (Koehler & Raithel, 2017). Then the employee's moral character will be negatively evaluated, and people will recommend punishment damaging the employee's reputation (Effron et al., 2015). This happens also when the employee hides certain knowledge of the transgression by playing dumb through deceptive knowledge hiding (Burmeister et al., 2019). For instance, when they said they did not know about the wrongdoing when they actually already did. Then the employee's online ambassadorship behaviour can be done with the right intentions yet is probably not justifiable when an organizational transgression has been made public and the employee remains as a positive online ambassador

The negative reputational impact of an organizational transgression will probably spillover to the employee. People judge negatively when one is associated with groups that are responsible for wrongdoings. Even though Malle (2010) points out that judging an individual is relatively easy, judging individuals who are part of an organization is not. Judging the employee's online ambassadorship behaviour depends on the awareness of the transgressional actions. If the employee knew about the wrongdoing the judgment will be more negative. The moment a transgression comes out it is very unlikely that an employee will not know anything about the behaviour of the organization. When the employee subsequently participates in ambassadorship, people can see this as expressing support for the immoral company, which means that they can also assess the employee's morality lower. However, if an employee lends support on SNS before the transgression is released, then it is likely that the employee was unaware of it. Therefore, it can be predicted that the reputation of the employee will be condemned more negatively when they still participate in positive online ambassadorship behaviour after the organizational transgression is widely known than before. Because the employee is then not dissociating oneself from the wrongdoer and therefore can be perceived as an advocate of the organization's actions.

H1a: The reputation of the employee is more negative if a positive message is posted on SNS after the transgression than before the transgression.

Employee's online ambassadorship behaviour can actually generate positive eWOM and increase their own reputation and that of their employer. However, when they work for an organization in transgression their morality can be judged more negatively by people. Therefore, this study also predicts that if there was no transgression the reputation of the employee would have been more positive than when the employee posted a positive eWOM message after the organizational transgression.

H1b: The reputation of the employee is more negative if a positive message is posted on SNS after a transgression than if there was no transgression

2.4 Platform

Employee's online ambassadorship and eWOM behaviour can take place on different platforms and in different forms. Within this study the focus lies on the social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn.

2.4.1 Online ambassadorship on Facebook

The first social media platform within this research is employee's online ambassadorship and eWOM behaviour on Facebook. Users on Facebook are in need to connect and sustain relationships with others. The eWOM activity, on social media in general, can be influenced by one's need to present the self and communicate this to the social network. Within the study from Pasternak et al. (2017) they found that people perceive their personal Facebook account as an extension of themselves. It has become an extension of one's identity. The information shared on Facebook often involves more information about one's identity like personal information, hobbies, interests, and relationship status (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Therefore, it also has the ability to shape someone's image towards their social network.

Online ambassadorship on Facebook can interest employees who identify strongly with the organization they work for (Van Dijck, 2013; Van Zoonen et al., 2018). This implies that employees who acquire more satisfaction from their organizational membership, also share organizational information to authorize their identities with their network. When, for

instance, an employee is visible on Facebook their posts are often directed to one or more persons in particular. Skeels and Grudin (2009) found that Facebook was used to, besides friends and family, keep in touch with colleagues on both work- and casual relationship level. Consequently, this can challenge the employees' decisions on how to present themselves in a consistent manner that fits within all the different social network groups on Facebook (Van Prooijen et al., 2018). Therefore, the employees can experience the online ambassadorship role on Facebook as restricted since the audience within the network may be too diverse (Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

The wide range of public audiences can make employees' online ambassadorship on Facebook challenging but not impossible. Within the research from Skeels and Grudin (2009) they also found that Facebook was used to maintain awareness and bond with colleagues and that work related discussions were also communicated on the platform instead of, for instance, the intranet. They do however point out that employees have become extremely careful what to post on Facebook, afraid of the possible different judgements from their social and work-related network. Conversely, employees therefore tend to share work related information faster with colleagues on a platform like LinkedIn than on Facebook. If the identification with the organization is not strong enough, the employee will tend to reduce its online ambassadorship behaviour on Facebook and favour disclosing more aspects of their personal life.

2.4.2 Online ambassadorship on LinkedIn

LinkedIn is known as the social media platform focussed on professional information, where its users construct a CV, highlight specific work-related skills, and establish work related connections. In comparison to Facebook, researchers have spent less attention to online ambassadorship behaviour on LinkedIn. For users of LinkedIn the main focal point lies in building and maintaining professional network relationships. Where profiles are kept more professional, with little to no information about hobbies or favourite books. (Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Van Dijck, 2013). Within comparison to Facebook, there is a lower barrier to forming a new connection on LinkedIn. Moreover, people include more weak contacts on LinkedIn than on their Facebook account (Utz, 2016). A new connection is made even with a low-key relation. Within the study of Skeels and Grudin (2009) a user said that LinkedIn was used to keep track of what former work colleagues were doing. But also, to keep track of trends and information of what is going on in the work field (Utz, 2016).

In contrast with Facebook, employees do tend to share more on LinkedIn about work-, organization- and profession-related information regardless of whether they identify with their organization (Van Zoonen, 2018). Given the purpose of LinkedIn it is more obvious for employees that their online ambassadorship on this platform is part of who they are as a professional. Nonetheless, by communicating organizational information on LinkedIn users not only increase their organizations image and reputation, it can also improve their professional value (Van Dijck, 2013). People tend to rely and trust the opinions and information employees share on LinkedIn as there they are known to be the professional (Utz, 2016).

2.4.3 Platforms impact on employee's reputation

Employees' online ambassadorship occurs more often when the organizational identification is stronger. Therefore, it can be argued that perhaps when an employee identifies with an organization the online network will also notice this identification. As a result, the network can react the same way towards the employee as they would towards the organization in transgression. Assuming that the same reputation will be spilled over from company to employee. Butler and Wang (2012) find that on SNS the interactions affect member dynamics and community responsiveness, both positively and negatively. When a strong contact in the network reacts negatively to an employee's posts the relationship between them can decrease. Since this responder is close, the employee will react stronger and more personally to the negative feedback. This also works vice versa, when the network can relate on a personal level with the online ambassador (Butler & Wang, 2012). Something similar is also demonstrated within the study of Utz (2016), where the relationship with strong and weak ties was highlighted. He found that on LinkedIn strong and weak ties contributed to informational benefits, while on Facebook only the strong connections were important. The strong relationship ties were in a higher frequency of communicating with each other and were also more willing to help each other out when needed (Burke & Kraut, 2013).

The relationships on Facebook are stronger than on LinkedIn and personal feelings will come into play. Therefore, it could be assumed that the dynamics on Facebook will be affected stronger than on LinkedIn but that the employee's reputation will not be significantly damaged. Because strong relationship bonds can overcome these obstacles. It is on LinkedIn where the employees tend to be more active as online ambassadors in hope of a positive spillover effect. This research predicts that negative feedback will be more present there than

on Facebook. Also, people who post more frequently tend to be perceived as more trustworthy (Utz, 2013), as more exposure increases someone's liking and trustworthiness (Zajonc, 1968). By assuming that the employee's online ambassadorship behaviour is more frequent and visible on LinkedIn the reputational impact will be more negatively affected. Because employees are perceived as more professional and knowledgeable on LinkedIn which could lead to more damage to the employee's reputation.

H2: The reputation of the employee is judged more negatively when the eWOM takes place on LinkedIn than on Facebook.

