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# Investigating the Consumer Emotions of the Volkswagen Dieselgate

-Feelings and Strategies When Part of a Scandal

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## Abstract

**Background** This thesis will take on a consumer perspective of what emotions were found and further explore what strategies the consumers used to handle their feelings when finding out they were unwillingly participating in the Volkswagen dieselgate. Recent scandals, like the 2015 Fifa corruption case, the BP oil-spill and Iphone's bendgate are mainly focusing on the organization's part in the scandal and consequently how the image of the brand will be affected. However, this branding disaster differs greatly from others since the consumers unwittingly took part, and not only were exposed to the scandal.

**Purpose** The purpose of this thesis is to investigate Volkswagen dieselgate by focusing on consumer feelings. Both by exploring what kind of emotions could be found among the consumers and how they have chosen to handle the situation. This research contributes with a new perspective where the feelings of consumer's involuntary participation in a scandal as well as their strategies to handle the emotions were explored.

**Method** The research is of a qualitative type since it's used to gain a deeper understanding of values and what the outcome of those could be. The thesis will describe and interpret the explored consumer feelings. It will take on a deductive perspective since the study is based on material found in interviews and netnography.

**Conclusion** The emotions found among our respondents and in selected netnography were apprehension, surprise, disapproval, sadness, grief, remorse, disgust, contempt, anger, annoyance, vigilance, anticipation, optimism, joy, love, trust and acceptance. Since all emotions are subjective to the person expressing them they're all handled in a subjective way. Consequently we can't define a theory or strategy for each emotion but have found three common themes.

## Acknowledgements

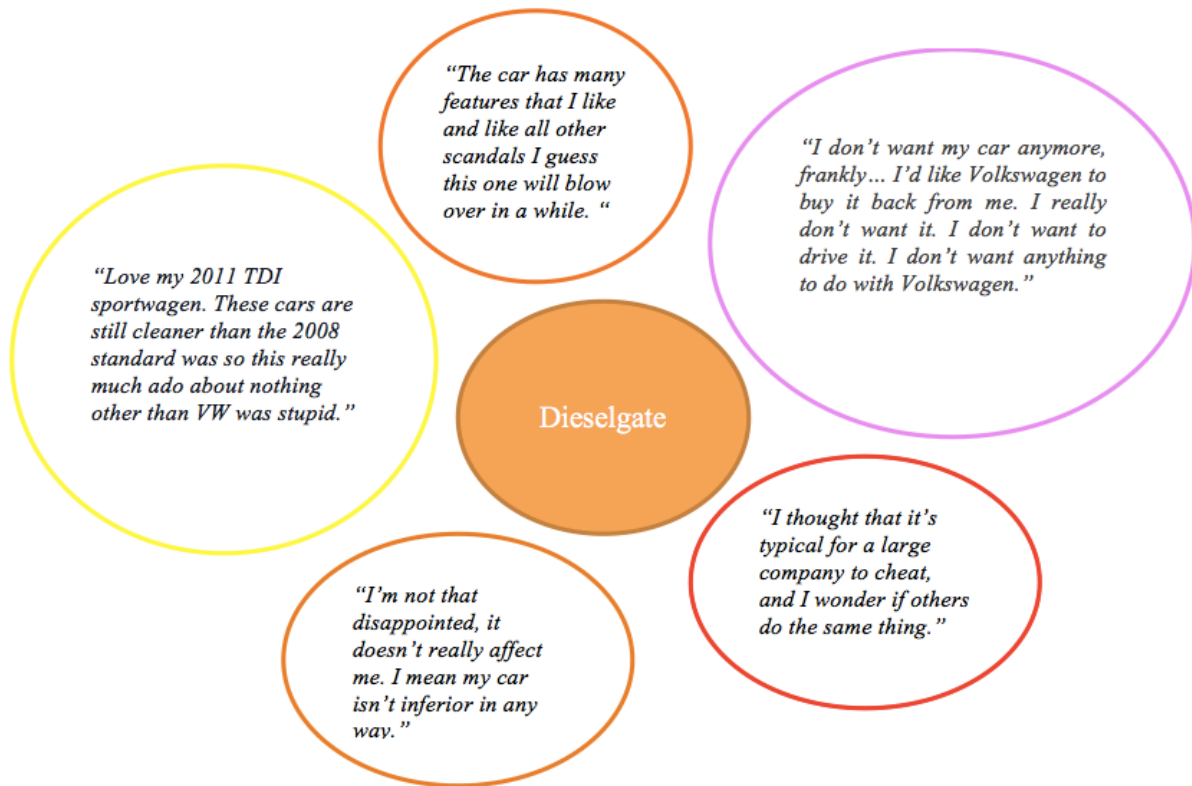
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# 1 Introduction



This thesis will take on a consumer perspective of what emotions were found and further explore what strategies the consumers used to handle their feelings when finding out they were unwillingly participating in the Volkswagen diesel scandal. Recent scandals, like the 2015 Fifa corruption case, the BP oil-spill and Iphone's bendgate are mainly focusing on the organization's part in the scandal and consequently how the image of the brand will be affected. In this case though, Volkswagen is seen as the prime villain, but consumer's contributed to the scandal without knowing it, merely by buying and driving the manufacturer's cars. This branding disaster differs greatly from others since the consumers unwillingly took part, and not only were exposed to the scandal. This thesis will consequently focus on the consumer perspective and by that the consumer emotions. To gain further understanding in what emotions the brand disaster have developed amongst current customers, netnography and interviews are used as method of investigation.

Previous research on different branding disasters was easy to find. Most investigations focused on either the producer perspective or the brand perspective of a disaster. Consequently, an angle that was well represented was how a company is affected by a scandal. However, very little previous research was found on branding disasters from a consumer perspective and how

the consumer's contributing to the scandal handle the situation. Neither could any previous published scientific articles on the topic dieselgate and emotions be found, this could be due to the recency of the event. Since dieselgate is an on going affair at this moment, there won't be any answers to how Volkswagen will get through this scandal, neither how this will affect the company in the long run. Instead this thesis examines the feelings brought by a disaster from a consumer's point of view.

The expectation with this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the consumer's emotions as well as illuminating what strategies the consumer's use to justify their participation in the scandal. No overall conclusions can be drawn since this thesis only examines a small group of consumers, their emotions could hence differ from the opinions of the majority. With that said, the next section will describe the background of the scandal dieselgate and the course of the event. The background further aims to contribute with a deeper understanding of the problem discussion and purpose of this thesis.

## **1.1 Background**

The Volkswagen scandal arose in the United States, May 2014, when West Virginia University performed a so called on road testing of diesel cars (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). When the test results came out it became clear that Volkswagen had manipulated their systems. Some of the Volkswagen models emitted approximately 40 times more Nitrogen oxides than what the regulations approved, and more important what they had told their customers (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). Oxides of Nitrogen is a substance that can cause different diseases such as bronchitis, emphysema and other respiratory diseases (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). According to emission limits in the U.S., diesel cars should not release more than 0,04 NO<sub>x</sub> g/km (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th) and in Europe no more than 0,08 NO<sub>x</sub> g/km (The AA, 2015). The Volkswagen model Jetta emitted up to 38 times more than the U.S. standards during drive up- and downhill, approximately 1,5 NO<sub>x</sub> g/km (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). The investigation revealed that Volkswagen had modified their software to sense when the car was in test mode. During tests the vehicle was installed to decrease the emission level to fit the American standards (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). After the discovery Volkswagen pushed back the accusations, blaming the researchers at the West Virginia University for not doing the tests properly (Hakim et al. 2015, Dec 26th).

