Managing negative publicity
-A quantitative study on how negative publicity affects the consumer

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Abstract

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**Title:** Managing negative publicity – A quantitative study on how negative publicity affects the consumer.

**Background:** A brand’s reputation can take many years to build up, although the value of the brand is not forever. Accidents, scandals or product safety incidents associated to a certain corporation can affect a brands reputation. The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010 led to much information being spread around regarding BP, the company behind the accident. The environment took damage and BP endured a lot of negative publicity.

**Purpose:** To gain knowledge about the effects on a company suffering from negative publicity and how they could proceed in order to minimize the damage.

**Delimitations:** This study is based on the company BP and their incident in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010. The investigation was done in the United States of America on American customers with a population restricted to car owners as the study examines purchase behavior.

**Method:** The research was conducted through a deductive quantitative approach. The data sources were collected by an archival analysis and an electronic questionnaire.

**Conclusion:** If the information received from media and from word-of-mouth after an incident (like BP’s oil spill) is considered as negative towards the company, this leads to a decrease in positive attitudes among customers that in turn affects purchase behavior negatively. It is important to implement strategies in the company as a foundation against negative publicity. The study shows that the most influencing strategies on consumer attitudes were corporate social responsibility followed by brand positioning.

**Keywords:** Negative publicity, BP, corporate social responsibility, brand positioning, brand revitalizing, consumer attitudes, purchase behavior.
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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the necessary background information for the study and highlights the main research objectives. It begins by stating examples where negative information has affected company brands in the past. From this a discussion rises on around the possible negative effects it has. Later on the case study of BP is presented as well as the research questions and delimitations.

1.1 The impact of negative information on brands

A brand’s reputation can take many years to build up, although the value of the brand is not forever. Accidents, scandals, service or product safety incidents connected to a certain corporation, such as airplane crashes, fraud scandals and chemical spills can affect a brands reputation. This could lower brand equity and thus lower the company revenue (Zyglidopoulos 2001).

Ford endured a lot of negative information after the many accidents associated with their SUV-model Ford Explorer. These cars where in many cases equipped with a certain Firestone tire which had a lack in quality. When this was detected it resulted in a recall of 6.5 million tires, many of these installed as original equipment on Ford vehicles (Noggle & Palmer 2005), it also led to over 100 deaths and 500 injured Americans (Hosenball & Naughton 2000). After the recall Ford faced hundreds of law suits (Greenwald 2001) and the brand directly dropped out from the top ten global brands according to Interbrand’s rankings (Andrews & Kim 2007). Another example is the pharmaceutical company Merck and their painkiller Vioxx. After several years on the market, Merck’s were forced to pull back the drug because of evidence of using the drug increased the risk of heart attacks (Singer 2009). Later research showed that Vioxx doubled the risk of heart attack and stroke (Wilson 2011). Approximately 25 million Americans had used the drug at the time and Merck were charged to pay $950 million to different institutions (Wilson 2011). The company also spent nearly $5 billion to settle roughly 50’000 lawsuits related to Vioxx (Singer 2009).

Negative information does not have to arise from product failures; it can instead derive from value related information, for instance how companies act and manage their business (Pullig et al. 2006). For example Texaco oil decreased in popularity after some junior executives’ were caught on tape, deriding minority employees in racist terms and paid minority employees less than minimum salary for their jobs (Labich 1999).
1.2 Deepwater Horizon disaster

In April 2010 the world’s largest accidental oil spill took place outside the American coast (Shapley 2010). The oilrig Deepwater Horizon, operated by the oil company BP, was located in the Gulf of Mexico, 50 miles outside the coast of Louisiana (McGill 2010). During the drilling on the April 20th a methane gas bubble erupted through the drilling pipe and caused an explosion on the rig (Batty 2010). This explosion did not only result in oil leaking out in the ocean, but also the death of 11 workers (Outzen 2011). The accident was followed by numerous of questioned statements from BP’s board members and other employees. For instance, the CEO Tony Hayward said that “The environmental impact of this disaster is likely to be very, very modest” and that “The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume” (BP boss Tony Hayward's gaffes, 2010). This was said while it took three months to get a temporary stop of the oil leaking out in the ocean and 650 miles (1 000 km) of coastline were covered with oil (Oiled Shoreline, n.d.). Later on the total amount of oil leaking out in the gulf was estimated to 185 million gallons (more than 700 000 m³) and was defined as the world’s largest oil spill in history (Shapley 2010).

1.3 Problem discussion

The modern corporate culture depicts the idea of branding or brand management as one of the prerequisite of becoming successful. A brand is considered a core asset within a company in the corporate world while being a central tenet in the academic marketing world (Doogan et al. 2003). Taking both the academics and the practitioner’s view of brands into account, it could be stated that brands are an important factor in marketing. The process of building a strong brand could span over several years, however considering benefits like sustained competitive advantage and a base of loyal customers, it would be wise to invest in developing a strong brand (Doogan et al. 2003). Having a base of loyal customers is something all companies should strive for since it could increase revenue and reduce marketing costs, however it could also be said that customer loyalty is a word that lacks a proper definition. Former studies have been made on the topic exploring the relationships between customer loyalty and satisfaction, quality and effectiveness. On the other hand, customer loyalty does seem to be connected to a desire of repurchase, regardless of the intentions of the customer (McMullan 2005).
If a well-established company with a strong corporate brand and a base of loyal customers would fail to deliver the expected value, or make a decision that would conflict with the brand values it sure would affect the relationship between the company and its customers. There is little research today on how value-related negative information impacts the consumers. However, there has been research in the area of product-related negative information flow impacting consumer behavior (Eisingerich et al. 2011). According to prior research, information about a brand can have a strong impact on consumer’s attitudes, buying behavior and their risk-taking behavior. This in turn could affect sales of products or services that the consumers are not well aware of (Eisingerich et al. 2011). They further explain that negative information about brands had a greater impact on consumers and their need to share the negative experience than positive information (Eisingerich et al. 2011). The increased use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and online forums has made information and opinions easy to spread and hard to prevent.

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010 led to much information being spread around regarding BP. Not only did the environment take damage, but BP also got a lot of negative publicity due to the fact that the company withheld information regarding the oil spill. The publicity in this case was not caused by a product failure but instead a value-related issue that conflicted with the BP brand. This study will investigate how BP suffered from the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico and what kind of strategies they employed in order to reduce the effects of the negative publicity.

1.4 Purpose
To gain knowledge about the effects on a company suffering from negative publicity and how they could proceed in order to minimize the damage.

1.5 Research questions
RQ 1: How has the BP disaster affected the US consumer’s attitude towards the brand and their purchase behavior?
RQ 2: What strategies did BP employ in order to minimize the damage caused by the oil spill disaster 2010?
RQ 3: What was the effect of the strategies adopted on consumer attitudes?
1.6 Delimitations
This study is based on the company BP and the incident in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010. The investigation is done in the United States of America because of two reasons; BP is an American company and the incident occurred outside the American coast. The results will therefore only display the American perspective of BP and might not be globally generalized. The population will be restricted to car owners as the study examines purchase behavior, which requires respondents who consume petrol. Moreover, the study only focuses on three possible strategies used to minimize possible effects of negative publicity, although, BP could also have used other strategies that have not been investigated.

1.7 Outline of the thesis
To be able to fulfill the purpose and answer the research questions, this study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, has already been presented to the reader and for that reason only the following chapters will be presented.

Chapter 2 - presents a theoretical framework based on previous research and commonly used theories relevant to the purpose and research questions of the study.

Chapter 3 - transforms the theoretical framework into concepts. Also presented is the conceptual framework and hypotheses of the study.

Chapter 4 - presents and motivates the research approach of the study and the methodology used to test the hypotheses of the study.

Chapter 5 – provides a comprehensive analysis of the collected data and presents the descriptive findings. In this chapter are also the hypotheses tested and discussed.

Chapter 6 – provides the final conclusions of the study, together with the limitations of the study. Managerial implications are presented and subjects for future research are proposed.
2. Literature review

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that the research will be based upon. It begins with the importance of marketing strategy and how brand management could be used as a valuable tool. A deeper explanation of negative publicity and the strategies to counter the effects is also presented based on commonly known theories.

2.1 Marketing strategy

Over the last fifty years, strategy has developed from a practice of military commanders and corporate executives to being a field of management science. Strategy is used in various branches of knowledge such as economics, political science, organizational sociology and cognitive psychology (Cheah & Garvin 2004). Nearly all organizations are today confronted with different strategic directions and decisions. Strategy could cover a broad spectrum of subjects from how a company should overcome problems they are faced with, or how to handle new opportunities (Johnson 2008). The basic explanation and importance of the strategy can be defined as the direction and scope of an organization over long term in order to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage (Johnson 2008).

According to Porter (1996) companies must be flexible to respond to market changes. They must benchmark continuously to achieve best practices. By outsourcing aggressively activities that are not part of their core competences, companies can gain efficiencies and also nurture their core competences in the race to stay ahead of rivals. A company can outperform rivals only if it can establish a difference that it can protect. It must deliver greater value to customers or create comparable value at a lower cost, or do both.

Even though they work in different ways, operational effectiveness and strategy are both essential to superior performance, which is the primary goal of any enterprise. Operational effectiveness means performing similar activities better than rivals perform them. In contrast, strategic positioning means performing activities different from rivals or performing activities in different ways (Porter 1996).

Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of values (Porter 1996). In order for a company to be successful in their strategy they must have means to communicate their values to the customers. One way of communicating company values could be through the brand (Arruda
2009). Branding is an important tool in marketing and should be part of competitive strategy; just naming a product is not enough. Corporate branding is mainly about developing and managing a relationship between the company and its stakeholders, including the potential customers (Fan 2005). A brand is a complex variable, which have multiple meanings. The American Marketing Association defines the concept as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and differentiate them from those of competitors” (Fan 2005, p. 342). This makes the brand a useful tool for the company to reach out to potential customers (Lehu 2004). It is also an asset, because the brand has a value in itself and when put on a product or service, this can by the customer be perceived as more valuable than a product without the brand (Kapferer 2008). To brand managers, the brand is mainly a differentiation tool, but to brand users the brand also can create an emotional relationship, and turn the brand into an icon. To create this it is important to communicate the company values and policy (Fan 2005).

2.2 Brand management

In consumer marketing, brands frequently offer the main points of differentiation between competitive offerings, and as a result they are capable of being critical to the accomplishments of corporations. Thus, it is vital that the management of brands is approached strategically (Wood 2000). Kapferer (2008, p. 10) states that “modern brand management starts with the product and service as the prime vector of perceived value, while communication is there to structure, to orient tangible perceptions and to add intangible ones.” While Malmelin & Hakala (2009) emphasize that brand management, traditionally has focused on the preparation and implementation of marketing aimed at consumers. However, Kapferer (2008) adds that in brand management it is important to address the whole system, linking a concept with natural value to products and services that are acknowledged by a name and set of proprietary signs (the logo and other symbols). The scheme only exists if products and services also exist. Furthermore he clarifies that brand management is about increasing in power and control, by making the brand concept more recognized, more acquired and more public. According to Malmelin & Hakala (2009, p. 256) one of the main tasks in brand management “is to communicate the brand philosophy as accurately as possible to all partners so that they too understand clearly what kinds of actions fit in with the brand. This contributes to better cooperation and ultimately to better results”. Additionally, Malmelin & Hakala (2009, p. 256) further emphasizes that another important task in brand
management “is to create and communicate an inspiring vision”. As this offers direction to the company’s processes and makes it easier to bring together the different parts of the corporation and external partners into a successful partnership. Liable principles and ideas also offer important direction for the development of dependable communications that stimulates the interest of clients and other stakeholder groups (Malmelin & Hakala 2009).

Keller (1999) clarifies that to have an efficient brand management companies need to obtain a long-term vision of marketing decisions. A long-term standpoint of brand management distinguishes that any adjustments in the supporting marketing plan for a brand could, by changing consumer knowledge, have an effect on the achievement of prospect marketing programs. In addition, Keller (1999) further explains that a long-term vision requires proactive strategies designed to preserve and improve consumer based brand equity over time in the face of external changes in the marketing environment and internal changes in corporations marketing objectives and plans. de Chernatony (1999) writes about the traditional view of brand management and states that when a gap between the identity and the image of a brand becomes obvious, it will act as a set off for change. Though, using image as an indicator for change is challenging given that this highlights awareness on the latest perceptions over short periods of time.