2.4.4 Relation between platforms and timing of online ambassadorship

As already mentioned, employees who participate in positive eWOM activities on social media, by posting content that is aligned with the companies' values, often identify themselves with the organization (Smidts et al., 2001; Utz, 2013). However, employees will receive more condemnation on SNS for their online ambassadorship activity, based on belonging to the organization undergoing a transgression (Doss, 2011). Fediuk et al. (2010) developed a general crisis information processing model to structure stakeholders' information processing into four phases: trigger event; evaluation process; emotional response; and attitudinal outcomes. Within this framework there is an event that triggers the stakeholders when they experience a violation of their expectations. Which can lead to perceptions of injustice (Coombs, 2007). This is followed by the stakeholders' evaluation process by scrutinising available information. A source of information can then be the employee's online eWOM practice on SNS.

The greater the gap between expected and anticipated behaviour, the more severe stakeholders judge the crisis. Consequently, moral outrage rises. This can lead to negative eWOM from the stakeholders and reputation damage for the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Fediuk et al., 2010; Koehler & Raithel, 2017). Positive interactions and information, however, can repair any reputation damages. This is in line with the expectations that the employees will be more negatively evaluated when they participate in online ambassadorship behaviour when the transgression is already publicly known. The feeling of being wronged is significantly more present by outsiders. Negatively influencing their own reputation. Also, another expectation made is that the employee will be more negatively evaluated on LinkedIn as the stakeholders' trust will probably be more violated by a

perceived professional than on Facebook. Like within the framework, stakeholders will search online for more information. The employee is then evaluated more severely on a platform that is recognized for its affordance to promote one's work experiences and professional knowledge (i.e. LinkedIn, than on a platform that focuses more on disclosing causal information about one's personal life (i.e. Facebook). Therefore, the next proposition is formulated:

H3: A positive eWOM post after the transgression on Facebook influences the employee's reputation more positively than on LinkedIn

2.5 Effect of negative emotions

When the public feels like their expectations of an organization have been violated or that they acted unjustified, they are also likely to respond with angry emotions toward the organization (Pace et al., 2010). Stakeholders will feel the need to externalize their reactions in an outward focused emotion like anger (Barclay et al., 2005; Pace et al., 2010). According to Douglas et al (2008), these negative emotions have a strong impact on the stakeholders' attitude towards the target. Hence, if an organization is responsible for a transgression, the public will focus their anger on the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). This also means that the more anger stakeholders have toward an organization, the more reputation damages the organization suffers. Stakeholders may have severe affiliations with the organization that did wrong and develop negative word of mouth (Coombs, 2007).

Emotions, like anger, also play a role in the Attribution Theory from Weiner (2005). Attribution Theory assumes that people search for the cause of events (make attributions), especially when it concerns a negative and unexpected occurrence. An individual attributes responsibility for a situation and will therefore experience an emotional reaction. In the Attribution Theory the core emotions are anger and sympathy. When a person or organization is judged as being held responsible for an issue or transgression anger can be evoked. These behavioural responses are positive when the judgement inclines that the certain individual or organization is not responsible for the event, which will result in sympathy (Weiner, 2005).

The negative emotional experiences seem most present when the employee has knowledge of the transgression but nevertheless not addressed them online. However, negative emotions reduce when the employee communicates to have been unaware of the bad actions from the organization, and these emotions might be absent when there is a rational

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reason for hiding (Burmeister et al., 2019). The possible absence of negative emotions by rationalized hiding can be attributed to the moral, social, and situational factors, therefore the trustworthiness and likeability of the employee will not be damaged. But all in all, this implies that the outward emotions towards a negative event, like transgressions, can be formalized based on if it is a result of situational factors or something that could have been controlled. The perceptions of the employee's morality and sociability can then be influenced by the negative emotions the outsider experiences. Hence, the negative emotions a transgression can trigger, will also have a big impact online because of eWOM. The negative eWOM that could follow the organizational transgression will leave an impact on the reputation of the company. But it will probably also affect the trustworthiness of an employees' eWOM contributions. Because even though positive eWOM can increase ones' reputation, it is a double-edged sword as the opposite can also occur. It can also contribute to negative reactions and can therefore drastically alter the conversation (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017) and create more negative feelings (Ellemers et al., 2013). Affecting the employee's reputation more significantly because of its online ambassadorship behaviour. Therefore, it is predicted that one's judgement, on something as negative as a transgression, will be influenced by their negative emotions like anger.

H4: The effect of the timing of eWOM on employees' reputation is mediated by negative emotions.

2.5.1 Role of environmental concerns

There are all kinds of transgressions and within this study the focus lies on the environmental transgression. An environmental transgression takes place when the organization has broken environmental protection laws and neglected environmental norms of behaviour (Sharma et al., 2019). Like with a transgression in general, stakeholders will hold the organization accountable causing deep frustrations and negative emotions which can turn into growing distaste for the company (Malle, 2010). This will, however, be even stronger when the stakeholder's environmental concerns are high. For instance, Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010) found evidence that people who identify themselves as pro-environmental were more influenced regarding various features of environmental behaviour.

According to Kals and Müller (2012) emotions play a significant role in explaining environmental behaviour. Environmentally relevant emotions have, for instance, in common

that the emotions are directed towards entities (e.g., people, subjects, organizations) that are somehow linked to the environment. When the moral norms of a pro-environmental person are transgressed, feelings like indignation will arise (Montada, 1998). Often the person's own perspective on the discord is seen as the singular valid interpretation of the situation (Kals & Müller, 2012), without taking into account other possible viewpoints.

Within the research from Hasanjanzadeh and Iahad (2013) they found that people found it important to contribute in positive eWOM if it could help to spread an organization's green message. This can imply that the opposite could also occur, that negative eWOM will be applied if an organization took part in an environmental transgression. To date, however, there have been no efforts to measure the role of environmental concern by making assumptions on employee's online ambassadorship behaviour regarding environmental transgressions. However, it can be said that the level of environmental concern plays a role in condemning entities that neglect the environment. Therefore, this research proposes that the timing of employee's online ambassadorship is moderated by environmental concern of the judgemental person.

H5: The effect of the employee's timing of online ambassadorship on the employees' reputation is stronger for those who have a higher level of environmental concern.
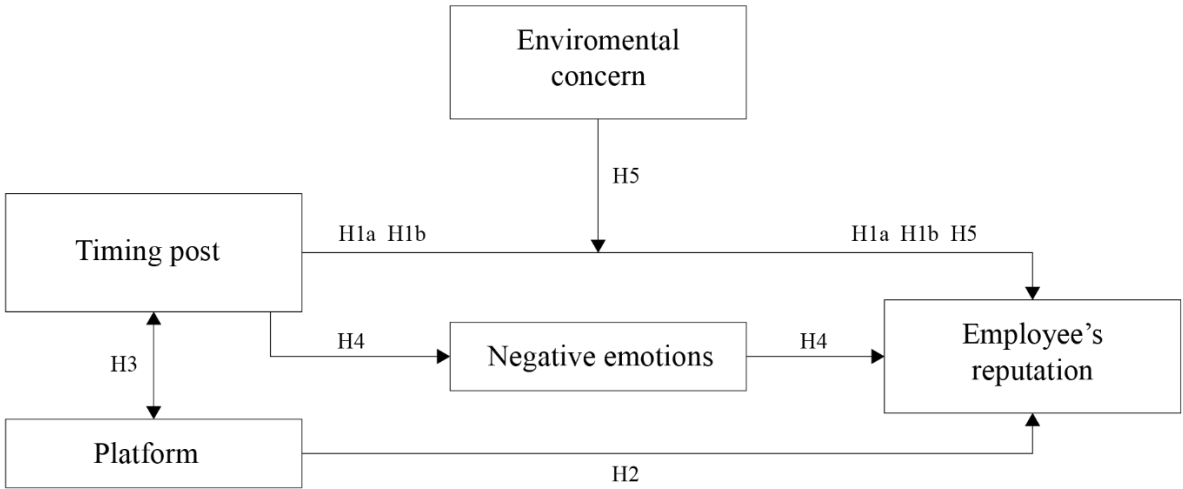

