



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

The need for human touch

An exploration into social responsibility during the
COVID-19 pandemic through a case study of the
NIVEA Care for Human Touch campaign

A dissertation submitted in
partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree BA
(Hons) Communication and
Media

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May 2022 **Supervisor: Dr Penny
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Word Count: 11,989

ABSTRACT

The advent and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the marketing and communications industry, as companies from all sectors have seen a shift towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Additionally, the spread of the virus has led to numerous governmental restrictions such as lockdowns to restrain human contact and the rate of infections. However, these restrictions have had significant impacts upon individual wellbeing, and thus their will to exert Individual Social Responsibility (ISR). Within this context, on the 28th of January 2021, NIVEA released a campaign entitled *Care for Human Touch* with the aim of increasing wellbeing by addressing topics such as loneliness and isolation. By conducting a series of semi-structured one-to-one interviews, this dissertation aims to uncover audience perception of the *Care for Human Touch* initiative in order to understand the campaign attributes that are necessary for the creation of a successful CSR initiative. This success is contingent on business and societal returns. Through the analysis, two key themes were found: (1) The reinforcement of ISR beyond the singular individual and (2) Success through credibility. Extending on Du et al.'s (2010) theoretical model and Yuhei and Aubrey's (2014) findings, this dissertation argues that the NIVEA campaign is successful as it reinforces ISR and positive attitudes towards the company. Additional findings highlight the interconnected relationship between social and business returns, demonstrating how businesses have the power to fundamentally impact society in powerful ways.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR), individual social responsibility (ISR), carewashing, credibility, corporate social marketing (CSM), wellbeing, COVID-19

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for my supervisor Dr Penny Rivlin whose guidance, support and encouragement has been invaluable throughout this dissertation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2021, NIVEA, a global skin and body-care company released their *Care for Human Touch* campaign. Owned by the Hamburg-based company Beiersdorf, NIVEA has positioned itself at the forefront of the skincare empire and as a prominent player in the global arena (Keller, 2003). Following the advent and spread of COVID-19 in 2020, the company set out to reposition itself in the midst of social distancing, seeking for an innovative way to appeal to the public (Stewart, 2020). As such, almost a year after the pandemic started, NIVEA launched their new brand purpose: “Care for human touch to inspire togetherness” (Beiersdorf, 2021a). The campaign launched on the 28th of January 2021 with the release of a short film through their social media called ‘Twins’. This highlighted the key benefits of skin touch, a central theme to the initiative. Additionally, the use of the #CareForHumanTouch hashtag was popularised on Twitter by NIVEA to bring awareness to the cause of skin-touch throughout the campaign. The *Care for Human Touch* initiative can be strongly linked to scientific knowledge and professional expertise, as NIVEA substantiates its claims, projects, and aims, on the importance of human touch. Underscored by two global reports published by the skincare brand before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Beiersdorf, 2020), the campaign aims to highlight the proven health benefits of physical touch combined with the promotion of skin-to-skin contact and connections (Beiersdorf, 2021b). The key aspects of the campaign can be found in situ on the NIVEA website (see NIVEA, 2022) as it presents a medley of real stories, scientific reports, projects, and professional interviews, aiming to raise awareness around the importance of connections, both physical and emotional. Additionally, beyond the informative hub on NIVEA’s website, the company has pledged to invest 20 million Euros in

skin-touch projects around the world, aiming to reach 150,000 people and reinforcing their strong commitment to helping society during the pandemic.

The role of a company in supporting society through corporate actions has been increasingly popularised in the last few decades (Einstein, 2013). Also known as ‘stakeholder capitalism’ in the corporate world, this new model of capitalism has gained popularity amongst large entities such as the World Economic Forum (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2022). Juxtaposed with ‘shareholder capitalism’ that embraces profit maximisation as a company’s main goal, the popular 2020 *Davos Manifesto* recognises ‘stakeholder capitalism’ as a “better kind of capitalism”, capable of helping resolve challenges faced by society (Schwab, 2019). Within the corporate realm, ‘stakeholder capitalism’ can be embodied by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This type of corporate action is a voluntary commitment to improving community wellbeing, fulfilled through business practices and initiatives (Kotler and Lee, 2005). CSR has further gained popularity in the past two years as the advent of COVID-19 opened many avenues for fruitful CSR strategies as a means of securing favourable public opinion amongst stakeholders (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020; He and Harris, 2020; Mata et al., 2021). The rise of CSR during the pandemic can further be linked to a second aspect of social responsibility: Individual Social Responsibility (ISR). This second type of social responsibility represents an individual’s perception of the actions they can or should take in order to help society (Mihaela, 2018). In a pandemic like COVID-19, ISR is a fundamental aspect linked to the safety and wellbeing of society (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). However, the amounting COVID-19 lockdowns have resulted in a wellbeing crisis led by a lack physical and mental connections, further endangering individuals’ ability to exert ISR behaviours (Brooks et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020a; Buheji et al., 2020b; Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). As such, these two different types

of social responsibility are intertwined as CSR can positively influence ISR through campaigns and other initiatives. Consequently, this situation requires more “amplified, prioritised, and strategically optimised CSR implementation and participation” from companies world-wide (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020, p.293).

As the emergence of CSR communication practices have multiplied in the past decades and years, this “has given rise to a distinct subfield of CSR communication research”, demonstrating its significance in the academic field of media and communication (Schoeneborn et al., 2020, p.6). Combined with CSR’s recent surge in popularity during the ongoing pandemic, this has led to many interesting avenues for research in the field. Additionally, as previously discussed, CSR’s growth as an emerging research field in the 21st century, further acknowledges the intertwining nature of business and society, and as such, CSR and ISR (Mahmud et al., 2021). Whilst scholars such as Yuhei and Aubrey (2014) have sought to study this link, they have solely confirmed its existence, associating this relationship to a credibility factor. This research therefore attempts to understand how this credibility factor can be enforced in order to make a CSR initiative successful. This topic is of relevance as “there is still a lack of acceptable empirical evidence on how companies are now responding and how they should respond to the COVID-19 pandemic disaster” (Mahmud et al., 2021, p.2). Yuhei and Aubrey (2014) suggest conducting field work in order to understand consumers’ perception of a company’s CSR credibility and overall campaign. Grounded on CSR and ISR literature, this study therefore attempts to explore audience perception of a CSR campaign during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Through semi-structured interviews, I will aim to uncover how NIVEA’s *Care for Human Touch* campaign is received by audiences, evaluating how it has performed both in terms of business and societal returns. In order to

focus the aims of this research, the following research question and sub-questions have been formulated:

- 1.** Is the *Care for Human Touch* campaign by NIVEA a successful CSR strategy?
 - (a)** Can it reinforce ISR within the context of a lockdown?
 - (b)** Can it reinforce positive attitudes towards NIVEA as a business?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section provides a theoretical overview to contextualise this research project within existing academic literature related to social responsibility, both corporate and individual, the impact of the pandemic on advertising and social responsibility, and NIVEA as an example of a social initiative. To contextualise the *Care for Human Touch* campaign, I first outline the concepts of CSR and ISR as they are central to my research and are the foundation of the campaign. To understand the evolution of CSR and ISR in today's everchanging environment, I will explain the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on corporate and individual social responsibility, highlighting their intertwining natures. Finally, I introduce the NIVEA brand and its *Care for Human Touch* campaign to situate the CSR initiative and how it aims to impact ISR and individual resilience.

2.1. Social Responsibility

2.1.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR as defined by Kotler and Lee (2005), is “a commitment to improve wellbeing through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources” (p.3). In conducting CSR, companies implement a set of corporate social initiatives to support causes and fulfil commitments. These activities can take six major forms: cause promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering, and socially responsible business practices (Kotler and Lee, 2005). My area of interest for the following research will focus on corporate social marketing (CSM) as the NIVEA campaign falls under this category. CSM encourages behavioural change “intended to

improve public health, safety, the environment, or community well-being” (Kotler and Lee, 2005, p.116). This can be done solely through the company and equally through other means such as partnerships and celebrity endorsements. For example, this can be seen by NIVEA Canada’s marketing efforts as they have partnered with Roots of Empathy, a children’s charity organisation, donating over \$250k to help with their initiatives linked to human touch and relationships (Beiersdorf Canada Inc, 2021). Additionally, NIVEA Canada has partnered with influential figures such as Tessa Virtue, a Canadian figure skater and a brand ambassador at the forefront of the *Care for Human Touch* campaign. CSR is therefore promoted beyond a singular campaign and can be seen as a myriad of marketing efforts to promote a particular cause that is of importance to a company.

The use of CSR “occupies a prominent place in the global corporate agenda” today (Du et al., 2010, p.8). This can be linked to its highly profitable approach in terms of reputation, business returns, and stakeholder appeal. Over the short term, businesses gain consumer trust and loyalty by appealing to their interests and needs, thus increasing sales potential. Over the long term, stakeholder supportive attitudes towards businesses are positively reinforced, encouraging “stakeholders’ socially responsible and advocacy behaviours” (Mugova et al., 2017, cited in Mahmud et al., 2021, p.5). CSR’s business profits therefore cannot be ignored and might invite scrutiny into the sincerity of corporate actions. Whilst CSR can reap significant business profits, it is equally crucial to identify its risks. As Du et al. (2010) highlight, CSR can be intrinsic, in that it is perceived as acting in a place of genuine concern and support for a social issue; and extrinsic, in which the company is viewed as trying to increase profitability from the situation (Du et al., 2010). Due to this ambiguity, the consumer is often left doubtful of the true intentions behind CSR campaigns. Scepticism is therefore a significant

impediment to the success of CSR initiatives and highlights the need to push credibility and authenticity forward (Du et al., 2010; Leiss et al., 2018; Yuhei and Aubrey, 2014). To prevent consumer scepticism, Du et al. (2010) suggest that CSR communication should emphasise its commitment and impact to a cause, its choice of engagement, and the congruence between the cause and the brand. Furthermore, the scholars Yuhei and Aubrey (2014) have demonstrated the “linkage among CSM credibility, value congruence, and consumer behaviour with respect to both social and business returns” (p.630). This thus highlights the significance to push credibility forwards in order to benefit both businesses and social causes. However, CSR is widely debated in the scholarship, as its altruistic nature is questioned by many. Whilst CSR takes on an assisting role in helping social causes, it is said to target certain causes that are easily marketable among consumers (Stole, 2008). By choosing causes over others, this can lead to a glamorisation of specific issues (Einstein, 2013). Concurrently, the powerful status held by companies due to their reputation and wealth, creates an “inequitable power relationship between charities in much need of funds and corporations that donate” (Einstein, 2013, pp.380-381). Consequently, corporate interest can take precedence over social causes leading to a situation where “the survival and success of many charities depend on their ability to fit a business profile” (Stole, 2008, p.33). The study of in-depth CSR initiatives such as CSM, is therefore extremely valuable to evaluate companies’ actions and ensure that they are benefitting social causes as much as their own business returns.