2.3 Public relations

There are many definitions for Public Relations (PR), where the most common definitional components appear to be management, organization and publics (Hutton 1999). Grunig & Hunt (1984, p. 6) defines PR as “management of communication between an organization and its publics”, and Cutlip et al. (2006, p. 1) defines PR more in detail as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public’s on whom its success and failure depends”. In addition, PR can further be explained as a characteristic management function that helps to create and preserve mutual lines of communication, understanding and collaboration between a corporation and its public, both internal and external. This helps managements be up to date and be receptive to public opinions, but also keep abreast of and successfully utilize change, in order to help foresee trends early (Hutton 1999). Because of its versatile nature, PR can furthermore be explained through its main functions. Broom (2007) proposes internal relations, publicity,
lobbying, advertising and public affairs among other things as the main functions of public relations.

In the media though, public relations has through the years been portrayed in a relatively negative way, providing descriptions that may become part of public perceptions. Perceptions about PR have an effect on the perceived trustworthiness of the profession and affect whether the public see PR as important to society (White & Park 2010). This makes it important to understand how the media describe public relations and how they use the term in the context of new stories. When ordinary people speak about PR, they have shaped their conceptual images and descriptions of PR based on insights from mass media (Jo 2003).

2.4 Cause factor

As PR is a way for an organization to communicate and to maintain relationships with the public (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Cutlip et al. 2006) it could be stated that the publicity an organization receives could be either positive or negative depending on how they manage their PR. In order to understand the underlying cause factor that is investigated in this study there is a need to explain and define the concept of negative publicity.

2.4.1 Negative publicity

A strong brand is built upon a set of corporate values and it depends on the ability of the corporation to communicate these to the consumers (Berry 1988; Chen 2001). The measurement of a brand’s strength is most commonly known as brand equity and according to Chen (2001) that includes brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality and brand associations. Brand image is how the consumers perceive the brand as a whole and according to Pullig et al. (2006) the consumer could have either a positive or negative attitude towards the brand. The brand attitude could be established when creating the brand, however there are factors that could influence consumer perceptions of the brand and change their attitude over the course of time (Pullig et al. 2006). One of the influential factors that could change a positive attitude into a negative attitude is an event that creates negative publicity. Pullig et al. (2006) proposes two general classifications of negative publicity, performance related (which refers to a product or service failure) or value related (affecting values associated with the brand). Value related negative publicity could seriously hurt the brand if the brand managers fail to recognize and response to the negative issues at hand (Andrews & Kim 2007).
The accessibility of the Internet have enhanced the impact of negative publicity since the information spreads quickly and reaches a large number of consumers all over the world (Chen 2001; Andrews & Kim 2007). Add to the impact of the Internet is that negative information seem to have a greater effect on Word-of-Mouth (WOM) than positive information (Eisingerich et al. 2011), in other words consumers have a great urge for spreading negative information to other people. This fact reduces the time span to respond to the negative publicity and minimize the possible brand damage. A well-developed strategy could prevent long-term damage to the brand and increase consumer resistance to negative publicity (Pullig et al. 2006; Andrews & Kim 2007; Eisingerich et al. 2011).

2.5 Aspects of consumer behavior
As negative publicity seems to be an influential factor for consumers, it is necessary to examine what aspects of consumer behavior that could be affected.

2.5.1 Consumer attitudes
Pullig et al. (2006) displays that a brand positioning strategy has the capacity to serve as an asset account of positive attitudes to protect the brand from harmful effects of negative event publicity. Positive brand attitudes are key components of the value consumers place on brands in the marketplace. An attitude is a predisposition learnt in order to react positively or critically towards something (Ajzen 2005; Sarabia-Sanchez 2005). Solomon et al. (2010) adds that an attitude is a lasting, general evaluation of people, objects or issues. Formed by direct experiences or obtained information it takes place within a particular context or situation (Sarabia-Sanchez 2005).

These attitudes are on the other hand vulnerable to exposure generated by certain types of negative events. When people receive new information that face up prior attitudes, they engage in an active memory search for information that supports their prior attitudes (Pham & Muthukrishnan 2002; Pullig et al. 2006). Due to the fact that negative publicity challenges the way a person thinks about a brand, the new information is perceived more analytical by the consumer (Pham and Muthukrishnan 2002). Pullig et al. (2006) adds that marketers should carefully describe the brand attitude they want to create and maintain in the minds of consumers. Moreover, by specifying the desired level of product- and non-product related benefits through promotional activities; marketers can also protect brands from harm caused by negative event publicity.
There are different degrees of attitude certainty that may or may not serve as a legitimate protection of the brand. Attitude certainty can be explained as the reflection of a person's subjective sense of belief in his or her attitude, or to the degree to which a person believes that his or her attitude is correct (Krosnick et al. 1993; Gross et al. 1995) and is usually measured by self-reports of certainty or confidence (Krosnick et al. 1993). In general, attitudes are believed to be high in certainty when people for instance possess more knowledge about an attitude object (Wood et al. 1995).

However, attitudes are a wide concept that is difficult to define because of the many interpretations in various areas of research (Udell 1965; Breckler 1984; Tsang et al. 2004; Evans et al. 2008). In the subject of social psychology attitudes could be divided into three components, affect, behavior and cognition, and this is known as the tripartite model (Breckler 1984). The affect component could be explained as the emotional feeling towards an object and the cognition reflects the individual knowledge, beliefs and perception of an object (Breckler 1984). These two components interact with the behavioral component that refers to how an individual actually reacts towards the object (Breckler 1984; Evans et al. 2008). Udell (1965) explain attitudes as summations of knowledge, emotions, intentions and motivation and this could be said are in line with the tripartite model. Overall when it comes to consumer behavior the cognition-affect-behavior model seem to be applicable (Evans et al. 2008) and in other words this implies that the knowledge and feelings the consumer inhabits could predict how they actually will behave.

2.5.2 Purchase behavior

As consumer insights radically affect their behavioral responses to, for instance, marketing activities, consumer attitudes toward marketing have been found to be essential (Chan & Cui 2004). As well since consumers are at the core of marketing strategies, their perception of marketing may be expected to influence their behavior (Pereira Heath & Heath 2008). The decision if a consumer likes a product or not is based on their attitudes towards the product itself. Consumer behaviors like purchasing decisions, beliefs, and evaluations about a product are all related to attitudes (Schiffman & Kanuk 2004). Howard & Sheth (1969, p. 480) define purchase behavior as “the overt manifestation of the buyer's predisposition, in conjunction with any inhibitors that may be present. It differs from attitude to the extent that inhibitors are taken into consideration: and it differs from intention to the extent that it is actual behavior which the buyer only forecasted in his intention”.

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Product choices from consumers are often based on what mixture of product attributes that best meets their needs based on proportions of cost, value, and past satisfaction. Attributes may either be considered as core attributes that deliver basic benefits, or extra attributes that provide additional benefits and are important for providing added value and differentiation (Manaktola & Jauhari 2007). Consumers do on the other hand not choose particular products only for the reason that they provide the practical or performance benefits expected, but also due to the fact that products can be used to state consumers personality, social status or symbolic purposes (Kim et al. 2002). When an individual intend to buy a particular brand, purchase intention is one type of judgment used. Variables such as considering buying a brand and expecting to buy a brand measure purchase intention (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007). By having an attitude towards a brand it drastically impacts the consumers intention to buy that brand, as there is a significant positive relationship between having an attitude to a brand and intention to buy (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007). It is also stated that a high positive attitude could increase purchase frequency towards a brand (Baldinger & Rubinson 1996; Rajshekhar & Moberg 1997). Social influence does also contribute to a consumer’s product choice and preference for a particular product (Yau 1994). “Thus, consumers values, which reflect social influences and environment, should affect needs to be fulfilled through purchase and consumption decisions, and therefore consumption behavior” (Kim et al. 2002, p. 481).

2.6 Strategies
A company that suffers from negative publicity must have a way to manage it before it inflicts too much damage. The three strategies presented below were highly mentioned in the literature that discussed how to deal with negative publicity.

2.6.1 Brand positioning
It has been a cornerstone of brand marketing practice to position a brand through a clear and consistent image-building campaign, and marketers spend millions of dollars every year to create and sustain brand images (Bhat & Reddy 1998). In addition, companies position brands in terms of advantages offered, for instance symbolic and/or functional. This form of positioning creates an overall brand attitude through the formation of brand associations held in the minds of the consumers (Marsden, 2002; Pullig et al. 2006). These brand associations represent nodes linked to the brands, which contain the meaning of the brands for consumers. For example, the association of “safety” with Volvo can describe a positioning in the mind of many consumers (Marsden, 2002). A significant feature of a brand’s position in a product
category is how similar or dissimilar the brand seems to be in contrast to other brands in the same product group (Sujan & Bettman 1989). When positioned brand associations are positive they are the foundation for consumer-based brand equity. However, this chosen positioning may also serve as a context for the evaluation of negative publicity (Pullig et al. 2006).

2.6.2 Brand revitalizing
Where brand positioning involves developing an image, attitude and associations, brand revitalization focuses on an already established brand where the goal is to change existing perceptions among the consumers (Andrews & Kim 2007). Naturally this would be considered as a reactive strategy, like an immediate reaction when a brand is faced with negative publicity. Companies should be quick to take responsibility for their actions since consumers are more forgiving towards sincere companies (Andrews & Kim 2007). Brand revitalization could be an applicable strategy whenever a brands image, attitude or associations takes an undesired turn in the consumer’s head (Ewing et al. 1995; Keller 1999; Andrews & Kim 2007). Thomas & Kohli (2009) adds that it may only be one aspect of the brand equity that is affected while for instance brand awareness still is high. In a case like that, it is required to form a revitalization strategy that targets the specific aspect of the brand equity (Thomas & Kohli 2009). Brand revitalization is a long-term initiative that typically spans from one to two years and this can become a challenge for managers and may result in some short-term losses (Thomas & Kohli 2009).

Since the brand values are intangible and non-product-related the natural approach in a revitalizing brand strategy would be through advertising (Keller 1999). Andrews & Kim (2007) explains that a company with negative brand equity could influence the consumers to change their perceptions by creating advertisements with positive associations. Advertisements with celebrity endorsements could enhance the message and further influence the consumers if done correctly (Silvera & Austad 2004; Andrew & Kim 2007), for instance choosing a celebrity who is known to promote several brands may be viewed as less credible and consequently lower the credibility of the advertisement (Silvera & Austad 2004). According to Chattopadhyay & Basu (1990) it is also important to understand the consumer’s prior brand evaluations and use this as strategic guideline when forming an advertising campaign.
2.6.3 Corporate social responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a strategy that can be defined as the “extent to which a firm benefits and contributes to society in positive ways” (Eisingerich et al. 2011 p. 61). This strategy is used, not only to adjust to legal matters and by demand from shareholders but mainly to increase the brand’s competitiveness on the market as well as their brand equity (Klein & Dawar 2004; Branco & Rodrigues 2006; Vanhamme & Grobben 2008). Because of the economic globalization companies are forced to address their social responsibility (Wang 2010), such as environmental protection and working conditions (Branco & Rodrigues 2006; Wang 2010). The strategy is used to influence consumers in their buying process and to protect a brand from negative information. This consequentially leads to less brand damage and makes it more or less resistant when exposed to negative information, depending on the successfulness of the CSR (Klein & Dawar 2004; Yoon et al. 2006; Vanhamme & Grobben 2008; Eisingerich et al. 2011). Klein & Dawar (2004 p.215) states the benefit of using CSR as “an insurance policy that is there when you need it”.

CSR affects the consumer’s perception and can in many cases become more important than economical considerations and outperform product attributes (Klein & Dawar 2004). This applies both when the brand is associated with positive and negative CSR (thus in an opposite way), as consumers might refuse to buy products and services from brands associated with negative CSR. Using CSR is certainly not easy and if it is performed incorrectly it can instead repel and ruin the brand (Yoon et al. 2006; Eisingerich et al. 2011). However, if it is well thought out it can protect the brand from negative information, and consequently protect it from huge monetary losses and reduced brand equity (Klein & Dawar 2004).