Figure 1: Conceptual model

3. Method

3.1 Survey experiment

The main goal of this study is to examine whether certain independent variables (timing of employees' online ambassadorship and online eWOM presence on Facebook and LinkedIn) influence a dependent variable (employees' reputation) (Figure 1). Furthermore, as previous studies have used survey experiments to answer somewhat similar research questions related to crisis responses after a transgression, this research continues on that (Hornsey et al., 2020; Pace et al., 2010). Also, within this study there is an interest in the causal relationship between the variables. Making, therefore, a quantitative research approach as the main method a logical choice for conducting this research.

Since this study is interested in determining the effect of two independent variables with a manipulation on the dependent variable, an experiment has been found suitable (Neuman, 2014). To be specific, this experiment will consist of a 2 x 3 (two by three) factorial design, making it six experimental groups (Figure 2). Within the factorial design, this research looks at all the combinations of categories in the factors. Figure 2 shows the two factors: timing of employee's online ambassadorship (three categories, before transgression, after transgression, without transgression), and platform where the eWOM takes place (two types, Facebook, or LinkedIn). The category, without transgression, is included as a control condition to check the effect on the employee's reputation when their online ambassadorship behaviour is for an organization who does not endure an environmental transgression.

	Timing of post before transgression *(Experimental group)*	Timing of post after transgression *(Experimental group)*	Timing of post without transgression *(Control group)*
Facebook			
LinkedIn			

Figure 2: 2 x 3 Factorial Design

The respondents will be randomly assigned to one of the six groups. Assigning the respondents unbiased helps in ensuring that there are no systematic differences between the groups (Neuman, 2014). Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic a real-life experiment would be unethical and hard to realize. Because of the timeframe for this research, an online experiment

is cheaper and faster to conduct than to operate a real-life experiment. Therefore, an online experiment is the most appropriate method for this research.

3.2 Units of analysis

Within this research the units of analysis need to consist of people of at least 18 years old with a basic knowledge of Facebook and LinkedIn. People from all countries, educational background, gender etc. are free to respond to the survey. The respondents do not have to meet additional factors, ensuring that no distinctions are made based on ethnical or social backgrounds.

3.3 Sampling

Sampling is done by using a non-probability sampling strategy. To be more specific the snowball sampling is applied, as a part of convenience sampling (Babbie, 2014). In snowball sampling, the "researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contact with others" (Bryman, 2016, p. 696). Initially the sampling was conducted through various Facebook and LinkedIn groups to reach a more diverse group of people, beyond personal connections. Also, the link to the online survey has been sent to a group of respondents of different social backgrounds, who then also set the online survey out amongst other potential respondents and so on. Creating the snowball effect. However, this sample process yielded only 98 responses. Therefore, the convenience sampling was applied by using Prolific, a time efficient participant recruitment service to gather the data. Hereby 132 more respondents were found in order to end up with a sample size of 228 respondents. This group of respondents were selected on their social media use, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts were necessary, and their British nationality. United Kingdom residents were chosen because the database from Prolific consists mostly of people from the UK.

After excluding three invalid survey respondents (these three were not completed) consisted the dataset of results about the effects of employee's online ambassadorship during a transgression. The final sample size was, $N = 222$. The survey has been distributed mostly among females 63.5% and then male 34.7%. Also, 1.4% indicated they identified themselves as non-binary. The survey was mostly conducted among people from the United Kingdom 57.2%, followed by the Netherlands 32.4%%. The age lies between 19 and 72 years old ($M = 36.00$; $SD = 13.57$). Besides questions about demographics, the survey also was interested in

the respondents' environmental concerns, negative emotions, feelings toward the employee (likeability and trustworthiness), and the respondent's presence on other social media platforms. So had 94.1% a Facebook account and 87.4% a LinkedIn account, while 3.2% reported not having a social media account.

3.4 Procedure

To conduct the experiment, this research will make use of an online survey. The respondents were introduced with an introduction text that explained the purpose of the survey and study. Hereby it was expressed that the respondent's anonymity was guaranteed, and any information gathered be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only. Also, it stated that by proceeding with the survey the person gives consent to use the gathered data for research purposes.

The first three questions asked in the survey were to what level the respondents indicated themselves as an environmentally friendly person. This was followed by two conditions (i.e. the manipulation). This contained a news article written by The Guardian about the organization followed by an employee's online ambassadorship post on social media. Hereby six different manipulation designs (figure 2) could be shown. These conditions are further explained in 3.4.1. After the manipulation the respondents were asked about what they have seen, to check if they interpreted the stimulus material correctly and increase measurement validity. For Prolific users this included a bot check, consisting of an extra open question about their first impression of the employee. This was asked to check no bots were used to fill in the survey. Next, they were asked which negative emotions they felt towards the employee. This is followed by statements about the likeability and trustworthiness concerning the employee. After these questions the respondents were asked for their social demographic information. This consisted of them revealing their gender, age, nationality, and on which social media platforms they are active. The final question asked was open-ended and interested if they wanted to add any additional comments. On the last screen the respondent was notified that a fictional organization and employee has been used. A last thank you for participation was given. Also, the researcher's email was provided for when the respondent wished to contact the researcher with questions or additional information (Appendix I).

3.4.1 Stimulus material

The design already portrayed that the survey experiment consists of four different experimental groups and two control groups (figure 2). Six combinations were made with the conditions, The Guardian news article concerning the employee's organization and an employee's online ambassador post on social media.

For the first condition the respondent was made aware that they will see a headline of a newspaper article about a pharmaceutical company and to read it carefully before continuing. The news article they saw was from The Guardian about a fictional pharmaceutical company called *Actinic Corp.* that had a breakthrough with a vaccine against Ebola. Three conditions were made for this stimulus. Two conditions contained the same negative message about the company because of dumping chemicals in a river, polluting its ecosystem. The third condition was used as a control. It contained a neutral news article about the same fictional pharmaceutical company that discovered a vaccine against Ebola and was waiting for the approval from the EMA. Another aspect that was manipulated within these conditions were the dates of publishing. To measure the influence of timing.

After the news article written by The Guardian will the respondent see a social media post from an employee from Actinic Corp. The text did not differ for the conditions. It mentions the name of the fictional employee *Daniel Smith* with a cheerful picture of him. The text that the employee posted included a positive message about how proud he is to work for the pharmaceutical company Actinic Corp. as they are working hard on a vaccine to fight the Ebola virus. The manipulation can be found in the different platforms, this is either on Facebook or on LinkedIn. With the LinkedIn post it is also revealed that Daniel Smith works as a project manager for Actinic Corp. Before the condition was portrayed were the respondents notified about that they will see a post from employee Daniel Smith. Hereby it is explained on which platform it is posted. Also, it was explicitly explained about the timing it was posted in relation to the publication of the news article by The Guardian (Appendix I).

