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Corporate Reputations Measured and in Practice: How Can Corporations Stay Authentic to Their Positive External Depictions, Internally?

Valeene Wilson
CUNY Bernard M Baruch College

How Can Corporations Stay Authentic to Their Positive External Depictions, Internally?

[CORPORATE REPUTATIONS MEASURED AND IN PRACTICE]

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By

_____**Valeene Wilson**_____

Graduate Student's Name

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This project also has been presented at colloquium to departmental colleagues and faculty.

Approved:

_____

Professor *Minna Lappmann*, Advisor |Date: _May 23, 2022_

_____

Professor _*Allison Hahn*_, Reader | Date: May 24, 2022 _____

_____

Professor _*Caryn Medved*_, Program Director | Date: May 24, 2022 ____

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How Can Corporations Stay Authentic to Their Positive External Depictions, Internally?

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Abstract

This research paper discusses corporate reputation and how companies can stay authentic to their positive external reputations internally. Organizations are getting better at communicating who they are but fall short in fulfilling broader reputation goals. To be managed, corporate reputations must be measured. Fombrun introduced the Reputation Institute and the RepTrak™ measurement system, which builds on research done on leadership, employee engagement, and the evolution of corporate reputation. This paper dives into how to assess a corporation's reputation using the aggregate Reputation ranking RepTrak™ as a frame for the analysis of qualitative data, collected on four organizations and supplemented with oral histories from employees in two of them. The paper looks at specific reputation drivers and the results and consequences of these drivers in the workplace. This research at hand closes the gap between corporate reputation in theory and specific companies who have been successful in practice, putting reputation measures in place in order to benefit their companies internally and externally. This research finds that positive interactions build favorable reputations, and that leadership is a driving force in employee engagement and morale. It also finds that citizenship and environmental social governance (ESG) are driving forces for workers and consumers when considering where to work and where to buy from. A corporation's reputation should be recognized as a valuable asset, resulting in significant outcomes such as, attracting top talent, motivating employees and increasing job satisfaction, generating more positive media coverage as well as attracting consumers. This research contributes to literature and to the practice of reputation management.

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Introduction

A corporation's reputation is the perception of how the company operates by its different stakeholders. These public opinions are based on several factors, such as the company's products and services, their partnerships, how the company treats its employees, what community responsibilities and investments they take part in, and lots more. A corporation's reputation can be either positive or negative, and it may change over time depending on the actions of the company and also depending on the changing views and values of the public (Eccles, Newquist, & Schatz, 2014). The two most important stakeholders that form perceptions of a company are its internal employees, and the external public. It is important to acknowledge that these two stakeholder groups might have completely different perceptions about the company they purchase goods and services from versus the company they work for. Their experiences with the same exact company could be so vastly different but could also be very similar. If we look at a company like Disney, it is a company known for its very large portfolio, from parks and hotels to movies and streaming services. Even with such a large business portfolio in different entertainment sectors, Disney is known by the public as the "happiest place on earth". The reputation is described as magical, admirable, and family-oriented (Best & Lowney, 2009). But is the internal culture the same? Another company we can look at is Google, a trailblazer in technology. The public perception is that Google is one of the most innovative companies globally, always growing and expanding their offerings. Do Google employees feel like they can grow at the company, can they be creative and implement new ways of doing things, or is creativity and growth stunted at the employee level?

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The following study will analyze if and how organizations have been able to stay authentic to their reputations externally and internally. I've chosen the following brands to research: Disney, Google, Amazon, and Target. The ultimate goal of this research is to understand what it takes to gain a positive reputation from both stakeholder sides, internal and external, and what went wrong for these companies if they have been experiencing negative internal perceptions juxtaposed to their positive external perceptions.

Literature Review

Definitions

Reputation can be difficult to define since the perception of it is in the eye of the beholder. Schreiber (n.d.) states that reputation is a perception of value by peers and competitors, held in the mind of stakeholders and prospective stakeholders (Schreiber, n.d). As reputation is in the eye of the beholder, there are a plethora of definitions through decades of research on corporate reputation and what it means.

1) According to the 'American Heritage Dictionary' (2022) 'reputation' is 'The general opinion or judgment of the public about a person or thing".

2) Repman Reputation Research Center defines reputation as "the sum total of your track record. It is the accumulation of your actions and statements to date" (Di Somma, 2021).

3) MIT Sloan Management Review define corporate reputation as a "'company-centric' concept that focuses on the credibility and respect that an organization has among a broad set of constituencies, including employees, investors, regulators, journalists and local communities — as well as customers" (Ettenson & Knowles, 2008).

4) Davies, Chun & Roper see corporate reputation as something that is dependent upon actual experience of the organization, as compared to 'image' for example, which is often used to refer to an opinion that is independent of actual experience (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006).

5) Schreiber (2011) views corporate reputation from two perspectives. "From the perspective of the organization, reputation is an intangible asset that allows the company to better manage the expectations and needs of its various stakeholders, creating differentiation and barriers vis-à-vis its competitors. From the perspective of stakeholders, reputation is the intellectual, emotional and behavioral response as to whether or not the communications and actions of an organization resonate with their needs and interests" (Schreiber, 2011).

6) Fombrun, Van Riel and Rindova (1997) propose that corporate reputation is a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It gauges a firm's relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments (Fombrun and Rindova, 1996-1997).

Overtime definitions of corporate reputation have changed as stakeholder expectations of companies have changed.

Fombrun, Guardberg, and Sever (2000) looked at definitions of corporate reputation across different industries (Table 1) and combined all of these definitions as suggesting that "corporate reputation is a collective construct that describes the aggregate perceptions of multiple

stakeholders about a company's performance, proposed as a collective representation of a firms past behavior and outcomes that depicts the firm's ability to render valued results to multiple stakeholders" (Fombrun et al, 2000). Through their research across these industries, they proposed that the definition of corporate reputation is that it "calibrates a firms relative standing internally with employees and externally with other stakeholders, in its competitive and institutional environments. A reputation is therefore a collective assessment of a company's ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders" (Fombrun et al, 2000, p. 243).

Table 1 – Definitions of corporate reputation across industries

Discipline	Definition
Economics	Reputations are traits or signals that describe a company's probable behavior in a particular situation
Strategy	Reputations are intangible assets that are difficult for rivals to imitate, acquire, or substitute, and so create mobility barriers that provide their owners with a sustained competitive advantage
Accounting	Reputation is one of the many types of intangible assets that are difficult to measure but create value for companies

Marketing	Reputation describes the corporate associations that individuals establish with the company name
Communications	Reputations are corporate traits that develop from relationships companies establish with their multiple constituents
Organization Theory	Reputations are cognitive representations of companies that develop as stakeholders make sense of corporate activities
Sociology	Reputational rankings are social constructions emanating from the relationship firms establish with stakeholders in their shared institutional environment

Fombrun, C. J., Gardberg, N. A., & Sever, J. M. (2000).