Weiner’s model, presented in the study by Klein & Dawar (2004), describes how consumer’s perception towards a brand is affected when negative information arises. There are three important factors to consider; locus, stability and controllability. The locus is the event that triggers the crisis; can be both internal and external. The level of stability indicates the stability of the firm, which can be unchanging or temporary; in other words, if the company has a history of crises tied to the brand or if it is a one-time event. The controllability of the behavior indicates who is responsible for the crisis, for instance, the firm or the consumer. According to the study by Klein & Dawar, (2004) the extent of the brand damage depends on the use of CSR, and the failure can be seen as less harmful even if the company has a low level of stability and is also responsible for creating the crisis.
According to Yoon et al. (2006) the most crucial matter to consider, is how the consumers perceive the CSR. If the consumer sees through the idea of why companies use CSR this can backfire and result in greater brand damage than if they did not use CSR at all (Eisingerich 2011). One example of this is the tobacco company Philip Morris, which started to support “youth smoking prevention”. This was, obviously, according to consumers, just because the brand strived for a better image, eventually the outcome of this CSR activity resulted in the opposite way (Yoon et al. 2006). According to Yoon et al. (2006) there are three factors to consider for a company when creating and implementing a CSR strategy to make it sincere. What benefits the use of the specific CSR activity provides to the company, how much money spent on the CSR activity in relation to the money spent to advertise the CSR and the source from which the consumers gain the information that the company uses CSR and through which activities. The ideal CSR activity arises, according to Yoon et al. (2006) when a company support a cause that has a low benefit to the company, the company puts money on the CSR (not just on promoting it) and lets other sources spread the good word about their activities, opposed to when the company announce their CSR through advertising. A company should, however, not support an activity which is perceived as highly beneficial to the company because consumers will perceive the activity as a strategy to increase the company revenue, or advertise the CSR in an extensive or expensive way because consumers will not perceive it as authentic (Yoon et al. 2006). Vanhamme & Grobben (2008) states that the period of time the companies have used CSR matters. A long history of CSR have a greater shield against negative information after an incident, as a company with a short history with CSR should not procure their CSR in attempt to protect their brand. These companies have not “earned the right to mention their good deeds without raising the suspicion of the consumers” (Vanhamme & Grobben 2008 p. 280). CSR is therefore a strategy that pays off in the long-term (Branco & Rodrigues 2006).
3. Conceptualization

This chapter transforms the theoretical constructs into a conceptual framework that is used as a foundation for the proposed research model. The research model also states the hypotheses that were later tested. This chapter also includes an archival analysis that was necessary in order to operationalize the strategies.

3.1 Establishing the conceptual framework

In the literature review chapter it was stated that negative publicity could affect a company or a brand. Since the impact degree of negative publicity may vary from occasion to occasion it would be necessary to conceptualize the possible outcome in terms of attitudinal change among the consumers. By defining the outcome of negative publicity as attitudinal change it could later be operationalized and measured. Negative publicity will hence above statement be categorized as the cause factor for this study. By scrutinizing the literature on commonly known strategies within the frame of how to minimize possible damage from negative publicity it was decided to delimit the framework to brand revitalizing, brand positioning and corporate social responsibility strategies. To be in line with the purpose of the study (learn more of the actual effects on a company suffering from negative publicity) the behavioral aspect of attitudes was added, more specifically the purchase behavior. The theory state that consumer attitude towards a brand could affect the purchase behavior (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007) and this makes it natural to have these aspects as a foundation to the upcoming survey aimed towards the consumers.

FIG. 1 Conceptual framework

![Conceptual Framework Diagram]
3.2 Research model and Hypotheses

With the establishment of the conceptual framework a research model emerges. The proposed research model that is presented below visualizes how the concepts from the literature review are connected. Moreover, five hypotheses are shown in the model situated by the concepts they relate to. An explanation of the hypotheses follows:

FIG. 2 Research model

3.2.1 Negative publicity and consumer attitudes

Former research states that negative information about a brand can have a strong impact on consumers’ attitudes and in turn affect their purchase behavior (Pullig et al. 2006; Eisingerich et al. 2011). If the negative information results in a negative attitude towards the brand it would damage the overall associations connected to it (Pullig et al. 2011) and the company could suffer financial losses due to a changed purchase behavior among the consumers (Eisingerich et al. 2011). In accordance to and a confirmation of former research it would be necessary to test what effect negative publicity has on consumer attitudes in this specific case. So the first hypothesis reads as following:

**H$_1$**: Negative publicity leads to a decrease in positive attitudes.
3.2.2 Strategies to minimize brand damage

Brand positioning, brand revitalizing and CSR (corporate social responsibility) are the three strategies that were chosen for scrutiny as they tend to be the most commonly used strategies, according to the literature when it comes to dealing with brand issues. This study will investigate how these strategies have been used and if they did have a minimizing effect on the negative publicity. This is considered the first step of testing the strategies possible minimizing effects on negative publicity since the hypotheses only focus on how consumer attitudes might have changed. The hypotheses will test if the consumers have perceived the strategies well, and if so, raised the positive attitudes towards the brand.

Brand revitalizing strategies has been used when a company wants to change the current perception of the brand among the consumers (Andrews & Kim 2007). The main goal of using this strategy is to change negative associations and attitudes towards a brand (Ewing et al. 1995; Keller 1999; Andrews & Kim 2007), and therefore make it necessary to test the effects of brand revitalizing by stating the following hypothesis:

\[ H_2: \text{A well-perceived brand revitalizing strategy increases positive attitudes.} \]

Brand positioning is unlike brand revitalizing something that a company employs in the start up of a new product or brand (Bhat & Reddy 1998). Brand positioning aims at creating a consistent and sustainable brand image over time (Bhat & Reddy 1998), and that includes creating positive associations and attitudes that are strong enough to counter negative publicity (Marsden 2002; Pullig et al. 2006). By this argument the following hypothesis was created:

\[ H_3: \text{A well-perceived brand positioning strategy increases positive attitudes.} \]

Klein & Dawar (2004) states that corporate social responsibility could work as a bank of positive attitudes to protect a company or a brand from negative events, like an insurance. In other words, if a company applies a CSR strategy the consumers will have a positive attitude towards the brand if the strategy is perceived as honest (Yoon et al. 2006; Eisingerich et al. 2011), and this could then in turn make the consumers more resistant to any negative publicity aimed at the company. This fact made the foundation for the next hypothesis that reads:
H₄: A well-perceived corporate social responsibility strategy increases positive attitudes.

3.2.3 Consumer attitude relationship to purchase behavior

The final hypothesis will test the relationship between consumer attitudes and purchase behavior. More specifically, with the purpose of the study in mind, this study will test if an increased positive attitude will increase purchase intention and/or frequency. Prior research shows that there is a significant positive relationship between having an attitude towards a brand and the intention to buy product or services related to that brand (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007; Eisingerich et al. 2011). However, since this study makes the assumption that the attitude is negative towards the brand the hypothesis will shed some new light on the matter and the results will in the end reflect how the above mentioned strategies may or may not increase purchase intention.

H₅: Consumer attitudes have a positive relationship to purchase behavior.

3.3 Archival analysis

In order to find out what strategies that had been used in order to reduce brand damage there was need for an archival analysis. This had to be made before the methodology chapter since the operationalization will partially be based on how the strategies are applied. Archival analysis is a method for scrutinizing secondary data like annual reports and strategic documents (Bryman & Bell 2011). In this specific case the sources used were BP’s home page (www.bp.com), their Form 20-F from 2010 and their sustainability review from 2010 (both downloaded from BP’s home page). The definitions of the strategies from the literature review were used as a guideline when conducting the archival analysis in order to identify if and how the strategies may have been employed by BP. What follows is the information that has been collected from the sources used and sorted under corresponding strategy, as they seem fit.

3.3.1 Corporate social responsibility

“BP has committed to pay all legitimate claims by individuals, businesses and governments and has established a $20-billion trust fund, following consultation with the US government, to provide funds for that purpose. In addition, BP is working with federal and state agencies to assess the nature and extent of the impact on natural resources resulting from the Gulf of Mexico incident.” (BP annual report and Form 20-F 2010, p. 19). This statement shows that
BP took their financial and legal responsibility towards the damage that was caused to the people and institutions by the incident in the Gulf of Mexico.

“In co-operation with the Unified Area Command, BP implemented a comprehensive environmental testing and monitoring programme to help guide oil recovery and clean-up efforts, and to assist in understanding any potential health and environmental impacts of the Deepwater Horizon accident. BP, the US Coast Guard, the EPA and other government agencies tested numerous samples of water and sediments for oil and dispersant, and implemented a comprehensive air-quality sampling and monitoring programme.” (BP sustainability review 2010, p. 12). This statement applies to BP’s controllability of the current situation.

“BP is working with scientists and trustee agencies through the NRDA (The natural resource damage assessment) process to identify wildlife and habitats that may have been exposed to oil or dispersants, and to look for evidence of injury. In addition, experts for BP and the trustee agencies are looking at how recreational uses of the Gulf have been affected so that lost opportunities to enjoy those activities can be addressed through restoration.” (BP sustainability review 2010, p. 12). This statement refers to the environmental responsibility that BP has taken after the incident.

“The lessons we learned throughout the response have wide applicability across the industry, and it is BP’s hope that our experiences can be used to improve the response to any potential future marine oil spill, anywhere. We are committed to working with the industry and governments to share lessons learned, as well as the new equipment and technology developed in response to this accident. In the Gulf of Mexico, BP has joined the Marine Well Containment Company (MWCC), an initiative with ExxonMobil, Shell, ConocoPhillips and Chevron designed to quickly deploy effective equipment in the event of another underwater blowout.” (BP sustainability review 2010, p. 12). This statement shows that BP will learn from their experiences and make improvements so that in case of future incidents they can react quicker and reduce possible damage.

By scrutinizing above statements with the help of the CSR definition from the literature review it is clear that BP is currently employing attributes that falls into the category of a CSR strategy. With this background it is concluded that BP is using a CSR strategy.
3.3.2 Brand positioning

“We deliver energy to the world. We find, develop and produce essential sources of energy. We turn these sources into products that people need everywhere. The world needs energy and this need is growing. This energy will be in many forms. It is, and will always be, vital for people and progress everywhere. We expect to be held to high standards in what we do. We strive to be a safety leader in our industry, a world-class operator, a good corporate citizen and a great employer. We are BP.” (Our values 2012). This text from BP’s home page explains that they first of all want to be perceived as an energy provider with high standards.

“We care deeply about how we deliver energy to the world. Above everything, that starts with safety and excellence in our operations. This is fundamental to our success. Our approach is built on respect, being consistent and having the courage to do the right thing. We believe success comes from the energy of our people. We have a determination to learn and to do things better. We depend upon developing and deploying the best technology, and building long-lasting relationships. We are committed to making a real difference in providing the energy the world needs today, and in the changing world of tomorrow. We work as one team. We are BP.” (Our values 2012). Extracted from the same page as above, this text emphasizes the importance of safety, respect and improving technology when delivering the energy.

Safety, consistency and being perceived as an energy provider seems to be important aspects for BP in terms of brand positioning. So the definition of BP’s brand positioning strategy will from now on consist of safety, consistency and being a high standard energy provider.

3.3.3 Brand revitalizing

The brand revitalizing strategy has been delimited to promoting the brand through advertising. Since this case focuses on value-related brand damage it would not be compatible to employ a product related brand revitalizing strategy (Keller 1999).

As a response to the negative publicity after the incident in the Gulf of Mexico, BP launched an advertising campaign called “Committed to the Gulf” promoting their restoration work in the Gulf. Some of the advertisement videos used BP employees as narrators. The campaign consisted of five different ads that inform the public how BP works in different areas and industries connected to the Gulf as a step in the restoration project (Committed to the Gulf 2012). The campaign focused on the environmental restoration of the beaches and waterways.
and how BP has financially helped the seafood and tourism industry. The ads were launched on national television in the US late 2011. BP has also expanded the campaign into social media channels including YouTube, Twitter and Facebook (BP updates Gulf restoration activity in new TV Ad 2011).

The committed to the Gulf campaign is interpreted as a brand revitalizing strategy in accordance to the literature review chapter on the subject and this concludes that BP have employed a brand revitalizing strategy.