To ascertain that the variables and conditions in the experiment operate as intended three manipulation checks were included. These manipulation checks were there to help in ruling out possible threats, increasing measurement validity (Neuman, 2014). In sum, the first manipulation was the timing of the employee's online ambassadorship in comparison to the timing of transgression, by making three differences in the timing (figure 3). The second manipulation can be found within the sentiment of the articles about the transgression. So are the articles for the experimental groups that consist of a transgression written with a negative

sentiment and for the control groups the articles are written neutral (Appendix II). The third manipulation lies within the platforms. Three groups will see Facebook and the other three groups will see LinkedIn.

Furthermore, the respondents were unaware that there were different versions of the survey. This resulted in them not knowing the complete true purpose of the research that in the end different groups will be compared to each other.

	Timing of employee's post 3 days before transgression *(Experimental group)*	Timing of employee's post 3 days after transgression *(Experimental group)*	Timing of employee's post on the same day *(Control group)*
Employee's post on Facebook			
Employee's post on LinkedIn			

Figure 3: Design of manipulation groups

3.5 Measurements

Manipulation checks. To check if the experimental manipulations were successful the participants were asked three questions. First, they were to indicate with what level of sentiment the article from the Guardian was written on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *extremely negative,* 7 = *extremely positive*). Second, they were asked about the time of the employee's post on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *10 days before the Guardian article,* 7 = *10 days after the Guardian article*). The third manipulation check was to measure the platform. This was done with a single answer multiple choice question (1 = *Facebook,* 2 = *LinkedIn*).

Measurements for employee's reputation. In order to measure the public's opinion, the reputation of the employee needs to be measured. To measure the employee's reputation, we will measure trustworthiness and likeability. Trust is a cognitive measure of reputation and reflects how stakeholders think about someone (Ipsos, 2017). According to Ipsos (2017), if someone is building on their trust they are also building on their reputation. Initially we aim to be seen as trustworthy, therefore it is the foundation in measuring reputation. Likeability is

also included as it affects the perception about how someone perceives one's reputation (Stamsnijder, 2016). Bruner (2019) mentions that scales can be applied to measure trustworthiness in stakeholder research. The five, 7-point semantic-differentials are used to measure how much a respondent believes if the employee is honest and not manipulative. The five scale items are: *honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness, reliability, and manipulative*. The 7-point scale ranges are 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*. To measure likeability the scales from Reysen (2005) can be used. Reysen constructed a 7-point Likert scale to research features of a person's likeability by looking at eleven items. For this study six of these items were used: *friendliness, likeability, approachability, advisability, level of knowledge, if an invite on social media from this person would be accepted*. Ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

To measure an employee's reputation the results from both trustworthiness and likeability needed to be ensured of their one-dimensionality. Therefore, the 11 items which were Likert-scale base were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax based on Eigenvalues (>1.00), *KMO* = .91, X^2 (*N* = 222, 55) = 1733.93, *p* < .001. The resultant model explained 66% of the variance in the amount of reputation. Factor loadings of individual items onto the two factors found are presented in Table 1. The factors found were: *Likeability*. The first factor included six items about how likeable the employee is based on friendliness, approachability, etc. (*M* = 4.21, *SD* = .98). *Trustworthiness*. The second factor included five items about how trustworthy the employee is based on honesty, and sincerity, etc. (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = 1.15).

Table 1. Factor Loadings explained variance and reliability of the two factors found for the scale employee's reputation (N = 222).

	Likeability	Trustworthiness
This person is friendly	.77	
This person in likeable	.82	
This person is approachable	.84	
I would ask this person for advice	.67	
This person is knowledgeable	.64	
I would accept an invite from this person on social media	.64	

This person is honest		-.88
This person is sincere		-.79
This person is trustworthy		-.78
This person is reliable		-.74
This person is manipulative		-.71
R^2	.56	.10
Cronbach's α	.85	.90

Moderator: Environmental concern. The level of environmental concern was measured with three items that were also used in the study from Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010). These items were: considering oneself as environmentally friendly, identifying oneself with environmental friendly people, and considering oneself as concerned about the environment. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*). The three items were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax based on Eigenvalues (>1.00), *KMO* = .71, X^2 (N = 222, 3) = 204.58, p < .001, portraying that all items belong to one factor. The resultant model explained 71.3% of the variance in the amount of environmental concern. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is .80, indicating that the scale is very reliable (M = 5.27; SD = .88).

Mediator: Negative emotions. Negative emotions were measured with four items (*irritated, annoyed, hostile, angry)* by asking how the participants felt the following emotions when looking at the social media post from the employee. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The three items were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax based on Eigenvalues (>1.00), *KMO* = .81, X^2 (N = 222, 6) = 954.93, p < .001, portraying that all items belong to one factor. The resultant model explained 86.7% of the variance in the amount of negative emotions. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is .95, indicating that the scale is very reliable (M = 3.31; SD = 1.58).

3.6 Validity and reliability

Within this research validity and reliability were taken into high consideration. The validity explains the accuracy of the measured concepts and to what extent the empirical measures adequately reflect the real meaning of the concept (Babbie, 2014). Validity can bring risks as people's opinions rarely take the form of, for instance, a Likert-scale. Therefore,

this research adopted multiple measures by using previously utilized scales. Cook and Campbell (1979) explain that in experimental research the problem of internal validity can occur. This is the possibility that the drawn conclusion may not accurately reflect what went on in the experiment. For that reason, the survey was pretested among 10 people. To which the survey was afterwards altered so certain questions were better understood and stimuli were better visualised. To increase internal validity the respondents were randomly and equally assigned across the six groups.

A high level of reliability suggests that the same data would have been collected if the research would have been replicated (Babbie, 2014). The pre-test ensured that the measured concepts within the research were trustworthy by making clear that the survey was clear for all respondents. Also, by presenting all participants with a standardized stimulus the unreliability of the researcher was eliminated. The sample size of 222 respondents was considered as high enough in order to make valid and reliable assumptions. Finally, the factors within this dataset were checked on reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values indicated that all scales had a high reliability analysis, α's > .80 (Pallant, 2013). Therefore, producing reliable data for the analysis and results.

4. Results.

In this chapter the results of the data analyses are reported. The data has been, after it was collected, exported to SPSS. In SPSS the data was analysed using multiple statistical techniques. First, descriptive statistics were analysed and described in the sample. Second, a factor analysis was conducted in order to recompute the variables employee's reputation, environmental concern, and negative emotions. Third, a two-way ANOVA provides answers to the relations for H1a, H1b, H2, and H3. Finally, with a regression analysis the moderation and mediation effect for H4 and H5 was examined.

4.1 Manipulation checks

The manipulation check was done to control if the respondents answered the questions based on the correct stimulus. Giving insight into whether the manipulations were being noticed. The three manipulation checks focused on the sentiment of the article, timing of eWOM, and platform of the employee's post. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of the manipulations on the manipulation checks. The first manipulation check, article sentiment, revealed as expected no significant main effect for the platforms, $F(1, 216) = .01$, $p = .905$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. ANOVA did reveal a significant main effect for the timing eWOM on the sentiment, $F(2, 216) = 161.83$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .60$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants who saw the control condition (no transgression) had read a significantly more positive sentiment article ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.27$) than respondents who have been put in the condition group timing before transgression ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 1.03$), $p < .001$ and timing after transgression ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.27$), $p < .001$. This concludes that the respondents had read the correct sentiment.