2.1.2. Individual Social Responsibility

Social responsibility can be broadly defined as the “moral principle of an organization or individual engaging in activities in order to improve the lives of others in society” (Mihaela, 2018, p.17). I have already identified the existence and spread of CSR as a fruitful business model that is increasingly being used by companies to benefit society and crucially, the company. However, as can be seen in this definition, social responsibility goes beyond the mere ‘organisation’ and involves the ‘individual’. Social responsibility therefore encompasses organisational social responsibility, or CSR, and individual social responsibility (Mihaela, 2018).

ISR is the moral responsibility of each individuals’ decisions, choices, and actions to benefit the wellbeing of their entourage (Mihaela, 2018). As members of society, individuals are expected to consciously monitor the choices they make and how their everyday actions can positively affect every sphere of their life (Davis et al., 2017). By taking a proactive stance in resolving societal issues, the individual is showing their altruistic investment in improving society and the significance of their own actions in the process (Mihaela, 2018). As ISR involves many different dimensions and takes many forms, it can be studied both on an interpersonal and organisational level. By juxtaposing the two, it can be argued that CSR and ISR are interrelated through both their intentions and outcomes. Indeed, CSR and ISR have aligning goals; the creation of CSR initiatives is often crafted with the aim to positively influence ISR. This is possible as prosocial behaviours are driven by different interdependent motives: “intrinsic altruism, material incentives (...) and social- or self-esteem concerns” (Bénabou and Tirole, 2010, p.15). By understanding the relation between each motive,

corporations can create impactful CSR initiatives that can truly change societal behaviours to benefit social causes.

Fundamentally, ISR is a duty that is assumed by singular individuals with the aim to have positive repercussions on the lives of others. However, this can only be done as Ebrahim and Buheji (2020, p.295) aver, if individuals “possess adequate awareness and exhibit positive behaviours towards their own wellbeing including psychological, physical, social and economic aspects”. This is where the role of CSR and companies are put forward, as they can positively influence the intrinsic altruism of individuals. This can be done by making them aware of significant social issues, as well as by improving their individual wellbeing to ensure that they are in full capacity to demonstrate responsibility towards others’ wellbeing (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020, p.295). In essence, ISR and CSR are strongly intertwined and should be studied in conjunction to one another to enable an understanding of how the actions of one can induce change in the other. By viewing CSR and ISR as a pair, the development of CSR campaigns that seek to influence ISR can create a trickle-down effect, positively influencing the company’s consumers who will then positively influence their circle and so on (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). By understanding this, the impact on wider societal needs can be significantly larger.

2.2. The Impact of the Pandemic on Social Responsibility

2.2.1. A Shift Towards Corporate Social Responsibility

The COVID-19 crisis has had significant economic, social, political, and cultural impacts all over the world for both citizens and businesses. Whilst citizens have struggled with marked lifestyle changes and restrictions on sociality and personal freedom, businesses have seen their industries forever change (He and Harris, 2020; Mata et al., 2021; Xifra, 2020). A predominant business trend can be identified as the pandemic has unfolded: the perceptible move towards CSR in every industry (Xifra, 2020). The pandemic offers many avenues for fruitful CSR initiatives, resulting in a redirection towards socially responsible business strategies as campaigns have carried “a social focus rather than a promotional one” (Mata et al., 2021, p.3). The substantial shift towards CSR results from the framework created by the pandemic as businesses have been able to create more genuine and authentic communications. During a crisis, the practice of CSR immediately becomes more meaningful for consumers as they are actively searching for solutions and reassurance. By demonstrating an investment to improve the day-to-day life of their consumers, companies are highlighting their dedication to positively contribute to community wellbeing (He and Harris, 2020). Additionally, the reorientation towards CSR can also be explained through evolving public expectations as businesses are expected to put the interest of communities ahead of their financial interest (Manuel and Herron, 2020). To a certain extent, the progression towards CSR during the pandemic has arguably been enforced upon companies, as straying away or ignoring the situation has serious ramifications on the relationship between a company and its stakeholders (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020; He and Harris, 2020; Mata et al., 2021; Taylor, 2020). Losing stakeholders is simply not an option as they are the backbone of companies, promoting, supporting, and advocating for their success and reputation.

Beyond the CSR initiatives promoted by many companies over the development of the pandemic, it is important to think about their purpose. At heart, companies' number one priority is profit making. Viewing CSR as a one-sided transaction where companies solely seek to improve society is simply unrealistic. Alongside the possibility to do good during the pandemic, companies have arguably seized the opportunity to operationalise a discourse of care, which Chatzidakis and Littler (2021) discuss within a framework of 'carewashing'. Carewashing refers to companies emphasising the word 'care' in a discourse that aims to conceal external motives beyond the social cause of focus. Driven by reputational and legitimacy concerns, carewashing epitomises how corporations have leveraged profit-making opportunities, capitalising on the circumstances of the pandemic within an established CSR remit. The commodification of care and prioritisation of corporate profits effectively puts these social, environmental and health causes at risk as they are seen as secondary importance to business profits (Einstein, 2013; Stole, 2008). However, as the advent of the pandemic has equally demonstrated, companies are increasingly becoming more powerful than ever. Their incontestable growth has been accompanied by their great potential for adaptation as they can be seen as taking on "a larger welfare and societal role" (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2021, p.14). Numerous examples of CSR actions since the start of the pandemic (He and Harris, 2020; Manuel and Herron, 2020) have proven that their initiatives "can have direct tangible impacts through humane support and economic relief" (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020, p.301). The powerful position upheld by corporations epitomises their responsibility to manage the crisis in the best of their ability and pushes the need to understand how to create impactful CSR campaigns that benefit corporations and social causes.

2.2.2. Resilience and Individual Social Responsibility

Similarly to businesses, the general public has suffered many consequences from the pandemic, notably due to the measures set in place to mediate the rate of infections. Following the inception and spread of the virus in 2020, many countries have instituted strict protocols forcing their populations to limit mobility and stay at home. The imposition of lockdowns has often been accompanied by school closures, travel restrictions, social distancing, and most significantly, quarantine (Buheji et al., 2020b). However, whilst this may appear as an effective solution in principle, the restriction of movement has generated large amounts of stress for the general population (Brooks et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020a; Buheji et al., 2020b; Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). Indeed, lockdowns have been proven to have negative effects on wellbeing and mental health, making them insufficient comprehensive solutions (Xiang et al., 2020). Specifically, quarantine has been deemed an unpleasant experience that reaps harmful consequences from a psychological point of view such as anxiety, loneliness, insomnia, and depression (Brooks et al., 2020). However, the potential harmful consequences of COVID-19 go beyond the psychological disturbances that develop during quarantine and impact the general resilience factor of individuals. Resilience is a key strength during crises, as it enables the creation of a united community made up of individuals that exude a socially responsible behaviour. However, the lack of psychological resilience from citizens due to lockdown measures has led to new mental health and wellbeing crises alongside the pandemic, increasing the need to strengthen wellbeing.

As I have previously noted, CSR and ISR are closely intertwined and have the power to create an abundance of social change. Looking at this dynamic in a COVID-19 framework, it becomes

evident how creating CSR strategies with ISR in mind can reap many benefits. In a pandemic like COVID-19, ISR is “manifested through responsible behaviour and interest to take an active and proactive role to purposefully help in confronting the challenges that our societies suffer from” (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020, p.293). ISR can be as small as obeying to the quarantine measures set by the government and can go as far as to advocate for these measures to one’s close circle. Moreover, ISR can only be practiced by an individual that possesses sufficient awareness of the situation and exhibits positive behaviours towards both their own wellbeing and others (Yoder, 2002). However, in times of crises, ISR becomes challenging due to the stresses brought on by restrictive measures and their impact on an individual’s wellbeing. A weaker individual cannot advocate for themselves and others’ ISR (Brooks et al., 2020; Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). It is therefore crucial for governments to consider the psychological distresses caused by restrictive measures and provide useful resources to help individual wellbeing. This can be done through a combination of a “psychological support strategy” (Buheji et al., 2020a, p.14), to manage and mitigate the stresses brought by COVID-19, and CSR, to perpetuate this information amongst the wider public (De lima et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

2.3. NIVEA as the Epitome of Social Responsibility

2.3.1. An Overview of the Brand

NIVEA is a global and well-renowned skin and body-care brand that established its supremacy in the 20th century. Initially founded in Germany, NIVEA has extended its reach on the world, positioning itself today as one of the most popular personal care brands in the world (Keller,

2003). The brand is promoted for use by the whole family as its products are universal, timeless, and unisex: “over time, the NIVEA name became synonymous with protection and caring for the skin and attained a special, almost mythical, status among users” (Keller, 2003, p.166). Indeed, the dominant qualities linked to NIVEA were ‘caretaker’, ‘gentleness’, ‘protection’, ‘reliability’, and ‘feel good’, which have remained to this day (Keller, 2003, p.166). NIVEA’s products are advertised to promote a holistic repertoire of benefits. Whilst they afford functional benefits such as the hydration of the skin, they also transcend functionality and offer symbolic benefits, giving consumers the impression that by consuming a NIVEA product, they will feel good in their own skin (Keller, 2015, cited in Alberti et al., 2019, pp.191-192). The repeated use of these benefits and qualities will therefore over time create positive brand attributes that are progressively anchored into the consumer’s mind (Alberti et al., 2019).

