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**GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES: SMALL BUSINESS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND
COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE IN SMALL TO MIDSIZED COMMUNITIES**

A dissertation submitted to
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

by

Amber Monique Chatelain

Approved by

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May 2024

Approval of Dissertation

We, the faculty supervising the work of Amber Monique Chatelain affirm that the dissertation, *Good Times, Bad Times: Small Business Social Responsibility and Community Crisis Response in Small to Midsize Communities*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Brad D. Smith Schools of Business and the Lewis College of Business. The work also conforms to the requirements and formatting guidelines of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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Dedication

My first dissertation was dedicated to the people closest to me during my academic journey. Specifically, I thanked my wonderful, loving, and supportive husband, Bryan Adams. My parents, Jim and Sandy Chatelain, were included in my dedication, along with my (now) late grandmother, Jeanne Happel. I acknowledged my then unborn son, Levi Nash Chatelain-Adams, as a driving factor pivotal to my pursuit of academic success. These people are still, and will always be, on the other end of my “why.” However....

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to myself. Sure, it may be selfish, but I deserve this little nod. The calculated decision to change academic career paths as a married, working adult with a family was not made lightly. The decision to pursue another doctoral degree in a subject I was passionate about was not made lightly. The decision to choose to spend years in doctoral classes and hours and hours and hours completing another dissertation was not made lightly. This time around, it was harder. It was exhausting. And I worked really, really, really hard.

Maybe in the future, if I’m crazy enough to get another degree, I’ll dedicate it to all the wonderful people in my life. But not this time and not this degree. This one is for me.

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I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Kevin Knotts, for his support and encouragement during the dissertation process. I could not have done this without you and we both know that.

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Abstract

It is common practice for small businesses to support their local communities through social responsibility and citizenship behaviors. Small business response to local crisis events and participation in relief efforts can serve as an indicator of the company's awareness of community events and signal to customers their embeddedness in and commitment to the local community. Using primary data and an experimental methodology, this dissertation examines customer perceptions of small business' response to community crisis. Specifically, this study examines customer perceptions of trust and loyalty, and customers' purchase intent for small businesses that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis. Results from the research study find firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm. However, results found positive customer perceptions of firm action positively relates to firm trust, trust in the firm positively relates to purchase intent, and purchase intent is positively related to customer loyalty. While perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intent, it was found that perceived self-interest motives do not moderate the relationship between purchase intent and loyalty. Further, this study found firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm. Theoretical and managerial implications are provided.

Keywords: business social responsibility, community crisis response, small business

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Amid catastrophic and fatal flooding in rural eastern Kentucky in 2022, New Frontier Outfitters in Morehead, KY quickly responded with the production and sale of “Eastern Kentucky Strong” t-shirts, where 100% of proceeds supported flood victims and those affected by the tragedy (WKYT News Staff, 2022). After the horrific 2022 school shooting in Uvalde, TX, where 19 children and 2 teachers died, Nite Owl Tattoo Studio offered a “heart-in-Texas” themed tattoo design for \$50 with 100% of proceeds benefiting victims and their families (KENS 5 Staff, 2022). When a deadly EF-4 tornado claimed the lives of 19 people and devastated a community in Cookeville, TN in 2020, Willow Avenue Express Laundry in Cookeville, TN offered free laundering services to families affected by the disaster, while Black Rifle Coffee Company in Manchester, TN served as a donation center for disaster relief supplies (*Tornado Relief*, 2020). After wildfires scorched the small communities of Malden and Pine City, WA in 2020, No-Li Brewhouse in Spokane, WA matched beer sales dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 for relief funds to be donated directly to affected families (Ahn & Carroll, 2020).

It is common for small businesses to support their local communities through social responsibility and citizenship behaviors (Besser, 2012). Small business response to local crisis events and participation in relief efforts can serve as an indicator of the company’s awareness of community events and signal to customers their embeddedness in the local community. Notwithstanding, small business owners perceive a responsibility to support their local communities through charitable acts and service (Besser, 2012; Lahdesmaki & Suutari, 2012). For example, the influential mixed-methods study by Besser (2012) demonstrated that the motivation for business social responsibility is enlightened self-interest (e.g., it will benefit the

business) in conjunction with a sense of moral obligation, and positive personal rewards. As one small business owner noted on the perceived responsibility of engaging in philanthropic activities: “[Business social responsibility is] just part of life in small towns. It’s expected. It’s important to be seen in the community by your peers and by your potential customers” (Besser, 2012, p. 135). In a similar vein, Brown and King (1982) found that some small business owners perceived the societal norms and pressures from peers and the community as more influential on civic engagement and business ethicality than possessing a sense of moral obligation or the anticipation of positive personal rewards.