To check if respondents noticed what the timing of the employee's eWOM was, ANOVA revealed as expected no significant main effect for this on platforms, $F(1, 216) = 1.64$, $p = .202$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. However, it did reveal a significant main effect for timing of eWOM, $F(2, 216) = 262.97$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .709$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants who saw the condition of 3 days before the transgression scored significantly more negatively on checking the time of eWOM ($M = 3.01$, $SD = .413$), $p < .001$ than the respondents who saw the condition of 3 days after the transgression. They scored significantly more positively on checking the time of eWOM ($M = 4.84$, $SD = .658$), $p < .001$. Also, the control variable revealed a significant effect ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .339$), $p < .001$. This means that the timing manipulation was successful.

For the third manipulation check Pearson Chi-Square test was done in order to examine if the correct platform was seen by the respondents. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for the platforms, χ_2 ($N = 222, 1) = 133.56$, $p < .001$. In total the correct platform was seen 197 times by the respondents. This means that the correct platform has been seen in most cases (88.74%).

4.2 Effects of timing and platform on employee's reputation

For H1a and H1b two two-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the effects of timing on the employee's trustworthiness and likeability. First, ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for timing of eWOM on trustworthiness, $F(2, 219) = 19.88$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .15$. When there is no transgression, the participants trust the employee significantly more ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .98$), $p < .001$ than those who saw the conditions timing after the transgression $p < .001$ and timing before $p < .001$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants who have seen the conditions timing before the transgression ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.11$) and those who have seen the conditions timing after the transgression ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.08$) trusted the employee not particularly much. However, this is not significant $p = .496$.

The second ANOVA analysis also revealed a significant main effect for timing of eWOM on likeability, $F(2, 219) = 11.62$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .10$. When there is no transgression, the participants liked the employee significantly more ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .90$), p $< .001$ than those who saw the conditions of timing after the transgression p $< .001$ and eWOM before transgression $p < .001$. Tukey post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants who saw the conditions timing before the transgression ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .99$) and those who saw the conditions timing after the transgression ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .90$) neither liked nor disliked the employee. However, this is not significant p $= .839$. The two two-way ANOVAs revealed that the employee's reputation is more negatively affected for both timing before and after transgression than when there is no transgression. Therefore, according to the analysis H1a is rejected and H1b accepted.

The same two ANOVAs analysis was used for H2. The ANOVA analysis results revealed that there is no significant main effect for the platforms on trustworthiness, $F(1, 220) = .70$, $p = .405$, partial $\eta2 = .003$. What the second ANOVA test also revealed is that there is no significant main effect for platforms on likeability, $F(1, 220) = .545$, $p = .461$, partial $\eta2 =$

.002. This reveals that there is no effect between platform and employee's reputation. For this reason, H2 is rejected.

For H3 the two-way ANOVA analysis showed that there is no significant interaction effect between platform and timing of eWOM on trustworthiness, $F(2, 216) = .452$, $p = .637$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. The two-way ANOVA analysis also portrayed no significant interaction effect between platform and timing of eWOM on likeability, $F(2, 216) = .459$, $p = .633$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. Resulting in no effect between timing and platform. Hereby H3 is rejected.

4.3 Mediation effect of negative emotions

It is predicted that negative emotions can play a role in how the public perceives employee's online ambassadorship. Here negative emotions work as a mediator between the two independent variables, also known as predictors, time of eWOM and platform and the criterion employee's reputation. Baron and Kenny (1986) state that to support a mediation effect there are conditions to be met. For instance, the independent variables should independently influence the reputation significantly even without the mediator. After that, the predictors should also significantly influence the mediator. Baron and Kenny (1986) further state that the mediator has to influence the dependent variable significantly. For this a regression analysis is required on both dependent variables' likeability and trustworthiness. This analysis includes two dummy variables. The first dummy variable compares the condition for timing of employee's online ambassadorship before the transgression with timing after transgression and no transgression. The second dummy variable compares the condition for timing of employee's online ambassadorship after the transgression with timing before the transgression and no transgression.

For trustworthiness the overall model was found to be significant, $R^2 = .16$, $F(3,218) = 13.53$, $p < .001$. The analysis indicated a significant negative relationship between the timing before- ($\beta = -.356$, $p < .001$) and timing after ($\beta = -.433$, $p < .001$) transgression and employee's reputation (Figure 3). The regression analysis portrayed a significant positive effect from timing after transgression on negative emotions $\beta = .294$, $p < .001$. However, for the platforms no significant relationship was found with trustworthiness $\beta = -.057$, $p = .360$, which means the platforms do not have a mediator effect. Looking further, the regression analysis shows there is no significant relation between timing before transgression on negative emotions $\beta = .124$, $p < .065$. In addition, negative emotions do have a significant effect on trustworthiness $\beta = -.616$, $p < .001$. Meaning, the more negative emotions the

respondent experienced the less trustworthy the employee became. The regression test also indicates there is a negative significant full mediation effect from negative emotions on trustworthiness β= -.601, p < .001, as time after transgression was no longer significant (β= -.072, p = .194). This means that the effect of timing after transgression on trustworthiness is fully explained by negative emotions.
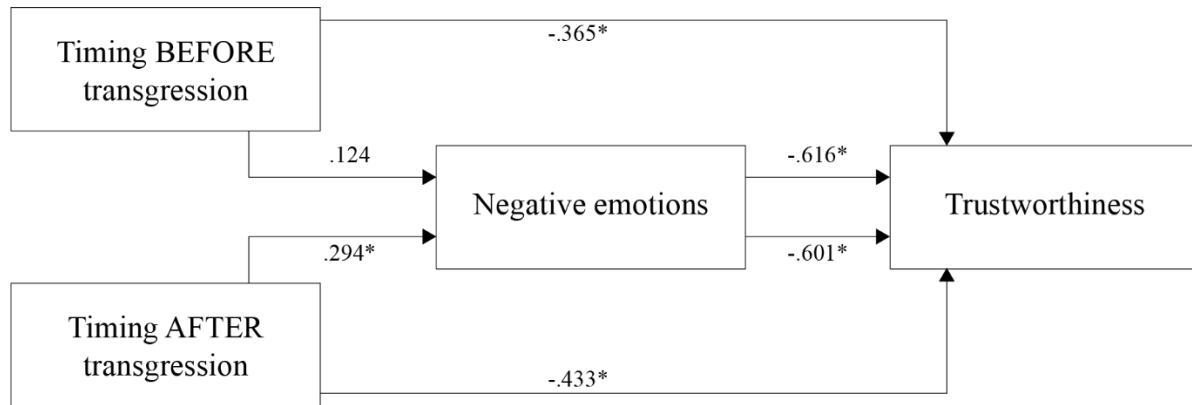

*Figure 4. Mediation model of the relationship between timing and trustworthiness with negative emotions as mediator. Note: * p <.001*

For the second criterion likeability the overall model was also found to be significant, R^2 = .098, $F(3,218)$ = 7.94, p < .001. The analysis again portrayed a significant negative relationship between the timing before- (β= -.295, p < .001) and timing after (β= -.334, p < .001) transgression and employee's reputation (Figure 5). Further, for platform no significant relationship was found with likeability β= -.051, p = .430, which means platform still does not have a mediator effect. Looking further, the regression analysis shows there is no significant mediation effect between timing before transgression on negative emotions β= -.121, p <.073. In addition, negative emotions do have a significant negative effect on likeability β= -.535, p <.001. Meaning, the more negative emotions the respondent experienced the less likeable the employee became. The regression analysis already portrayed a significant positive effect from timing after transgression on negative emotions β= .294, p <.001. However, the regression test also indicates there is a negative significant full mediation effect from negative emotions on likeability β= -.534, p < .001, as time after transgression was no longer significant (β= -.024, p = .688). This means that the effect of timing after transgression on likeability is fully explained by negative emotions.