3.4 Research constructs and their definitions

In order to conduct the research and test the hypotheses further definitions must be made. The table below presents the different concepts and how they will be operationalized (based on the archival analysis and the literature review) for the upcoming method chapter. The operational definitions will later be broken down into items and transformed into questions that will make the concepts measurable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Conceptual definition</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative publicity</strong></td>
<td>Negative information about a company that spreads through different channels like, TV, newspapers, Internet. (Chen 2001; Andrews &amp; Kim 2007)</td>
<td>To what extent the consumers have perceived the negative publicity through traditional media, WOM and electronic media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand revitalizing</strong></td>
<td>A strategy to be employed when a brand has been damaged or neglected by the consumers. (Thomas &amp; Kohli 2009)</td>
<td>To what extent the consumers have perceived the company’s advertising campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand positioning</strong></td>
<td>A strategy for companies on how to position the brand in the minds of the consumers in the most favorable way. (Marsden 2002)</td>
<td>To what extent the consumers have perceived the company to be consistent, being safe and having a good image as a high standard energy provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate social responsibility</strong></td>
<td>A strategy for companies that allows them to take responsibility for their actions. (Eisingerich et al. 2011)</td>
<td>To what extent the consumer perceives a company to be social responsible and if it is perceived as honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumer attitudes</strong></td>
<td>An attitude is a predisposition learnt in order to react positively or critically towards something. Attitudes are the lasting, general evaluation of people, objects or issues. (Sarabia-Sanchez 2005; Solomon et al. 2010)</td>
<td>To what degree the emotions, knowledge and cognitive is affected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase behavior</strong></td>
<td>Consumer behavior that explains why and how consumers act when they buy product or services. (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007)</td>
<td>To what degree purchase intention and purchase frequency is affected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Methodology

This chapter describes the whole process of how the research has been conducted. It explains why it was decided to make a deductive quantitative research and which research design that was used. It also explains what data sources that have been used and why they were collected by archival analysis and a questionnaire.

4.1 Research approach

There are several decisions to consider when choosing research approach (Bryman & Bell 2011). In this sub chapter the decision and reasoning between inductive and deductive research approach and the choice between a qualitative and quantitative research is presented.

4.1.1 Inductive vs. Deductive research

There are two different approaches in order to reach conclusions in a research, inductive and deductive. A deductive approach means that the conclusions are reached by testing commonly known theories, conducting hypotheses and then test these theories by collecting data. This will lead to either a rejection or confirmation of the hypotheses. The inductive research works in the opposite way and starts off with an observation, and from the result of the observation it is possible to generalize and establish conclusions that can lead to a theory (Bryman & Bell 2011).

The aim of this study was to test how commonly used strategies to prevent brand damage are applied in reality, in other words, testing theories against reality. To be able to reach reasonable conclusions for this study, a deductive approach was chosen.

4.1.2 Qualitative vs. Quantitative research

Qualitative and quantitative researches are the two ways of gathering data. They differ in the way they are conducted, but also in what kind of empirical data it brings to the study. Which one to apply depends on the purpose of the study (Bryman & Bell 2011). The aim with a quantitative research is to generalize, for instance behavior and opinions, within a population. The data gathered must be measurable in a way that makes it possible to present it in comparable numbers. This is because it should be presented in statistical statements. This is a formalized and structured way of gathering data, and is used when a few variables are studied but with a large amount of respondents (Bryman & Bell 2011).
Qualitative research is a way to gain deeper knowledge in a more complex problem or a certain situation, to be able to describe the situation where the research is done. This is a less formalized way of gathering data and is used when a lot of variables is studied, but with few respondents (Bryman & Bell 2011).

Since the study has focused on few variables (consumer attitude, purchase behavior, brand revitalizing, brand positioning and corporate social responsibility) and covers a large sample of respondents it was preferable to use a quantitative data collection method so that the results could be generalized.

4.2 Research design

There are three different general categories of research designs to choose between when conducting a research. These are exploratory, descriptive and casual research. The design of the research depends on the aim of the study and the current knowledge about the subject. (Aaker et al. 2010).

An exploratory research is used when the problem of the study is not clearly defined. This kind of research is normally performed in the beginning of a study, to make the problem clearer and more defined. This makes it possible to set an aim for the study and to come up with a purpose. It might also help to deconstruct a problem into a number of hypotheses that makes it easier to gather data and later on draw conclusions.

A descriptive research is used when the researchers have sufficient knowledge about the subject and the aim of the study is well defined and clear. It is used to describe market characteristics, functions and attributes. Aaker et al. (2010, p. 73) states that the purpose of descriptive research “is to provide an accurate snapshot of some aspect of the market environment”. In other words it shows how a certain situation is, at a certain time. This kind of research makes it possible to describe who, what, when, where and how about a situation, but lacks the ability to explain why (Aaker et al. 2010). It also makes it possible to examine the degree of association between different variables (Malhotra 2010). A descriptive research can be performed with two different designs, cross-sectional and longitudinal design. A cross-sectional design is when the data is collected at a single occasion, to make it possible to draw conclusions from two or more variables. A longitudinal design is often used to locate changes over time. The observation is conducted on two or several occasions, to find differences to
draw conclusions. A longitudinal design is more time consuming and requires more time than a cross sectional design (Bryman & Bell 2011). There is also a choice to use one or several samples for the study. By using two or more samples, comparisons can be made between these, to draw conclusions about the differences (Malhotra 2010).

A causal research is made to examine how a variable depends on another, in other words it is used to study the cause and effect between different variables. This is made in order to find out which variable that cause, and which variable that effects in a situation. These kinds of researches often call for an experimental study (Aaker et al. 2010).

In this study two different designs were used, exploratory and descriptive research. The knowledge about certain strategies had to be increased, which means that an exploratory research was needed. When the knowledge about these strategies was sufficient, a descriptive research was done in order to investigate the attitudes towards the brand and the relationships between variables. Because the study investigated the problem on one occasion to investigate differences, the research conducted was cross-sectional, and not longitudinal. A single cross-sectional study was done due to the fact that there was no need to use two or more samples in this study.

4.3 Data sources

There are mainly two different sources of data, primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected for the specific study; due to the fact that the data is collected with the research questions in mind it makes it well suited for the study. The data is also up to date, which means that the result of the study will not be outdated. This kind of data collection is often related with higher costs and also more time consuming than secondary data collection (Bryman & Bell 2011).

Secondary data is data that is already collected by someone else. It is therefore not collected with the purpose of the study at hand. The relevancy of this kind of data might however not be that high, the availability could be low and it may be insufficient to make useful conclusions. The data collection cannot be monitored, which might lower the reliability of the data. Secondary data can be divided in two types, internal and external data. Internal data is
collected and compiled by, for example, the organization that is studied, and external data is collected and compiled by someone outside the organization. (Bryman & Bell 2011)

Both internal secondary data and primary data were collected for this study. Internal secondary data was collected to see which strategies the company was using and primary data was collected to see the change in consumer attitudes and purchase behavior.

### 4.4 Research strategy

Different strategies are used to collect data for different reasons, and the choice should be made depending on the purpose of the study (Bryman & Bell 2011). There are five different strategies to use when collecting data; archival analysis, case study, experiment, history and survey (Yin 1994). When making the decision on which one to use, three different factors should be considered; how the research question is formulated, if it requires control over the behavioral events and if the study focuses in contemporary events (Yin 1994).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Strategy</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control over behavioral events</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival analysis</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>How, Why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, Why</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, Why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Yin 1994, p.6)

Because of the nature of the research questions and purpose of this study the research strategies to choose between were archival analysis and surveys. Because of the focus on a contemporary event, and that primary data is preferable, this study mainly used surveys to collect data. Archival analysis was used in the exploratory research to find out what strategies BP used. To find out how the strategies were used secondary data was sufficient.
4.5 Data collection method

For a quantitative approach that involves primary data collection there are three possible ways of collecting data, these are; through experiments, observations, and surveys. An experiment is a methodical procedure carried out with the goal of verifying, falsifying, or establishing the validity of a hypothesis whereby one or more variables are altered to establish the differing effects. An observation is the act of making and recording a measurement of the behavior of a studied object, for instance, consumers and organizational processes. It stems from anthropologic research and there are possibilities of having participant observations and non-participant observations. Another form of observational method is the archival analysis, whereby the researcher examines the accumulated documents, or archives, of the unit of analysis. A survey can be explained as the sampling of individuals from a population with a view towards making statistical inferences about the population using the sample (Kinnear & Taylor 1991; Aaker et al. 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011). Due to the fact of the big population foreseen for this study as well as the incapability of having a participant or non-participant observation to gather the information required in a timely and cost-effective approach, the quantitative data collection method considered suitable for the study was the survey method. This method is best suitable for gathering primary data from a population too big to be observed directly (Bryman & Bell 2011).

Surveys can be made through personal interviews, telephone interviews, or self-administered questionnaires. Personal interviews are in-depth interviews lasting between 30 and 90 minutes, and can be done both in an unstructured and semi-structured way. This is the best method for in-depth probing of personal opinions, beliefs, and values. Probing is very useful at uncovering hidden issues. Personal interviews give a very rich depth of information, while it also is very flexible. Although the advantages, this is a very time consuming and expensive method, and often, this data collection approach requires skilled interviewing skills (Bryman & Bell 2011). An interview may also be conducted by telephone rather than face to face. In comparison to the personal interview the telephone interview is far cheaper and quicker to manage if the sampling population is relatively large and geographically dispersed, while they also are easier to supervise than the personal interview. A telephone interview has its limitations as well as interviewers are not in a situation to respond to signs of puzzlement or nervousness on the faces of respondents when they are asked a question (Aaker et al. 2010; Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011).
Self-administered questionnaires that are done by respondents themselves are one of the main tools for gathering data and can be distributed both electronically, for instance via Internet solutions, or through paper based questionnaires. A big advantage with questionnaires is the cheapness of the method, especially when collecting data through electronic means. The disadvantages with questionnaires are that the questions asked should be precise and carefully premeditated as the chance for misunderstandings and incomplete information is much higher when there are no interviewers present to explain or offer extra information if required (Aaker et al. 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions/Questionnaire</th>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Internet/e-mail</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility (ability to clarify problems)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of in-depth information (use of open-ended questions)</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of visual aids</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of a widely dispersed sample</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking sensitive questions</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of interviewers effects (no interviewer bias)</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed of data collection</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Available contact methods adapted from Hollensen (2010)

In order to distribute the survey through the web and gather data, there are usually three main categories when choosing which way to approach: Point-of-contact, E-mail-based, and Web-based. Point-of-contact means that a respondent fills out an e-survey on a computer provided by the researcher. The E-mail-based surveys are described as survey tools that are carried out through electronic mail applications over the Internet or corporate intranets, and the Web-based surveys are normally described as survey tools that physically exist on a network server, usually linked to an organization’s intranet, and that can be accessed only through a Web-browser (Jansen et al. 2007).
Based on the purpose of the research project, aforementioned factors and in combination with the available means in terms of time and finances, the E-mail-based survey was chosen. The main reasons behind this decision were based on the facts that e-surveys have the ability of overcoming international boundaries, which was of utmost importance for this research, and because the timeframe of implementation could be much reduced (Dillman 2000). In addition, an archival analysis was also done. The data for the archival analysis was downloaded from a web page owned by the company that is under investigation.

4.6 Archival analysis
Archival analysis is a form of observational method where accumulated documents like magazines, newspapers, annual reports and other business reports are examined. (Bryman & Bell 2011). The archival analysis was the method used for collecting secondary data to this study.

The archival analysis was conducted in order to establish how the strategies had been utilized and in what way they were expressed. The literature review chapter about the strategies was used as a guideline for identifying the different strategies. The main source used to find the required information was BP’s homepage. BP’s Form 20-F from 2010 and sustainability review from 2010 were both downloaded from their homepage. These documents were scrutinized and the information that mentioned how BP employed any of the strategies is presented in chapter 3. From this information keywords were selected to become the foundation of their operational definitions used in this study.

4.7 Questionnaire design
According to Toepoel (2008), when designing a web survey, a researcher has to make many choices. A decision on which kind of sample a researcher wants to use has to be made. Different samples might give different respondents’ answers. Furthermore, the form of data collection is also a significant design decision. Depending on the way of communication, through paper or Internet, the respondents’ answers might be influenced if there is an interviewer present or not. In this research, it has been mentioned earlier that the survey will be provided through e-mail. The survey was created using Google Docs. Google Docs is a web based office suite and storage service offered by Google. In Google Docs it is possible to collect data by creating a form with the tools you are offered and then easily spread the link connected to the survey (An overview of Google Docs 2012).
In order to have a high quality questionnaire that does not deter the respondents from answering it, it is recommended that the questionnaire should not be too long. On the other hand, making it look very crowded and compact might also deter respondents. Hence, there are no worldwide common procedures that can be employed to guarantee the design of a well-organized and successful questionnaire (Aaker et al. 2010; Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011). Criteria that are important to consider when constructing a questionnaire should at least involve; operationalization, measurement scales, question format, question wording, question sequence and pretesting (Aaker et al. 2010; Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011).