However, in the middle of September 2015 the scandal was a fact and the extent of Volkswagen's cheat lead up to its disparaging name -dieseldate (Schmitt, 2016, March 11th). The information spread viral through media and it was just a matter of time before the whole world knew about the scandal. On the 20th of September Volkswagen's chief executive told the public how deeply sorry they were (Kollewe, 2015, Dec 10th) and on the 22nd of September they admitted that 11 million cars around the world had been manipulated (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). Following the diesel scandal multiple employees and managers got fired, including the CEO Martin Winterkorn. On the 25th of September Volkswagen appointed Porches former CEO Matthias Mueller. In October 2015 he told all diesel car owners that Volkswagen would compensate them before the end of 2016 (Kollewe, 2015, Dec 10th). The Volkswagen price per stock fell from about 38 dollars in September 2015 to 28 dollars in March 2016 and the company's profit had a huge loss of 1.81 billion dollars in their third quarter of 2015 (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th).

The scandal upset a large number of consumers which led to lawsuits against Volkswagen (Gates, et al. 2016, April 28th). The whole industry was affected by the scandal, everyone from suppliers and employees to companies connected to the brand Volkswagen felt betrayed (Marcus, 2015, Oct 18th). A contributing factor to the emotional reaction from the consumers, as well as the public, was the fact that Volkswagen was marketing their cars as "clean diesel" (Reuters, 2015b). Volkswagen is proud of their quality and often associated with German accuracy and order. The term "made in Germany" in the context of a car manufacturer has until now been a positive expression (Reuters, 2015a) but the on going diesel scandal might have affected both the car industry as well as German engineering (Marcus, 2015, Oct 18th). When the diesel scandal was revealed it was a discussion of whether the company's trust was lost in Volkswagen's country of origin, Germany, or not. According to results from several surveys, there were still two thirds of the German population that trusted the company (Löhr, 2015, Oct 20th).

Volkswagen has a long history, founded in the late 1930's (Volkswagen, 2016). The brand has ever since been closely connected to German expertise and marketed their products as a car for the mass (Marcus, 2015, Oct 18th). In 2007 Volkswagen launched their new slogan, 'das Auto', which was supposed to make people think Volkswagen when thinking of cars (Motor Authority, 2007). Even though the slogan is known worldwide, Volkswagen is now planning on dropping it since they want to present a more humble approach (Reuters, 2015b).

## 1.2 Problem discussion

The problem discussion is based on a thought that the dieselgate affair has created different feelings among Volkswagen customers. These feelings could also be thought to differ from each other because of earlier perceptions of the brand. Despite experiencing various feelings, the way of handling these also differs between people. To be able to understand the full picture of dieselgate it's of great importance to understand the consumer emotions and why they feel the way they do.

A company's image can be defined as how the customers feel about the brand. Since brand image is the same as a person's perception of a brand, this feeling could be thought to develop over time (Mårtenson, 2009). To explain the behaviour of consumer's change in attitudes and brand loyalty the theory of cognitive dissonance is widely used (Telci et al., 2011). The theory states that when people experience contradictory feelings they tend to transform or deny some of their feelings and opinions to reduce the dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In the case of dieselgate, a consumer could have had a positive feeling for the car that is contradictory to the negative feeling of having contributed to polluting the environment. The consumer could then choose to reduce the negative feelings by justifying the positive emotions he or she has for the car.

The brand Volkswagen has a long history and values, Urde et al. (2007) calls this having brand heritage which according to other researchers also influences the current image of a brand. Since heritage could be thought to improve the consumer's feelings for a brand when, and if, a scandal occurs (Rindell & Iglesias, 2014), the theory is important in this context. Kervyn et al. (2014) further discuss how companies are damaged by scandals in different ways and how this outcome also depends on the consumer's emotions. If the consumers have a positive feeling for a company prior to a scandal, the scandal is thought to cause greater damage (Kervyn et al., 2014). What we know now is that the extent of dieselgate by all means will lead to lawsuits and economic punishments against Volkswagen (Gates, et al. 2016, March 28th). But looking at this scandal from a different perspective, how do the consumer's that unwillingly took part in dieselgate feel? What are their reactions to the scandal and their own participation, and why do they react in the way they do? The problem discussion leads up to the following research questions:



### **1.3 Research questions**

- What emotions were found among the Volkswagen consumers?
- What strategies do the consumers use to deal with their emotions?

### **1.4 Purpose**

The problem discussion results in the main purpose with this thesis which is to investigate Volkswagen dieseldate by focusing on consumer feelings. Both by exploring what kind of emotions could be found among the consumers and how they have chosen to handle the situation. This qualitative research contributes with a new perspective where the feelings of consumers involuntary participation in a scandal is explored.

### **1.5 Limitations**

Since this thesis is of a qualitative type, we won't make a full comparison of the brand image pre dieseldate and the image of today. The study instead focuses on the consumer's feelings when part of a scandal. We won't investigate how a company should communicate during a crisis or whether Volkswagen handled the situation correctly, this information is merely thought to contribute with background. Neither will we discuss the economical effects the scandal will have on Volkswagen as a brand. The research will instead focus on a consumer perspective where the feelings are in focus and why the consumers feel the way they do. This thesis is also limited to investigate the feelings for the brand Volkswagen and not the Volkswagen Group. Consequently semi structured interviews was held with respondents who drive Volkswagen since they directly contributed to the scandal. Initially focus groups were to be used as a complement to the interviews. Because of limitations in extent as well as time, this had to be revised. The number of respondents was limited to five persons because of difficulties in finding consumers who had ability to participate. At first this thesis was supposed to focus on consumer anger. Since other emotions were expressed during the semi structured interviews the directions were changed to instead discuss different feelings. With this research we want to identify the consumer's feelings of their unwilling participation in a scandal, and what strategies were developed along with their emotions.

## 2 Literature review

The literature review will be focusing on emotional research and the theory of cognitive dissonance together with theories of brand disaster and brand heritage. These theories will further be explored together with empirical data in the analysis to try to reflect and understand the consumer's feelings and behavior when part of a brand disaster.