As predicted in H4, the employee's reputation is mediated by negative emotions. For that reason, H4 is accepted.
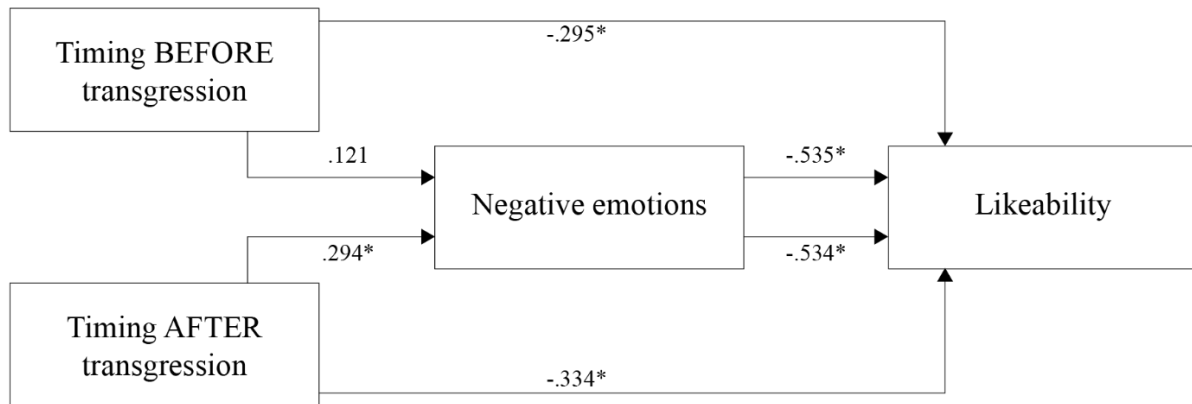
*Figure 5. Mediation model of the relationship between timing and likeability with negative emotions as mediator. Note: * p <.001*

4.4 Moderation effect of environmental concern

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with environmental concern as moderation criteria to assess its effect on the public's opinion on the likeability and trustworthiness of the employee. Dummy platform, two dummies time conditions (before and after), and the standardized score of environmental concern were included in the first block explaining 9.8% of the variance in likeability, $F(4, 217) = 5.93$, $p < .001$. The time condition before ($\beta= -.30$, $p <.001$) and time condition after ($\beta= -.33$, $p < .001$) had a significant negative effect on likeability. The effects of platform ($\beta= -.05$ $p = .432$) and environmental concern ($\beta= .003$, $p = .963$) did not reach significance. The model did not reach significance, $R^2= .12$, $F(3, 214) = 1.71$, $p = .166$. After the entry of three-way interactions did the hierarchical multiple regression analysis also not reach significance, $R^2= .12$, $F(2, 212) = .22$, $p = .803$. The manipulation conditions indicated there is no significant relationship between environmental concern and likeability of the employee.

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis was also conducted with environmental concern as moderation criteria to assess its effect on the public's opinion about the trustworthiness of the employee. Dummy platform, two dummies time conditions (before and after), and mean score of environmental concern were included in the first block explaining 16.6% of the variance in trustworthiness, $F(4, 217) = 10.79$, $p < .001$. When the time condition before ($\beta= -.30$, $p <.001$) and time condition after ($\beta= -.33$, $p < .001$) were used as a single predictor the

model did reach significance. For the platform (β= -.05 p = .432) and mean score of environmental concern (β= .003, p = .963) as a single predictor does the model not reach significance. When the environmental concern was used as a two-way predictor the model did not reach significance, R^2= .18, $F(3, 214)$ = 1.25, p = .292. After the entry of three-way interaction prediction of environmental concern the hierarchical multiple regression analysis also did not reach significance, R^2= .19, $F(2, 212)$ = .58, p = .560. The manipulation conditions indicated there is no significant relationship between environmental concern and trustworthiness of the employee. Employee's reputation is not moderated by the environmental concern of the participant, which makes H5 rejected.

4.5 Second analysis data

A second analysis was conducted in which respondents who failed one or more manipulation checks were excluded (N = 185). This is in order to increase the validity of this research. The first manipulation check was to measure if the respondents read the news article with a correct level of sentiment. This manipulation was checked with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *extremely negative,* 7 = *extremely positive*). Respondents from the experimental group that answered with a positive sentiment were excluded. The second manipulation check was to measure if the respondents saw when the employee posted his message in comparison to the news article that revealed the transgression. This manipulation was checked with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *10 days before the Guardian article,* 7 = *10 days after the Guardian article*). The respondents were not excluded within this dataset if the respondent was correct in answering whether the timing was before or after the news article. Finally, respondents who answered incorrectly for the question on which platform the employee posted his message were excluded.

When analysing the results of the hypothesis testing and the mediation role of negative emotions there were no significant changes in the output. However, this was not the case for the moderation effect of environmental concern on the likeability of the employee. When environmental concern was used as a two-way predictor the model did reach significance, $F(3, 177)$ = 3.08, p = .029, explaining 14.3% of the variance in likeability. When the time condition before (β= -.31, p <.001) and time condition after (β= -.33, p < .001) were used as a single predictor the model reached significance. Platform (β= -.06 p = .407) and mean score of environmental concern (β= -.004, p = .980) as a single predictor did not reach significance in the model. Interestingly this is also the case with the two-way predictors,

platform*environmental concern (β= .103 p = .274), timing before transgression*environmental concern (β= .085, p = .394), and timing after transgression*environmental concern (β= -.187 p = .088). Even though the model did portray a significance when environmental concern was used as two-way predictor, the two-way predictors did not reach significance. Therefore, for trustworthiness nothing significant changed.

As a result, within this dataset nothing changed significantly compared to the first dataset. Hence, the first dataset will be used to analyse and discuss the results.

5. Discussion

In recent years employees have been using social media more often to share information with people in their online networks about the organization they work for (Van Zoonen et al., 2018). This generated eWOM can leave an impact on both the employees and the organization (Helm, 2011; Van Zoonen et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2016). Often this behaviour is encouraged as it can increase relationships with stakeholders and the perceived reputation. However, these online ambassadorship behaviours could potentially come with risks for employees' reputation when the organization has undergone a transgression. Their visibility on social media platforms, like Facebook and LinkedIn, can result in them being associated with the organization in transgression. Resulting in being blamed and condemned for their actions online (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Malle, 2010). Within this judging by people their negative emotions might play an important role. As negative emotions can lead to a decrease of the employees' reputation, since their moral characteristics and social judgment is taken into doubt (Brambilla et al., 2013). Also, to be more specific, when it concerns an environmental transgression peoples' environmental concerns will probably also pose as a factor that can influence the employees' reputation. To find the relationship between all these concepts an experimental survey with a factorial design was conducted to answer the following research question: 'To what extent does the timing of employees' online ambassadorship as well as online eWOM presence on platforms, influence the reputation of employees when the organization has gone through environmental transgressions?'.