4.7.1 Operationalization and measurement scales

In order to test the hypotheses stated in chapter 3 there is a need to make the research constructs into measurable items. The items are based on the operational definitions stated in Table 1 from chapter 3. These items were later used when formulating the questions in the questionnaire. A Likert-scale was used to rate the questions since they are based on attitude related items and perception items. According to Bryman & Bell (2011) a Likert-scale is appropriate for these measures. To increase the validity and reliability of the study it would be preferable to reuse items created by other researchers that have been used in several prior studies (Bryman & Bell 2011), however in this study, new items were created to suite the specific case. Since this study focuses on a specific incident and its consequences it was decided to customize the items to better fit the study. This may cause the questions to be hard to replicate for other studies but the results of this study aims at being generalized. Multiple items have been used for each construct to make the research more accurate and reduce possible mistakes made by the respondents (Bearden & Netemeyer 1999; Bryman & Bell 2011). There is always a risk that the respondent may rate a question wrong and if only one item is used in the mentioned case it may reduce the validity of the research (Bearden & Netemeyer 1999; Bryman & Bell 2011). Consumer attitude and purchase behavior items are based on the theories in the literature review and the strategy items derive from the archival analysis that used the literature review as a guideline to identify the strategies.

With the purpose of the study in mind, it was necessary to construct different sets of items. The first three questions measured how consumers perceived the information about BP directly after the incident in the Gulf of Mexico. The second set of items measured how the consumers perceived BP’s actions and strategies regarding the incident and the last items addressed how the consumer’s attitudes towards BP are as of today. These questions were
then later used in the analysis to see which strategy was most apparent and if it had any correlation to the possible change in attitude and purchase behavior.

Nevertheless, the items were compelled to be measured. By the levels of measurement it means the possibility of calculations that can be done on the data to summarize, present (display) and apply statistical techniques on the data. Types of variables based on levels of measurement can be divided into; nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio (Nolan & Heinzen 2007; Malhotra 2010). The nominal scale is the most primitive type of data from the viewpoint of data analysis. Due that they are just numbers assigned to objects they cannot be ranked, therefore very few formal statistical analyses can be done on nominal data. The ordinal scale signifies a higher level of measurement than the nominal. This because the numerals allocated to reflect order also serve to identify the objects. Interval scale and ratio scaled data are from the data analysis point of view also good as these types of data make it possible to perform a wide range of both parametric and nonparametric tests. What characterizes interval and ratio variables is that the ratings are not only possible to put in order, but there is the same difference in the scoring, for instance the difference between $99 to $100 is the same difference as the increase from $999 to $1000, in other words, $1 (Aaker et al. 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011). In this study the interval scale was the most common scale used as these variables also enables to compare differences between objects, simultaneously as they are good to use when measuring attitudes and opinions (Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011).

To be able to analyze the variables the Likert-scale was used as earlier mentioned. A Likert-scale necessitates a respondent to point out a degree of agreement or disagreement with a selection of statements linked to the attitude or object, generally with a number of five- or seven-point scales (Trost & Hultåker 2007; Aaker et al. 2010). It is generally two-parted, containing the item part and the evaluative part. The item part is basically a statement regarding a particular product, event, or attitude, while the other part is a list of response categories. One important assumption of this method is that each of the items measures several aspects of a single general factor (Aaker et al. 2010). The questionnaire in this research contained a seven-point Likert-scale with a response category ranging from 1) “strongly disagree” - 7) “strongly agree”.

To assess the respondent’s knowledge about the incident in the Gulf of Mexico and about their confidence of answering the questions, two threshold questions were stated at the end of
the questionnaire. These questions were also configured by a seven-point Likert-scale, although having a response category ranging from 1) “very low” - 7) “very high”.

Table 4 below presents the items and measurements used in the questionnaire and table 5 shows how the items are connected to the questions. The full questionnaire is found in appendix A.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Type of scale</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative publicity</strong></td>
<td>Likert scale 1-7</td>
<td>NP1 – Traditional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree – Strongly agree</td>
<td>NP2 – Word-of-mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NP3 – Electronic media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate social responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Likert scale 1-7</td>
<td>CSR1 – Environmental responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree – Strongly agree</td>
<td>CSR2 – Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CSR3 – Controllability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CSR4 – Improved crisis plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand revitalizing</strong></td>
<td>Likert scale 1-7</td>
<td>BR1 – Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree – Strongly agree</td>
<td>BR2 – Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BR3 – Sincerity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand positioning</strong></td>
<td>Likert scale 1-7</td>
<td>BP1 – Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree – Strongly agree</td>
<td>BP2 – Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BP3 – High standard energy provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumer attitudes</strong></td>
<td>Likert scale 1-7</td>
<td>CA1 – Beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree – Strongly agree</td>
<td>CA2 – Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CA3 – Emotional Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CA4 – Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase behavior</strong></td>
<td>Likert scale 1-7</td>
<td>PB1 – Purchase intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree – Strongly agree</td>
<td>PB2 – Purchase frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative publicity</td>
<td>NP1 – Traditional media</td>
<td>- I perceived the information about BP from traditional media as negative. (TV, Radio, Newspaper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NP2 – Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>- In social situations, people often spoke badly about BP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NP3 – Electronic media</td>
<td>- There was a lot of negative information about BP in electronic media. (Facebook, Forums, Web-pages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social</td>
<td>CSR1 – Environmental responsibility</td>
<td>- BP took sufficient environmental responsibility after the incident 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility</td>
<td>CSR2 – Honesty</td>
<td>- BP’s environmental agenda since the incident seems honest and trustworthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CSR3 – Controllability</td>
<td>- BP seems to have control over the situation in the Gulf of Mexico today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CSR4 – Improved crisis plan</td>
<td>- I am convinced that BP will have a better plan of action in case of another disaster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand revitalizing</td>
<td>BR1 – Endorsement</td>
<td>- The use of BP employees in their advertising campaigns makes it more credible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BR2 – Message</td>
<td>- BP’s advertising gives me hope about the beach restorations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BR3 – Sincerity</td>
<td>- Their advertising campaigns seem sincere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand positioning</td>
<td>BP1 – Safety</td>
<td>- I have always associated BP with safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BP2 – Consistency</td>
<td>- I perceive BP to have been consistent in retaining a good image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BP3 – High standard energy provider</td>
<td>- I have always considered BP as a high standard energy provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer attitudes</td>
<td>CA1 – Beliefs</td>
<td>- My beliefs regarding BP have improved since the incident in 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CA2 – Knowledge</td>
<td>- I think that BP has made amends for the incident 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CA3 – Emotional Impact</td>
<td>- I am pleased with BP’s environmental initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CA4 – Knowledge</td>
<td>- BP has regained my trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase behavior</td>
<td>PB1 – Purchase intention</td>
<td>- Today I have no problem with buying gasoline from a BP gas station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PB2 – Purchase frequency</td>
<td>- Today my total gasoline purchase is made at BP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7.2 Question format
When the problems related to the content of the questions have been analyzed, the next thing to keep in mind is how the questions are structured. Alternatives like closed-ended and open questions are the most common ones (Kinnear & Taylor 1991). Closed-ended or structured questions can be described as questions that specify the limit of response alternatives and the response format. Here the researchers know all the options available. They can make the respondents make one or more choices from a list of possible responses or make a choice from a rating scale or multiple-choice questions (Aaker et al. 2010; Malhotra 2010). Open-ended or unstructured questions as they also are called generally mean that the respondents are free to write the answer in their own words. Open-ended have a much less biasing influence on response than closed-ended questions as the respondents are free to express any views. Thus, it might give the researcher rich insights (Kinnear & Taylor 1991; Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011).

The questionnaire contained mainly closed-ended questions, mainly due to the easiness of processing the answers, the fact that they are easy for respondents to complete and because the structured questions made it easier to show the connection between variables and to make comparisons between respondents or types of respondents. Questions regarding age and which states the respondents lived in were open. All questions were made mandatory so that no respondents could finish the questionnaire without answering all of the questions. This decision was made to eliminate the problem of missing data when analyzing.

4.7.3 Question wording
When asking questions, it is important to consider if the respondent understands the question, if they know the answer, if they remember the answer, but also if they are willing to provide the answer (Bryman & Bell 2011).

The questions should overcome the respondent’s incapability and unwillingness to answer. Respondents may for instance not be capable to answer if they are not informed, cannot retain information, or cannot articulate the response. The reluctance of the respondents to answer must also be overcome. Respondents may furthermore be unwilling to answer a question, if it requires too much effort, if it is asked in a situation or circumstance considered out of place or if it asks for information that is sensitive. Therefore, it was, among other things, important to use ordinary words, avoiding long questions, avoiding leading questions, using positive or negative statements, but mainly it was about defining the issue and always aiming at
answering the research questions (Kinnear & Taylor 1991; Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011).

4.7.4 Question sequence
Once the wording of the questions has been determined the next important aspect to consider is the sequencing of the question. In the beginning of the questionnaire it is important to have easy and uncomplicated questions, and then gradually ask more and more complicated questions. The questions asked should be in a reasonable sequence from the respondent’s perspective, in order not to influence the respondent in any manner (Kinnear & Taylor 1991). In this study, these guiding principles were followed as much as possible. Simple and general questions like age, gender and which state the respondents in the US were living in were used at the beginning, while the questions became more complex towards the end.

4.7.5 Pretesting
At the end, in order to identify and eliminate potential problems, a pretesting of the questionnaire on a small sample of respondents is recommended. Every feature of the questionnaire should be tested, including question content, wording, sequence, question difficulty, and instructions. The respondents doing the pretest should be drawn from the same population as the respondents used for the actual survey (Malhotra 2010). In this study, the pretesting was conducted on a small sample consisting of 11 American citizens. Contact with these respondents had already been established through the researchers own personal networks and the questionnaires were given out through the social media Facebook. The questionnaire was also pretested by four PhD’s within the area of business and economics who reviewed it and gave further suggestions on development. Because of the distance between the respondents and researchers, the pretest version contained at the end a small text box in order for the respondents to leave comments and opinions on how the questionnaire could be improved. Furthermore, to be sure of the wording, misspellings and other linguistic matters, a High School English teacher contributed to correct these issues in the questionnaire.

The data collected from the pretest questionnaire was analyzed with the statistical program SPSS in order to establish that the questions deriving from one item tested the same thing. This was mainly done through reliability testing using SPSS. The analyzing resulted in some changes in a few questions that were problematic and unreliable. The questions with very low reliability were erased from the questionnaire and new questions were formed instead.
After solving the problems with the first pretest, another pretest was done with an updated questionnaire on 16 other American citizens, these were contacted in the same way as the first time. The results were then analyzed as the previous pretest. After this pretest there were some minimal changes made for the final version of the questionnaire.

4.8 Sampling

The population in this study was narrowed down to people who are car owners in the United States of America. The research questions in this study aims for the American consumers and thus the geographical factor was already stated. The delimitation to car owners was made because these people consume petrol, which makes them potential customers to BP. The size of the chosen population is approximately 190 million people (Americans lead the World in Car Ownership, China and India fast catching up in absolute number of cars owned, 2007).

To collect data from all the members of a population (called a census study) is considered impractical (Aaker 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011). Even if there is enough time and monetary means to do so, the odds that everyone will answer are minimal, particularly with a large population. In fact it will in many cases result in a less accurate study, because of the difficulty to maintain control over the data collection (Aaker 2010). To solve this problem the choice was to conduct a sample survey. This means that a smaller amount of people was selected to represent the whole population, and the respondents will provide sufficient data (Bryman & Bell 2011).

There are different ways of choosing the sample for a study. To be able to draw conclusions about the population, an important factor to consider is that the sample actually represents the population (Aaker 2010). The best way to achieve that is by using probability sampling. Probability sampling is done by randomly picking respondents from a population. This can be made for example by using different lists conducted by statistical agencies, and from these make a pattern, or choose respondents randomly. This makes the chance of every unit to be chosen equal to all other units in the population.

When using non-probability sampling the chance of every unit to be chosen is not equal to all the other units in the population. This is however a way to collect data quicker, at a lower cost. One approach to adopt in non-probability sampling is convenience sampling, which means that the researchers use a sample that more easily can be contacted. This can for
instance be a classroom of students or people outside a store. It can also be using existing channels to access respondents. This way of sampling is not as accurate as a randomly picked sample, but it is used when the time and monetary means are limited (Aaker 2010). Because of the limited time and monetary means this study was done using convenience sampling.