### 2.1 Emotional research

According to Mårtenson (2009) consumer emotions can strengthen the feeling for a brand. Emotions are related to a brand's associations which can provide further benefits since people are widely affected by their feelings (Mårtenson, 2009). Humans are constantly exposed to different emotions and all individuals handle these emotions differently. People also tend to remember events that have a strong connection to their feelings. When individuals deal with their own self image and believes it is important that the surroundings reflect their perceptions (Mårtenson, 2009). A consumer's perception is also of great importance when choosing between different products to fit their needs. A product's primary attributes can be connected to the product's main motivation of purchase. If a product lack these primary attributes the consumer won't buy the product even though they think good of the brand. In the book "Marknadskommunikation" by Mårtenson (2009. pp.139) it's written:

*"The attitude towards the brand must be linked to a buying motive. It is not enough that the target group have a positive attitude to the brand as environmentally friendly, if the environment isn't a motive for them to choose a brand from that category."*

Damasio (1994) stated the term somatic marker hypothesis. This hypothesis is explained as when the individual is exposed to a feeling, the feeling is affected by emotional and cognitive processes in the body. When dealing with different emotions the somatic mechanism helps the individual to choose the feelings that are most advantageous (Damasio, 1994). When managing negative emotions the natural behaviour is to remove those feelings (Overskeid, 2000). This could lead to people thinking positive even though this emotion isn't correct in the context. The author calls it "the prediction addiction", the consumer chooses the solution that gives a positive feeling since it is easier to focus on the positive emotions than to deal with the negative ones (Overskeid, 2000).

### 2.1.1 Plutchik's wheel of emotions

Plutchik's psycho evolutionary theory consists of ten different postulates where the first one states that emotions could be found in all animals and humans (Plutchik, 2002). According to Plutchik (2002) emotions are very complex and have a long evolutionary history that has helped organisms with their survival. Further he states that the emotions could be expressed differently by different species, but common patterns can be identified. According to Plutchik (2002) there are eight basic emotions, joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger and anticipation. All other feelings are combinations or compounds of these. The primary emotions are constructions that need proof to be inferred. Finally Plutchik (2002) explains how primary emotions can be paired to an opposite and further vary in degree of similarity as well as vary in degree of intensity.

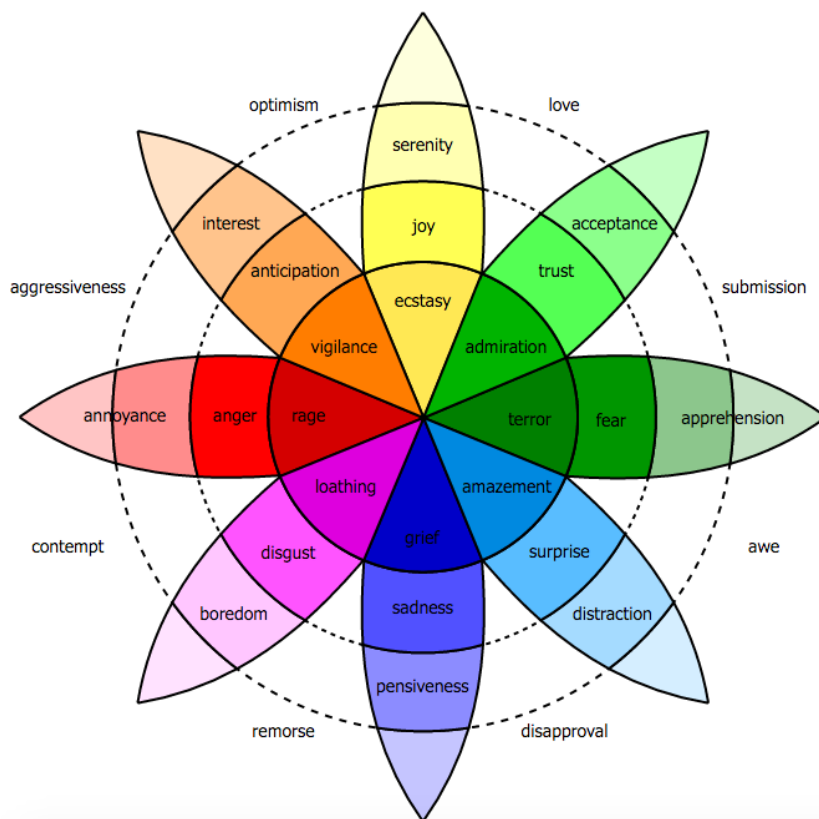


Figure 1: Plutchik's wheel of emotions

Plutchik (2002) created the wheel of emotions (figure 1) that illuminates the eight emotions which he calls basic or primitive. These emotions include both cognition and behaviour which means that it could be linked to the fight or flight mode. In addition to the basic feelings he describes a wider spectrum of emotions where the basic ones could be expressed with various

degrees of intensity. A more intense feeling of joy is according to Plutchik (2002) ecstasy while a less intense feeling is serenity. The feelings could also be mixed with each other to form new emotions. If joy and trust are combined, a feeling of love is created.

### **2.1.2 Cognitive dissonance**

The theory of cognitive dissonance was created in 1957 by Leon Festinger and implicates that if a person has contradictory feelings he or she tries to change the attitudes, feelings, opinions or actions to reduce this dissonance (Telci et al., 2011). The dissonance emerges because people want to think of their choices as correct even when the opposite is proven. A person could reduce dissonance by motivating, put blame to or deny certain feelings or events (Telci et al., 2011). Cooper and Fazio (1984) discuss how dissonance only is created in the case where an action could result in an unwanted feeling. Steele (1988) further suggests that dissonance is created only when a person feels that their behaviour goes against their own moral. In marketing the cognitive dissonance theory have been used to explain the behaviour of the consumers, mainly in areas regarding change in attitude and brand loyalty (Telci et al., 2011).

Although Festinger's theory stated in the 1950's still is of great importance, further researchers on the subject have contributed to the field. Korgaonkar and Moschis (1982) stated that the level of involvement from a consumer influenced the feelings for the product after the purchase. According to the authors those who had high expectations before the purchase also were more willing to give positive evaluations of the product afterwards and consequently reduced their own cognitive dissonance (Korgaonkar & Moschis, 1982). O'Neill and Palmer (2004) suggested that people seem to forget about their feelings for a product or a brand as time passes. The consumer instead tends to form new expectations and feelings as they are presented to new stimuli about the product, a fact that could lead to an increased cognitive dissonance (O'Neill & Palmer, 2004).

## **2.2 Brand heritage**

According to Rindell and Iglesias (2014) a strong image establishes trust, stability and differentiation in a brand, especially when the market is turbulent and competitive. The writers further discuss how consumer's past experience of a brand, the so called brand heritage, influences the current image of a brand. Rose et al. (2015) further discuss how brand heritage has a positive influence on purchase as well as provide the brand with positive emotions, trust

and attachment. Wuestefeld et al. (2012) discuss the impact of brand heritage on customer perceived value and expresses how consumers prefer brands with a heritage since these can be believed to be more reliable and trustworthy. The heritage could add a higher value to the brand and make customers more willing to pay a higher price for the product (Wuestefeld et al., 2012).