5.1 Key findings

The reputation from the employee after an organizational, specifically environmental, transgression in relation with online ambassadorship was analysed within this research to answer the hypotheses. First, H1a predicted that the reputation of the employee is more negative if a positive message is posted on SNS after the transgression than before the transgression. The first key finding that the analysis portrayed was that within this research this did not apply. The employee is not more negatively condemned on his trustworthiness and likeability whether the online ambassadorship behaviour is before or after the transgression. However, for H1b it was anticipated that in comparison to when there is no transgression the employee's online ambassadorship behaviour after a transgression would be more negatively evaluated. This was also the outcome within this research. In fact, the results

revealed that timing before and after transgression were more negatively judged than when there is no transgression. This aligns with previous research. It is already revealed that when an individual maintains loyalty to a stigmatized person (Kulik et al., 2008; Goffman, 1963) or groups of wrongdoing (Burmeister et al., 2019; Denson et al., 2006; Malle, 2010) the individual would be negatively affected. This research therefore acknowledges that there is a negative spillover effect from organizational reputation on employees' reputation.

It, however, remains debatable why H1a was rejected. The manipulation check for time revealed to be significant. They noticed whether the employee's post was shared before or after the transgression. Malle (2010) describes that judging if certain behaviour is intentional are made very fast and separate from how, for instance, personality and beliefs are evaluated. This can explain why it can be presumed that the respondents probably did not take the effort to properly process the information of time and instead made quick observations and judgements. Resulting in blaming the employee for its online ambassadorship for both before and after the transgression was made public. It is expected that when the stimuli gave more information about the employee's intentions, the results could have reached more significant results. Because awareness and rationality of the employee could have revised the respondents' judgements and altered the results (Malle, 2010; Sheehy, 2006). For instance, did the employee know about the transgression before it was revealed publicly (Malle, 2010) and what was his position within the organization's hierarchy (Effron et al., 2015). So does Sanders et al. (1996) predict that a CEO or manager will receive more blame than other peers. Based on the findings within this research it can be confirmed that employees' online ambassadorships behaviour can be negatively affected when there is an organizational transgression.

The second key finding is that there is no significant relationship between the platform of eWOM and the employee's reputation. Within this research it was expected that the employee's reputation would be more negatively judged on LinkedIn than on Facebook. However, the employee was judged uniform on both social media platforms. Therefore, H2 is rejected. Previous research focused mostly on the differences between platforms and how online ambassadorship behaviour is explained on these platforms (Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Van Dijck, 2013; Van Prooijen et al., 2018; Van Zoonen et al., 2018). It seems the findings within this research can be explained by an observation from Van Dijck (2013, p.210), 'while LinkedIn's interface features are aimed at a more professional audience than Facebook, both platforms use the same architectural principles of connectivity and narrative to channel users'

self-presentations.' Facebook and LinkedIn are possibly gaining similar practices by its users. Resulting in no different evaluations of the employee's online ambassadorship actions. Another possible factor within the rejection of H2 is that the survey experiment depicted a fictional employee. Former studies indicated that condemnation of online behaviour depended on the strengths of the connections (Butler & Wang, 2012; Effron et al., 2015; Utz, 2016). Indicating that the results could have been more significant if the respondents knew the employee on a personal level.

For the third objective this research was interested in the interrelationship between the timing of employee's online ambassadorship and the platform (H3). The prediction was that eWOM after the transgression on Facebook would influence the employee's reputation more positively than on LinkedIn. The analysis resulted in rejecting this hypothesis as no significant relationship was found. H2 already concluded that platforms have no relation to the employee's reputation and H1a showed that the timing of eWOM did not influence the participants' judgements. Therefore, this insignificant result is aligned to those findings.

The fourth aim of this research was to find out whether negative emotions mediated the relationship between timing of employee's online ambassadorship and employee's reputation (H4). The analyses showed that the employee became less likeable and trustworthy due to negative emotions. This reveals that the effect for employee's timing of online ambassadorship is fully explained by negative emotions, resulting in accepting H4. This result supports previous studies (Barclay et al., 2005; Burmeister et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2008; Pace et al., 2010; Weiner, 2005) as the more negative emotions a person had the less likeable and trustworthy the employee becomes, resulting in more negative condemnation. This outcome could be an interesting addition to the discussion Malle (2010) already started. For instance, negative emotions and blaming an individual is often not a rational reaction. Again, the intentionality from the employee's motives for the online ambassadorship behaviour before or after an organizational transgression needs to be taken into consideration before the morality can be judged. Lickel et al. (2012) explained that blaming can be extended towards others than the wrongdoers. Collective responsibility can be a reason for stakeholders' negative evaluation of an employee from the transgressional organization. The analysis revealed that whether the employee knew of the transgression, no matter the timing of eWOM after or before the transgression, the negative emotions will be more present than when there is no transgression. For the online ambassadorships timing after the transgression this outcome can probably be explained because dissociating from the organization was possible,

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but the employee maintained as a positive online ambassador. Resulting in the reputation being more negatively affected (Malle, 2010). The employee is being strongly associated with the transgressional organization and the angry emotions directed towards the wrongdoers is being spilled over towards its affiliated employee (Kulik et al., 2008; White & Harary, 2001).

The final analysis aimed to find out if the relationship between the timing of an employee's online ambassadorship and employee's reputation is moderated by environmental concerns. Therefore, H5 proposed that the effect of the employee's timing of online ambassadorship on the employees' reputation is stronger for those who have a higher level of environmental concern. The results presented no interaction effect of environmental concern between timing of online ambassadorship and employee's reputation. This means that H5 is rejected. It has been demonstrated that when the moral-norms of a pro-environmental person are transgressed, negative emotions will arise (Montada, 1998). Even though this research revealed a significant relationship between the timing of an employee's online ambassadorship and employee's reputation, the analysis did not reveal a moderation effect of environmental concerns. Kals and Müller (2012) argue that emotions are directed towards the entities that are linked to the environment. Despite the organization undergoing an environmental transgression the employee did not mention anything about the environment. However, Kals and Müller (2012) also mention that a pro-environmental person often only takes their own viewpoint into account. The rejection of H5 can possibly be explained because of the sample group. There possibly were no strong pro-environmental persons. Therefore, the prediction that environmental concerns would play a moderated role is therefore still present.

The main objective of this research was to examine the extent to which the timing of employees' online ambassadorship as well as online eWOM presence on the platforms Facebook and LinkedIn influence the reputation of employees when the organization has gone through an environmental transgression. It was found that the employee's reputation will be negatively affected by its online ambassadorship behaviour when the organization is undergoing a transgression. Whether the online ambassadorship was before or after the transgression, the bad reputation from the organization will spill over to the employee. Negative emotions play an important role in this as it influences the judging of the employee more severely. On the other hand, there was no difference if the eWOM took place on Facebook or LinkedIn for the employee's reputation. What is more, even though this research

concerned an environmental transgression it was not found that the environmental concern from the receiver would influence the employee's reputation.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this research give valuable insights into the effects an organizational transgression can have on the reputation of its employee when this employee participates in online ambassadorship activities. Considering that the negative stigma around the organization can spillover towards the employee make it questionable if an employee should engage in online ambassadorship behaviour. For that reason, this main key finding makes this research interesting for employees as their reputation can be imperilled. With the arrival of eWOM the visibility of the employee is greater. Yet, this also applies for negative eWOM. Therefore, organizations and employees are easier targets to externalize these angry emotions on (Barclay et al., 2005; Pace et al., 2010). People are capable of blaming individuals other than the wrongdoers. However, employees are encouraged to participate as online ambassadors as it can increase the organization's reputation towards its external stakeholders (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Yet this research makes it probably advisable for employees to maintain unobtrusiveness as an online ambassador when an organizational transgression happens.