Next, the importance and dimensions of corporate reputation will be discussed.

Significance of Positive Corporate Reputation

A positive corporate reputation is essential to the longevity and popularity of a brand and one of the biggest priorities of a corporation is to develop and maintain a positive reputation of their products and services. As times have progressed, also corporate values, morals, and social responsibilities have gained importance in building and maintaining a positive reputation. It is

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important that brands and corporations spend time in actively building a positive reputation inside and out and maintaining a high level of consistency in this area.

Scholars McDonald and Christopher (2003) liken a brand's reputation to a personality – "a combination of sensual appeal (the way it looks, feels, sounds, smells, tastes), rational appeal (the way it performs, how cost efficient it is), and emotional appeal (psychological rewards it offers, moods it conjures up, associations it evokes)." Coombs and Holladay (2006) describe reputation as stakeholder evaluation of an organization, developed through interactions, communication, and the relationship between the two entities. Positive interactions build favorable reputations while unpleasant interactions lead to unfavorable reputations. Coombs and Holladay go on to explain that reputations should be recognized as a valuable, intangible asset, linked to significant outcomes such as attracting customers, generating investment interest, attracting top employee talent, motivating workers, increasing job satisfaction, generating more positive media coverage, and garnering positive comments from financial analysts (Coombs and Holladay, 2006). Chun et al (2019) liken the term reputation with ethics. They describe a cross-section between business ethics and reputation, the fine line between looking good and doing good (Chun, Argandoña, Choirat, and Siegel, 2019).

"Reputation is influenced on all sides," says RepTrak™ VP of Advisory Anne Potts. "It's a combined effort across stakeholders, leaders, and cross-departmental collaboration." We can separate this into two categories, internal and external.

Internal Reputation - Leadership

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A study "Strategies for Survival in the War for Talent," captured survey data from 330 companies across 50 countries on employee perceptions of the companies they worked for. It was found that one of the biggest reasons employees leave their jobs is because they are unhappy with their boss (Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim, 2015). The styles of leadership influence an employee's experiences, as the style of leadership in most cases decides an effective or ineffective leader.

As early as the 1940s leadership behavior was studied, and task-oriented and relationship-oriented leaders were the two most prominent styles. Moving into the 1960's and 70's saw a Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) leadership style, stating that "leaders form high-quality relationships with some subordinates but not others" (Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim, 2015). The 1980s introduced the Charismatic Leader whose behavior was to inspire employees to commit themselves to goals by communicating a vision and setting powerful personal examples. In the same era, Transformational Leadership Theory emerged which put four aspects of effective leadership in the forefront: charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and consideration (Encyclopedia of Management, 2009). Leaders who engage their employees consistently are the ones who drive performance, and 80% of HR professionals believe that engagement directly relates to leadership (Lazic, 2021). Next, employee engagement will be discussed in more detail.

Internal Reputation – The Employee Experience

Former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, professed that employee engagement sits at the top of his list for measuring a company's reputation. Customer satisfaction and free cash flow came second and third, respectively (Popli and Rizvi, 2016).

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There has been substantive research on positive outcomes of employee engagement. A Gallup (2013) study examined 49,928 business units covering 1.4 million employees in 192 organizations, across 49 industries, in 34 countries, and concluded that in any economic climate, employee engagement is an important competitive differentiator for organizations. The research found that departments that scored "in the top half of their organization in employee engagement have nearly double the odds of success (based on a composite of financial, customer, retention, safety, quality, shrinkage and absenteeism metrics) when compared with those in the bottom half. Those at the 99th percentile have four times the success rate compared with those at the first percentile" (Popli and Rizvi, 2016).

There are extensive benefits of employee engagement in a company, from improved performance and motivation, reduced turnover, positive effects on employee health and well-being, to flexibility and adaptability to change initiatives which in turn help in the success of the business. Very importantly, these successes can include increased advocacy of the organization by the employee, and customer loyalty and satisfaction. (Popli and Rizvi, 2016). Researchers Popli and Rizvi (2016) looked at literature that cited eight common predictors of employee engagement, which included "expansive communication, trust and integrity, rich and involving job, effective and supportive direct supervisors, career advancement opportunities, contribution to organizational success, pride in the organization and supportive colleagues/team members. Other drivers of engagement cited in studies include management practices, immediate supervisor, career development opportunities, recognition, teamwork and supportive environment, pay rewards and benefits" (Popli and Rizvi, 2016). How internal stakeholders feel

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at a company reverberates externally, and when employees can speak highly of the company they work for, people listen and take their experiences to heart.

External Reputation - Media Monitoring and Crisis Management

Researchers Chun et al (2019) discuss the factor of how a corporation is portrayed in the media, and if their reputation management or crisis management departments are skilled enough in order to keep them out of negative media. How a company is seen by the media leads to the evaluation by the public on if a company is good or bad. Chun, Argandoña, Choirat, and Siegel (2019) talk about the idea that "reputation damage is not driven by the severity of the allegation, but by credibility of the source report" (Chun et al, 2019, p. 1133). The authors are arguing that a company's reputational damage is based on the source reporting the news versus the actual reputational issue at hand. "This condition then confirms reputation to be a socially constructed concept and that communication of good behavior is as important as doing good itself" (Chun et al, 2019, p. 1133). Another phenomenon to look at when analyzing socially constructed concepts of public perception especially after a crisis is how leaders leave a company. A study found that resignation has more negative reactions than terminations. Public view was worse when the CEO of a company was heard to have resigned rather than being terminated, and reaction was even worse for a company when it was previously regarded as being a socially responsible company. When executives leave a company after a crisis, how they leave can increase or decrease negative public reaction, so it is important that crisis management handle these events with care and do it the right way.

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Corporate reputation is recognized as a significant competitive asset, and a good reputation can be considered as one of the most valuable outcomes of doing the right thing. As this research dives into a deep analysis, it will reflect on these significant factors and how these link to the companies in conversation. But a big question to be answered is how the reputation of a company can be truly and consistently measured.

How to actively measure Corporate Reputation?

Through the years and through the continued research on corporate reputations, several credible methods and strategies have been created in order to track and measure these corporate reputations using several categories based on internal and external sentiments. Three methods to be discussed are, the Corporate Character Scale, The Harris Interactive Reputation Quotient (RQ), and RepTrak™.

The first measurement method is the Corporate Character Scale. Davies, et.al. (2004) developed the Corporate Character Scale which determines how a company is perceived based on specific personality traits such as warmth, emotion, integrity, and dominance, among several other traits. The development of this character scale is to assess the reputation of an organization from both the employee perspective and the customer perspective by personifying a company. This personification metaphor approach draws on a number of literatures that identifies traits labeled as 'corporate character' as a way to measure the perceptions of employees and customers. Davies et al defines corporate character as "how a stakeholder distinguishes an organization, expressed in terms of human characteristics" and their approach is guided by their objective to create a measurement tool that was generic, diagnostic and equally applicable to both employees and

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customers (Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2004). The Corporate Character Scale surveyed

over 2,000 employees and over 2,000 customers in 49 different business units of 13

organizations in order to provide data and identify the dimensions of corporate character. As

outlined in the table below (Table 2), this personification metaphor approach focuses on the

emotional attachments that stakeholders have with an organization, for example, do they trust a

corporation rather than do they think it is financially successful.