The NIVEA brand has substantially expanded beyond its original NIVEA crème product in the early 20th century to incorporate a range of sub-brands encompassing skin, hair, and body care, to capture global audiences (Alberti et al., 2019). The collective values attributed to NIVEA have thus developed a need to create a strong marketing strategy, nurturing NIVEA’s core values and symbolic associations whilst equally applying them to the sub-categories in the NIVEA catalogue (Keller, 2003). NIVEA has therefore worked on creating a “NIVEAness” between each sub-brand “by creating a universal name for each product category and common packaging on a worldwide basis” (Keller, 2003, p.173). By standardising the branding and advertising of the multiple sub-brands, the company has maintained a consistent and universal image that relates back to the NIVEA crème; the original product to which many consumers have forged strong brand loyalty (Keller, 2003).

Keller (2003) observes that “over time, NIVEA ads were altered to reflect changes in self-images and lifestyles” (p.167). For example, Keller notes that in response to the privations of wartime in the 1950s post-war period, “NIVEA ads reflected the German population's desire to enjoy life by showing NIVEA products used in relaxed and happy settings” (Keller, 2003, p.167). This demonstrates advertising's capacity to adapt to and reflect the desires and needs of society at different historical moments. For example, following the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic on the 11th of March 2020, advertisers shifted their efforts towards addressing the life changing restrictions that were announced by governments (Manuel and Herron, 2020; Mata et al., 2021). As I have previously explained, the rise of COVID-19 led to a common trend as companies replaced their commercial communication with more socially responsible communication, addressing the situation and offering help and support (He and Harris, 2020; Mahmud et al., 2021; Manuel and Herron, 2020; Mata et al., 2021). Similarly, NIVEA’s marketing since 2020 has been impacted by the pandemic, leading to a shift in how the brand approaches its strategic marketing efforts and the types of campaigns it releases.

2.3.2. The *Care for Human Touch* Campaign

A significant societal trend that has been identified by many researchers is “touch deprivation” (Beiersdorf, 2020, p.16). Fundamentally, lack of human contact with others affects us all, notably in today’s digital era where our busy lifestyles and evolving social norms have created a burgeoning divide as there has been a gradual shift towards the reliance on technology (Beiersdorf, 2020). Additionally, experts have identified an important knowledge gap, as a lack of awareness of the psychological, and more significantly, physiological benefits

of human touch remain largely unknown. Also known as the ‘social organ’, the skin has the power to lower blood pressure and heart rate, reduce stress hormones, and even strengthen the immune system (Beiersdorf, 2020; 2021a; 2021b). The profound benefits of human touch on health, both mental and physical, urges the need for more regular human connections. Additionally, the high-stress situation created by the pandemic, has led to a lack of human touch which may have significant, deleterious impacts for the wellbeing of the population. Consequently, companies such as NIVEA have taken the responsibility to spread awareness around solutions to increase resilience in the face of such measures and in doing so, to increase ISR. NIVEA therefore launched a CSM campaign in January 2021 titled *Care for Human Touch* with the aim to raise awareness around the health benefits of touch and to support skin touch projects (Beiersdorf, 2021b). Based on two global reports exploring human touch pre and post pandemic, the campaign can be found in situ, on a digital hub where a medley of interviews, scientific research, and stories are displayed (NIVEA, 2022).

Despite the significant investment in this campaign through the numerous resources and programmes offered on the website, it is important to consider ulterior motives that can come into question. The *Care for Human Touch* campaign can arguably be seen as a carewashing tactic, as NIVEA has adopted “piggyback marketing”, jumping on the COVID-19 care bandwagon (McCracken, 1989, cited in Chatzidakis and Littler, 2022, p.10). By plastering the word ‘care’ all over their campaign, NIVEA’s initiative can be seen as “leveraging the COVID-19 crisis and its language of care” to make profit (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2022, p.14). The seemingly one-sided nature is arguably deceptive, as NIVEA has hidden their corporate agenda and profit objectives. Furthermore, on a larger scale, carewashing can be detrimental to the very cause if corporate interest takes precedence over the cause itself (Einstein, 2013).

Ultimately, within the myriad of CSR initiatives, it is key to evaluate their intentions, performance, and outcomes, in order to define a business model that fairly benefits both corporations and society without harming either. The advent of COVID-19 has not only unlocked short-term reputational benefits for companies, but has also created “a broader tectonic shift that is attempting to create a larger welfare and societal role for corporations” (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2022, p.14). The pandemic has therefore highlighted the inevitable legitimisation of corporations as powerful institutions capable of impactful changes. Their outreach and potential to help society on a micro and macro level cannot and should not be ignored (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2022). Having identified the key challenges and discourses surrounding CSR and ISR, my research will now focus on evaluating the NIVEA campaign as a means of understanding how a campaign can benefit both society and businesses.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Methodological Approach

This study investigates audience perception of, and response to, the *Care for Human Touch* campaign. Through qualitative, semi-structured interviews, I explored the participants' attitudes and behaviours towards a CSM campaign that aims to reinforce ISR within the context of the pandemic. Advertisements have larger sociocultural implications "that go beyond the corporate bottom-line", which can affect consumers (Goldman, 1992, p.1). Media scholarship demonstrates that audiences are not passive receivers of media messages, but are rather active decoders of messages, and actively interact with media across a range of contexts (Fiske, 1987; Hall, 1991). The qualitative interview is therefore an appropriate method as it views respondents as meaning makers, and the interview is a means to uncover their inner thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and emotions linked to the area of study (Brennan, 2017; Kvale, 1996; Qu and Dumay, 2011). Additionally, Goldman (1992) discerns how the ubiquitous nature of advertisements and marketing materials can often lead to taking "for granted the deep social assumptions embedded in advertisements" (p.1). The use of the in-depth interviews can therefore help shed light on advertisements as the probing of information can engender further reflections from the participants (Berger, 2020).

Whilst the interview is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016), it has limitations that need to be acknowledged and countered. Firstly, the interview relies on human data, making it prone to the imperfect nature of humans. People do not always tell the truth, they forget things, can withhold information, misinterpret questions, are easily affected by external factors, and have everchanging beliefs (Berger,

2020). Whyte (1982) highlights that while it is crucial to acknowledge these idiosyncratic limitations, the interview remains a very strong and legitimate method which can access richly textured meaning compared to other methods involving human participants, such as the survey (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, academic research highlights how the interviewer can counter these participant-related limitations (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Lobe et al., 2020). Through “the use of various skills, such as intensive listening and note taking, but also careful planning and sufficient preparation”, the interviewer can create a good environment for the retrieval of information (Qu and Dumay, 2011, p.239). I therefore countered this limitation through a strong interview protocol, expertise in the topic area to ask informed questions, and substantial knowledge on how to conduct interviews (see Appendix A, B, and C for the research protocol and fieldwork forms). Secondly, the use of a qualitative approach, which involves subjective interpretation of narrative data, combined with the small sample size, has negative implications for the generalisability of the research. My findings are not representative of the wider population of NIVEA advertising audiences, since a larger study would be required to claim empirical validity and representativeness. However, this study provides a snapshot of audience views of, and their interactions with, the NIVEA campaign, and provides rich, meaningful data which has significance and utility in the context of a small-scale research study with limited resources. Thirdly, the use of the qualitative interview is subject to the interpretivist method, making its validity questionable (Babbie, 2015). Subjectivity is inevitable within studies as researchers may not always interpret their participant’s interview data as it was intended by the participant. Whilst it is important to not over-interpret the data created from interviews, Hammersley (2010) argues that “what words they literally pronounce does not in itself tell us what they were intending to communicate or do” (p.565), making it crucial for the researcher to interpret the data carefully and

rigorously, paying attention to what is not said, as well as what is said. Additionally, once the data has been interpreted, it is the researcher's responsibility to clearly explain the thought process behind the findings and make the data accessible to others. By presenting a detailed methodology that provides an outline of the study, my research process is logical, traceable, and documented (Hammersley, 2010). This highlights what Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) deem as strengthening the validity of a study through conformability as from an exterior point of view, the research can be easily understood by linking the findings and the interpretation.

3.2. Sampling Technique

In this study, ten people were interviewed with the aim to gain insight into the views of a small sample of receivers of CSR communication, and how this impacted their understanding and actions of their own ISR within a COVID-19 framework. I chose to use purposive sampling, as my main criteria was to interview people who had experienced a lockdown within a shared household and who were aware of the company NIVEA. Whilst this method has specific research purposes that are influenced by the researcher, Deacon et al. (1999) highlight how individuals belong to specific social networks and backgrounds that make them knowledgeable interviewees, able to discuss the research topics from a situated perspective. Through a purposive sampling method, I aimed to maximise the potential for the production of relevant, textually rich, and meaningful data from the participants. The participants are aged between 20-50 years old, and six women and four men were interviewed. Whilst their gender and age were not decisive characteristics when analysing their responses, I wanted to gain a wide range of views through this diverse demographic (see Appendix D).

3.3. Interviewing, Transcribing, and Coding

Due to the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic, the interviews were carried out on the videoconferencing platform Zoom, for the comfort and safety of both the interviewees and myself, and they lasted between 30-60 minutes. In order to replicate a real face-to-face interview, both parties could hear and see each other. Furthermore, as online interactions limit the control researchers have over their environment, I sent out a set of guidelines to advise the participants of the preferred interview environment, such as aiming for a time where interruptions or distractions would be less likely and checking for a good quality internet connection (Lobe et al., 2020). The use of online means can equally limit the relationship built between the researcher and participant (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). Consequently, I made sure to build rapport with interviewees through friendly yet professional messages sent prior to the interview, allowing a connection to be developed.