Where the insights can contribute to maintaining an employee's reputation, this research, however, is also of interest for organizations. Whether a transgression took place or not, the organization is partly responsible for its employees. By facilitating assistance and awareness for their members they can contribute in preventing a possible negative stigma spillover on the employee. For instance, transparency of company practices can help give employees' direction with their online behaviour (Stamsnijder, 2016).

5.3 Limitations and future research

This research contributes to the further understanding of the impact an organizational transgression can have on the employee's reputation. The results build further on previous (academic) literature and theories about online ambassadorship behaviour, eWOM, blaming, negative emotions, environmental concern, and the impact of it all on an employee. However, in order to be able to grasp the findings within this research, certain limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the used sampling method was snowball- and convenience sampling. Babbie (2014) already warns that with these nonprobability sampling methods an accurate representation of the population is difficult. The sample within this research consists mostly of females 63.5% and does not represent the population fairly. Also, the sample did not contain a significant representation of pro-environmental respondents. Considering that environmental concern is increasing (Wells et al., 2011) this is probably not well represented within this research.

Second, organizational transgressions can come in different shapes. Within this research the survey only consisted of an environmental transgression. However, the theoretical framework and results are mostly referring to an organizational transgression. Making the results more general. For future research this can be a gap to explore further. So can a more diverse number of organizational transgressions be analysed to see what causes a bigger impact on the reputation of an employee. For instance, Effron et al. (2015) propose that individuals receive greater judgement when it concerns a contradictive ethical transgression that their organization promotes.

Finally, the respondents of the survey had limited information about the fictional used employee. Previous research indicated that blaming and condemning an individual can be explained by the intentionality of the person (Malle, 2010) and if this person had prior knowledge about the harmful actions the organization performed (Burmeister et al., 2019). The possibility exists that the respondents could have given different answers in the survey if they were more informed about these aspects (Babbie, 2014). Therefore, future work is still needed to research if blaming and condemning the employee's online ambassadorship behaviour would have been more negative or positive if the employee did or did not know about the transgression. Also, the reason why people judge an employee other than the transgressional organization can be further investigated. Understanding the process by which people make judgements within the moral and social perception.

6. Conclusion

The role employees play as online ambassadors in developing their own and the organizations' reputation is increasing rapidly with the arrival of eWOM. Publicly posting about companies' practices can increase the employees' credibility. Positioning themselves as the professional with the most knowledge about the company. However, when the organization is publicly outed as a wrongdoer and is getting involved in negative eWOM it can leave a stain on the employees' reputations.

In sum, the current study demonstrated that employees' reputation will be negatively affected if they participate in online ambassadorship when the organization is undergoing a transgression. There is no difference whether the timing of online ambassadorship takes place before or after the transgression, or if it is on Facebook or LinkedIn. They will be negatively examined for their online actions. The negative spillover effect from the organizational transgression can be fully explained by higher levels of negative emotions the receivers experience. Resulting in judging the employees' reputation more negatively. However, no significant moderation effect was found for environmental concern for the judgement of the employees. Thus, it is recommended for employees to maintain unobtrusiveness as an online ambassador when an organizational transgression happens. Because the employee is being strongly associated with the transgressional organization and the angry emotions directed towards the wrongdoers are being spilled over towards its affiliated employees.

This study can contribute to advising employees on their online ambassadorship behaviour. The research also gives insights on how blaming can be transferred from organization to its employee. Yet, further research can be done to explore how and why blaming the employees is done for actions they are not responsible for.

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Appendix I – Online survey

Introduction

Welcome!

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey which is a part of a Master thesis research project at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The purpose of the research is to study perceptions about employee's social media behavior.   Please be assured that the survey is anonymous and any information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only. The whole survey should take no more than 6 minutes to fill in.

Should you need any additional information regarding the survey or have any recommendations about it, please don't hesitate to contact me at 502154jp@student.eur.nl

Be aware that you can best fill in this survey on a desktop or tablet. When filling in this survey on your mobile phone, I would recommend turning your phone sideways.

(By clicking on the arrow you agree to take part in this survey and give consent to use your data for research purposes)

Prolific ID check

Please fill in your unique Prolific ID

_____

Environmental concern

To start, in this section you will be presented with statements regarding how concerned you are with the environment. Please keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I consider myself as environmental friendly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I identify myself with environmental friendly people	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I consider myself as someone who is concerned about the environment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Manipulations

Below you will see a headline of a newspaper article about a pharmaceutical company. Please read this carefully before continuing to the next page.

Image (Appendix II)

Below you will see a **Facebook/LinkedIn** post from employee Daniel Smith. **It is important to know that he posted this 3 days BEFORE/AFTER/the same day the news article from the Guardian was published**. Please read it carefully before continuing.

Image (Appendix II)

Manipulation check

With what sentiment was the article from the Guardian written?

	Extremely negative	Moderately negative	Slightly negative	Neither positive nor negative	Slightly positive	Moderately positive	Extremely positive
The article from the Guardian was written	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When did the employee post his message?

	10 days before the Guardian article	7 days before the Guardian article	3 days before the Guardian article	The same day as the Guardian article	3 days after the guardian article	7 days after the Guardian article	10 days after the Guardian article
The employee posted his message on social media	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

On which platform did the employee post his message?

○ Facebook

○ LinkedIn

Bot check for Prolific users

Can you please tell me your first impression about the employee Daniel Smith?

_____

Negative emotions

Did you feel any of the following emotions when you looked at the social media page of the employee? Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Irritated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Annoyed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hostile	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Likeability

This section will introduce statements about the likeability of the employee. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This person is friendly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is approachable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would ask this person for advice	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is knowledgeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would accept an invite from this person on Social Media	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Trustworthiness

Here you will be introduced with five statements regarding how trustworthy you think the employee is. Please indicate how you perceive the employee.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This person is honest	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is sincere	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is reliable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This person is manipulative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Social Demographic

Please fill in the following questions about yourself

What is your gender?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Non-binary / third gender

○ Prefer not to say

What is your age?

_____

What is your nationality?

_____

Which of the following social media platforms do you use? Multiple answers possible

○ Facebook

○ Instagram

○ LinkedIn

○ Twitter

○ I do not use social media

○ Other _____

Final comments

You are almost done with the survey.

Is there anything you want to add? Please add any additional comments below.

Ending

You have come to the end of the questionnaire.

In this survey we were interested in your opinion on employee's social media behaviour. Please notify that a fictional organization and employee has been used.

Thank you very much for your participation! If you have any questions about the study, please contact me by emailing 502154jp@student.eur.nl.

When you are finished you can click on the right arrow button so your answers will be send.

Appendix II – Stimulus

Timing before transgression

Timing after transgression

No transgression

Employee's post on Facebook

Employee's post on LinkedIn