Table 2: The Corporate Character Scale: Dimensions, Facets and Items

| Dimension	Facet	Item
Agreeableness	Warmth	Friendly, pleasant, open, straightforward
	Empathy	Concerned, reassuring, supportive, agreeable
	Integrity	Honest, sincere, trustworthy, socially responsible
Enterprise	Modernity	Cool, trendy, young
	Adventure	Imaginative, up-to-date, exciting, innovative
	Boldness	Extrovert, daring
Competence	Conscientiousness	Reliable, secure, hardworking
	Drive	Ambitious, achievement oriented, leading
	Technocracy	Technical, corporate
Chic	Elegance	Charming, stylish, elegant
	Prestige	Prestigious, exclusive, refined
	Snobbery	Snobby, elitist
Ruthlessness	Egotism	Arrogant, aggressive, selfish
	Dominance	Inward-looking, authoritarian, controlling
Informality	None	Casual, simple, easy-going
Machismo	None	Masculine, tough, rugged

(Davies et al, 2004).

The second measurement method is the Corporate Reputation Quotient Model (CRQ). In 1999,

Harris & Fombrun created the CRQ Model measuring corporate reputations based on focus

groups and pilot studies to establish empirical validity and reliability. The assessment tool

initially used six dimensions of reputation and 20 attributes to understand public perception and

asses the visibility of a company. The six dimensions of reputation include: products and

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services, financial performance, workplace environment, social responsibility, vision and leadership, and emotional appeal (Harris Interactive, 2006). The first annual reputation quotient results announcing the top 100 companies based on corporate reputation were published by The Wall Street Journal in September of 1999 and since then the report is published annually and has since evolved (Figure 1), today being known as The Harris Poll or the Axios Harris Poll.

Figure 1
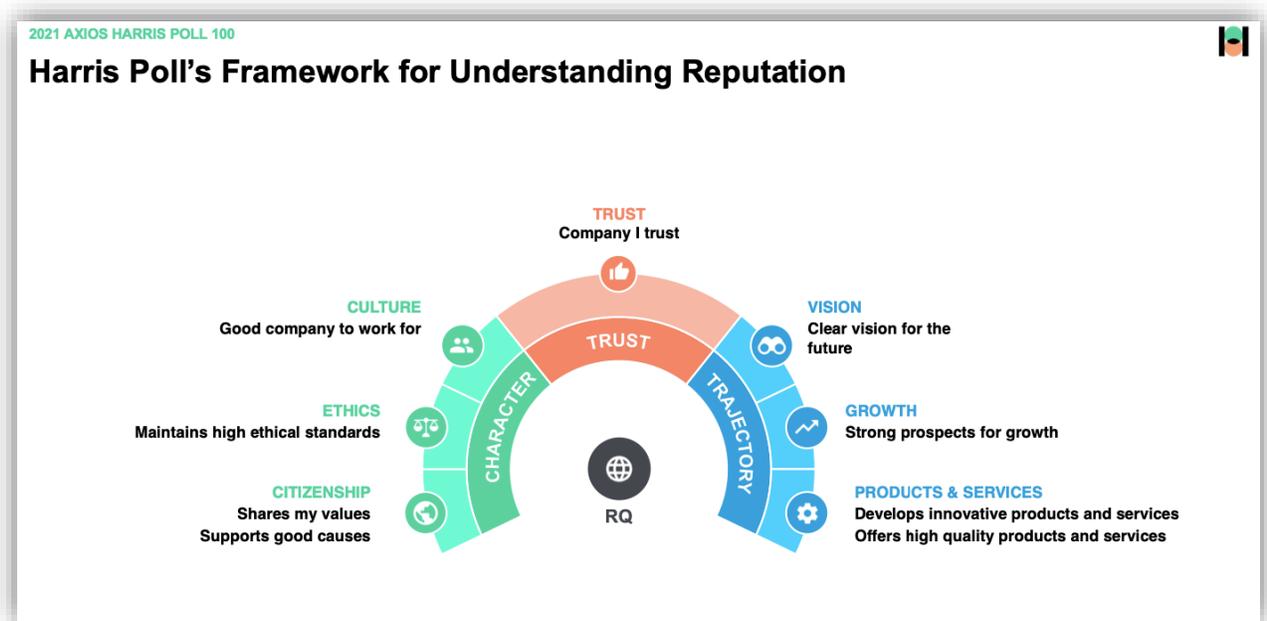
(Nielsen, 2016)

The Axios Harris Poll 100 surveys over 40,000 Americans in a nationally representative sample using a two-step process to look into the public's top-of-mind awareness of companies that either excel or falter in society. "These 100 "most visible companies" are then rated by a second group of Americans across the seven key dimensions of reputation to determine the ranking. If a company is not on the list, it did not reach a critical level of visibility to be measured" (Harris Interactive, 2006). The Corporate Reputation Quotient has become an invaluable tool for

companies when managing corporate reputation and identifying new market risks and opportunities. Many people consider The CRQ /Harris Poll to be a reliable validation of corporate reputation, so it can most definitely drive public perception of a company positively or negatively (Reputation X, 2021).

The third measurement method is RepTrak™. Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) called for work that bridges the many diverse perspectives on reputation and built the Reputation Institute with this goal in mind. By 2004, The Reputation Institute developed an instrument called RepTrak™ which measures across seven drivers of reputation as shown in figure 2: Products and Services, Innovation, Workplace, Citizenship, Conduct, Leadership, and Financial Performance, with 23 attributes of reputation within these drivers.

Products & Services
The quality and value of its products & services, including customer experience and client support.

Innovation
How innovative a company is, whether it is first to market, and adapts quickly to change.

Workplace
The extent to which a company cares for employees' health & well-being, and its ability to offer fair rewards and equal opportunities in the workplace.

Leadership
A company's vision, the quality of its leader and managers, and managerial effectiveness.

Conduct
A company's ethics, including fairness, openness, and transparency in its business practices.

Citizenship
How environmentally-friendly a company is, its ability to support good causes, and have a positive impact on society.

Performance
A company's financial results, including profitability and growth prospects.

Figure 2 (RepTrak™, 2022)

The Reputation Institute examines emotion, feelings and trust toward companies among the general public across 25 countries, and touts that their proprietary RepTrak™ model is "the global standard for measuring and analyzing the sentiment of the world, using proven data science models and machine learning techniques across industries and geographies" (The RepTrak™ Company, 2022).