While the semi-structured interview is inherently flexible, I decided to create a research protocol to guarantee a certain uniformity between every interview, ensuring that all topics and questions would be covered (Babbie, 2015; Bryman, 2016). The interview guide is a combination of questions and probes to help direct the conversation towards the topics and issues of importance (see Appendix A). This study used a standardised interview format with mostly open-ended questions to create an environment for focused discussion, whilst also allowing differing responses and data contingent to the interviewees (Qu and Dumay, 2011). The discursive nature of the interview therefore enabled the generation of rich personal experiences. Prior to the interview, the participants were given an Information Sheet (see Appendix B), explaining that the interviews would discuss the subject of marketing and its link

to social issues, notably how companies take a standpoint in this context and its link to individuals. The interviewees were not provided with a detailed explanation of the topic as a means of accessing their own perspectives that were not informed by myself as the researcher. This approach attempts to avoid the issue of respondent conformity, where participants try to assist the researcher by adapting their responses in line with perceived aims of the research project (Hansen and Machin, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Additionally, participants were made aware of their right to retrieve consent, their anonymity, their consent to record the interview, and the sensitive topics that would be discussed in both the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form (see Appendix B and C).

The interview itself was then conducted in 4 stages. I began the interview with introductory questions to build rapport with the participants and put them at ease with the interview process. The questions were therefore very broad and non-threatening, covering their own experience of lockdown during the pandemic. I then moved on to discuss the impact of the NIVEA campaign on their own selves and ISR. I ensured I began the interview with open-ended and indirect questions to let the participants freely describe their first thoughts and opinions without my interference. Progressively, I then moved to more targeted and specific questions. Having gone through the impact of CSR on society, I then wanted to explore the success of the campaign through the marker of credibility. Finally, at the end of the interview, I provided space for interviewees to raise any questions or to discuss issues that they felt important, and that may not have been addressed in my interview questions.

After each interview, the conversation was immediately transcribed to keep the material fresh in mind and to immerse myself in the interview data. The transcriptions were then

analysed through coding, as I categorised the data by moving back and forth across the data, aiming to identify patterns, similarities, and differences that could be drawn (Berger, 2020). In order to create a strong analysis, I have analysed the transcripts in comparison with each other and as a whole. This allowed me to identify further overarching themes that I may have not seen through cross-sectional analysis alone. Finally, the analysis builds upon the existing academic literature, corroborating and extending pre-existing research. Firstly, I build on Yuhei and Aubrey's (2014) findings, examining the link between the NIVEA hub, credibility, and social and business returns. Finally, I build my analysis comparing the perception of the campaign to Du et al.'s (2010) conceptual framework of CSR communication, emphasising the importance of CSR fit, motive, impact, and commitment.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Reinforcing ISR Beyond the Singular Individual

In a pandemic, ISR is “manifested through responsible behaviour and interest to take an active and proactive role to purposefully help in confronting the challenges that our societies suffer from” (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020, p.293). However, the hardships of the COVID-19 situation aggravated through the lockdowns, has led to a wellbeing crisis that damages individuals’ ability and will to express ISR. Consequently, it is in the interest of society for companies to support and improve individual wellbeing so that individuals can advocate this sense of responsibility to others.

4.1.1. Pre-Existing Altruism

Prior to discussing the effects of the NIVEA campaign on participants’ ISR, it is crucial to consider how they perceived their own ISR during lockdowns. This provides insight into what pre-dispositions the campaign may have built upon. Across all the interview narratives, it became evident that participants recognised a sense of communal responsibility that came with abiding to the lockdown measures and regulations:

“[it] was kind of we’re all in this together and everybody’s going through it so just feeling like you’re not alone helps a lot” (Mary)

“I just thought we have to protect each other and we have to protect people that are vulnerable so I’m going to follow the rules” (Isabel)

Supporting this sense of collective responsibility, Madeline and James describe how this sense of solidarity and unity both online and offline, played a big part in helping them get through the lockdown, demonstrating ISR behaviours:

“I remember every night we would hear all the neighbours clapping and I mean we don't see them, but we knew that they were there which I think actually reminds us that we're kind of all in this together. I would also go on social media, and we would see people all over France doing the same thing and it actually kind of warms the heart to see that we're all in the same shitty situation and we're making the best of it” (Madeline)

“I think there was kind of the consensus that because everyone's doing it and everyone's making the sacrifice, it wasn't too hard because no one else was able to meet their friends, no one else was able to meet say their grandparents, everyone else was sticking by the regulations which made it easier” (James)

This sentiment of communal responsibility felt by the participants effectively corroborates Mihaela's (2018) definition of ISR as it is manifested through acceptance and implementation of the lockdown measures in order “to improve the lives of others in society” (p.17). Furthermore, by recognising this aspect of togetherness that arose during the lockdown, participants highlighted what Brooks et al. (2020) describe as an increase in altruism, when one feels that others can benefit from their own actions:

“Reinforcing that quarantine is helping to keep others safe (...) and that health authorities are genuinely grateful to them, can only help to reduce the mental health effect and adherence in those quarantined” (Brooks et al., 2020, p.8).

The presence of intrinsic altruism from participants prior to any effects of the campaign, conveys a strong base on which CSR can both nudge and profoundly impact individuals. This observation further highlights the interconnected relationship between ISR and CSR when creating a CSM campaign, as its primary objective “supports the development and/or implementation of a behavior change campaign intended to improve public health, safety, the environment, or community well-being” (Kotler and Lee, 2005, p.114). Additionally, this aligns with the overarching discourse of solidarity advocated by the government (Brooks et al., 2020) as the participants expressed how this communal responsibility benefited their lockdown experience. However, these benefits need to be weighed carefully against the many psychological effects that were felt by individuals during the lockdowns (Buheji et al., 2020a;

2020b; Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). Drawing on De Lima et al. (2020), the data supports their contention of the need to “develop and implement actions to minimize the population psychological distress” in a more sustainable manner, as altruism alone cannot be the driving force to strengthen ISR (p.254). Consequently, the *Care for Human Touch* campaign offers a more sustainable approach by providing individuals with the sufficient tools to become more resourceful, encouraging their will to exert ISR. This is done through the campaign’s multitude of sources, both academic and scientific, that provide knowledge on the wellbeing crisis that arose during COVID-19 lockdowns (NIVEA, 2022). As such, the campaign is arguably attempting to educate individuals about their own wellbeing, raising awareness around methods to strengthen their wellbeing. This is essential as ISR can only be performed by an individual that first and foremost exhibits positive behaviours towards their own wellbeing (Yoder, 2002).

4.1.2. Knowledge as a Powerful Tool

The success of the NIVEA campaign in helping spread awareness around the topic of loneliness and isolation stood out in the interview data since all participants claimed to have been surprised by some or most of the information shared. Beyond this awareness factor, a distinct theme of normalisation emerged. Throughout the interviews, the issue of feeling isolated and lonely was said to have been overlooked at the time; Millie and Madeline indicate that their feelings were disregarded during the lockdowns which made it difficult to manage their wellbeing:

“When you talked to other people, they were like it's fine everyone's going through this, which is supposed to help you but like it doesn't” (Millie)

“Not a lot of people were actually acknowledging that social isolation was actually affecting some people very badly, and I think during that time the people that were probably affected by the isolation couldn't really speak out on it because it wasn't received well, because I mean worse things were going on and you can't really talk about your own little problem when everyone is dying” (Madeline)

The silencing of discussions around wellbeing from a societal point of view during the extended period of lockdowns, was an unexpected finding as it is not addressed in the academic literature. However, it clearly demonstrates the need for larger entities to start a conversation around wellbeing. By doing so, corporations have the power to normalise the issue and subsequently provide solutions to help individuals become resilient throughout future lockdowns. This silencing around wellbeing can further be recognised from governments as the issue was not majorly addressed or acknowledged and limited actions were observed on a global scale regarding mental health and social isolation (De Lima et al., 2020). This was further observed by many participants who expressed a lack of acknowledgement and prevention on the topic of mental health and wellbeing during the lockdowns:

“Mental illness has also been raised as an issue resulting from COVID-19, but at the same time it's been overlooked, there's no real investment in mental health at all, it's always rather disinvestment” (Taylor)

Consequently, the NIVEA campaign was received by participants as a much-needed source of knowledge to help normalise an important issue that had not been sufficiently addressed. Beyond normalising the issue, some participants also acknowledged that they felt the information on the NIVEA hub validated how they personally felt during the multiple lockdowns. Millie explains how helpful it was to hear that her experience was not unique:

“The fact that there's also other people out of that close circle and that there's actually studies and stuff that validates that really helps”

Concurrently, Mary highlights how the campaign helped her make sense of her feelings as she gained a better understanding of the universal nature of loneliness and isolation, which in turn, helped her accept that her feelings were a normal consequence from the lockdown:

“It just feels like a bit reassuring that we all have this baseline and we’re all kind of similar in the way we react to things that are universally happening to all of us”

The NIVEA campaign evidently helped raise awareness of this issue for participants, which arguably supported their understanding of the impact of loneliness and isolation on their own wellbeing during and after the lockdowns. By making sense of this affective dimension, some participants expressed feeling like they held tools to manage a next lockdown and become more resilient:

“Just being aware of your feelings and how they can affect you and how your small actions can influence those feelings, it really helps” (Mary)

“Seeing kind of it put into perspective from different groups and different professionals from different backgrounds makes it easier to understand and easier to feel like you're not alone in feeling this way or you shouldn't feel guilty about wanting it” (Nicole)

In the context of COVID-19, the NIVEA campaign demonstrates its capacity to raise awareness around wellbeing for the participants, informing their ability to make sense of their feelings at the time. This links back to the ineludible need for a strong wellbeing to support and exert ISR behaviours (Brooks et al., 2020; Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). The NIVEA campaign is thus arguably influencing participants’ ISR by giving them the tools to “possess adequate awareness and exhibit positive behaviours towards their own wellbeing” (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020, p.295). This significant factor highlights the power of corporations to positively impact on society, in turn, strengthening their role in doing so. As such, NIVEA has displayed the power of CSR through CSM campaigns as they possess the capacity to help societal issues in a truly impactful manner. This positions CSR as a plausible solution, capable of reinforcing ISR

within the corporate realm and highlights the campaign's successful strategy. Concurrently, the intertwined relationship between CSR and ISR underscored by Mihaela (2018) is put forward, as one is effectively influencing the other.