Taking the definition of brand heritage in consideration Urde et al. (2007) proposes that there are five elements to be considered when defining whether a brand could be said to have heritage or not. The first aspect is track record, which can be described as the values and promises that lasts over time, Volvo's track record for instance could be considered safety (Urde, 2007). As former CEO of Volvo expressed it in year 2005 (Urde, 2007.pp.9):

*“Heritage provides a legacy that offers us a timeless relationship to the market/customers, society partners, and employees. Over time people recognise and expect that the company will continue to deliver on these commitments (safety, quality, environment, design). It sets Volvo apart from other car companies —it is hard [for others] to copy and be trusted. Our brand is the history and the future”.*

Many heritage brands have a long history which proves the importance of longevity that according to Urde et al. (2007) brings values like sustainability or consistency to the brand. Further the authors propose that core values, the basic values of the identity that defines the brand, should be considered. Following upon this is the use of symbols, which are the logos and design that defines and signals the brands values (Urde et al., 2007). The fifth and last aspect according to Urde et al. (2007) is the company's understanding of their history being important to the brand identity. With this said the authors in no way states that heritage on its own creates value, but it helps by making the brand relevant to the present as well as the future. As expressed by Urde et al. (2007, pp.11):

*“Heritage can add to the brand's value proposition with depth, authenticity, and credibility for the customer/consumer. For example, some automobile brands are marques that speak effectively to consumers by connoting a heritage of engineering excellence, style and/or prestige”.*

### **2.3 Brand disaster**

The article Branding disaster (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014) states that news and media coverage following a disaster plays a significant role in forming customer's opinions and trust in a company. According to the authors, mass media is said to possess a gatekeeper-role by deciding a public discourse as well as influencing and stating which news that are highlighted each day. Told in media, the disaster often is built up as a dramaturgical play, starting by defining the characters, describing a series of events and finally blame will be given to some of the actors or events (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). First when the stage is set, the work of restoring and rebuilding the brand can be initiated. To restore and rebuild trust for the company attention is drawn to expected punishments and how the company will repay and make up for the damage (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). Handled right, the narrative together with an adequate level of compensation will lead up to the stage where the company could re-enter the market as a trustworthy and reliable brand (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014).

Kervyn et al. (2014) propose how different scandals damage corporations in diverse ways, some brands could be harmed at its' core whilst others barely are affected. The authors further discuss the concepts warmth and competence. A company of warmth is according to Kervyn et al. (2014) perceived as warm, friendly and trustworthy and thought of as a company with good intentions. A company perceived as warm is consequently affected harder by a scandal since the consumers believe the company to be more honest than a cold and unfriendly one. The concept competence provides answer to the question if the company is able to accomplish their intentions. A company of competence is thereby seen as competent and capable unlike an incompetent one. These two concepts could according to the authors determine to what extent a scandal will damage a company. The conclusion presented by Kervyn et al. (2014) was that previous feelings of warmth for a company affected the company negatively when exposed to a scandal. The scandal however didn't affect the view of the company as competent.

### **3 Method**

This part of the thesis will be focusing on the methods chosen to investigate the consumer emotions and strategies. The chapter describes which choices were made to build this thesis in a way that could result in answering the research questions.

#### **3.1 Research method**

Since emotions are very subjective and could be seen as complex and diffuse, the research on emotions in this study mainly originates from the experience of participants in semi structured interviews as well as from netnography on the topic. Theories will then be used as a complement to further explore the findings.

The research could be described as qualitative since it's used to gain a deeper understanding of values and what the outcome of those could be (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The opposite would be to use a quantitative research that rather quantifies a problem with numeric data. A method which is less suitable as to gain understanding of the consumer's emotions because of their very subjective experience (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Since this thesis aims to explore the consumers' feelings and emotions a qualitative research is preferred as it describes, explains and interprets. Further a qualitative method doesn't assume that there is only one truth, the method rather describes subjective aspects (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). To gain a deeper understanding of the research questions, semi structured interviews are used to discuss the topic. This method is compared to surveys preferable in a qualitative investigation since it contributes with feelings rather than data (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Even though this study is of a qualitative type, important data is collected by reviewing interviews and netnography. The information collected in form of netnography and semi structured interviews is seen as primary data because of its contribution to this thesis. Further the theories found in published books and articles will be used as secondary data to gain a deeper understanding of the subject (Patel & Davidson, 2015).

#### **3.2 Data collection**

The data is collected through semi structured interviews and netnography. Two widely different methods in gathering information and opinions that together will complement each other and contribute with findings to answer the research questions.

### **3.2.1 Semi structured interviews**

This research is of a qualitative type and we have chosen to perform semi structured interviews. These interviews are built on questions that leads to an on going conversation and an open discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2013). This form is advantageous since the questions are used as a guideline and can be modified during the dialogue. Semi structured interviews could sometimes result in the participants expressing things they wouldn't in a closed interview (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this thesis the semi structured interviews were performed with five respondents, all driving Volkswagen. This demarcation was chosen since this thesis investigate the consumer's feelings of their contribution to dieselgate. All the respondents chose to be anonymous. The interviews were performed on a location selected by the respondent. We chose to have only one person present during interviews to create a relaxed atmosphere. The interviews were taped to make sure that the answers were perceived in a correct way. The material was then transcribed and the respondents got a chance to read and approve their answers. However a difficulty with semi structured interviews is the fact that our own opinions and how we asked the questions could've affected the respondents, this is something we tried to avoid.

### **3.2.2 Netnography**

In today's society netnography is a great method to use for research, where findings could be identified in communities on the Internet (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography is one of the methods used in analysing markets and communication (Bryman & Bell, 2013) since the method is advantageous to assemble information that is discussed in different forums that are related to the market question. When using netnography and studying online communities, individual's opinions could be found that would be hard to identify through other methods. This method starts with defining a topic and is followed by identifying and observing the community. The data and findings are then analysed and presented (Kozinets, 2010). When using netnography, interesting and current information of what the society think about themes according to their own opinion is gathered. It is a useful way to find opinions that are relevant of what the public think about a certain topic (Bryman & Bell, 2013). A deficiency could be that the chosen netnography only is a small selection of all the opinions on the Internet.

### **3.3 Validity and reliability**

In a qualitative research validity and reliability are linked to each other (Patel & Davidson, 2015). According to the authors validity is of greater importance while reliability should be



seen as a background to the unique occasion that each interview implicates. When gathering information it's of great importance to think about validity, as this is how trustworthy the sources are. A mix of sources are used in this thesis, this is according to Patel & Davidson (2015) called triangulation. Triangulation could contribute with a deeper validity to the research. Understanding the research process and the sources where the information comes from is important for a credible thesis (Patel & Davidson, 2015). The sources that are used in this thesis are carefully selected and the respondents are seen as credible but the validity could have been stronger if there were a greater number of interviews performed. The fact that we interpreted the respondents feelings could also have affected the validity.

## 4 Empirical findings

The empirical findings consists of emotions found in semi structured interviews and netnography. Both semi structured interviews and netnography is of great importance in this thesis since the research is based on the consumer's feelings on their participation in dieselpgate and how they have chosen to rectify this to themselves.

### 4.1 Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews were performed with respondents who all own a Volkswagen car. Some of the respondents drive diesel and could consequently be said to be a contributing factor to the higher levels of Nitrogen oxides that the cars emitted. Others drive gas or gasoline but could still be seen as connected to the brand and thereby connected to the on going scandal. The semi structured interviews contributed with a deeper understanding of the consumer's feelings about their participation in the scandal as well as how they've chosen to rectify and justify their emotions.