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Of these three methods used to gauge public sentiment of a company, this research will use the RepTrak™ model created by Fombrun as a supportive tool in the empirical research. I'm choosing to use this model based on the extensive research done in order to develop a RepTrak™ as a balanced instrument for measuring corporate reputations globally. The instrument is research based and measures and quantifies corporate reputations and examines reputations antecedents and consequences (Gardburg & Fombrun, 2002) as a valid, reliable, and robust tool. This tool will provide the frame for the analysis, and of the corporate reputation definitions displayed earlier, this thesis research will use the Fombrun (2000) definition as the theoretical frame throughout this research.

Research Question

The question to be researched is: *How can corporations successfully stay authentic to their positive external reputations internally, maintaining positive perceptions on both sides?* The question will be answered by employing a qualitative secondary data analysis of four case companies as the main research strategy, supplemented by experiential, emic data of two of the four case companies drawn from oral histories.

Research Methods & Data Collection

The four case companies were studied in depth using an integrated literature review of mainstream media, business data, and additional third-party sources, along with journals, publications, and research articles to assess the authenticity of reputation at the four companies. The four companies where chosen based on their external reputations being either significantly positive or negative, or very neutral. Additionally, two oral histories were conducted with

individuals employed by Disney and Target corporation through Zoom, a virtual teleconferencing platform with a narrative interviewing technique that surrounded the topics of corporate reputations, employee satisfaction, and specific emphasis on their personal and unique experiences and perspective as an employee working for Target and Disney (Sommer & Quinlan, 2005, p. 5). The two interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was carried out in the narrative data, analyzing and identifying key words and themes. The oral history process was used to address the research question, while the interviewees were also prompted with questions relative to corporate reputation, what employees want from the companies they work for, and what consumers want from companies they buy from during the interviews. The interviews will help to deeper elaborate the themes of this research and help to provide more insight from the participants' personal experiences as employees of Target and Disney, and combined with the secondary data used, will form a rich description of what it's like to work for these companies and what these companies are doing successfully internally.

Data Analysis

Assessing Reputation using RepTrak™

The RepTrak™ System is a tested and reliable way of assessing and analyzing reputations, sharing rigorous research-based insights on ways to improve stakeholder perceptions. The system presents reputation as an emotional reaction based on stakeholder perceptions of a company, and what drives them to form those perceptions. The RepTrak™ Database houses annual consumer ratings of companies enabling the platform to share best practices with companies to help them assess all reputation risks and opportunities (Fombrun, 2008).

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The Global RepTrak™100 annually reports the 100 most reputable companies worldwide and uses a reputation score from 0-100 that measures how people feel towards a particular company, determined by seven key reputation drivers and four larger all-encompassing drivers. These are (see Figures 3 and 4):

1) **Products and Services:** the quality and value of its products and services, including customer experience and client support

2) **Innovation:** how innovative a company is, whether it is first to market, and adapts quickly to change

3) **Workplace:** weather a company pays for its employees' health and wellbeing, and its ability to offer fair rewards and equal opportunities in the workplace

4) **Conduct:** a company's ethics, including fairness, openness, and transparency in its business practices

5) **Citizenship:** how environmentally-friendly a company is, its ability to support good causes and have a positive impact on society

6) **Leadership:** a company's vision, the quality of its leader and managers, and managerial effectiveness

7) **Performance:** a company's financial results, including profitability and growth prospects

The four overarching categories of the RepTrak™ measurement that encompass these drivers include:

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1) **Brand -** Brand and reputation are connected but not the same thing. A brand is the promise a company makes, and expands across personality, authenticity, consistency, and communication, which is developed from the inside out. While reputation is how the company fulfills that promise, and developed from the outside in.

2) **Environmental – Social – Governance (ESG) -** ESG is a measure of an organization's ethical efforts, perceived by several stakeholder groups from investors to consumers to employees. Measures of citizenship include being a positive influence on society', being environmentally conscious, and supporting good causes and RepTrak™ considers factors like sustainability, talent management, diversity, and ethical governance. For companies it's not just about what they do, but how they do it.

3) **Industry Benchmarks -** Industry benchmarks compare companies to their competitors within the same industries. As stakeholder needs evolves, it influences how companies and brands are valued and perceived. Fluctuations in reputation across industries tell the story of how priorities shift throughout the year, and how companies responded.

4) **Media -** Media and reputation influence one another. How news outlets discuss organizations impacts their reputation and how corporate reputation is perceived impacts how news outlets discuss those organizations.

These Reputation Drivers reveal how a stakeholder thinks about a company encompassing what the public typically considers when formulating and interpreting reputation, and the scores demonstrate a strong, positive relationship with business outcomes, such as stakeholders'

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willingness to buy, willingness to work for, recommend, or trust a company to do the right thing in a time of crisis.

Figure 3 (RepTrak™, 2022)   Figure 4 (RepTrak™, 2022)

In 2022, the global reputation score based on the RepTrak™ method posted at 74.2 points, a 0.7 decrease in points compared to the year prior. Interestingly, the point difference from 2020 to 2021 was a 1.8 increase, and the data suggests that an increase or decrease of 1 point value could result in a 5% drop or increase in support for companies. It can be seen that the biggest driver of reputation was a company's products and services, which makes sense since this is first and foremost what a company is known for. Workplace is the least important driver based on the table in figure 3, however this does not mean it is not important at all. As seen in figure 3, workplace had the biggest drop in points, suggesting that heightened expectations from corporate workplace efforts during the major events of 2020 and 2021 were not met in 2022 (RepTrak™, 2022).

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Of the several reputation drivers mentioned above, leadership, conduct, workplace, innovation, and citizenship were discussed intently in oral history interviews conducted with employee of Target corporation and Disney. The Target employee has been working in a technical role at the company for 6 months, and the Disney employee had been working in an accounting role for 14 years. The interviews surrounded the topic of corporate reputation and discussed the interviewees wants and needs of a company they want to work for and of companies they want to buy from. The interviewees presented their experiences and unique perspectives as individuals working for the Target and Disney corporations and provided interesting insights that fit within the larger themes of this research. Some of the recurring themes found during these interviews were leadership and conduct, community, the employee experience surrounding growth and support, and themes around diversity and inclusion and corporate social responsibility. These perspectives will be discussed along with societal context from supplementary sources.

Next, we are going to look at leadership in the workplace and their conduct, understanding the needs of the employee when it comes to what they want out of a leader.

Internal - Leadership & Conduct

According to the 2022 RepTrak™ reputation drivers, leadership was the third most important driver in what forms a company's reputation. The Target employee interviewed spoke about their experience with leadership at the company, and what they look for in a leader when considering where to work. They shared that from leadership they want "somebody to look up to, and be inspired by, somebody you feel like you can go to ask questions, if you need to express any thoughts, feelings, or feedback…somebody who's relatable, who understands what the lower-level employees go through or need. And expresses that they understand that. And so that makes

you as an employee feel like, there's not this huge space or gap in between you, but you feel connected, and you feel like you can relate. I feel like a leader should encourage growth in their employees, and I think leaders at Target do that".