A small business is generally defined as an independent business with fewer than 500 employees. There are over 32.5 million small businesses in the US, representing 99.9% of all firms (including employer and nonemployer firms). In 2021, US small businesses represented 46.8% of private sector employees, 43.5% of gross domestic product, and paid 39.7% of the private sector payroll. Since 1995, small businesses have accounted for 62% of new job creation in the United States (US Small Business Administration, 2021). Small businesses are particularly vital to the economic stability of small to medium-sized towns. Given the vast number and fluidity of the nature of small to medium-sized towns, it can be difficult to provide an exact number of these municipalities currently in the United States. However, recent data from the United States Census Bureau seems to indicate of the number of cities, towns and villages in the country, 99.8% would be considered rural, small, or medium-sized towns (e.g., registered incorporated places with population sizes of 499,999 or less) (Toukabri & Medina, 2020).

Business social responsibility suggests businesses and communities are interconnected and not interdependent entities; therefore, society has expectations of the functions of businesses outside of standard operational procedures (Wood, 1991). Further, business social responsibility

suggests that firms have an obligation to pursue societal betterment by devoting resources (e.g., products, services, etc.) to the communities in which they operate (Besser, 2012; Davis, 1973). Besser (2012) suggests the literature is biased toward large firms with the prevailing use of the term corporate social responsibility as opposed to the more comprehensive and inclusive term business social responsibility. The term ‘corporate’ implies large or multinational firms and small businesses fall into neither of these terminology categories. Thus, the term business social responsibility will be operationalized in this paper.

Social responsibility orientation has been studied extensively in the literature in relation to large, multinational corporations (Jenkins, 2006) such as Google, Amazon, Apple, Walmart, and ExxonMobile (e.g., Bonsu, 2019; Singh & Misra, 2022). Although these types of enterprises report high levels of social engagement, philanthropic activities, and contributions to charitable causes (Singh & Misra, 2022), some scholars contend that their benevolence is, at least, partially due to greater visibility and public scrutiny than smaller businesses (Brammer & Millington, 2006). While these are prominent and visible companies that may be expected to engage in socially responsible activities, many smaller companies also invest in the same endeavors (Green & Peloza, 2014). Additionally, and contrary to previous research that suggests customers are uninterested in the philanthropic activities of small businesses (i.e., Hillary, 2000), current studies appear to support the notion that customers recognize the importance of small business social responsibility and its wider impact on communities (e.g., Besser, 1999; Green & Peloza, 2014).

One of the difficulties of examining business social responsibility is the unformalized consensus on what social responsibility entails. As noted in the European Commission’s strategy on business social responsibility entitled “Corporate Social Responsibility: A new definition, a

new agenda for action” on October 25th, 2011, “Although there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ and for most small to medium-sized enterprises the [business social responsibility] process remains informal, complying with legislation and collective agreements negotiated between social partners is the basic requirement for an enterprise to meet its social responsibility.”

Empirical research on small business social responsibility is important since, as previously noted, small businesses represent the majority of businesses and make significant contributions to local economies. Additionally, it is erroneous to assume the outcomes of social responsibility from large corporations are generalizable, transferable, and apply to small businesses (Besser, 2012). To that end, there is an area of literature dedicated to examining these phenomena in small and family enterprises (e.g., Besser, 2012; Peake & Eddleston, 2021; Peake et al., 2020; Lahdesmaki & Suutari, 2012). However, investigation of the literature shows these phenomena are often examined from the business owner / manager viewpoint. Scant literature exists examining business social responsibility and response to community crisis from a customer perspective, who are perhaps some of the most critical stakeholders. As many small businesses endure high failure rates and poor performance levels, customer patronage and retention is particularly important for long-term success and survival (Hawkins & Hoon, 2019).