The interview guidelines could be found in appendix 1 and 2 and all the essential feelings that were discovered during the interviews will further be discussed in the analysis. However three of the most interesting questions together with answers from the respondents are presented below.

#### **What did you think/how did you feel when you found out about the scandal?**

*A: I thought that it's typical for a large company to cheat, and I wonder if others do the same. Then I got angry and wondered if our car emits more, because we experience that it uses much more gasoline than what was specified.*

*B: I have a feeling of dissatisfaction for Volkswagen, but I guess all big companies cheat.*

*C: Disappointed, you've had a perception of a brand that's incorrect. When you buy a car with different necessities and the environment is an important criteria, you want the car to be "better" for the environment. When you find out it's not you feel incredibly fooled and betrayed. It's like buying a vegetarian sausage and finding out it's meat in it.*

*D: I guess I reacted less then you should, it feels like you get quite cynical, like fed with scandals, things happen all the time. I think that I had reacted differently if I stood behind the brand and like talked about how good it was. I also think that I would've reacted stronger if it*

*was like Ikea, it's from Sweden and then you feel some sort of pride that this is "my" company, it comes from us. This doesn't feel quite as personal, I may be disappointed but I guess it will pass rather quickly.*

*E: I'm not that disappointed, it doesn't really affect me. I mean my car isn't inferior in any way.*

### **Has your loyalty with Volkswagen changed?**

*A: I've actually been a bit disturbed by the fact that my car uses more gasoline than what was said and I've associated this to the scandal. Now it turned out that it doesn't have anything to do with me since my car run on gasoline. But it still feels like it's connected, I mean if you cheat with one thing you could cheat with others.*

*B: Probably, but I would buy Volkswagen again.*

*C: Yes, I still drive Volkswagen but it's hard to melt how they've fooled a whole planet. They've sold cars that haven't promised what they said, that makes you wondering if other things are lies as well.*

*D: No unfortunately not...I don't know...I wish I was more principled but my comprehension is that the scandal occurred due to bad corporate culture, I think they tried to lower the emissions in an honest way at first but when corporate culture says you have to fix it..well I guess everybody wants to keep their jobs?*

*E: No, but I didn't have any loyalty to begin with.*

### **How do you think Volkswagen has been affected by the scandal?**

*A: Very negative. I knew almost nothing about them before, now this is kind of the only thing I know.*

*B: The Volkswagen brand probably was affected at first, but customers forget. I think that the scandal even might have affected other companies in a positive way. Other engineers have scratched their heads on how Volkswagen could've lowered the emissions that much and worked on solutions. This might even have led to something positive in the end. Well, it might have nothing to do with the image but you understand.*

*C: Personally I think that it have affected me a lot but I have seen a tendency in different news that the company and consumers already have moved on and the focus is not longer on the scandal. It leads me not to engage in the same extent as I did when the scandal arose.*

*D: The image of Volkswagen has definitely been affected, it is bad publicity, they look like bad guys, but the saddest part is that I'm so terribly satisfied with my car, I would never think about not driving it. ... Well the scandal doesn't really do anything on the safety which I thought was important when buying the car, so well, it might sound bad but dieselgate haven't really got anything to do with the main idea to why I bought the car...I 've chosen their gas car because of the environmental reasons but it doesn't affect me personally if you understand.*

*E: It is not so good for their image, the whole car industry is built on trust. One must be able to trust the car manufacturer.*

## **4.2 Netnography**

Some consumers express upset feelings on the considerably larger impact that Volkswagen has on the environment, as an American Volkswagen driver expressed it on Consumer Reports Facebook-page (Facebook Consumer Reports, 2016a):

*“Consumers don't need to be compensated, but nature and the environment do.”*

Others seem to feel more worry, especially on how the scandal will affect them. The concern of the latter focuses on if they will suffer from higher taxes, whether the car will use more diesel and how the scandal will influence the resale-value of their Volkswagen (Flashback, 2015). The independent organization Consumer Reports have identified five different themes on social media expressed by upset and disappointed Volkswagen owners (Consumer Reports, 2015). According to them the common themes found were feelings of passion, betrayal, concern, wonder and anxiousness. The feelings of betrayal and a loss of trust for the company have been expressed by existing Volkswagen owners on the Consumer Reports website:

*“So when ‘dieselgate’ broke it was disheartening in the same way it would be if you discovered your best friend was committing fraud. I want to forgive, but there are trust issues now. Beyond that, I'm genuinely concerned about the future of my TDI. I'm not concerned about resale value so much as I am about the car's performance after a recall. What will my mpg be?”*

*“In short, I feel betrayed. They lied to me, both directly (via ads and claims about the emissions by dealers) and indirectly (via the cheat used to trick the EPA). They've dumped pollutants into the atmosphere that my family, my friends, and I breathe. They've also made me an unwitting and unwilling accomplice in their environmental crime.”*

According to Alex Klein at Autolist, an online service, a consumer survey made on their customers showed that people are 28 percent less likely to buy a Volkswagen post dieselgate (Autoguide, 2016). Timothy Cain, tracker of auto sales data, says that the impact a scandal has on a brand strongly depends on the view on the brand before the occurring scandal (Autoguide, 2016). According to him Volkswagen already suffered from a perception of low quality in the U.S., Klein further enlightened the fact that 20 percent of the Volkswagen brand sales in the country came from diesel-equipped vehicles. It's consequently hard to say whether the declined sales is a result of upset emotions and lowered trust in the company or merely the fact that Volkswagen were forced to put a stop to sales of diesel-driven vehicles (Autoguide, 2016).

A great number of Volkswagen customers expressed how they felt a total loss of trust in the company (Autoguide, 2016). Further dieselgate made some consumers feel like they not wanted any connection to the brand (Plugis et al., 2015, Sep 22nd):

*"I don't want my car anymore, frankly... I'd like Volkswagen to buy it back from me. I really don't want it. I don't want to drive it. I don't want anything to do with Volkswagen."*

While some consumers feel almost disgusted by the scandal, there are existing customers that still have a positive mind regarding Volkswagen. At Odyssey online the blogger Alexander Wittenberg expresses his and his family's feelings of love for the brand. Further he says that he still sees a dedicated company, loyal to their customers, that provides quality vehicles as well as good customer service (The Odyssey Online, 2015, Sep 29th). Ahiza Garcia, a reporter at CNN, also found positive emotions among consumers when asking them about their feelings for their car (Garcia, 2015, Sep 29th):

*"Love my 2011 TDI sportwagen. These cars are still cleaner than the 2008 standard was so this really much ado about nothing other than VW was stupid. The vehicles themselves are no big deal, its like arguing whole milk at 4% vs 2% milk vs 1%, just grandfather them and move on. Think about the fact of how many pre-2008 diesels are out there (millions) versus this issue."*

In this case the consumer also seemed to rectify dieselgate by referring to Volkswagen's lowered emissions compared with earlier models. While there are satisfied customers expressing feelings of passion and love for their car, the ones taking a negative turn on the

company are of a greater number. A fact that the opinions expressed on Consumer Reports reflects upon (Facebook Consumer Reports, 2016b):