A big part of leadership in relation to employee engagement and satisfaction is the type of leadership style the management team employs, which can result in a buildup of trust and respect from an employee group to the leadership team. Leaders at Google saw transparency as a major part of their culture, and so their senior leadership team implemented company-wide meetings on a weekly basis, justly named "Thank God It's Friday" meetings to keep employees up to date and in the loop on new developments at the company. These kinds of casual meetings give employees the space to question and even challenge company leadership, with leaderships encouragement to do so (Hsieh, Klopfenstein, and Mehta, 2020).

Similarly, the Target employee expressed that "it's very important to me that they're open about what they are doing…they need to be transparent, they need to have employees involved to get their feedback and such. I think they are very good about that, and I appreciate it. The leaders are very seen at Target…you feel connected to the leaders. They emphasize relationships with the leaders. They're regular humans and you can relate to them. So, I think Target does a good job in that."

In the memoir of former Disney CEO Bob Iger (Denning, 2019), Iger speaks about his induction as the CEO of Disney and his desire to refresh the leadership style of the company. He shared several pointers in his strive to become a great leader for the company. Optimism was must -

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"The tone you set as a leader has an enormous effect on the people around you. No one wants to follow a pessimist." He promoted curiosity - "The path to innovation begins with curiosity...Innovate or die." He believed in fairness - "Strong leadership embodies the fair and decent treatment of people...Nothing is worse to an organization than a culture of fear." He stood by authenticity - "Truth and authenticity breed respect and trust." And he pushed for the relentless pursuit of perfection – "This doesn't mean perfectionism at all costs, but it does mean a refusal to accept mediocrity or make excuses for something being 'good enough" (Denning, 2019). Leadership is who shape the culture of an organization, from the top down. So, it important that employees feel comfortable, connected, inspired and all stakeholders are able to work toward a shared goal.

The Disney employee interviewed shared that she "was blessed to get a wonderful boss. That was totally different. And he said he saw what I saw. We had people that were the head of HR that came from California, and they were amazing, because they wanted to hear what it is that we wanted." "And one of the things that I received out of my boss is that he actually cared. He listened to me. He was the global controller. So that means his office was a revolving door, all the divisions that come in, they talk to him, but he took time to hear me, listen to me, that's what I would say were one of his greatest characteristics. And that's where the retention comes in, people don't want to leave. They don't. He moved mountains when he needed to make sure that I felt comfortable." As the Disney employee mentioned, feeling this type of connection and trust from leadership made herself and her coworkers want to stay at the company, and this clearly was a major part of her employee experience working at Disney, and past CEO Bob Ifer tried to make this a part of the Disney culture.

Next, we are going to look at workplace and culture and how these affect the employee experience.

Internal - Workplace, Culture, & the Employee Experience

As we discussed, leadership forms company culture. According to Steiber and Alänge (2016) "organizational culture is the set of shared beliefs, values, and norms that influence the way members think, feel, and behave"(in Tran, 2017, p. 1). The organizational and leadership culture at Google is one that has been imitated by many corporations trying to emulate the company's success in business and attracting quality talent. Googles People Operation team, a glorified Human Resources department, uses science to build the best culture for their employees. The innovative tech firm looks at everything from a perspective of data and are consistently optimizing their actions and practices by experimenting to find the best ways to satisfy their employees and create the best and most efficient working environment for them. The leadership at Google has created an environment where employees have a sense of freedom to contribute their ideas and opinions and are not afraid to make mistakes. Allowing employees to make mistakes is a major consideration for why Google employees feel so much freedom and autonomy. Instead of blaming an employee for a mistake made, the company and its leaders put their efforts toward what the cause of the problem was and how to fix it as quickly and efficiently as possible. As an innovative and ever-evolving company, experimentation is encouraged, and employees are given the opportunity to overcome failure in exchange for brilliant ideas (Tran, 2017).

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In an article titled *What Google Teaches Its Leaders*, it's shared that former Google CEO Eric Schmidt always "urged his managers to run toward the most difficult challenges rather than try to find ways around them." Former Google president of the Americas, Margo Georgiadis, explained that "the idea that it's the manager's job to inspire rather than the underling's responsibility to follow orders taught humility. …[Google is] not a culture of stars. It's a culture of highly collaborative, aspirational leaders that are highly networked and interdependent" (Bircovici, n.d). The message from the top down is for employees to be highly ambitious in their actions and ideas, building in margin for error. And they are given the resources to do so. Employees must feel comfortable enough at the company they work for to be as innovative and creative as possible, to feel safe enough to try new things and share big ideas, and to make mistakes. A culture of collaboration and connection can breed this.

In interviewing the Target employee, they shared that "Target definitely makes the employees feel like family and feel very welcomed and at home from the beginning, from onboarding sessions…Onboarding includes these tasks or activities called 'Get To Know You's' where you're given a list by a manager of people that you should get to know. And you're welcomed to reach out to people and get to know them, set up a 20-minute conversation via zoom with them, find out more about the company more about their experience, just have casual chats, it's very encouraged". This type of internal networking is important to help employees feel connected and seen.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for a successful corporate culture, but companies with a positive internal culture tend to see positive results externally. The Harvard Business School case

study titled *Culture at Google* explains that in a 2012 study, workers across the United States that were satisfied with their companies' work culture were almost 35% less likely to search for new opportunities, which proved that a satisfied workforce meant less employee turnover for the company. A 2017 survey complemented this earlier study showing that 50% of employees wanting to leave their current company said that a poor workplace culture was their primary motivation for feeling this way (Hsieh, Klopfenstein, and Mehta, 2020).

Insight from the interview with an employee from Target supported the idea that work culture is an important factor in retaining or losing employees. "Something that was a really big shock for me at Target was the amount of time people spend at Target. A lot of the people that I've met have been there upwards of 20 years, I met people there upwards of 30 years, 40 years. I think the highest amount I've met was someone who's been there for 43 years. Many people have met their husbands and wives and many people have their kids working there. Many people have made their life-long friends at Target. So that was a very big shock, because I've never seen that anywhere before, knowing that people can stay at one company for over 20 years, over 30 years. And that speaks to how the employees like the company, if they're willing to stay there for that long".

Recently, Target corporation announced it would pay for the full cost of college for its employees, allowing them this resource as soon as they begin working for the company. Target invests in its employees from the bottom up, combatting high turnover and allowing for employees to build their careers at Target and really know the company as they rise up the ranks from retail clerk into leadership. This educational benefit has been deemed "the most

comprehensive debt-free education assistance program available in the retail industry" (Nietzel, 2021), and is estimated to cost Target at least $200 million over the next four years. Melissa Kremer, Target's chief human resources officer, shares "we don't want the cost to be a barrier for anyone, and that's where Target can step in to make education accessible for everyone,". Target Forward, a new corporate strategy, was unveiled last year with goals to create an equitable and inclusive workforce, as well as including other initiatives designed to support the health, safety, well-being and career development of its workers, including recognition bonuses, free virtual doctor visits, and free mental health counseling services (Nietzel, 2021). The investment into employee's education is an investment in employee retention, and Targets aim is to have employees grow with the company. The Target employee interviewed agreed "they're very big advocates on exploring Target and different roles. And they are open to people transferring laterally to different roles across target …and so that's another reason why people tend to stay is because they are able to have many careers within Target. So, for example, the person that I spoke to who has been there for 43 years, she's had five different careers at Target across different departments. So, they're very good at keeping their employees".