4.1.3. Helping Yourself and Others

Interestingly, the campaign's disparate effect on participants stood out in the interview data. This pointed to a contingency between participants' pre-dispositions and the way they perceived the information. Participants who did not previously uphold physical touch as an important factor for personal wellbeing and were not significantly impacted by the pandemic, did not feel personally affected by the contents of the NIVEA hub. Nevertheless, whilst all participants were not similarly impacted by the pandemic, they all recognised that it impacted people they knew. This was further reinforced by the campaign as it shed light on the scope of its impact on others:

"I always knew that touch was kind of important and I think, you know, throughout the campaign I understood that people couldn't touch each other as much, that makes a lot of sense. But to think about the implications of that is quite new to me" (Joe)

"I really liked the fact that this was recognised, and I can associate with touch, but I can also see that a lot of people around me are very associated to touch and I realised how important it can be which opened my eyes to that" (Nathan)

By raising awareness around this topic through the NIVEA digital hub, participants who claimed to have felt negative effects of the pandemic and a lack of physical touch, expressed a connection to the issue. Concurrently, those who were not significantly affected understood the importance of the issue vicariously through their loved ones. The significant impact of the information was thus highlighted through its power to raise awareness around loneliness and isolation for all participants regardless of their pre-dispositions. In conjunction with this asset,

ISR was then expressed through participants' desire to advocate for these topics by actively sharing this information with people they knew needed help:

“[sharing] the link to people was the first thing I wanted to do because I know some people have expressed exactly that feeling of needing more touch, and to me that's one more link to validate their feelings” (Taylor)

Contradicting this positive ripple effect on ISR, some participants discussed limitations to sharing this information that were linked to their personal situations. These participants explained how they would not share this information with others because they did not know anyone in their close circle that needed to hear this information. Consequently, this demonstrates a contingency between participants' willingness to share this knowledge and, therefore, express their ISR and their own personal situation:

“I think that I mostly know people who are naturally touchy and that's the issue as well, I think that I don't know many people that are very isolated in life so the people I interact with directly in my life at the moment are people who are naturally very social and touchy. So yeah, I wouldn't share the campaign to help them because I don't think they would need it” (Peter)

Essentially, the NIVEA hub can be said to have increased participants' respective ISR through a strengthening of their own wellbeing and a partial increased willingness to share the information they learned. This reinforces what Buheji et al. (2020a) deem “psychological support strategies” to help the wellbeing crisis that is inadvertently affecting ISR. Whilst the study does recognise the limited power on ISR that is contingent to participants' own personal situation in terms of advocating ISR behaviour to others, this can be countered by the power of the campaign to raise awareness for every participant. As such, the NIVEA campaign is a successful CSR strategy as it reinforces ISR within the context of a lockdown.

4.2. Defining Success Through Credibility

Having demonstrated how the NIVEA campaign contributes towards positively impacting society through its ability to reinforce participants' ISR, the findings now focus on the impact the campaign has on NIVEA as a business. Academic literature links CSR success to its ability to increase credibility and minimise scepticism (Du et al., 2010; Yuhei and Aubrey, 2014). Predicated on Du et al.'s (2010) model underscoring CSR fit, motive, impact, and commitment, the campaign attributes were evaluated to determine the level of credibility perceived by participants.

4.2.1. Going Above and Beyond

The participants' first impression of the campaign was based on the level of effort invested in the CSM initiative. Also known as 'CSR commitment' (Du et al., 2010), this attribute was recognised by all participants as they expressed how NIVEA had dedicated time, effort, and resources to produce a campaign of great quality:

“[due] to the fact they quoted some real statistics from real research, and they used real people's experiences and professionals, I think that makes it a bit more trustworthy because you do see lots of campaigns just doing CSR, and they don't really mean it, but I got a more genuine feel from NIVEA” (James)

“[seeing] statistics and research being done, it kind of validates this feeling as a true symptom and as more of a physical thing. If you see that something has research put into it, it really does give it more credibility” (Nicole)

The NIVEA campaign incorporates many aspects including statistics, reports, and professional interviews (NIVEA, 2022). The scientific and evidence-based knowledge demonstrates an authentic involvement from the brand, creating a sense of commitment, and thus reinforcing its credibility as a source of information for participants. This in turn has positive

repercussions on the business as participants expressed that they trusted NIVEA to share this information. These positive repercussions on the brand NIVEA were highlighted by Nicole who explains how this effort reinforced her positive image of NIVEA as a caring brand which was further carried onto their products:

“Through this campaign it made me feel like they were putting more care into the products than before, which I know probably isn't the most true, but it felt like through them understanding and valuing this concept of loneliness, they project that onto their products, which I think made me appreciate and value that more than I did before”

By demonstrating their CSR commitment to the cause of wellbeing during COVID-19, NIVEA has essentially created a caring persona for participants. Subsequently, this brand positioning benefits the company on two levels. Firstly, NIVEA successfully portrays a caring persona that has a positive ripple effect on the perception of their products, and subsequently on their sales and long-term brand image. This corroborates Kotler and Lee's (2005) analysis of CSM campaigns as they explain these corporate strategies have benefits such as “strengthening brand positioning, creating brand preference, building traffic, and increasing sales” (p.143). A second level of success can be identified as the campaign reinforced Nicole's trust towards NIVEA. This in turn has positive repercussions on participants' acceptance of an ISR message as “the effectiveness of CSM depends largely on the corporate credibility of a company in supporting a social cause” (Yuhei and Aubrey, 2014, p.623). As such, high credibility in the company results in high acceptance of ISR behaviours.

Conversely, other participants acknowledged how they questioned the sincerity of the campaign, demonstrating their awareness of the business-led motives that drive these CSR campaigns, notably during the COVID-19 crisis:

“I think it's good to have these kinds of articles and for them to have real stories and research, and then not necessarily be pushing you to buy things which this campaign is not doing. I guess for me, a campaign is good if it appears genuine because lots of campaigns are just faces to sell you more things or greenwash other issues” (James)

“[when] you hear about it from a corporate side, you're kind of thinking okay, this is good stuff but are you just doing this for PR, are you just doing this for other reasons. It's a really good message, but then you just try to think because it's a big brand they could have some kind of agenda. I guess you could think they're kind of exploiting the pandemic and this situation but they're also just talking about something that's very important and relevant and trying to protect people's wellbeing.” (Joe)

In these two accounts, James and Joe inadvertently highlight the concept of carewashing (Chatzidakis and Littler, 2021), establishing it as a significant indicator of mistrust from consumers. Countering this however, the participants equally explain how the NIVEA campaign successfully showcases its commitment to increasing people's wellbeing, enhancing their positive perception of the brand and the message. This was further expressed by Peter who underlines how NIVEA's investment in the project further contributed to reducing his doubts about the sincerity of the campaign:

“At first I saw the motives, but then after, as I was reading through the campaign, I thought it was very interesting because obviously the people who are interviewed by NIVEA and who participate in the research with NIVEA, are people who are very motivated and passionate about the topic. I think that when you read what these people have to say, you don't really think about the marketing and stuff.”

Through this first indicator of CSR success, NIVEA can be seen to have effectively encouraged credibility and minimised scepticism, reaping business-related benefits as NIVEA is seen as a caring brand (Kotler and Lee, 2005; Yuhei and Aubrey, 2014). Additionally, this profit can be simultaneously linked to its benefit on society, as higher trust resulted in higher acceptance of the message. This highlights what Yuhei and Aubrey (2014) point to as a mutually beneficial outcome when CSR focuses on both business and social returns. As such, through the indicator of CSR commitment, the NIVEA campaign has proven to be successful on a business

level as it diminishes scepticism and increases credibility, and subsequently on a societal level, as this enables the positive reinforcement of ISR behaviours.

4.2.2. A Lack of Apparent Commercial Intentions

When a company creates a CSR campaign, pushing forward value-driven motives as opposed to profit-making motives is essential. Also known as 'CSR motive' (Du et al., 2010), NIVEA has arguably strengthened this campaign attribute by removing any evident branding elements and products within the campaign materials. This was emphasised by participants as they agreed minimal to no commercial efforts were visible throughout the entirety of the campaign. Madeline even compares the campaign to a blog, underlining how this lack of commercial presentation impacted her own perception of the campaign materials and her overall trust towards NIVEA:

"When I was going through the pages and stuff, it was actually pretty disconnected from the commercial side of NIVEA. It actually looked like a blog and when I was going through the pages, there were no ads, no images of products, which actually builds a lot of trust and you feel like okay, I'm actually reading something that's going to educate me and not like brainwash me into buying NIVEA stuff."

Similarly, this was observed by Nicole, who details how this lack of commercial intention made her feel like NIVEA cares about her own wellbeing:

"If the NIVEA campaign was saying, we need physical touch, and a way to improve physical touch is having really soft skin, and using this cream or that cream, then that loses instantly a lot of credibility because you can see the ulterior motive and it makes you feel like you're being used through this campaign to buy certain products. However, because there's no mention of that with NIVEA, it just feels like they're trying to care for their customers to make sure that they're happy and prospering"

By reinforcing a strong CSR motive, and equally a strong CSR commitment as I have previously discussed, the NIVEA campaign is demonstrating how it is not simply carewashing the topic of wellbeing, but rather, it is actively addressing emergent social issues in a pandemic context.

Whilst carewashing can be understood as a process in which “corporations are attempting to capitalise on crisis” (p.6), the NIVEA hub has arguably gone beyond commercial intentions, focusing on the cause at hand as any commercial elements have been majorly reduced or removed. The emphasis on CSR motive can thus be connected to the complementarity between societal and business needs and returns theorised by Yuhei and Aubrey (2014). Based upon these outcomes, it can be suggested that whilst companies evidently have business-led motives, a stronger emphasis should be placed upon the social cause as it will eventually lead to a positive business outcome. The strong relationship between societal and business outcomes is apparent in the interview data as a lack of pursuit towards commercial activity positively affected participants’ perception of the brand NIVEA. Additionally, by prioritising societal benefits, this reduces the likelihood of harmful consequences that attend a lack of investment in a social issue. Consequently, these findings further build upon Yuhei and Aubrey’s (2014) theory, championing how CSM can serve a dual goal incorporating both the business and society.