*“I cannot reason in my head why they would do this. Especially because of the loyalty they have with the TDIs. It kind of makes me sick. I am not sure if I will come back to VW after this. It really will depend on how they choose to rectify this scandal. For them to make this right for me, they will need to make a fix that will not affect the performance or fuel mileage of my car.”*

According to Ahiza Garcia (2015, Sep 29th) most Volkswagen consumers felt betrayed, angry and cheated when finding out about their contribution to dieselpgate. A physician in California, treating people with asthma had bought a Jetta Volkswagen in 2010 he expressed his feelings (Garcia. A, 2015, Sep 29th):

*“There was a sense that we were doing the world some good. To have it flip 180 degrees is just shocking. I haven’t computed the cost to society now that i’m spewing out Nitrous oxide but it’s definitely an ironic twist.”*

There are different ways to look at the Volkswagen scandal. One that is discussed in an article on Consumer Reports is if Volkswagen used their cheat as a selling point (Fisher, 2015, Oct 19th). When Volkswagen marketed their new diesel cars they were bragging about how they were outperforming other cars in the same segment. This fact could be thought to be a contributing factor to consumer anger (Fisher, 2015, Oct 19th). The next chapter will be analysing what emotions were found among consumers, these will be connected to the chosen theories.

## 5 Findings and analysis

In findings and analysis the result from empirical findings will be analysed together with the selected theories. The theories and findings are interpreted based on the feelings in Plutchik's wheel of emotions. The emotions were then divided into three different consumer strategies. These strategies are based on our own interpretations.

### 5.1 Head findings

The table below present some chosen quotes connected to Plutchik's (2002) wheel of emotion. The colours in the table are connected to those in Plutchik's wheel. The findings in table 1 will be analysed deeper in the next section.

<u>Emotions</u>	<u>Quotes</u>	<u>Strategies</u>
Apprehension	<i>"Before dieselgate I knew barely nothing on what Volkswagen stood for but now the scandal is about my only reminiscence of the brand".</i>	Consumers feel disoriented and seem uncertain of their own feelings. The strategies of this group might be affected by opinions expressed in media or by other consumers.
Surprise	<i>"I cannot reason in my head why they would do this."</i>	
Disapproval	<i>"Well, what do I think really... I think their brand is a bit damaged since their credibility is gone... Generally it feels like you have greater trust in a large and old company since they have more to live up to, but this was just a big sham".</i>	
Sadness	<i>"Disappointed, you've had a perception of a brand that's incorrect."</i>	Consumers feel betrayed and used by Volkswagen and want to dissociate from their car as well as the brand. The consumers are not likely to return, the trust might have been broken for the future.
Grief	<i>"So when 'dieselgate' broke it was disheartening in the same way it would be if you discovered your best friend was committing fraud. I want to forgive, but there are trust issues now. Beyond that, I'm genuinely concerned about the future of my TDI. I'm not concerned about resale value so much as I am about the car's performance after a recall. What will my mpg be?"</i>	
Remorse	<i>"There was a sense that we were doing the world some good. To have it flip 180 degrees is just shocking. I haven't computed the cost to society now that I'm spewing out Nitrous oxide but it's definitely an ironic twist."</i>	
Disgust	<i>"I don't want my car anymore, frankly... I'd like Volkswagen to buy it back from me. I really don't want it. I don't want to drive it. I don't want anything to do with Volkswagen."</i>	
Contempt	<i>"In short, I feel betrayed. They lied to me, both directly (via ads and claims about the emissions by dealers) and indirectly (via the cheat used to trick the EPA). They've dumped pollutants into the atmosphere that my family, my friends, and I breathe. They've also made me an unwitting and unwilling accomplice in their environmental crime."</i>	
Anger	<i>"I can assure you I will never buy one again or ever recommend one"</i>	

Annoyance	<i>"I thought that it's typical for a large company to cheat, and I wonder if others do the same thing."</i>	<p>Consumers accept the scandal and are not repressing the negative emotions. They instead use cognitive dissonance to justify their participation. The consumers either generalize the scandal or focus on their positive feelings even when the opposite is proven.</p>
Vigilance	<i>"I am not sure if I will come back to VW after this. It really will depend on how they choose to rectify this scandal. For them to make this right for me, they will need to make a fix that will not affect the performance or fuel mileage of my car."</i>	
Anticipation	<i>"I still think it's a good car, it takes me from point A to point B. I think that my trust in the company has decreased but can be built up again."</i>	
Optimism	<i>"The car has many features that I like and like all other scandals I guess this one will blow over in a while."</i>	
Joy	<i>"I think of a typical family car, and also the slogan 'das Auto'. I think it's fun, to make it sound like Volkswagen is the only car existing".</i>	
Love	<i>"Love my 2011 TDI sportwagen. These cars are still cleaner than the 2008 standard was so this really much ado about nothing other than VW was stupid. The vehicles themselves are no big deal, its like arguing whole milk at 4% vs 2% milk vs 1%, just grandfather them and move on. Think about the fact of how many pre-2008 diesels are out there (millions) versus this issue."</i>	
Trust	<i>" I still have trust in the brand Volkswagen, I believe that the company has the same values as before."</i>	
Acceptance	<i>"Well the scandal doesn't really do anything on the safety which I thought was important when buying the car, so well, it might sound bad but dieselgate haven't really got anything to do with the main idea to why I bought the car."</i>	

Table 1: Head findings from interviews and netnography



## 5.2 Analysis

Humphreys and Thompson (2014) states that media coverage following a scandal affects the customer's feelings and trust for a company. According to the respondents, most are convinced that media influences their feelings and thoughts of a brand, especially since you're more often exposed to media coverage of a brand than to the brand itself. When discussing their own participation in dieselgate some of the consumers seemed almost uncertain of their own feelings. One of the respondents expressed a feeling that could be described as apprehension:

*"Before dieselgate I knew barely nothing on what Volkswagen stood for but now the scandal is about my only reminiscence of the brand."*

From having a vague perception of Volkswagen, media coverage had left the consumer with a feeling of doubt. According to the strategies found, consumers expressing disoriented and uncertain feelings could more easily be affected by opinions expressed in media or by other consumers. However, it is hard to say when the feelings are shaped by the consumer alone or when the emotions are reinforced by media. According to Humphreys & Thompson (2014) media coverage following a disaster plays a significant role in forming customer's opinions and trust in a company. Further the authors discuss how the emotions for the brand could be restored if the company manages to make up for the damage. Although, there are some customers that express such feelings of disgust that it is hard to believe that there's any way to turn them around:

*"I don't want my car anymore, frankly... I'd like Volkswagen to buy it back from me. I really don't want it. I don't want to drive it. I don't want anything to do with Volkswagen."*

Another theme that was found on the Internet as well as amongst respondents was feelings of contempt:

*"In short, I feel betrayed. They lied to me, both directly (via ads and claims about the emissions by dealers) and indirectly (via the cheat used to trick the EPA). They've dumped pollutants into the atmosphere that my family, my friends, and I breathe. They've also made me an unwitting and unwilling accomplice in their environmental crime."*