The Disney employee? interviewed agreed that access to growth in the workplace is an important factor for employees to consider, and something she struggled with in her early years at Disney. "I put the years in, and some things are promised to you. And then you see, well, they got somebody with more experience, or they got somebody from outside. And, you know, I was really, really maintaining and taking care of millions of dollars for this company. And I never had an office, I had worked on a workstation. There were some other people that were going through it too …you know, I was like, when is my turn? Let me tell you, I didn't have to break

the glass ceiling. I had to get a sledgehammer, get up there and knock it all the way down." "One time I was asked by someone in upper management, what would you like to see with the company because you know, now I'm climbing the corporate ladder. And I had to go through a lot to climb the ladder. And I said, it would be nice to see someone in upper management that looks more like me".

Amazon's treatment of employees has been under the microscope in recent years amid allegations of racial inequity and poor treatment of warehouse workers. The company's revenue increased exponentially during the pandemic, and so the company has experienced even more scrutiny about underpaying and overworking employees. Amazon has always been a customer-focused corporation, and one out of the initial 14 leadership principles presented is customer obsession – "Leaders start with the customer and work backwards. They work vigorously to earn and keep customer trust. Although leaders pay attention to competitors, they obsess over customers". From the negative news that Amazon tends to be associated with, leadership always put their employees last (Soper, 2021). However, upon former CEO Jeff Bezos' exit in 2021, two new leadership principles were added. One being, strive to be Earth's best employer. This principle promotes that "leaders work every day to create a safer, more productive, higher performing, more diverse, and more just work environment. They lead with empathy, have fun at work, and make it easy for others to have fun. Leaders ask themselves: Are my fellow employees growing? Are they empowered? Are they ready for what's next? Leaders have a vision for and commitment to their employees' personal success, whether that be at Amazon or elsewhere" (Soper, 2021).

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In Bezos' final shareholder letter as Amazon CEO, he focused on the company's treatment of employees and shared that "Despite what we've accomplished, it's clear to me that we need a better vision for our employees' success…We have always wanted to be Earth's Most Customer-Centric Company. We won't change that. It's what got us here. But I am committing us to an addition. We are going to be Earth's Best Employer and Earth's Safest Place to Work." (Soper, 2021).

A safe space for all employees no matter their race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability is important for an employee base to feel a sense of belonging and trust. As the employee from Disney stated "It's called inclusion. If you are not feeling like you're included that's a form of microaggressions. Microaggression is people feeling left out or some of those slight comments that people make. So, you're supposed to be included in the company if it's equal opportunity". What I have to commend them for is…what they implemented. Integrity training. So it happened at first annually, then they saw the need for it to be semi-annual. With that integrity training we talked about diversity. We talked we talked about how Disney expects for you to act in their company, and how you're supposed to treat each other". "I didn't like people coming and playing with my braids. I used to wear braids down to my waist. They would say but I love your hair I just want to touch it. So, a lot of times, they didn't mean no harm. There's times I felt embarrassed because I was the only one sitting there with braids. And then everyone comes to touch on my hair. I had to learn how to respond, because then they would be like, oh, she's an angry Black woman. …And then I had a couple of people that were superior to me that were asking me questions like, oh, so you're gonna change your hair for the meeting, you're gonna wash it, right?" "So those integrity trainings kind of brought to light some things that they really

didn't know they were doing. You know, that's all nationalities, Blacks, you know, White, Latino, whatever your ethnicity is. We had these little things that we've learned that were negative and so very offensive. So, I have to give Disney props, I saw that they cared enough".

To make inclusive spaces for diverse employees, through the years diversity groups, also known as employee resource groups (ERGs) or affinity groups, have become popular and even standard in many corporations. These groups can have a significant and powerful influence in the workplace and bring coworkers together who have similar backgrounds or interests. These diversity groups allow access to networking, mentorships, and opportunities for professional and personal development. "Affinity groups can help employers attract more diverse candidates, reduce turnover, and increase employee morale" (Taylor, 2019).

The Disney employee interviewed shared that "[The CFO of Disney] said we need to change the morale of the culture". "They asked me to be the head of the morale committee. I ran surveys, I interviewed, you know, employees to see what they wanted. So, I had a chance to go to the accountant and the finance department and say what is it that you want?" "So being that I was not, at that time, I wasn't in upper management, and he wanted to know how [we] felt. So, I started different campaigns that changed the morale…It changed them around and we just started doing things to bring people together. Like I said, I did surveys, but nobody knew who was putting those answers in. We did things where they plant a seed and give ideas to make things run better in the company in terms of morale. So that's what the morale committee was about". "Disney was about synergy; we even had a synergy department. But he just felt something was lost. And so with the morale committee, he wanted me to help to boost the morale".

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This leads us to our next section where we are going to look at a company's conduct externally, discussing citizenship and their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts. We will discuss how this affects the company's reputation, as purchasing habits evolve to be more ESG focused.

External - Citizenship & Environmental – Social – Governance (ESG)

A company's internal stakeholder experience reverberates on the outside, whether positive or negative. A huge part of employees feeling safe within an organization is the company's ethics, and their efforts in corporate social responsibly. This is also a huge contribution to corporations' external reputations. Looking back to the events of 2020, corporations were put in the limelight and held to a higher standard as consumer expectations changed based on the events happening around them. How companies handled their employees amidst the global pandemic, as well as how companies responded to the Black Lives Matter protests happening across the country and the World became important considerations for external stakeholders.

Target CEO, Brian Cornell, understood from the very beginning of the pandemic that the company had to do all they could to take care of their employees. They permanently raised its starting retail wage to $15 per hour across the country. The company offered paid time off for those with higher health risks, and extended health benefits. They also offered free rides to employees needing to get a covid test or a covid vaccine (Kohen, 2020). During the Black Lives Matter protests, Cornell met with a group of Black executives to better understand and empathize with how the killing of George Floyd impacted Target's Black employees and their allies. He encouraged all employees to speak up about how they were feeling, and the company committed

$10 million to advance social justice, promote multiculturally-owned businesses and entrepreneurs, and promote equity in housing and in the workforce. The company also announced that the Juneteenth holiday that commemorates the end of slavery would be designated as a company-wide holiday, encouraging reflection and connection (Kohen, 2020). As the Target interviewee shared "I do remember during COVID, if you remember specifically, the George Floyd case actually happened where their headquarters is, which is in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Target definitely backed the Black Lives Matter movement, and just made the community aware that they weren't supportive of that… they were very encouraging of their employees to take time off if they felt they needed to, just because it was a lot of stress on a lot of employees that they have a Target. Target also has been very good when it comes to hiring diversity, and even more so since these situations have arisen, they've pledged some really good things like continuously hiring diverse candidates throughout the next few years".