4.8.1 Sampling frame

A sampling frame is a framework with elements that respondents in the sample must fit into (Bryman & Bell 2011). In this study, first of all, the population included people living in the United States of America who own a car. The limited time frame and monetary means for this study required a channel that quickly could reach people within this population. Due to the fact that students at universities in the United States are assigned an e-mail account, and also have free access to the Internet, an opportunity arose to reach a large amount of respondents in another part of the world. To find the American respondents the international coordinator at the Linnaeus University was contacted. An E-mail was written (Appendix B) and forwarded by the international coordinator to her contacts at Linnaeus University’s partner universities in the United States. When the contact was established, the survey was sent to the universities so that they could spread the questionnaire throughout their internal e-mail at their university (the introductory letter can be found in appendix C). This resulted in a sample that mainly was including students and employees at these universities. The researchers own personal network in USA was also used to add up to the total respondents. This decision was made because it saved time and was inexpensive.

The questionnaires were sent to students and employees at the following universities:
Hawaii Pacific University, Hawaii
George Mason University, Virginia
California State University Chico, California
State University of New York at Oneonta, New York
University of South Florida, Florida
Pratt Institute, New York
Western Oregon University, Oregon
4.8.2 Sample selection

To determine the sample size in this study a statistical method was applied. This method, presented by Malhotra (2011) considers the size of the population under investigation and the confidence level that is the number of standard errors.

\[
\text{Sample size} = \frac{2500 \times N \times Z^2}{(25 \times (N-1) + (2500 \times Z^2))}
\]

\[N = \text{Population size}\]
\[Z = \text{Number of standard errors}\]

Adapted from Malhotra (2011)

This method determines that the sample size needed to make this study was 384. As stated before, the questionnaire was sent out to seven universities but only five universities did know how many people they had reached as some made use of social network sites as Facebook. The five universities that responded to how many people they had reached ended up on a sample of 542. The mean of the sample was calculated to 108 and added two times to cover up for the two universities that did not know how many they had reached. The researchers own contacts in USA reached approximately 50 people. The total calculation was: 542+(108*2)+50= 808. So the total amount of US citizens reached was 808.

Because of the limited time and the low response rate of the questionnaire, the researchers ended up with a total of 114 respondent answers.

4.9 Data analysis method

To analyze the collected data in this research, the computer program IBM SPSS Statistics Standards (version 20.0) was used. A statistical package which enable one to carry out procedures in order to help explain relations among variables, identify trends, create clusters
and make predictions (SPSS Statistics Standard n.d.). The first step was to enter the data into SPSS, this was made by converting the data sheet from Google Docs into a SPSS document. The second step was to code the variables to be able to analyze it statistically. To make the collected data more understandable, descriptive statistics was used to organize and to summarize the data in a way that made it easier to describe, understand and to analyze. It also made it possible to find improper data, for instance, missing scores and outliers that would make the study less accurate (Nolan & Heinzen 2007).

To observe the relations between different variables a regression analysis can be done. A regression analysis looks at the relation between one or more independent variables and one dependent variable (Aaker 2010). The dependent variable is the variable that changes when the independent variable is manipulated, in other words, it depends on that variable (Nolan & Heinzen 2007). The relation is presented with a beta-coefficient, which can vary from -1 to 1. If the coefficient is 1 it means that there is a perfect positive relationship between the two variables, if one variable increases, the other variable increases with the same amount. If the coefficient is -1 it means that there is a perfect negative relation, when one variable increases, the other variable decreases in the same amount. If there is absolutely no relation between the variables the coefficient will be 0 (Nolan & Heinzen 2007; Aaker et al. 2010). A regression analysis can also predict how much of the variance in one variable that can be explained by the other. (Aaker 2010)

The regression analysis was made in order to analyze the relation between the independent and dependent variables and to be able to predict how negative publicity and the strategies used affected consumer attitudes and purchase behavior.

4.10 Quality criteria

The accuracy of the study depends on the validity and reliability of the measuring instruments. It is important that the investigation examines what is actually intended to be measured and that the measuring tool, in this study the questionnaire, is reliable over time (Aaker et al. 2010).

4.10.1 Validity

Validity is the degree to which a measurement instrument measures what it is intended to measure. It can further be described that the findings with the questionnaire actually represents the reality of what is measured (Saunders et al. 2009; Malhotra 2010; Bryman & Bell 2011). When discussing the validity there were 3 important forms of validity to consider...
in the research; content validity, construct validity and criterion validity.

Content validity, also sometimes called face validity, means that the measure should in an understandable way replicate the content of the concept in question. This can be established through doing a small scale pretesting by allowing experts and potential respondents judge the representativeness of a measure before the main data collection takes place (Bryman & Bell 2011). In this research, the questionnaire was pretested by a small sample of the population simultaneously as four PhDs within the area of business and economics reviewed it in order to determine if the concepts were described in clear and complete ways.

Construct validity can be described as the extent to which an operationalization distinctly measures the concept it is supposed to measure (Bryman & Bell 2011). One aspect of construct validity is discriminant validity, which is evaluated by statistically assessing whether the different constructs in the study are not correlating too high. To be certain that the variables do not measure the same concepts and in order to establish relationships between the investigated variables a Pearson’s correlation test was used (Saunders et al. 2009; Bryman & Bell 2011). The correlation between the independent variables should be less than 0.9. If the variables correlate higher than 0.9 there is a risk of lack in discriminant validity (Bryman & Bell 2011). For this reason the authors strived for a correlation under 0,9.

Criterion or concurrent validity as it also is called refers to the extent to which an operationalization can predict other constructs and performs as expected in relation to other variables (Bryman & Bell 2011). This variable can contain psychographic and demographic characteristics, attitudinal and behavioral measures, or scores acquired from other scales (Malhotra 2010). In this research the criterion validity was assessed by statistical hypothesis testing, as this is a way to identify relationships between the variables (Nolan & Heinzen 2007).

4.10.2 Reliability

Reliability is the consistency of a measure of a concept, and an underlying condition for validity (Bryman & Bell 2011). “The term is commonly used in relation to the question of whether or not the measures that are devised for concepts in business and management (such as team working, employee motivation, organizational effectiveness) are consistent” (Bryman & Bell 2011, p. 41). It is important for a researcher to know if the measure is stable or not, therefore it can be assessed in different ways, for instance, by repeating the study at a later point in time (Bryman & Bell 2011). In addition, reliability can also be assessed by internal consistency. This means correlating the answers to each question in the questionnaire with
those to other questions in the questionnaire, this is done through calculating and reporting the Cronbach’s alpha (Saunders et al. 2009). In this research, the Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure if the different values were acceptable enough. Cronbach’s alpha basically determines the average of all potential split-half reliability coefficients. This makes it an important feature when presenting the data correctly in order for other researchers to repeat the research and show that it is reliable. To draw a conclusion that a research is reliable a coefficient preferably needs to be 0.7, but 0.6 is also an adequate value (Saunders et al. 2009; Bryman & Bell 2011). This research strived for getting a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.6.

4.11 Graphical summary of the methodology choices

FIG. 3 Summary of methodology

![Graphical Summary of Methodology](image)

The chosen methods are marked in green.
5. Analysis and results

This chapter presents and analyzes the results of the empirical study conducted for this research. The data collected from the e-survey is presented and examined under different sections. Beginning with descriptive statistics used in order to display a clear sum up about the sample and the measures, followed by reliability test on the items used in the questionnaire to measure the concepts. Further, regression analysis was done to measure the relationships between the independent variables and dependent variables. The results from the regression analysis made it possible to test the stated hypotheses and that is followed up by an overall discussion about the findings.

5.1 Descriptive statistics

After the data was collected it was compiled into descriptive statistics. There were a total of 114 respondents answering the questionnaire. The response rate was calculated to 14,1% (114/808), which was considered low. Out of these, 35,1% of the respondents were females, and 64,9% were males. The average age was 34 years, spread from 15 to 76. These people were spread out at eight different states in the US. Virginia represented the largest part with 38,6% of the respondents, followed by Hawaii (16,7%), Florida (11,4%) New Jersey (9,6%), New York (8,8%), Texas (8,8%), Oregon (5,3%) and Illinois (0,9%).

There was no missing data from the questionnaires, this because all questions were mandatory and it was not possible to complete the questionnaire if not all the questions had been answered. One respondent had specified the age to 165 years; the respondent’s answers otherwise seemed sincere, which meant that it was useful in the study. This age was replaced with the mean age, before calculating the average age.

The two threshold questions asked at the end of the questionnaire showed that the respondents thought that they had good knowledge about the incident in the Gulf of Mexico, with a mean of 4,9 in a seven-point Likert-scale from (1) “very low” to (7) “very high. The respondents confidence of answering the questions was slightly higher, with a mean of 5,11 on the same scale.

Table 6 below shows the distribution of the answers in descriptive statistics. The distribution for one and each item is presented, were 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 7 stands for “strongly agree”. Presented are also the mean, median and standard deviation of the different items.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Distribution of responses</th>
<th>Scale properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP1 – Traditional media</td>
<td>7,90%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP2 – Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>2,60%</td>
<td>7,90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP3 – Electronic media</td>
<td>5,30%</td>
<td>2,60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR1 – Environmental responsibility</td>
<td>15,80%</td>
<td>8,80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR2 – Honesty</td>
<td>11,40%</td>
<td>7,90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR3 – Controllability</td>
<td>11,40%</td>
<td>0,90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR4 – Improved crisis plan</td>
<td>11,40%</td>
<td>7,90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR1 – Endorsement</td>
<td>18,40%</td>
<td>8,80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR2 – Message</td>
<td>13,20%</td>
<td>12,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR3 – Sincerity</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11,40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP1 – Safety</td>
<td>16,70%</td>
<td>9,60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP2 – Consistency</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP3 – High standard energy provider</td>
<td>16,70%</td>
<td>5,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA1 – Beliefs</td>
<td>16,70%</td>
<td>6,10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA2 – Knowledge</td>
<td>16,70%</td>
<td>8,80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA3 – Emotional Impact</td>
<td>13,20%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA4 – Knowledge</td>
<td>17,50%</td>
<td>10,50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB1 – Purchase intention</td>
<td>11,40%</td>
<td>2,60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB2 – Purchase frequency</td>
<td>45,60%</td>
<td>16,70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.1 Negative publicity
The table shows that the information received by the respondents about BP was perceived as negative. The information was mainly negative from the traditional media (mean 5.62) followed by electronic media (mean 5.26). The information perceived through word-of-mouth was the least negative (mean 5.09). The average from these three items in negative publicity was calculated to 5.32, which means that the publicity around the incident was mostly negative.

5.1.2 Corporate social responsibility
BP’s corporate social responsibility strategy is perceived as slightly positive. Respondents believe that BP now has an improved crisis plan (mean 4.74) simultaneously as they have a better control over the situation in the Gulf of Mexico today (mean 4.68). BP’s honesty of the environmental agenda is slightly more questioned (mean 4.54) but still positive. The responsibility BP took after the accident was also seen as sufficient (mean 4.43). These four items resulted in an average of 4.60, which means that the corporate social responsibility strategy was well perceived by the respondents.

5.1.3 Brand revitalizing
The brand revitalization strategy BP used was perceived as slightly positive. The use of BP’s own employees was perceived as somewhat positive (mean 4.22). The same goes for the hope of BP restorations on affected beaches (mean 4.27). The respondents also thought that the advertising BP used after the incident seemed somewhat sincere (mean 4.31). This strategy was also well perceived with an average of 4.27, though not as much as corporate social responsibility.

5.1.4 Brand positioning
The brand positioning strategy was not that well perceived. The respondents did not associate BP with safety (mean 3.54). They were although almost neutral with how consistent BP had been in retaining a good image (mean 4.13). About if BP was seen as a high standard energy provider the perception was slightly positive (mean 4.34). The brand positioning strategy was not well perceived, but not negative either, with an average of 4.00.

5.1.5 Consumer attitudes
The respondents’ beliefs towards BP were unchanged before and after the incident (mean 4.05). They however think that BP has made amends for the accident (mean 4.29) and that they are pleased with BP’s environmental initiatives (mean 4.46). BP have not, however
regained the respondents trust for the company (mean 3,33). The average of these two items resulted in an average of 4,03.