The consumer expressed how he thought he had contributed to a better environment and believed in what ads and media told about Volkswagen. With this negative feeling in consideration there is a risk that the trust from this consumer is broken for all future. However, O'Neill and Palmer (2004) discuss how consumers forget their feelings for a brand as time passes and form new expectations and feelings as they are presented to new information. Adding these facts to Humphreys and Thompson's (2014) theory on branding disaster, it's of great importance that Volkswagen now present how they're planning on compensating both their consumers as well as the environment. Some consumers saw the environmental aspects as the car's primary attribute, which lead to one of the consumers wanting to dissociate from the brand:

*“There was a sense that we were doing the world some good. To have it flip 180 degrees is just shocking. I haven't computed the cost to society now that I'm spewing out Nitrous oxide but it's definitely an ironic twist.”*

The consumer above expressed his feelings of remorse when realizing his participation in the diesel scandal. Instead of trying to reduce the dissonance, the consumer strategy was to distance himself from the brand and consequently from dieselgate. Since the consumer's main motive of purchase (Mårtenson, 2009) was the environmental aspects it lead to the consumer no longer wanting to be related to the brand. Feelings of disappointment was another repetitive theme found among both respondents and in netnography and could be thought to be handled with the same sort of strategy. Since brands of heritage are seen as more reliable and trustworthy than others (Wuestefeld et al., 2012) the feeling of disappointment could be thought to be worse than if Volkswagen would have been a young and less trusted company. The emotions could further be connected to Kervyn et al. (2014) theory on how a company of warmth is seen as having good intentions. If this company proves to be dishonest, the negative effect is even bigger. According to one consumer he felt as he was betrayed by a friend:

*“So when 'dieselgate' broke it was disheartening in the same way it would be if you discovered your best friend was committing fraud. I want to forgive, but there are trust issues now. Beyond that, I'm genuinely concerned about the future of my TDI. I'm not concerned about resale value so much as I am about the car's performance after a recall. What will my mpg be?”*

The intense feeling of sadness the consumer expressed could according to Plutchik (2002) be described as grief. The consumer apparently felt a strong connection to the brand which could be the reason of showing such strong emotions. His strategy of dealing with the emotions is to process his feelings instead of trying to reduce the dissonance (Festinger, 1957). The consumer's trust issues might lead to the fact that he won't return to Volkswagen in the future. Despite the extent of diesalgate and the major effect it had on most Volkswagen owners, the company still receives trust from a large number of consumers. Although a scandal often is associated with negative feelings, the contrary was found both among respondents and on the Internet, one man even expressed love for their car:

*“Love my 2011 TDI sportwagen. These cars are still cleaner than the 2008 standard was so this really much ado about nothing other than VW was stupid. The vehicles themselves are no big deal, its like arguing whole milk at 4% vs 2% milk vs 1%, just grandfather them and move on. Think about the fact of how many pre-2008 diesels are out there (millions) versus this issue.”*

This quote indicates that Volkswagen still has a large number of customers that doesn't believe diesalgate to be a big deal, and instead chooses to look at the scandal as well as their participation in a positive way. The consumer focuses on how his car emits less than the cars sold prior to 2008 and how this in fact is an improvement. By changing focus from the reality that Volkswagen lied, this could be thought to be a sign of wanting to repress negative emotions. The consumer wants to justify his feeling of love for Volkswagen even though he's supposed to feel the opposite (Telci et al., 2011). Repressing the negative feeling connected to the scandal could be a way of protecting himself from the fact that he's now driving a car that didn't turn out to be the car he expected. To deny the real problem is a way of removing the negative feelings. This could be explained by Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957) and the fact that the consumer's choose to focus their emotions on their previous feelings of Volkswagen as a trustworthy company. This is further strengthened by Rose et al. (2015) findings on how heritage provides the brand with positive emotions and trust:

*“ I still have trust in the brand Volkswagen, I believe that the company has the same values as before.”*

The brand heritage is especially important when the market is turbulent (Rindell & Iglesias, 2014). Since previous experience influences our current perception, a previous thought of Volkswagen as a reliable brand could consequently affect the opinion of today. This also corresponds to Korgaonkar and Moschis (1982) theory that consumers who had high expectations of a brand before the purchase were more likely to express positive feelings afterwards. It could be explained with how the consumers want to strengthen their own feeling of having made a good investment. Some consumers felt a decrease in trust for Volkswagen but still had feelings of anticipation for the future:

*“I still think it’s a good car, it takes me from point A to point B. I think that my trust in the company has decreased but can be built up again.”*

According to Kervyn et al. (2014) this quote could be explained with the fact that the consumer’s still see Volkswagen as a company of competence. The feeling of competence remains unaffected even if the feeling of trust is lost. Another respondent expressed how her feelings probably were affected at first but added that consumers seem to forget easily. This could indicate that those who had a positive feeling about Volkswagen before the scandal haven’t considerably changed their opinions and still thinks of Volkswagen as a reliable company. It could according to Urde et al. (2007) be explained with the fact that a brand of heritage is influenced by its’ track record which implies that over time people will continue to expect the company to deliver on their commitments and promises. A younger company on the other hand could have had more trouble in re-creating trust as a reliable and honest brand. Whether the theory of track record is reliable or not, it’s not compatible with O’Neill and Palmer’s (2004) theory that time makes consumers forget about their feelings for a brand.

Even though one consumer expressed feelings of annoyance he seemed to generalize that emotion by saying that Volkswagen is not the only one cheating, the company is not any worse than their competitors:

*“I thought that it’s typical for a large company to cheat, and I wonder if others do the same thing.”*

The fact that he assumes that all big companies are dishonest and by that rectifies what Volkswagen did might also be a result of the manufacturer’s brand heritage. His previous

feelings for the brand influences how he chooses to look at both the scandal and his participation in it. Further the generalization implies that he's using cognitive dissonance to justify his emotions (Festinger, 1957). An additional aspect on what adds heritage to a brand is the use of symbols. A heritage brand has logos and design that defines and signals the values of the brand (Urde et al., 2007). Several respondents mentioned the slogan 'das Auto' when asked what they associated with the brand Volkswagen, two short words that from the company's point of view implies that there are no competitors at sight. As one of the respondents expressed it:

*"I think of a typical family car, and also the slogan 'das Auto'. I think it's fun, to make it sound like Volkswagen is the only car existing."*

The respondent mentioning the slogan still felt something comparable to joy when thinking about Volkswagen. She too chose to focus on positive feelings even though her participation easily could have raised other emotions. The consumers mentioning 'das Auto' still thought that the brand stood for a safe and secure product. Volkswagen's recent statement that they're going to change it (Reuters, 2015b) because the slogan isn't humble enough might then be a bad decision. Further one consumer justified her feelings of acceptance with the fact that she didn't buy the car because of environmental causes and thereby she didn't believe herself to be a part of the scandal. Despite this, it was implicated that she understood how this could be perceived by others and she consequently expressed slightly shameful feelings about her own statement:

*"Well the scandal doesn't really do anything on the safety which I thought was important when buying the car, so well, it might sound bad but dieselpgate haven't really got anything to do with the main idea to why I bought the car."*