The year of 2020 was a significant year for corporations and proving their contribution to investing in their employees and in their communities. The global pandemic and global social justice protests emphasized the continued shift in consumerism and how it has evolved from just a simple exchange of goods and services to a more complex exchange conditioned on consumers morals and values. How corporations are dealing with corporate social responsibility and environmental and social governance shows a direct link to how a lot of the public respond to these corporations. Employees want to know that companies are investing in the things that are important to them, from sustainability, to equality, to employee health and wellbeing. Historical RepTrak™ data shows 51% of the global public believe it is essential for corporations to provide both actions and words in response to cultural issues. Additionally, consumers are significantly

more likely to purchase from and trust a company with a high ESG Score. In fact, ESG is the most powerful indicator in determining whether the public is willing to trust a company and give it the benefit of the doubt (RepTrak™ 2022). "I would say that's important to me. And I think it's important to a lot of people nowadays. It's not really just about saving money anymore. It's about other things that the company is doing. So, I think as a consumer, those things are important to know that I am supporting a company that supports all these other aspects", as the employee from Target shared.

The Disney employee interviewed shared the same sentiments about the company's efforts during the Black Lives Matter movement, and in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion space overall. "I was happy to see that the Walt Disney Company reinforced that they…were standing with the family of George Floyd. And so in order to do that they got together with Black Lives Matter. And then they even like put a link on the face of their website, to say that we won't stand for anything other than equal opportunity, and we stand with the family of George Floyd and we don't mistreat people because of their race, or their ethnicity. So this is the type of thing I'm talking about. So we no longer just look at the reputation and the good reputation anymore. We hear what's going on behind the scenes".

2020 brought unique conflict that companies haven't delt with on this level in the past, from social, health, environmental, and political issues. In many cases, the efforts, promises, and pledges made in 2020 and 2021 were halted in 2022, and the public noticed who continued acting and who didn't. Below is an exert from the interview with a Target employee about the company's most recent efforts in the corporate social responsibility space.

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"Some of the things that come to mind is not only do they pledge on placing minority products in the store on the shelves, made by minority business owners, but they also make an effort to work with them when it comes to repairs in their store, or the A/C, or cleaning options in their store. So, it's not just for businesses on the shelves, but they're making efforts to support other minority businesses in other ways. Also, they are connecting with a Black-owned TV network. And they have a show where they're allowing black business owners to come and pitch their business. And then they are providing funding for them to be able to actually grow their business. There's actually a lot they're doing for the community…we do a lot of pro bono work. And they make sure that employees know about this so that you can sign up if you want to, if you have a certain skill, you can help businesses…They have a couple programs, where they work with people who are not traditionally educated. So, people who maybe dropped out of college, dropped out of high school, got a GED*, or decided not to go to college. And they train them in engineering and some other technical roles, and they bring them in as a full-time employees at Target…they're doing a lot out there…A project that they're working on right now is working on making it easier for their blind consumers to navigate the stores and they're making an app where they can kind of like listen to their location and guide them around the store…They're very good on their communication at Target and we get updates very often, different kinds of briefings and newsletters about what's going on and what they're doing and what they're trying. And it's very exciting to see some of the things that they're doing. We have live conversations about some of the tasks that they're working on for disabilities, for their customers who have disabilities, for the different kinds of customers that they have, they make an effort to include them.

* GED = General Education Development Test designed to show that a person has high-school level academic skills although they did not graduate from high school

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They're being very authentic with it and they're not trying to boast about what they're doing just for likes, they are just being authentic with it. They're sharing it with their employees and making sure that the employees see what they're doing and feel excited about and proud about the company they work for. And then it just stems from there, that they're gonna' probably express it to people outside of the company or express it to the community and I think that's what they focus on, more of a community and more of their employees versus shouting out to the world. They know that it will trickle, and eventually the right people will know about it, which is the people they are trying to help. So, I think that is their mindset when it comes to that, because you really don't hear about these things. But there's a lot going on behind the scenes when it comes to helping the community". A question that comes to mind is, does no media presence help or hurt a company's external reputation? According to RepTrak™ 2022, investing in ESG efforts makes a lasting impact with a powerful crowd, but you must communicate them to the public. 90% of companies measured saw that their ESG efforts did not match the public's perception of them.

Next, we are going to look at media management and how well or not so well companies can keep their media mentions positive, or to a minimum.

External - Media Management and Crisis Management

Next to ESG, media management and crisis management are important, especially as a company intends for what they say and what they do to be cohesive. When corporations have skilled reputation and crisis management teams, is not always widely reported when they have issues within the company or even run ins with legal implications. Some corporations are able to keep

their external reputation in a positive light while employee dissatisfaction runs rampant inside the company walls. Google is one of these corporations that have been able to do this, and we can attribute this to the "halo effect", where a positive brand image can help organizations bounce back from negative media or help them to hide behind their positive images. In 2016, Google employees were not happy with security-related government contracts that Google had partnered into. They felt these contracts were not consistent with Googles morals and many employees discussed an interest in organizing and unionizing. In turn, Google monitored employees' emails and calendars more closely, and ended up firing four employees involved in internal activism, claiming their actions breached its data security policies and code of conduct.

Employees at Google felt the company had illegally retaliated against their efforts to organize. This was a blow to employee morale, and they used Googles code of conduct against leadership, as the code states "don't be evil, and if you see something that you think isn't right—speak up!' "Don't Be Evil" had become a central feature of the company, with many employees reporting that they felt a genuine sense of moral responsibility in the workplace (Hsieh, Klopfenstein, and Mehta, 2020). In 2017, the department of labor along with former female employees sued Google for gender discrimination after the company refused to release compensation data. The employees claimed that they were hired at lower compensation levels than their male colleagues with similar qualifications (Hsieh, Klopfenstein, and Mehta, 2020). In 2018, Google was exposed as the board of directors approved a $90 million exit package for an executive that was

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More recently, The Walt Disney Company has been in the news surrounding a political bill that was approved in Florida named the "Parental Rights in Education" bill but dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" bill. The bill passed by state legislators bans educators from discussions about sexual orientation and gender identity with children from kindergarten to third grade. Disney CEO Bob Chapek chose not to publicly condemn this bill that many of his LGBTQ+ employees and allies have been closely following, who feel extremely offended and attacked by it. The approval of this bill is felt to be a human rights violation and thousands of employees felt strongly that their CEO should speak up about it. Chapek instead shared publicly that he feels "corporate statements are often weaponized by one side or the other to further divide and inflame" (Pallotta, 2022). Employees joined together to speak up for their rights publicly and privately and even hosted daily walkouts to strengthen their protests against the company's views. They proposed that Disney immediately and indefinitely cease all campaign donations to the parties involved in approving the bill, and after several days and the continued protests of his employees, Chapek shared that Disney employees "helped me better understand how painful our silence was." He chose to pause all political donations in Florida (Pallotta, 2022).