### 5.1.6 Purchase behavior

The respondents purchase intention towards BP was positive (mean 4,82). The purchase frequency was also positive (mean 4,8). The high distribution of respondents choosing the alternative (1) “Strongly disagree” (45,6%) might be explained by respondents living in areas where BP do not have gas stations.

### 5.2 Reliability testing

A reliability test was conducted on all of the individual concepts to ensure that the items used in the survey were corresponding with the measured concept. This study uses Cronbach’s alpha as an evaluation for the reliability as stated in the method chapter. The study aimed at having a Cronbach’s alpha at ≥0.6 on all of the concepts since it according to Hair et al. (2003) would display a sufficient reliability. Even more so, all concepts except for purchase behavior employed three or more items for a more acceptable reliability in accordance to good research manner (Hair et al. 2003; Bryman & Bell 2011). To calculate the Cronbach’s alpha on the multiple-items concepts the statistical computer program SPSS was used. Table 7 below displays the results from the reliability testing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative publicity</td>
<td>0.640</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social</td>
<td>0.946</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revitalizing</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand positioning</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer attitudes</td>
<td>0.933</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase behavior</td>
<td>0.683</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.2.1 Discussion of the results

As the table displays, none of the concepts had an alpha value below 0.6 that explains them all to be consistent and reliable in this research. Negative publicity and purchase behavior displayed alpha values of 0,640 respectively 0,683 and these two concepts were the ones with lowest alpha values. These values are moderate, however considered still acceptable according to Hair et al. (2003). Brand positioning almost reached an alpha value of 0.9 and is considered a very good reliability (Hair et al. 2003). Corporate social responsibility, brand
revitalizing and consumer attitudes all had an alpha value of over 0.9 but below 0.95 which indicates an excellent strength of association (Hair et al. 2003). If the alpha value would have been >0.95 then it would have to be a discussion regarding if the items really measured different aspects of the concept (Hair et al. 2003). As mentioned before, purchase behavior did only employ two items to measure the concept and this could have affected the alpha value. Due to the fact that the items used were specifically constructed for this study, other researchers should be aware of this if any intention of reusing the items despite good alpha values.

5.3 Correlation analysis

A correlation analysis was conducted using SPSS in order to do a construct validity test on the different variables used. The correlation analysis was done to ensure that the independent variables were not correlating to highly and increase the risk of them measuring the same concepts, in other words it was testing the discriminant validity. Pearson’s correlation was used as a measurement for the correlation. The variables should show as low correlation as possible. The table below presents the correlation analysis for all the concepts.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Negative publicity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Corporate social responsibility</td>
<td>-0.350**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Brand revitalizing</td>
<td>-0.254**</td>
<td>0.893**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brand positioning</td>
<td>-0.352**</td>
<td>0.798**</td>
<td>0.833**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Consumer attitudes</td>
<td>-0.297**</td>
<td>0.937**</td>
<td>0.865**</td>
<td>0.801**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Purchase behavior</td>
<td>-0.274**</td>
<td>0.738**</td>
<td>0.741**</td>
<td>0.663**</td>
<td>0.753**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The correlation analysis shows that negative publicity does not correlate highly with any other independent variables as it has a negative value with all the variables. Corporate social responsibility shows some high values with the other concepts and even passes 0.9 on consumer attitudes. This means that there is a risk of them measuring the same concepts, however, one of the hypotheses states that corporate social responsibility has a positive relationship to consumer attitudes and the high value could explain that relationship. Brand revitalizing, brand positioning and consumer attitudes also show some high values but they
are all below 0.9 and are therefore considered acceptable in this study.

5.4 Regression analysis and hypothesis testing

The regression analysis was conducted to determine if there were any relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables. The strength of the relation between the variables is explained in table 8. Three individual regression analyses were conducted using SPSS and the different analyses are presented below. All tables below are imported from SPSS and transformed in Microsoft word to simplify the readability.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficient Range</th>
<th>Strength of Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.90 - 0.99</td>
<td>Near perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.70 - 0.89</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.50 - 0.69</td>
<td>Substantial to very strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.30 - 0.49</td>
<td>Moderate to substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.10 - 0.29</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.01 - 0.09</td>
<td>Trivial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strength of correlation coefficients. (de Vaus 2002)

5.4.1 Negative publicity and consumer attitudes

In this analysis negative publicity was considered the independent variable and consequently consumer attitudes become the dependent variable. The negative publicity variable was the sum of all the negative publicity items used and was coded NPtot in SPSS. Same procedure goes for the consumer attitudes variable which was coded CAtot in SPSS.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>R Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative publicity (NPtot)</td>
<td>Consumer attitudes (CAtot)</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This model summary table provides the $R^2$ value. The $R^2$ value indicates how much of the dependent variable, in this case, consumer attitudes can be explained by the independent variable, negative publicity. The $R^2$ value is showing a value of 0.088 which means that consumer attitudes can be explained to 8.8% by the negative publicity.
Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficient</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative publicity (NPtot)</td>
<td>-0.426</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second table, the coefficients, provides information of each predictor variable. It gives the information required to predict consumer attitudes from negative publicity.

By looking at the Beta column under the Unstandardized Coefficients column we can see the NPtot value of -0.426. This number indicates that negative publicity has a moderate to substantial negative relationship to consumer attitudes. This could be interpreted as an increase of one unit in negative publicity leads to a decrease in positive consumer attitudes with 0.426 units. Moreover, to be sure that this relationship is correct, a look at the significance column can be done. The significance shows a value of 0.001 and meaning that the relationship is significant.

5.4.2 Strategies and consumer attitudes

To investigate the possible relationship between corporate social responsibility, brand revitalizing and brand positioning strategies towards consumer attitudes this regression analysis used the composed items of all strategies as independent variables and consumer attitudes again as the dependent variable. The strategies were coded BPtot (brand positioning), CSRtot (corporate social responsibility) and BRtot (brand revitalizing) in SPSS.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>R Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand positioning (BPtot) Corporate social responsibility (CSRtot) Brand Revitalizing (BRtot)</td>
<td>Consumer attitudes (CAtot)</td>
<td>0.887</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table, the $R^2$ is showing a value of 0.887, which means that consumer attitudes, the dependent variable, can be explained to 88.7% by the different strategies (independent variables). This means that almost 90% of a consumer's attitude towards this brand derives from these strategies.
Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficient</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand positioning (BPtot)</td>
<td>0,140</td>
<td>0,036</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social responsibility (CSRtot)</td>
<td>0,756</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand revitalizing (BRtot)</td>
<td>0,061</td>
<td>0,416</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By looking at the Beta column above we can see the values of the different strategies and how strong their relationship is to consumer attitudes. All values are positive, which means that all of the strategies in this study have a positive relationship to consumer attitudes. Corporate social responsibility has a very strong relation to consumer attitudes, the value of 0,756 means that an increase of one unit in how well perceived the corporate social responsibility is, results in an increase of 0,76 units in consumer attitudes. Brand revitalizing strategy has a trivial relation to consumer attitudes, with a value of 0,061. This makes an increase with one unit in how well perceived brand revitalizing strategy is, result in an increase of 0,061 units in consumer attitudes. Brand positioning has a value of 0,140 which makes a low relation with consumer attitudes. This means that an increase with one unit in how well the brand positioning strategy is perceived, result in an increase with 0,14 units in consumer attitudes. Although, the significance levels on the strategies differs from each other. The CSR and the brand positioning have a strong significance (≤0,05), whereas the brand revitalizing strategy has a low significance grade and can be ruled out as the result of 0,416 (≥0,05) shows an uncertain relationship.

5.4.3 Consumer attitudes and purchase behavior

The final regression analysis investigates the possible relationship between consumer attitudes and purchase behavior. In this analysis, consumer attitude was set as the independent variable as the purchase behavior as the dependent variable. Purchase behavior variable consisted of the purchase intention item and purchase frequency item and was coded PBtot in SPSS.

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>R Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer attitudes (CAtot)</td>
<td>Purchase behavior (PBtot)</td>
<td>0,567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at the relationship between consumer attitudes and purchase behavior the $R^2$ shows in this table a value of 0,567. The purchase behavior can with other words be explained by consumer attitudes with 56,7%

### Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficient</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer attitudes (CAtot)</td>
<td>0,742</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td>0,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Beta column on consumer attitudes in this table demonstrates a value of 0,742. A number that indicates that consumer attitudes have a very strong positive relationship with purchase behavior, an increase with one unit in consumer attitudes assumes to have an increase with 0,742 units in purchase behavior. The significance level also shows a value of 0,000, which indicates that the relationship is significant.

### 5.4.4 Hypothesis testing

The finalized results from the regression analysis made it possible to test the hypotheses stated in chapter 3 by either confirming or rejecting them. The first regression analysis tested if there was a significant relationship between negative publicity and consumer attitudes. Former research has found relationships between negative information and attitudes towards a brand (Pullig et al. 2006; Eisingerich et al. 2011), so in order to strengthen or weaken this theory the following hypothesis was stated:

**H$_{1}$**: Negative publicity leads to a decrease in positive attitudes.

The regression analysis found that 8,8% of consumer attitudes could be explained by perceived negative publicity. The Beta value of -0,446 translates to that the relationship is negative and with a significance of 0,001 does imply that the relationship is real. These results confirms the stated hypothesis and adds value to prior research (Pullig et al. 2006; Eisingerich et al. 2011). H$_{1}$ is therefore accepted.

The second regression analysis tested if there was a significant relationship between the strategies corporate social responsibility, brand revitalizing, brand positioning and consumer
attitudes. As stated before all strategies was tested simultaneously in order to see possible differences in the effects on consumer attitudes. Following hypotheses were stated regarding the strategies:

**H2:** A well-perceived brand revitalizing strategy increases positive attitudes.

**H3:** A well-perceived brand positioning strategy increases positive attitudes.

**H4:** A well-perceived corporate social responsibility strategy increases positive attitudes.

The results stated that the strategies altogether could explain 88.7% of the consumer attitudes. Brand revitalizing Beta value was 0.061 and considered low compared to the other two strategies and it had a significance value of 0.416. Since significance was >0.05 there cannot be stated that there was any relationship. H2 is therefore not supported.

Brand positioning had a Beta value of 0.140 and a significance value of 0.036 (<0.05) thus implying that there is a positive relationship between brand positioning strategy and consumer attitudes. H3 is therefore accepted.

Corporate social responsibility had the highest Beta value of all the strategies with 0.756 implying a positive relationship between CSR and consumer attitudes. With a significance of 0.000 suggesting that the relationship is real. H4 is therefore accepted.

The last regression analysis tested if there was a significant relationship between consumer attitudes and purchase behavior. Prior studies have found that there is a positive relationship between consumer attitudes and purchase behavior (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007; Eisingerich et al. 2011), and naturally it was then necessary to test if this relationship were apparent even in this study. The hypotheses was stated:

**H5:** Consumer attitudes have a positive relationship to purchase behavior.

Results from the last regression analysis showed that 56.7% of the purchase behavior could be explained by consumer attitudes. The Beta levels confirmed that there was a positive relationship between the variables and the significance level was 0.000 which implying the relationship to be true. H5 is therefore accepted.
6. Discussion and conclusions

The final chapter discusses the results from the analysis and looks back to what prior research had stated in order to draw conclusions, answer the research questions and fulfill the purpose. Managerial implications from the conclusion are also presented as well as delimitations of the study.