A relatively small amount of literature explores small business social responsibility, creating an impression that small business community contributions are limited and participation in social responsibility is nominal (Besser, 2012). Green and Peloza (2014) argue that “simply because of their size relative to large firms, [small businesses] are perceived, *de facto*, as socially responsible even without formal [business social responsibility] programmes” (p. 282). Other scholars have found evidence that organizational size can influence perceptions of firm ethicality and that small businesses are likely to be perceived by customers as more ethical and responsible

than large multinational firms in the same sector (Brunk, 2010). Indeed, research illustrates, compared to large firms, small businesses are more economically and socially tied to their communities (Besser, 2012). Further, the personal relationships between small business owners and customers can influence and heighten the level of engagement and philanthropic activities in the community (Lahdesmaki & Suutari, 2012). As this research is focused on small businesses in small to mid-sized communities, particular attention will be paid to the self-regulated, philanthropic behaviors and activities that contribute to local community well-being.

Very little academic research has focused on the nature of business social responsibility and crisis management, with much of the literature failing to provide a comprehensive study of this phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2010). In a similar vein, much of the empirical research on crisis management is more of a “how to” guide for large and small businesses to persist and remain resilient in the face of a crisis. For example, the work of Runyan (2006) identifies small businesses’ barriers to recovery from natural disasters following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Similarly, the work of Herbane (2010) sought to understand small business owner response in relation to crisis management during business interruptions including, but not limited to, product failures, loss of utilities, personnel crisis, criminal activities, terrorism, economic recession, and natural disasters. Spillan and Hough (2003) proposed theories to explain small business managers’ justifications to implement crisis planning mechanisms and procedures into their business operations. At the time this dissertation was written, scant empirical research could be found on small business response to local community crisis (e.g., provincial natural disasters, tragic school shootings, injury or death of a community member, etc.) or social events (e.g., workers strikes, the Black Lives Matter movement, community protests, etc.). Indeed, while businesses are increasingly involved with communities after a crisis, there is a lack of

scholarship focused on business social responsibility and corporate disaster aid (Cheng et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2010; Shi, 2020).

Further, the literature examining customer perceptions of small business' responses to local and community crisis is sparse. As customers are one of the primary participants in commercial economic activities, it is important scholars understand customer opinions on business social responsibility. Customer perceptions of a firms socially responsible activities can influence its reputation, which can determine customer trust, brand equity, and profits (Swaen et al., 2021). Green and Peloza (2014) argue the necessity and importance of empirical exploration of customer response to small businesses' social responsibility such that the proliferation and magnitude of the small business sector "can result in a significant impact on the amount and types of investment in [business social responsibility] and the positive social... outcomes" (p. 282). Furthermore, Spence et al. (2000) suggest small businesses may not fully comprehend the magnitude and importance of reputational benefits associated with philanthropic behaviors. Past studies have yielded some important insights on this topic, empirically suggesting that customer perceptions of firms are meaningful because they affect and influence the behaviors of internal and external stakeholders, including consumer purchasing behaviors (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Rindova & Fombrun, 1999).

Small business owners are often sole proprietors or primary decision-makers within their organization and therefore possess the capability of shaping the organization including firm vision, culture, strategies, capital investments, and social contributions (Muskat et al., 2021). Owners should be equipped with knowledge that poise their business for success (Bacon & Schneider, 2019), including stakeholder perceptions of business social responsibility activities. Although empirical evidence appears to confirm the notion that a business' survival and

longevity is strengthened when it responds to customer concerns, little attention has been paid to the effects of business social responsibility behaviors on customers and their resulting perceptions of the business (Stanaland et al., 2011). Other scholars argue to gain a more comprehensive view of social responsibility, more diverse studies and sample populations are needed (Park et al., 2017). Thus, further empirical studies should be conducted to understand the dynamics between business social responsibility and customer response within the small business context, as this is an understudied and underdeveloped topic in the literature that deserves consideration with substantive practical implications.