4.2.3. Brand Congruity with the Cause

Companies gain higher credibility when they support a social cause that is congruent with their brand image and products (Du et al., 2010). Also known as ‘CSR fit’, this factor was demonstrated in the data as all participants highlighted a link between the brand NIVEA and the topic of loneliness and isolation. This can be seen by Nicole, as she underscores the strong brand congruence between the topic chosen by NIVEA and the brand itself:

“I think it's very much connected to the brand as I've always seen their products as connecting people together (...) I also think them addressing human touch is very well linked to that, because they've always been trying to connect people through human touch for a while just from a different perspective. To me that's very much part of

their brand and it's not like they're trying to rebrand really quickly due to pandemic, it felt like a very natural progression of their brand into something a bit more serious.”

As such, Nicole highlights how NIVEA has built upon its established brand attributes (Keller, 2003), notably through the campaign's strong link to 'universality'. This is achieved through NIVEA's discussion of a universally felt sentiment (loneliness) during a universally felt experience (COVID-19). Additionally, Nicole explains how normal it felt to see this campaign coming from NIVEA, as it felt like a natural progression from the brand into a more serious topic. This highlights the impact of the pandemic upon businesses as it pushed brands to address unconventional topics whilst using CSR (He and Harris, 2020). In doing so, NIVEA has arguably done a successful job as they found an angle that links the contemporary events of the pandemic to their brand seamlessly.

Furthermore, beyond perceived brand congruence, Madeline underlines how this campaign influenced her perception of the brand as a trustworthy source of information, positively reinforcing NIVEA's brand image:

“A campaign like this definitely builds interest and respect for the brand, which is a lot more important than building trust in the products I think. It builds trust and respect and an awareness for this brand, and it also builds a very good brand image which can be linked to its products”

As such, Madeline demonstrates how brand congruence played a major role in increasing her credibility of the brand, going as far as to relating that trust towards NIVEA's products. This links back to Nicole's perception of NIVEA as a caring brand with caring products through their portrayal of a strong CSR commitment. Essentially, this highlights the ability to reach consumers in different ways through different CSR attributes, as various participants valued similar and dissimilar qualities of the campaign. As such, NIVEA has the power to reach and affect consumers by working on all campaign attributes.

In sum, by choosing to advocate for a topic that is heavily linked to their brand's ethos and attributes, NIVEA has successfully positioned itself as a trusted source of credible information for the respective participants. NIVEA's dedication to strengthening CSR fit strongly benefited their brand as participants expressed trusting NIVEA to share a message about social isolation during the pandemic. Subsequently, this benefits ISR as higher credibility results in higher acceptance of the message, demonstrating once again how companies should put emphasis on both the business and society equally (Yuhei and Aubrey, 2014).

4.2.4. Actions Beyond Words

As previously discussed, the findings suggest there is a consensus that the campaign successfully helped raise awareness, which in turn, helped participants' own wellbeing and ergo, their ability to express ISR during lockdowns. Contrastingly, numerous participants suggested there was a lack of tangible solutions offered by the campaign, demonstrating a significant limitation:

“[for] me this is a nice concept, but I don't understand how they want to apply the concepts in a practical way to practical matters. I don't necessarily promote something without understanding what's behind it” (Nathan)

“I didn't really see how NIVEA was taking action, so I think maybe there would be more trust if there was more visible action” (Peter)

Nathan and Peter raised important concerns linked to this lack of tangible impacts; they do not wish to promote a campaign that has not sufficiently impacted them and do not trust NIVEA as much if there is no concrete action on their part. The actions expected, ranged from suggesting resources to contact, to having a detailed support strategy explained on the NIVEA hub. This lack of what Du et al. (2010) name 'CSR impact', is problematic as it prevents trust towards the campaign and by extension, the brand. Whilst some participants did recognise

the campaign helped to a certain extent, for others, that impact was not deemed significant enough. This highlights the cruciality of having a strong CSR impact as it is a valued campaign attribute for participants, and as such, should not be overlooked.

Contrasting this lack of CSR impact, Taylor and Nicole express their differing views on the topic, explaining they did not want a corporation to provide solutions to this issue:

“I think what they've done with the research is great, it's a start. It's not the full solution and the full picture, but the solution can't come from them, that's not their business, that's not their core, who they are, what they do, or what their business is about” (Taylor)

“I think the good thing that NIVEA does is that it doesn't provide a solution, it just raises awareness. I think as soon as a company starts providing a solution, especially if it links back to them and their profits, that's when the customers lose that value and respect towards the company.” (Nicole)

These differing opinions and responses put into question the role of companies as communicators and actors of the social world. Chatzidakis and Littler (2021) discuss the growing power of corporations in taking responsibility on a global scale to tackle key social, environmental, and economic issues. This topic was picked up by Madeline who points out the power of CSR to positively impact both society and the brand:

“I think on subjects like COVID-19, it's a perfect subject because it affects everyone, and there's nothing political about it. I think companies should definitely take part in those kinds of debates, like social issues such as domestic violence or LGBTQ issues. All those kinds of societal subjects that are not talked about much should be endorsed by big companies because it improves their brand image, and it puts the debate forward and it makes it legitimate.”

Madeline's view thus corroborates with that of Chatzidakis and Littler (2021), emphasising the huge potential and power corporations uphold to support social causes, such as wellbeing during a pandemic. This responsibility essentially demonstrates the need for companies to act within the interest of society. However, as Yuhei and Aubrey (2014) have similarly argued,

encouraging societal benefits does not obviate business returns. Companies should thus combine their business and societal efforts equally to create a campaign that can be mutually beneficial for both parties.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to contribute to the media and communication discipline by seeking to understand how the CSR *Care for Human Touch* campaign by NIVEA is received by audiences. In order to do so, the following questions were answered **(1)** Is the *Care for Human Touch* campaign by NIVEA a successful CSR strategy? **(a)** Can it reinforce ISR within the context of a lockdown? **(b)** Can it reinforce positive attitudes towards NIVEA as a business? Grounded on academic theory, the research made use of semi-structured one-to-one interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how audiences construct meaning around CSR campaigns. Thereby, using thematic analysis, the study has identified and presented several key themes highlighting how the NIVEA campaign has positively impacted ISR and NIVEA interchangeably.

5.1. Summary of Findings

Building upon research in the field and my own data, firstly, I have found the campaign demonstrates a successful reinforcement of participants' ISR. The NIVEA campaign was built upon a base of pre-existing altruism, as individuals already felt a sense of responsibility throughout lockdowns. However, as the academic literature has demonstrated, intrinsic altruism alone is not strong enough to drive ISR, and as such, must be coupled with other factors (Brooks et al., 2020). Consequently, the campaign reinforces wellbeing as this factor has been weakened throughout lockdowns (Ebrahim and Buheji, 2020). This is achieved through the resources on the NIVEA digital hub shedding light onto the impact of loneliness and isolation for all participants. Furthermore, I have found that beyond strengthening individual wellbeing, the NIVEA campaign encouraged participants to share this information

with others. As such, the NIVEA campaign is successful on a societal level as it encouraged ISR by strengthening individual wellbeing and encouraging participants to advocate this sense of ISR to others. A second part of this study focused on audience perception of the brand NIVEA, and thus the effects of the campaign on a business level. Building upon Yuhei and Aubrey's (2014) findings, as well as Du et al.'s (2010) theoretical model, I have identified four key aspects reinforcing positive perceptions of the brand NIVEA. These factors were evaluated through the marker of credibility, as consumer scepticism is the most significant impediment to the success of CSR initiatives (Du et al., 2010; Yuhei and Aubrey, 2014). As such, the NIVEA campaign has pushed credibility forward through its effective work on CSR commitment, motive, fit, and impact. The campaign has firstly demonstrated its commitment to the cause through extensive research and credible professional sources that were perceived by participants as evidence of strong engagement in relations to the cause. Secondly, the lack of commercial intentions throughout the NIVEA digital hub, were picked up by participants who explained the initiative did not seem as leveraging profit-making opportunities. Thirdly, brand congruity was acknowledged, linking the topic of loneliness and lack of human contact to the brand NIVEA. Finally, NIVEA's impact was disparately judged as some participants highlighted a lack of concrete actions resulting in a lack of trust. These findings were anomalous as they revealed reactions that were not expected. However, this can be contrasted with other participants who explained not expecting a company to provide solutions, deeming the CSR impact successful.

Overall, all the campaign attributes (CSR commitment, motive, fit, and impact) were perceived as significant for all participants when deeming the campaign credible and subsequently trusting the message and the brand. However, interestingly, the disparate

reactions to certain attributes such as CSR impact, highlights the necessity to firmly dedicate effort and engagement for every campaign attribute uniformly as some members of the audience may value and trust certain characteristics more than others. Nevertheless, this campaign demonstrated strong credibility as participants expressed trusting both the company and the message overall. This highlights Yuhei and Aubrey's (2014) findings, as they assert companies have the power to influence audience behaviour in terms of both social and business benefits by placing an emphasis on credibility. Indeed, when participants expressed that they found the NIVEA campaign credible, this was accompanied by a higher acceptance of the message and higher trust towards the company. As such, the campaign was successful as it impacted on participants' ISR and reinforced or created a positive brand image for participants. One conclusion applicable to the combination of business and social returns, is the overall potential of corporations as actors in the social world. This builds upon Chatzidakis and Littler (2022) who aver companies have an increasingly powerful role in society, even surpassing that of governmental institutions. The authority upheld by corporations thus further underlines the significance of studying the topic of CSR in academia, notably in relations to COVID-19 where there is a significant lack of empirical evidence on how companies should respond to the pandemic in a successful way (Mahmud et al., 2021). As such, my study has contributed to the academic field of CSR communication in hopes of demonstrating how CSR can be used to positively impact both a business and society equally.