The respondent's feelings could be described with what Overskeid (2000) calls "the prediction addiction" which means that people repress negative feelings and instead chose a solution that leaves them with positive feelings since these are easier to handle. However the netnography found revealed more vigilant feelings than what was detected during interviews. While many of the respondents seemed to try to reduce the dissonance by denying their participation in dieselpgate, the consumer's on internet in a greater extent focused on blaming Volkswagen. The

social channels of the American website Consumer Reports (Consumer Reports, 2016b) were filled with doubtful Volkswagen customers, one of them expressed his feelings:

*“I am not sure if I will come back to VW after this. It really will depend on how they choose to rectify this scandal. For them to make this right for me, they will need to make a fix that will not affect the performance or fuel mileage of my car.”*

This further strengthens the theory stated by Humphreys and Thompson (2014) that the outcome of a scandal mainly depends on how the company chooses to rectify the damage. According to the authors one of the most important aspects in rebuilding trust from the consumers is linked to reprobation and restoration. Volkswagen’s first action regarding that matter could have been by letting previous CEO Martin Winterkorn resign from his position. The theory of cognitive dissonance also states that by blaming somebody else for their own perceived inconvenience, the consumer’s could reduce the contradictory feelings and still think of their own choice of driving Volkswagen as correct.

Some common themes could be found among the Volkswagen owners. Conclusions can be drawn from the consumers investigated in this research but we have no evidence that the same feelings are reflected by the majority. The conclusions are based on the findings from semi structured interviews and netnography and will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 6 Conclusion

Although a number of various emotions were detected during interviews, most respondents still seemed to have positive feelings about Volkswagen. This can be derived to the fact that Volkswagen is a brand of heritage and possess a profound perception of a loyal and trustworthy brand in most consumers' minds. Heritage is consequently seen as having a moderating effect on the feelings (Urde et al., 2007). The result is also explained with the theory of cognitive dissonance which states that people chooses to think of their choices as correct even when the opposite is proven because this reduces the dissonance. Further Damasio (1994) stated that somatic markers trigger people to make decisions that make them feel good, a reason to why many of the respondents could be described as having quite positive feelings despite their participation in dieselgate.

The emotions found in chosen quotes were apprehension, surprise, disapproval, sadness, grief, remorse, disgust, contempt, anger, annoyance, vigilance, anticipation, optimism, joy, love, trust and acceptance. We were able to identify a new feeling in almost every quote, which proves the complexity of the field of emotional research.

Because of the complexity of emotions (Plutchik, 2002) no clear strategies of dealing with feelings are to be found. Even though the emotions are linked to Plutchik's theory, all emotions are subjective to the person expressing them and hence handled in a subjective way.

Consequently we can't define a theory or strategy for each emotion but have found some common themes. We have divided the emotions found in to three different strategies based on our own interpretations.

The emotions based on fear and surprise have resulted in consumers feeling disoriented and uncertain of their own feelings. They express how they can't understand why Volkswagen would do such a thing and how their trust of the company is gone. Since these consumers haven't really decided what they think of their own participation we believe that their emotions might be easily affected by opinions from other consumers. Their feelings can also vary depending on how media chooses to report on the scandal.

Another strategy was found among the consumers that were feeling different levels of sadness, disgust and anger. These consumers felt betrayed and expressed harsh feelings on how they had been fooled into an unwilling complicity. They described how they wanted to dissociate

themselves from the brand and in some cases even their own cars. These consumer's strategy and feelings are most likely harder to change, their trust in the company seem ruined.

A third strategy was based on the emotions anticipation, joy and trust. These consumers chose to justify their participation through cognitive dissonance. A common theme among these consumers is the willingness to reduce negative emotions and instead focusing on those that make them feel better. The consumers either generalized the scandal or focused on their positive feelings even when the opposite was proven.

### **6.1 Suggestions for future research**

The complexity of emotions implies that feelings aren't persistent and have different intensity which leads to our suggestion for future research:

Because of the subjectivity of emotions marketers could benefit from further investigating what other strategies could be found to get a deeper understanding of the consumers. Another suggestion is to compare the effects of dieselgate to a scandal where the consumers only are exposed to and not participating in the scandal. Since dieselgate is an on going scandal it could also be of interest to reinvestigate the emotions of the consumers in the future.



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## **Appendix 1 - Interview guideline Swedish**

### **Varumärke**

Vad anser du vara viktigt för ett varumärke? Hur tycker du att ett starkt varumärke ska vara?

Vad tänker du på när du hör varumärkesimage? Vad är varumärkesimage enligt dig?

Tror du massmedia påverkar hur du uppfattar ett varumärke?

### **Volkswagen**

Vad tycker du om varumärket Volkswagen?

Tycker du att Volkswagen har ett starkt varumärke (I så fall varför/ varför inte)?

Fanns det någon särskild anledning till att du köpte en Volkswagen?

Vad associerar du till varumärket Volkswagen (varumärkets image)?

Vad känner du till om Volkswagen- skandalen?

**En film som sammanfattar skandalen:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ4irwe3ZDk>

Var detta någon ny information angående Volkswagen eller visste du vad skandalen gällde?

Vad tänkte du/hur kände du dig när du fick reda på fusket?

Hur tror du att Volkswagen har påverkats av skandalen?

Tror du att media har påverkat din bild av Volkswagen?

Har din syn på Volkswagen ändrats efter skandalen? (tappat förtroende?)

Skulle du kunna köpa/ byta till en annan Volkswagen i dagsläget? (Varför/ varför inte?)

Har din lojalitet till varumärket förändrats efter skandalen?

Har du fortfarande förtroende för varumärket?

Hur tror du att du kommer se på varumärket Volkswagen i framtiden?

### **Bakgrund**

Följer du nyhets rapportering? (ungefär hur mycket tid lägger du på nyheter)

Vart får du främst dina nyheter ifrån? (sociala medier, tv, radio, tidning, vänner etc.)

## **Appendix 2 - Interview guideline English**

### **Brand**

What is the most important thing in a brand? What is a strong brand for you?

What do you think about when you hear brand image? What is brand image according to you?

Do you think media affects how you perceive a brand?

### **Volkswagen**

What do you think about the brand Volkswagen?

Do you think Volkswagen is a strong brand (why/ why not)?

Was there a certain reason why you bought a Volkswagen?

What do you associate with the brand Volkswagen (brand image)?

What do you know about the Volkswagen scandal?

**A movie summarizing the scandal:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ4irwe3ZDk>

Was this any new information about Volkswagen or did you already know about the scandal?

What did you think about when you found out about the scandal?

How do you think Volkswagen has been affected by the scandal?

Do you think that media has affected your view of the brand Volkswagen?

Have your view of Volkswagen changed after the scandal (loss of trust)?

Would you buy Volkswagen again (why/why not)?

Has your loyalty to the brand Volkswagen changed after the scandal?

Do you still have trust in the brand?

How do you think you will perceive the brand Volkswagen in the future?

### **Background**

Do you follow any news (and approximately how much time)?

Where do you get your news from (social media, tv, radio, newspapers, friends etc.)?