To advance the knowledge and possess a more profound comprehension of this line of inquiry, this dissertation extends the research on small business social responsibility and attempts to establish a connection between firm action and customer loyalty. First, this paper begins by critically examining the existing literature on business social responsibility and business social responsibility from the consumer lens. This is paramount in assessing key opportunities to advance knowledge in the field. Using primary data, this dissertation examines customer perceptions of small business' social responsibility and response to community crisis. Specifically, this study examines customer perceptions of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty to small businesses that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis. Exploring these relationships represents one of the novel aspects of this research.

The following operational definitions for the studied variables are used in this dissertation:

Trust: "The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712).

Purchase intention: “The probability that the consumer chooses a particular product” (Bianchi et al., p. 210).

Loyalty: “A deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, *despite* situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34).

Irrespective of the findings, we will gain considerable knowledge in the field and further our understanding of the intersection of business social responsibility, small business response to community crisis, and customer perceptions.

Research Questions

Within the field of business social responsibility and the small business literature, a number of crucial questions remain unanswered. While progress has been made towards understanding the dynamics of business social responsibility in large, multinational organizations, the application of business social responsibility principles in small businesses presents opportunities for understanding and addressing the unique challenges and opportunities for these types of firms, particularly in the face of community crisis. This study will seek to answer the following questions regarding customer perceptions of business social responsibility to community crisis response in small to midsized communities:

- What impact does firm action have on customer trust?
- What impact does firm action have on customer purchase intent?
- What impact does firm action have on customer loyalty?
- What is relationship between customer trust, intent, and loyalty?
- How does perceived self-interest moderate trust and purchase intent?

- How does perceived self-interest moderate purchase intent and loyalty?
- How do firm actions in the face of community crisis impact customer perceptions?

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Business Social Responsibility

The concept of business social responsibility originated with Bowen's (1953) comprehensive and foundational discussion of business ethics and socially responsible behavior in *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. Since then, business social responsibility has received considerable attention from multiple scholarly and managerial perspectives (Saeidi et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016). While some organizations have historically engaged in socially responsive practices, stakeholder awareness of business social responsibility in the past few decades has led to more firms embracing these practices. In fact, an estimated 90 percent of the largest companies in the world published a business social responsibility report in 2019, up from just 20 percent in 2011 (Stobierski, 2021). This dramatic increase in business social responsibility behaviors and reporting those behaviors, suggests firms consider business social responsibility an important and strategic tool in developing and maintaining enduring customer/firm relationships (Severa-Frances & Arteaga-Morono, 2015). Other empirical evidence appears to confirm the notion that, in developed countries, firms place emphasis on meeting the social needs of consumers and consider business social responsibility an essential business practice (Aljarah et al., 2020).

Business social responsibility broadly expresses the ethical behaviors and activities of a company with respect to their perceived societal obligations (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Given that business social responsibility is a broad concept, it is unsurprising that there are an assortment of meanings given to the term. Most business social responsibility scholars define organizational obligations through five key elements, including environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness dimensions (Dahlsrud, 2006). Additionally, a multitude of operational

definitions have been offered in the literature to explain business social responsibility. In an analysis of 37 business social responsibility definitions, Dahlsrud (2006) concludes most operational definitions are congruent and reference the five key elements of social responsibility (e.g., environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness). For example, Brown and Dacin (1997) described business social responsibility in terms of a firms' activities in relation to perceived obligations to society and key stakeholders. Swaen et al. (2021) extend this definition, characterizing business social responsibility as "an organization's context-specific actions and policies aimed at enhancing stakeholders' welfare by accounting for the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (p. 711). This sentiment can also be observed in Mohr et al.'s (2001) conceptualization of business social responsibility that focuses on minimizing adverse effects and maximizing long-term societal benefits through activities such as charitable contributions.

This research study, however, specifically focuses on business social responsibility in relation to small businesses and response to community crisis. Thus, business social responsibility will be operationalized in this paper through the definition offered by The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000), where it is defined as "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to the economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large" (p. 9). In addition, this definition is aligned with the European Commission's notions of the socially responsible entrepreneur that has previously been recognized in the literature (Peake et al., 2020). Relevant to this study, the European Commission defines the socially responsible entrepreneur as one who (1) treats customers, business partners, and competitors with fairness and honesty; (2) cares about the health, safety

and general well-being of employees and consumers; (3) motivates their workforce by offering training and development opportunities; (4) acts as ‘good citizens’ in the local community; and (5) are respectful of natural resources and the environment (European Commission, 2004). In October 2011 the European Commission adopted a new strategy on business social responsibility and updated their definition of social responsibility as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” and that business social responsibility “concerns actions by companies over and above their legal obligations towards society and the environment” (European Commission, 2011).