The Disney employee that was interviewed worked for the company for 14 years and expressed the companies past efforts around discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community. "I would say to you in terms of anything that has to do with people's sexuality, Disney reinforces it, 100%, that you treat people correctly. They are big in affirming that we won't stand for it, and one of the things they said if they see that you're treating people incorrect for their race, sexuality, any of those things, you will be immediately fired. And that's something that I saw....They were like

we will not accept it. So, if they heard of anything that was going on like that, making comments about peoples sexuality, you were going to be escorted right on out". This goes to show that the employee voice is an important one. And that if a company's outward actions don't align with internal values, it can stain the reputation of the brand even if the company has been known to have a great reputation.

Target is a company that isn't so much in the news. Their communications and PR departments have been able to keep any negative happenings at the company out of the public eye. However, how quiet is too quiet when it comes to media representation? Positive news stories can really help build a brands reputation, and Target can be missing out on positive external perceptions because they are not sharing their positive efforts widely enough, which means they could be missing out on great talent applying to work for their company, or consumers and investors looking to support a company that is doing great things for the community.

The Target interviewee stated that they almost didn't apply for a job a Target because they had no information on the company enticing her to form a positive opinion about the company being a great company to work for. "It definitely is an underdog…in not really knowing how much Target is doing behind the scenes. For me personally, target wasn't on my radar when I was searching for roles. It just wasn't a company that I thought about working at, maybe it's because it's not really in the limelight for the things that it's doing. So, it didn't really make me want to say I would love to work at this company. So, when the opportunity arose for me to apply I applied for the position and was really shocked during onboarding at how personable they are, trying to make their employees feel very welcome and feel like family. I've never experienced

that in previous roles, they definitely have this family feel to them even though they're a huge corporation…Target is not in the limelight, but they're doing a lot of things. They are doing a lot when it comes to serving the community, when it comes to supporting different organizations, different cultures, being green. …They're doing a lot, they even just opened a store that's fully green, all decked out in solar panels. And they're testing that out, to see how much money or how much energy they can save. I'm definitely proud to work for Target. And I think they're doing a lot, putting a lot of efforts towards just being a better company as a whole. And I think that's how they're going to gain and keep employees, and consumers as well."

Discussion on Findings, Limitations, & Implications

Bringing back the thesis question: How can corporations successfully stay authentic to their positive external reputations internally, maintaining positive perceptions on both sides? and comparing the literature review and the data analysis, my findings were similar and provided significant information to consider. We have seen that positive interactions build favorable reputations. A corporation's reputation should be recognized as a valuable asset, resulting in significant outcomes such as, attracting top talent, motivating employees and increasing job satisfaction, generating more positive media coverage as well as attracting consumers. It was found that one of the biggest reasons employees leave their jobs is because they are unhappy with their boss (Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim, 2015). The data from my oral histories and case studies supported this. The data agreed that styles of leadership influence an employee's experience, including trust, transparency, open connection, and the opportunity for growth. The data supported that there are major benefits of employee engagement. When employees fit in,

feel safe, are satisfied, and have access to growth they feel motivated, are less likely to leave, and will vouch for the company (Popli and Rizvi, 2016).

Amazon is a company well known to have a positive external reputation when it comes to products and services as well as its financial performance, but this is overshadowed by the newsworthy negative reputation when it comes to leadership creating a culture of fear, and unsafe and distrustful workplace environment, and unethical practices of overworking and underpaying employees. Google is a company known to be innovative and a leader in the tech space, and through case study research it is shown that the company really values this innovation and leadership internally, as well, emphasizing transparency, trust, and freedom from the top down, allowing employees to feel seen, heard, and fearless. However, there are some issues surrounding conduct and ethics that the company has been able to keep out of the mainstream media, like gender inequality, sexual assault, and contradicting values. Disney is a company known as the happiest place on earth. A family-oriented company that people love to love. Through research and data from an oral history, it is proven true that their reputation is authentic from the outside in. From leadership making sure employees feel listened to, to making efforts to build up employee morale, the company values its workforce, including those from diverse backgrounds. And when internal issues arise, the company makes efforts to find ways to fix those issues. Target is a company that doesn't have as much of a strong external reputation, whether positive or negative, and has kept out of the media. Something to consider is if this helps or hurts the company. However, through the research and the oral history it is shown that they have an extremely positive reputation internally with their employees. The leadership values connection, transparency, and growth within the company, investing in their employees in

different ways. They showed innovation and quick adaptation to change by offering covid

support to their employees, and they practice citizenship and environmental social governance on

many fronts. All of this under the radar way from the public eye.

The implications of this research are important for practice and will benefit corporations that are

actively trying to improve their reputations in a real and authentic way, and those that are aware

of how important internal and external perceptions are to their brand and their reputation. With

purchasing decisions changing based on yearly trends and what becomes important to society,

customer needs must be met. Consumers have higher expectations and are more mindful about

where they choose to spend their money, so as diversity, sustainability, and community outreach

become more important to consumers, companies need to keep up. And just as employee well-

being, satisfaction, and access to information and growth within the company become more

important to people making choices where to work, companies need to keep up and make efforts

to meet these everchanging needs. For the future, research results indicate that reputation is an

area that needs further research as consumerism continues to evolve.

The limitations of this research are of the four case companies looked at, only two were able to

get supplementary and supportive data from oral histories conducted with current and former

employees. The authors access to employees at all four of these case companies was limited.

Another limitation is the idea by some researchers that reputation is a socially constructed

concept and an intangible asset hard to measure. As consumer and employee perceptions and

needs change, this research will need to be updated based on changes in what society see as

positive and negative or more important and less important.

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Through this research, it is recommended that corporations consider actively monitoring these key reputation drivers on a frequent basis and strive to be as consistently positive internally as they may be externally. This research helps solve the problem of internal and external corporate reputations not being aligned or cohesive and addresses the gap in knowledge of how to measure a social construct such as reputation and so how corporations can maintain positive perceptions on both sides of the stakeholder track.

Conclusion

The researched aimed to understand *How corporations can successfully stay authentic to their external reputations internally, maintaining positive perceptions on both sides?* remains to be answered. Through this research it is shown that to be successful at this, corporations must internally look at key reputation drivers such as their leadership, their workplace environment, their conduct, their citizenship, and their innovation, as when internal stakeholders are happy, engaged, and satisfied, it is reflected externally. As mentioned in the research, company culture is unique to each corporation, and there are no once size fits all approach to an individual corporation's efforts to improve their reputation. But it is evident where to start. Based on the oral histories used to get individual insider perspectives and experiences from case company employees, they supported the boarder research and the importance of these key reputation drivers.

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