6.1 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about the effects on a company suffering from negative publicity and how they could proceed in order to minimize the damage. To stress the influential factor of negative publicity the decision was made to investigate the oil company BP because of the recent oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Since the disaster was not performance-related the definition of negative publicity in this study was narrowed down to value-related negative publicity (Pullig et al. 2006). Before conducting any new research there was a need to review what prior research had to say about the effects of negative publicity. Andrews & Kim (2007) proposed that negative publicity could change the attitudes towards a brand and attitudes in turn could affect purchase behavior (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007). Attitudes and behavior have long been tied together in marketing research, as the two concepts seem to be highly intertwined (Breckler 1984; Evans et al. 2008). This fact laid the foundation for this study and became the main concepts for the investigation. The results from the empirical investigation confirmed that the publicity spread about BP was mostly negative, especially in traditional media such as newspapers, radio and TV, but as well in electronic media and from word of mouth. The study also showed that negative publicity did have a negative relationship with attitudes, meaning that an increase in negative publicity will decrease positive attitudes associated with the brand. Consumer attitudes could by 8.8% be explained by the negative publicity. While this value might not be very strong it is nevertheless a negative relationship. More so the effect of the negative publicity might not be so strong today because the effect has been reduced naturally over the course of the two years since the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Further research will be needed in this area and tested on an event of negative publicity that is fresher in the minds of the consumers in order to produce a more accurate value. On the other hand one could say that even today, two years after the disaster, the negative publicity still has an effect on the attitudes towards BP.
As the first hypothesis was accepted this led to the second aspect of this study. Knowing that negative publicity could predict a loss in positive attitudes associated with a company or brand, a need to counter this effect will surely arise. The literature review narrowed it down to three strategies that companies could adopt in order to counter negative publicity, or even making the consumer more resistant to the negative publicity (Klein & Dawar 2004; Yoon et al. 2006; Vanhamme & Grobben 2008; Eisingerich et al. 2011). Corporate social responsibility, brand revitalizing and brand positioning were the three strategies tested to have any reducing effect of the negative publicity as the archival analysis showed that BP did employ these strategies. This research showed that two of the strategies BP used were well perceived. The most well perceived one was the corporate social responsibility strategy with a mean 4,60, followed by brand revitalizing 4,27. The third strategy under investigation, brand positioning, had a mean of 4,00. The result from the investigation was that brand revitalizing strategies did not have a significant relationship to consumer attitudes while both corporate social responsibility and brand positioning did have a significant positive relationship to consumer attitudes. Brand positioning had a Beta value of 0,14 and corporate social responsibility a Beta value of 0,756, and this could mean that a well-perceived corporate social responsibility strategy could be more effective than brand positioning when trying to counter negative publicity. As brand revitalizing did not have any significant relationship not much can be said about the effects of that strategy. Keep in mind also that the items used for evaluating the strategies were picked by the authors and created from the archival analysis whereas some carefulness must be applied when interpreting the results.

The last aspect and hypothesis of this study was aimed at understanding if negative publicity could in the end even affect the consumers purchase behavior. Prior research shows that consumer attitudes do affect purchase behavior (Laroche et al. 1996; Teng et al. 2007; Eisingerich et al. 2011) and this had to be tested if it was apparent in this case. The results showed that consumer attitudes had a significant positive relationship to purchase behavior with a Beta value of 0,742 making consumer attitudes a very strong predictor of purchase behavior. In the end this could mean that if negative publicity decreases positive attitudes it could in turn affect purchase behavior and the implications would be that a company could suffer financial losses. To connect this to the first research question stated in the introduction chapter, it would suffice to say that the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico did lower positive attitudes associated with BP and affected the consumers purchase behavior in a negative way.
6.2 Conclusions

Through this study the researchers have collected enough information in order to present answers to the research questions and the purpose stated; to gain knowledge about the effects on a company suffering from negative publicity and how they could proceed in order to minimize the damage.

If the information received from media and from word-of-mouth after an incident (like BP’s oil spill) is considered as negative towards the company, this will lead to a decrease in positive attitudes among customers. Since the attitudes are highly tied together with purchase behavior, it is important to implement strategies in the company as a countermeasure. This in order to reduce as much negative impact from attitudes as it consequently can lead to significant losses in revenue. Among the strategies in this study, corporate social responsibility and brand positioning was found to be useful tools to protect companies from negative publicity. The study clearly showed that from these two strategies, the one most influencing on consumer attitudes was the corporate social responsibility. Unfortunately, in this study, brand revitalizing could not verify a significant effect on consumer attitudes. Hence, no general conclusion can be drawn about the effect of a brand revitalizing strategy.

6.3 Managerial implications

Since the result of this research confirms that negative publicity has an impact on consumer attitudes that in turn affect purchase behavior, managers and organizations should develop a plan to deal with negative publicity if there is an incident such as the case of BP. Having a plan in place enables corporations to overcome the negative publicity caused by the negative publicity as quickly as possible in order to prevent serious damage to the company’s brand.

When negative publicity occurs it is highly important to handle the situation in a quick and effective way before consumer attitudes are influenced strongly (Andrews & Kim 2007). So it would be wise to consider developing a strategy that could be employed as soon as the negative publicity occurs, like an instant countermeasure.

In addition, while working on this thesis we have reached an understanding that corporate social responsibility is an effective strategy against negative information towards an organization. The strategy influences consumers’ attitudes and helps protecting the brand.
Therefore, based on our research, we recommend managers whose corporations could be affected by negative publicity to consider implementing a corporate social responsibility strategy.

Even though brand positioning did not have the same impact on consumer attitudes as corporate social responsibility it still is a strategy that influences. Thus, it is vital to have a brand positioning strategy that is well elaborated and positively received by consumers.

One method to defend against negative publicity could be by implementing the corporate social responsibility strategy into the brand positioning. As corporate social responsibility has a great impact on consumer attitudes, it is very important that the customers perceive the strategy as honest and trustworthy so it does not backfire (Eisingerich 2011). Initially that implies that if a manager would consider integrating a corporate social responsibility strategy with their brand positioning it would be of critical importance that the two strategies are aligned. If these precautions are not considered it could have the opposite effect and create more negative attitudes. Finally, it is fundamental for managers that customers can maintain positive attitude towards the brand as purchasing behavior is influenced to a large extent by the attitudes.

6.4 Future research

During this study the authors found other interesting fields for future research. This section provides suggestions for other researchers interested in the area of negative publicity.

Since this study only investigated one company in the industry, future studies can be conducted towards other companies in the same industry in order to be able to generalize on a more significant level and to be able to contribute more to the industry.

As the company in this research has a history of accidents and environmental disasters (Mouawad 2010), studies could be made in order to see potential differences in how a company with another history is affected by negative publicity and how strategies protect such a company.

Additionally, further research can determine if and how negative publicity impacts differently
on people who are directly affected by the situation that caused the negative publicity (for instance live, work or in somehow are attached to the afflicted areas), in contrast to people who are not directly affected in the same way.

The data in this study was collected towards a company that had a highly mentioned accident two years ago. Due to this, the results can be influenced by the time factor. A longitudinal study could be made to see how much the factor “time” can repair (or worsen) the damages of negative publicity.

6.5 Limitations of the study
The results and conclusions of this study might not be applicable on all industries due to the fact that BP handles such a high demand product as oil. The strategies chosen may not have the same effect within other industries, for instance industries that produces a lower demand product. The results could however be of value to companies within the oil industry in terms of gaining knowledge on how to respond to negative publicity in case of a crisis equivalent to the incident in the Gulf of Mexico.

The investigation was conducted in the United States of America and the sample population was taken from universities rather than general population and this means that the result is mainly relevant for companies doing business in America and limited to those who are in one way or another affiliated with colleges in the United States. Another factor that might have limited the study was the time and money. This resulted in that the authors had to settle for a final sample size of 114 respondents, which was considered as a poor sample size. The sample size may not be significant enough to draw any conclusions of real value. The distribution between the genders was not ideal either as only 35% of the respondents were female, this could in turn have influenced the result because the male perspective is somewhat more representative in this study while the female perspective is left unexplored.
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http://www.oilspillcommission.gov/media/restoration/ecological-toll-oiled-shoreline.html


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Appendix A

Questionnaire

In this questionnaire we want to capture your thoughts about the oil company BP after the incident in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. This questionnaire is entitled to car owners only. If you do not own a car, you do not have to proceed. Thank you for your participation.

Please choose an answer to the questions that represents your opinion in the best way, there is no right or wrong. The answers are anonymous and individual responses will not be published anywhere.

How old are you? ____

Your gender Female Male

Which State do you live in? (US) ________________

Please take your time and carefully read the statements below. You respond by choosing the most suitable number on the scale from 1 to 7.

SECTION I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The first three questions address to how you perceived the information about BP after the incident in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I perceived the information about BP from traditional media as negative. (TV, Radio, Newspaper)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social situations, people often spoke badly about BP.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a lot of negative information about BP in electronic media. (Facebook, Forums, Web-pages)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following ten questions address how you perceived BP’s actions regarding the incident in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BP took sufficient environmental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
responsibility after the incident in 2010. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
---|---
BP’s environmental agenda since the incident seems honest and trustworthy. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
BP seems to have control over the situation in the Gulf of Mexico today. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I am convinced that BP will have a better plan of action in case of another disaster. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The use of BP employees in their advertising campaigns makes it more credible. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
BP’s advertising gives me hope about the beach restorations. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Their advertising campaigns seem sincere. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I have always associated BP with safety. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I perceive BP to have been consistent in retaining a good image. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I have always considered BP as a high standard energy provider. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**SECTION III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These following five questions address to your attitude towards BP today.</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
My beliefs regarding BP have improved since the incident in 2010. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
I think that BP has made amends for the incident in 2010. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
I am pleased with BP’s environmental initiatives. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
BP has regained my trust. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
Today I have no problem with buying gasoline from a BP gas station. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
Today my total gasoline purchase is made at BP.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

SECTION IV

The following questions address to the degree of certainty of you as a respondent.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

My knowledge about the incident in the Gulf of Mexico is:

Very low | Very high

My confidence for answering these questions is:

Very low | Very high

What is your total annual income?  
[ ] Less than $25,000
[ ] $25,000 - $49,999
[ ] $50,000 - $74,999
[ ] $75,000 - $99,999
[ ] $100,000 or more

Thank you for responding to our survey!
Appendix B

E-mail to the Universities in the US.

Hi,

We are three marketing students from the Linnaeus University in Sweden and we have been recommended to contact your University about an issue regarding our bachelor thesis. As of now we are writing our bachelor thesis in the subject of business and economics with a focus on marketing. It is a quantitative study that investigates concepts of branding, consumer attitudes and purchase behavior. The aim of the thesis is to apply these concepts by doing a case study on the corporation BP (BP). The choice of BP was made due to the terrible oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 and we want to know how this disaster has affected BP as a brand. This will be done by conducting a E-survey directed towards the American consumers since the disaster had the most impact on the American people. The survey takes the form of a Internet based questionnaire and will state questions such as how the attitudes and purchase behaviors might have changed towards BP after the disaster. The investigation will be important because it will have implications on how a big oil corporation will have to act after a disaster and make them improve their crisis management in order to reduce the environmental damage it may cause.

Our only problem was to reach out to the American consumers since we live in Sweden. Then we got the idea from our thesis supervisor to reach out to one of Linnaeus University partners in USA. We found out that your University was well-recognized and helpful in matters like this. So our question is if it is possible to spread our E-survey through your internal school e-mail system or any other way by your help? Our intention is to send you an e-mail including an introducing text to the E-survey and a link to the Internet questionnaire. Our hopes are that you could forward that e-mail containing the link through your internal school e-mail out to students and maybe university employees and by that way we can collect the data needed for the survey.

We fully understand if you cannot help us due to rules and regulations in your University and we respect that integrity but any help will be very much appreciated.

Thanks in advance!

Best regards from Linnaeus University in Sweden/
Conny Johansson
Simon Möllefors
Shkumbin Ibrahimi
Appendix C

Introductory e-mail to the e-survey.

Hi,

We are three marketing students from the Linnaeus University in Sweden and as of now we are writing our bachelor thesis in marketing. The aim of the study is to investigate the US consumers’ attitudes towards the oil company BP following the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The investigation will be done by conducting a web-based survey with questions regarding how you as a consumer have been affected by the oil spill disaster. The investigation will be important because it will have implications on how a big oil corporation will have to act after a disaster and make them improve their crisis management in order to reduce the environmental damage it may cause. The web survey takes about 5 minutes to complete and your answers will be completely anonymous. The data will only be used for the purpose of our study.

We would very much appreciate if you would take the time to answer our survey as it would help us out a lot. Just follow the link down below and you will be brought to our web survey.

Here is the link to our e-survey:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dEl1UUloR2MzY1prNG9ubHlBSHRhX0E6MQ#gid=0

Best regards from Linnaeus University in Sweden.
Conny, Simon & Shkumbin
Linnaeus University – a firm focus on quality and competence

On 1 January 2010 Växjö University and the University of Kalmar merged to form Linnaeus University. This new university is the product of a will to improve the quality, enhance the appeal and boost the development potential of teaching and research, at the same time as it plays a prominent role in working closely together with local society. Linnaeus University offers an attractive knowledge environment characterised by high quality and a competitive portfolio of skills.

Linnaeus University is a modern, international university with the emphasis on the desire for knowledge, creative thinking and practical innovations. For us, the focus is on proximity to our students, but also on the world around us and the future ahead.

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