Previous studies have demonstrated that business owners engage in socially responsible behaviors for a variety of reasons. For example, the enlightened self-interest theory suggests that, in its simplest form, benevolent giving to the community is good for business. Researchers offer two streams of explanations examining the intersection of business social responsibility and business success under the lens of enlightened self-interest (Besser & Miller, 2004). One explanation emphasizes the negative consequences for non-participation in business social responsibility activities, often referred to as the Iron Law of Responsibility. This rule combines the concept of power and social responsibility, arguing that in the long-run, businesses must behave responsibly towards society or risk the loss of power, legitimacy, and potentially their business (Besser & Miller, 2004; Davis, 1967). The other explanation argues that businesses who engage in socially responsible practices positively influence their business by attracting customers and, thus, increase profits. While earlier studies suggested that empirical evidence is inconclusive about the financial relationship between business success and business social responsibility (Besser & Miller, 2004), later research seems to indicate that there is a positive relationship between the two (Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022).

The costs of obtaining new customers versus retaining current customers is substantial (Tong & Wong, 2014); therefore, organizations should pursue smart business practices that satisfy customers. Jiang and Rosenbloom (2005) highlighted that loyal customers significantly contribute to greater product consumption and, thus, greater profits. Customers who are satisfied with an organization are more likely to pay premium prices and are less price-sensitive overall (Chopra & Sudan, 2013). Germain to this point, Du et al. (2007) uncovered a correlation connecting business social responsibility and customer loyalty. Their research revealed that firms that embrace a stance of business social responsibility are more inclined to receive rewards from their customers, such as loyalty and advocacy. These customer behaviors ultimately contribute to the profitability of the firm, giving it an advantageous position over its competitors (Du et al., 2007).

Business social responsibility has emerged as a relevant research area, studied extensively by examining a diverse range of variables. Servera-Frances & Piqueras-Tomas (2019) have studied the phenomenon by focusing on value, commitment, and satisfaction. Gallardo-Vazquez et al. (2019) examined business social responsibility as an antecedent of innovation, competitive success, reputation, and performance. Examining the financial impacts of business social responsibility practices, Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson (2022) investigated the effects of customer-perceived business social responsibility on firm innovativeness and short- and long-term financial earnings. While these are not the scope of this study, important theoretical and managerial implications were drawn from this literature. This study examines customer perceptions of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty to small businesses that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis.

Business Social Responsibility and Disaster Aid

A natural disaster is a naturally occurring event that often overwhelms local resources, communities, and municipalities (Gallant, 2008). Natural disasters cause significant property and economic damages to communities, and often result in the loss of life. In 2022, a total of 387 natural disasters resulted in the loss of 30,704 lives and affected 185 million people worldwide, with estimated economic losses totaling \$223.8 billion (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, 2023). In the United States alone, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reported 20 weather-related disasters with losses exceeding \$1 billion each in 2021 (FEMA, 2022).

The outcomes of business social responsibility hold vital importance in communities and play important societal roles, such as philanthropic giving, pro-environmental activities, and volunteering (Besser, 2012; Hillary, 2000). As a part of business social responsibility activities, firms additionally regularly provide disaster aid to individuals and communities affected by tragedy (Madsen & Rogers, 2015). Consider, for example, the benevolent giving from Amazon, which has donated more than 20 million disaster relief items to people impacted by over 95 natural disasters worldwide since 2017 (Amazon, 2023), or Home Depot, which announced a commitment of up to \$1 million to support immediate natural disaster relief and long-term recovery efforts to those impacted by a destructive tornado that touched the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Illinois in December 2021 (The Home Depot Foundation..., 2023). Indeed, most organizations that provide disaster aid focus on post-disaster measures and post-recovery efforts (Miyaguchi & Shaw, 2007).