5.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study focuses on ten in-depth qualitative interviews, providing rich textual data that illuminates the CSR attributes that can be used to create a campaign, benefitting both the

business and society. However, it is important to recognise the limits of this research as it focused on a single campaign, interviewing a small sample of participants. As such, my findings are not generalisable to the wider population of the NIVEA campaign audiences, and simply provide a snapshot of the ways in which audiences understand and make meaning of CSR campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this research has shown that there is much scope for further development of this topic. Therefore, with additional resources, future research in this area could focus on a project that would explore the perception of CSR campaigns aiming to reinforce ISR, looking at a wider sample of the population to gain a wider canvas of views and create more generalisable findings. It could also be interesting to compare demographic characteristics to compare and contrast gender, age, and ethnicity in audience responses. Finally, research could be done to analyse audience perception of a wider sample of campaigns, reinforcing the generalisability factor.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Interview guide

Time per interview – 30:00-60:00

A. Introductory questions and understanding the experience of COVID-19/ lockdown measures

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your living situation during one of the COVID-19 lockdowns?

[Probe: how many people were in the household; what were the living arrangements; how often did they go outside, talk, or interact with the members of that household; were they still working and participating in their usual activities online]

2. How did you find sticking to the rules and regulations around the lockdown measures?
[Probe: did they follow the restrictions willingly; did they feel a sense of communal responsibility; did they ignore all protocols because it was too much]

3. Did you feel like the lockdown measures and this new way of life affected your wellbeing in anyway?
[Probe: when did they feel those feelings (start, middle, end); how often; did it impact their day-to-day life and relationships (work, friends, family)]

4. Did you feel like anything could help you manage your feelings and wellbeing at the time?
[Probe: did they create their own coping strategies; did they change their behaviour or the way they communicated and interacted with the other members of their household; can they name any strategies led by the government or companies that helped]

B. Questions about the link between ISR and the CSR campaign by NIVEA

1. Having gone through the NIVEA *Care for Human Touch* digital hub, what are your initial thoughts on the campaign?
[Probe: what did they look at first; was there a particular source of information that was helpful/ stood out to them]

2. Do you find the campaign interesting?
[Probe: what stood out to them; what about it made them feel like that (reports, interviews, general digital hub)]

3. Do you feel like this information shared by NIVEA is useful in the overall context of a lockdown?
[Probe: can it help with their wellbeing and happiness; what on the digital hub made them think that; what aspect of a lockdown would it be useful in]

4. Do you feel like the website might be useful in relation to what you were experiencing in lockdown?

[Probe: relate to the start of the interview and how they experienced lockdown; how could it help them]

5. Do you feel like a campaign like this that's promoting touch and possibly ways in which we might deal with lockdowns and COVID-19, could help you manage a next lockdown in anyway?

[Probe: could it make them more resilient in the face of another lockdown]

6. Would you share this campaign with other friends or family?

[Probe: would they want to help others be more resilient as well; would it help them enough to want to share this information with others]

7. Would you look for a campaign like NIVEA's again?

[Probe: if they found it interesting and useful would they take a look at other campaigns from NIVEA or from another company]

C. Questions about the credibility of the campaign

1. Did this campaign make you feel like NIVEA cares about you and more specifically your wellbeing whether it be in relation to lockdown or more in general?

[Probe: what made them think that; does this aspect of care reflect on the brand itself (do they see it as a caring brand?)]

2. Did you feel like it made sense for NIVEA to be discussing the lockdown and physical touch?

[Probe: Does the message seem compatible with the company NIVEA; do they see an association between skin/touch and NIVEA; do they trust NIVEA to share this message and help others]

3. Are there any other companies that you came across that had a similar kind of campaign in the context of COVID-19?

[Probe: Can they remember any other CSR campaigns that helped them manage their wellbeing that was helpful; what was it about those campaigns that worked (or not)]

4. How would you situate NIVEA's campaign in relation to the other campaign(s) you just discussed?

[Probe: what has NIVEA done right (or wrong); it is the choice of message, the type of communication]

5. Should companies be participating in the discussion and using their platform to spread information linked to the crisis or other societal issues?

[Probe: are they doing a better (or worse) job than governments and scientists]

D. Questions about their thoughts on it all

1. Do you have any more questions?
2. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet for a final year student dissertation project: Strengthening individual social responsibility through human touch

Thank you for taking the time to read this participant information sheet. You are being invited to take part in my dissertation research project from the University of Leeds. Before you decide to take part in this project, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the project?

The aim of my research is to study the subject of marketing and its link to social issues, notably how companies take a standpoint within the context of COVID-19 and its link to individuals' awareness and subsequent actions taken to benefit all aspects of society. I will be observing this through the case study of the NIVEA *Care for Human Touch* campaign. The project is being carried out during my last academic year and will end mid-May when the Dissertation will be examined.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been selected for my project as I want to interview a range of views from people who have lived through a lockdown in a shared household. I will be interviewing 9 other candidates with similar experiences and within different demographics.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Please be aware that you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to browse the *Care for Human Touch* digital hub and explore the website before the interview. Please feel free to note down any reflexions or thoughts linked to the website section. The interview itself will be like a conversation where we will go through the research project, and I will ask some questions relevant to your own experiences during quarantine and your thoughts on the NIVEA campaign. The interview will take 30-60 minutes.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The interview process will take place online via Zoom so that I can save a transcript of our conversation if you consent to it. Once I have your agreement, I will be using the audio recordings of the interview made during this research for analysis and for illustration for my dissertation project. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. The recordings will then be deleted immediately after I have transcribed the data. Your identity will not be revealed in this research project, and your responses will be anonymised.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Some of the topics addressed can be sensitive to discuss. Here is a list of potentially sensitive topics: wellbeing, isolation, sadness, loneliness, lockdown, and COVID-19. Please let me know prior to our discussion if there are any topics you do not wish to discuss, and I will take that into account. During the interview, you do not have to answer a question if you prefer not to.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will participate to understand the link between businesses and individuals during the COVID-19 crisis. It is also hoped that you will enjoy taking part in this discussion by sharing your views.

What will happen to the results of the research project? What will happen to my personal information?

Any contact information such as your email address kept during the course of the research will be strictly confidential and stored separately from the research data in a password protected University of Leeds storage facility. When my dissertation has been examined, I will delete all data related to your interview and participation. I will take steps wherever possible to anonymise the research data so that you will not be identified in any reports or publications. The data will be used for my dissertation project in the form of quotes and general information.

Who is organising/ funding the research?

This project is a final year dissertation for the completion of a BA in Communication and Media. Consequently, no one is funding my research and I am the only person working on this study.

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me via the following:

Email address: me19as@leeds.ac.uk

You can also contact the module leader for the Dissertation project Giles Moss:

Email address: g.s.moss@leeds.ac.uk

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Consent form for final year student dissertation project: Strengthening individual social responsibility through human touch

	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 20 th March 2022 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason/ until the 18 th of May 2022 and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Anouk Stricher contact information: me19as@leeds.ac.uk If I want to withdraw from this study, my data will be immediately deleted and will not be used for the purpose of this research or any other research.	
I understand that the student researcher and the dissertation examiners may have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by the dissertation examiners from the School of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the student researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of researcher	
Signature	
Date	

Appendix D: Participant information and interview details

Number	Name*	Age	Interview Length
1	Nicole	21	54:41
2	Mary	21	33:15
3	Nathan	53	31:15
4	Peter	22	31:47
5	Taylor	49	31:00
6	James	22	33:21
7	Madeline	20	42:32
8	Isabel	57	34:14
9	Millie	21	37:40
10	Joe	22	38:40

*All names have been changed with pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants

Appendix E: Sample Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Mary (Pseudonym)

Interviewer: Anouk

Date and time: 30 March 2022, 33:15

Location: Virtually, via Zoom

Anouk

So, could you tell me a little bit about yourself and your living situation during one of the COVID-19 lockdowns?

Mary

Right. So most of the COVID time happened during my second year and I was living with three of my good friends at the time. We shared a house together and then by the end of, I'd say winter 2021, I started living with my boyfriend. So yeah, that was kind of my situation back then, I was living with my mates and then my boyfriend, I was switching between my boyfriend's accommodation and our house basically.

Anouk

So would you say the main people you were talking to during the lockdown were the members within your household and your boyfriend?

Mary

Yeah, and a couple of my friends.

Anouk

Were you still working and participating in your usual activities even if they switched online?

Mary

Well, I was participating in the lectures at uni or online labs or tutorials that we had but it definitely did not feel the same, and I felt like my work didn't necessarily have a purpose or a real outcome. Every time I would do it, I felt like it would be futile, so it did influence the way I was participating but I did try to still join in my lectures and keep up with everything. It was really confusing at times because everything was online, every lecture had a different style of sending the links to join the lectures to us, so we had to dig deep to find where to go and join and it was a bit frustrating.

Anouk

And in terms of communicating with people outside of that circle, so family back home or anything like that, did you find it difficult or different?

Mary

I mean it didn't really feel different because it was the same as my first year with my family or my friends back at home, I would still communicate with them digitally. In fact, very rarely I would go back at home for a weekend to see them physically, so that didn't really make a difference. It was more the group of people that I formed in Leeds, the group of friends that

I had that I couldn't see anymore. So outside of the really close circle and the people I was living with, yeah, I didn't really communicate with many people.

Anouk

Yeah, was it difficult to not be able to communicate with those people?

Mary

Definitely, especially the people on my course because it's not that I have really close friends on my course but every time I'm comparing it now that I have lectures in uni on campus to how it was in second year, it feels so much better after a lecture in person where you see you talk to different people and you kind of share the experiences that you had in the past couple of days. It's always really comforting to see what they're up to with like certain work or what they're doing with applications for placements. Even just having conversations, it's much more easy to approach someone.

Anouk

And even if it was quite difficult to, as you said, talk to people online, did you still try to reach out to them?

Mary

Yeah definitely, I mean digital media is a big part of everyone's lives right now so yeah, I would even if it was just sending a joke to someone, or FaceTiming them, I was still trying to do that otherwise I would feel really lonely.

Anouk

And with your family, did you feel like you reached out to them more?

Mary

I didn't, kind of the opposite happened because since I started dating my boyfriend I had him 24/7 with me and it was a bit easier to have someone close to me especially physically. So I would still communicate with my family of course, but it wasn't with a scope off feeling better.

Anouk

And you mentioned right before that sometimes you were feeling a bit lonely, did you feel like the lockdown measures and this new way of life affected your wellbeing?