Emergency management after a disaster has traditionally remained the responsibility of local, state, and federal governments (Wilson & Oyola-Yemaiel, 2001), but increasingly,

effectively responding to disasters is a growing financial burden for government entities (Ballesteros et al., 2017). While the costs associated with disaster relief have sextupled in the past 50 years, the amount of aid provided from governments and other aid organizations has remained relatively stagnant (Becerra et al., 2014). Moreover, it has been suggested that, during select disaster and crisis events, government agencies and aid organizations in charge of emergency planning and management have failed to function entirely (Edwards, 2007). Indeed, disasters can often overwhelm government and response efforts (Wise & Nader, 2002). Take, for example, Hurricane Katrina, which covered approximately 90,000 square miles of the Gulf Coast in the United States in August 2005, resulting in an estimated \$151 billion in damage and 971 deaths (Brunkard et al., 2008; Institute of Medicine (US), 2007; Torres et al., 2018). This is considered one of the worst natural disasters occurring in the United States and largely a failure in response by the government and emergency management organizations (Edwards, 2007), as destruction from the storm was significantly compounded by the governments' slow and inadequate response (Horwitz, 2009). Correspondingly, some researchers have put forth the proposition that disaster aid from individual firms is more effective and efficient than governmental aid because they can respond quickly, have capabilities and resources unavailable to other agencies, and understand their local environment better than external government and aid relief organizations (Ballesteros et al., 2017). Tangentially, corporate aid can complement the work extended by governments and other non-profit aid groups (Zhang et al., 2010). Anecdotal evidence shows that the federal government has recognized the resources and various aid the private sector possesses and contributes during times of crisis (Johnson et al., 2011).

Empirical research by Ballesteros et al. (2017) found local firms have a comparative advantage over other organizations in providing corporate disaster aid and contributing to

societal welfare. Correspondingly, local businesses are more likely than non-local businesses to donate to communities impacted by natural disasters (Muller & Whiteman, 2009). However, in a review of 100 US businesses' social responsibility statements, Johnson et al. (2010) found no companies included specific verbiage or philosophies to address short-term crises or disasters.

The public expects firms to participate in societal welfare activities, even during natural disasters. When a crisis event occurs, society further expects businesses to contribute to postcrisis relief efforts in a manner that appears to be altruistic and shows genuine care and concern for societal problems (Cheng et al., 2019) via corporate disaster aid. Corporate disaster aid refers to a company's efforts during a natural disaster and they can help to facilitate a community's recovery after experiencing such an incident. Comparative to other organizational types, for-profit firms are more likely to provide rapid, specific, and directed disaster relief aid with their individual resources. As such, firms are continually asked to participate in disaster relief (Ballesteros et al., 2017). In fact, some researchers hypothesize that companies will be increasingly responsible for future aid as there are more frequent and intense natural disasters occurring due to climate change (Johnson et al., 2010).

Just like other business social responsibility endeavors, firms exhibit their commitment through diverse approaches when it comes to providing aid and relief during natural disasters. For example, firms may act as independent agencies, partner with other organizations, or donate money, time, or resources to affected parties (Twigg, 2001). The work of Johnson et al. (2010) demonstrates that most firms are reactive in immediate disaster relief and recovery efforts and that participation in crisis relief efforts is primarily episodic and short-term. Further, firms are most likely to engage in business social responsibility activities during a crisis targeted to direct and emerging stakeholders (i.e., employees, customers, and communities) (Johnson et al., 2010).

From an organizational standpoint, this decision is logical. Due to their limited and bounded resources, organizations typically prioritize their stakeholders based on normative considerations (Jamali, 2008).

Corporate disaster aid has been hypothesized to yield positive outcomes, as engagement in philanthropic activities affects external perceptions of a company (Gautier & Pache, 2015). White and Lang (2012) found that corporate disaster aid during natural disasters is crucial for fostering connections and relationships with external stakeholders. Participation in corporate disaster aid can additionally positively affect the shareholder value of a company in addition to customer attitudes and choice orientation (Gautier & Pache, 2015). Further, compared to routine business social responsibility actions, customers are more likely to view a firm's aid support for natural disasters as altruism-based (Ellen et al., 2000).