Mary

Definitely, 100%. I do consider that my second year of uni was the worst year of my life probably mentally speaking. I didn't really quite grasp the effect it had on me until things kind of went back to normal and I started seeing my friends again. I remembered, oh my god this is how it feels like to actually communicate with people and to be around them. It's definitely not the same thing being in a Team's call or just hanging out with your friends in person.

Anouk

And so did you feel like you started to feel those feelings more towards the start towards the middle or the end?

Mary

I think it was right at the beginning of November when I remember that one of my housemates tested positive so we had to isolate for 10 days. I did catch it as well because I lost my sense of taste, but my symptoms weren't necessarily very intense, it was just that I was feeling fatigue and nausea all the time. By the time it ended, mentally I was really down. I remember I had a deadline, and it was a group project and I didn't have the energy to collaborate or to participate the way I wanted to so I really felt really bad. But yeah, I think that was the start of me noticing things were different.

Anouk

Did you feel like anything could help you manage your feelings and your wellbeing at the time during the lockdown?

Mary

I was going on a lot of walks with my housemates, and I think the fact that I had my really close friend as a housemate and my boyfriend as well helped a lot because it was kind of we're all in this together and everybody's going through it so just feeling like you're not alone helps a lot.

Anouk

Could you name any strategies led by the government or campaigns from companies that helped you at the time?

Mary

Yeah, nothing comes to my mind right now, I don't think there was anything.

Anouk

So do you feel like most of the habits that you started to take like going on walks was more coming from your own initiative?

Mary

Yeah, it was inherent motivation that I had, it wasn't anything from the outside.

Anouk

Okay, so now I'm going to move on to the *Care for Human Touch* hub. So I'll start with more kind of general questions, and then we'll go into more specific ones. So, having gone through the NIVEA *Care for Human Touch* hub, are there any initial thoughts on the campaign that you have?

Mary

Other than the fact that I've read through the reports and looked at the numbers, it seems like they're very sensible and realistic. It does not surprise me that of course loneliness affects us in significant amounts.

Anouk

So, you mentioned the reports, were you more drawn to the reports, rather than for example, the interviews?

Mary

Yeah I think so, that's probably the engineering part of my brain. I don't know why I looked at them but yeah, that's the first thing that I noticed.

Anouk

Do you think there's a specific reason?

Mary

I don't necessarily look at statistics all the time but seeing a number put in a certain context tells a lot to me, even through the experiences of people and how they phrase things, that speaks to me as well.

Anouk

So, did you feel like you could relate to anything that was said on the website?

Mary

Definitely, loneliness and isolation affect us and how it affects us, that's very relatable.

Anouk

And did you feel like what was said kind of validated how you felt during the lockdown because you said how you felt demotivated and isolated?

Mary

Yeah definitely, it confirmed a lot of things.

Anouk

And how did that make you feel?

Mary

It just feels like a bit reassuring that we all have this baseline and we're all kind of similar in the way we react to things that are universally happening to all of us.

Anouk

Do you feel like this information shared by NIVEA could be useful in the overall context of the lockdown?

Mary

I think yeah, it definitely could because I feel like people don't realise what we've been through globally in the past two years. I was actually talking to my therapist a while ago, and I was telling him that I can't remember what context I found myself in where there were a lot of new people that I didn't know and it felt like I didn't have anything to share with them or I forgot how to connect with people or how to bring up interesting subjects of discussion and it felt really weird. I think we're kind of ignoring that thing, we're seeing it as if it's weird that it's happening but we're forgetting the fact that in the past few years, we actually didn't have human contact at all, and he did tell me that a lot of his clients are experiencing this so it's interesting to analyse. Also, I feel like many people don't actually see the big picture and the

fact that we have this history and the past few years that we should not take for granted and we should definitely address the fact that we've been through these really shitty times and we should think of ways in which us as a community, like a global community, could aid that or help make it better.

Anouk

And so, do you feel like the campaign is helping?

Mary

Yeah, I feel like it's definitely helping because it's bringing awareness to the fact that this is a consequence of being isolated for so much time and we shouldn't treat it as if it's supposed to be like this after things are going to go back to normal or it's supposed to stay like this forever because it shouldn't. Even though some things can work, even maybe better online, that doesn't mean that we should keep this the way that we're doing things because it's not the quality of life that I want and probably most people want for their lives as well.

Anouk

And so, you put an emphasis on the fact that raising awareness around that kind of topic and normalising it is really important. In a way, the information on the hub could help you perhaps even support that strategy that you had put in place to, for example, go on walks. Do you think that with more awareness about what you were feeling and the fact that it was normal would have helped?

Mary

Yeah, definitely. Just being aware of your feelings and how they can affect you and how your small actions can influence those feelings, it really helps. I feel like it's really important because it's really easy to just stay in your bubble, even during lockdowns. You could go on walks if you wanted to so you could still go outside and go for walks and not giving up on the different strategies that you mentioned to help you cope with things because, as I said, like staying in the bubble, it could just lead to hiding behind the fact that this lockdown is happening and that you're allowed to feel sad but you should also try to minimise those feelings and not linger in them.

Anouk

And in minimising those feelings, in one of the interviews, Derrek Feldmann who's one of the interviewees, he discusses this thing called the 'loneliness paradox' which is how taking that initiative to reach out to others when you're feeling lonely is really difficult, so sometimes we as a society can help share awareness around that topic. Do you think we as a society can help raise awareness to help?

Mary

Yeah, I definitely agree with the fact that it can be really difficult. Even I'm experiencing those types of things when I'm agreeing to doing something with a friend and then by the time there's an hour left before going out I don't feel like going out anymore. Although it's a healthy thing to do and I know that I will feel better after doing it, it's uncomfortable but it brings you a lot of benefits.

Anouk

What NIVEA is already doing on the hub, do you think that's a good step?

Mary

Yeah, definitely. It just informs people about the fact that they're not alone and everyone is experiencing these things so it's valuable to read and get educated on these things.

Anouk

And do you think you'd share this campaign with other friends and family?

Mary

Yeah I think I would because I actually really found it interesting.

Anouk

Do you think by sharing it, it could help others?

Mary

It depends on the types of people that I'm sending it to because obviously, the people that are already very opinionated, they might not be open to reading it or accepting that information as something interesting or valuable in their lives. But you could explain and talk to these people about the benefits of such a campaign, so it doesn't have to be anything forced.

Anouk

Do you feel like the campaign has made you want to share it?

Mary

Yeah, actually while I was reading it, I was thinking this is pretty cool that they put this together because as I've said, I feel like a lot of people don't actually realise the effects of lockdown and what it did to them.

Anouk

And do you think you'd look like for a campaign like this again?

Mary

It would be interesting to see how different companies look at that and what perspective they have on this.

Anouk

Looking for a campaign like this, do you think you'd look more at some coming from companies or would you also be interested in campaigns coming from governments around wellbeing?

Mary

I'd probably look more to the corporations because I'm a bit biased towards the National Health Systems in various countries. I feel like companies that have an image, a marketing

image for example, might have a greater impact with their campaigns than just national governments.

Anouk

Do you feel like they can reach more people, or their campaign is more impactful?

Mary

Yes, they can reach more people because their image is more impactful, that's what I would say.

Anouk

And did this campaign make you feel like NIVEA cares about you and more specifically your wellbeing whether it be in relation to lockdown or more in general?

Mary

I wouldn't say that I feel like it cares about me, but it cares about every version of me that went through this. So basically, everyone was in the same situation, and I feel like up to a certain level, everyone had these fears and anxieties during lockdown, so it does help everyone that went through this, which is a lot of people. Because it's such a big, shared feeling, it's really easy to touch people as it's very relatable.

Anouk

And do you feel like this aspect of care reflected on the brand itself then, do you see NIVEA as a caring brand?

Mary

No not really I wouldn't say so but I do know about the brand, it was quite big in Romania while I was growing up, so yeah, it did speak to me more since I know it's a big corporation.

Anouk

And since you said you're a bit familiar with the brand, do you feel like it made sense for NIVEA to be discussing the lockdown and physical touch?

Mary

Yeah it did. I mean, you can definitely see the connection between moisturisers and the sense of touch. I think it's a cute metaphor as well. So yeah, it does make sense for them to do this.

Anouk

And did you feel like you trust NIVEA to share this message then if it kind of seemed more compatible?

Mary

Yeah, but not necessarily based on the fact that it's connected. I would trust them because I know they're a good brand, or a decent brand.

Anouk

And when you went through the campaign, or when you think about NIVEA the campaign, do you feel like there's possibly anything more at stake?

Mary

Honestly, I didn't feel like that at all.

Anouk

Okay, and then in general, are there any other companies that you came across that had a similar kind of campaign in the context of COVID-19?

Mary

I can't remember exactly. I think I saw this ad on YouTube from Patagonia, it's a sports clothing brand like North Face or Adidas. It was one of the few ads that actually was interesting, or I actually enjoyed viewing and didn't skip it. So I think that one, but regarding COVID-19 I'm not sure if I saw any others.

Anouk

And what was it about that campaign that didn't make you skip it?

Mary

There was a certain message from it, it was about climate change actually, it wasn't about COVID. It was basically reversing the effects of climate change and reading something backwards. It had this buildup and by the end of it, you would actually see what the meaning was so it's quite a clever play of words I think. But yeah, I can't really remember any other companies that I saw regarding COVID-19 to be honest.

Anouk

And so, for example, you mentioned that campaign, it talks about climate change, and we've also been discussing this campaign that discusses the COVID-19 crisis. Do you think companies should be participating in the discussion and using their platform to spread information linked to the crisis or other societal issues like this?

Mary

Yeah, definitely. I mean, they do have the most power and if they can use it smartly or cleverly, they definitely can have a lot of impact.

Anouk

And in comparison to governments, do you feel like they're doing a better or worse or similar job?

Mary

I think they could do better because I know there's a certain reluctance from people towards governments in general so I think they would actually be more successful in spreading the word or actually taking action on certain things.

Anouk

Okay well that's it. I'm conscious I don't want to take too much more of your time so I just wanted to ask if you have any more questions, if there's anything you want to discuss about the topic that I haven't covered.

Mary

No, I have no questions.