Small Businesses and Customer / Community Relationships

Within the small business literature, research on the intersection of small businesses and customer relationships is limited but has received more consideration in the past decade. For instance, research by Peake et al. (2020) investigates the role of motivation orientation of small business owners who engage in socially responsible activities with respect to customer, societal, and employee-oriented social responsibility. Examining this phenomenon through the lens of regulatory focus theory, the authors suggest that while economic gains of participation in business social responsibility are desirable, entrepreneurs' primary motivation for such participation is, in part, due to customer exigencies. This study advances the hypothesis that failure to meet the needs of primary stakeholders- including customers and employees- could result in inherent profit losses or a negative brand image for the firm.

In a similar vein, Botero and Litchfield-Moore (2021) have carried out an extensive study on customer perceptions of family-owned businesses (which are often small to medium sized firms) and how those perceptions affected purchase intentions. Under the framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action, the authors found that customers who had positive attitudes towards family-owned businesses correspondingly exhibited greater purchase intentions from those firms (Botero and Litchfield-Moore, 2021).

Current studies appear to support the notion that small businesses often shepherd philanthropic activities within local communities (Ortiz-Avram et al., 2018) and that small business owners are often socially and economically embedded in the community in which they operate. They feel a personal connection to customers (Besser, 2012), which, in turn, positively affects their ethical treatment of these customers (Spence et al., 2000). These arguments are built upon the work of Jones' (1991) theoretical concept of proximity as a moral construct that guides ethical decision-making. Jones (1991) described *proximity* as “the feeling of nearness (social, cultural, psychological, or physical)” (p. 376) that one has for others. Within the business context, this can include the feeling of proximity between a business and its stakeholders (Lahdesmaki & Suutari, 2012). The proximity element suggests that, intuitively, people feel more connected to and care more for others who are close to them than they do for people who are socially, culturally, psychologically, or physically removed from them (Jones, 1991). This is evidenced by research from Lahdesmaki and Suutari (2012) who find that small business owners who are socially proximal to their communities are committed to the well-being of the locality and are willing to philanthropically invest resources in the community for economic development. Correspondingly, small business owners who are socially distant from their

communities do not feel a moral obligation to the community and are resistant to voluntarily devoting resources or investing in that community.

Small to medium sized businesses are often characterized by virtue of their embeddedness within the local community. While there has been a great deal of research on locality and business social responsibility, with the exception of researchers such as Besser (2004, 2012) and Lahdesmaki and Suutari (2012), the interrelation of these phenomenon, particularly within the small business context, has received limited focus. For example, drawing upon Jones' (1991) research, Besser (2012) argues that the physical proximity of small businesses to their communities and stakeholders contributes to positive ethical behaviors towards that group. Empirical evidence by Jenkins (2006) also appears to support the notion that entrepreneurs are more likely to engage in socially responsible activities within the community and surrounding communities in which they operate. Further, research by Besser (2012) suggests that small business owners who live in the town in which they operate will have more commitment to and involvement with the community and customers than small business owners who do not or are removed from the business. Indeed, many small business owners feel a moral obligation to engage in philanthropic activities and work towards community improvement because it is considered a norm prevalent in small towns (Besser, 2012). It is important to note, however, that participation in socially responsible business practices lies at the discretion of the business owner. Thus, engagement in such activities is dependent upon the stakeholder interests and the type of business culture of the firm (Crane & Matten, 2004).

Building upon Besser's earlier works, Lahdesmaki and Suutari (2012) have further analyzed this phenomenon from the business owner-manager perspective. Through thematic interviews of 25 Finnish small business owner-managers, the researchers yielded important

insights into perceptions of the relationships between business and community, and interpretations of these perceptions within the context of business social responsibility. For example, the authors suggest firm owners' engagement in philanthropic activities are externally motivated. That is, to avoid social or economic punishment, small business owners feel obligated to involve themselves in and behave responsibly towards the local community. Nevertheless, engagement in socially responsible behaviors is seen as an inherent behavior of a small business owner or a responsibility of the business to contribute to the welfare, economic success, and survival of the local community. However, study participants suggested the exchange was mutually beneficial between the business and the local community. That is, the relationship between the business and local community leads to a 'virtuous circle of reciprocity' where both parties recognize the necessity of investing in each other for survival.

In small to medium sized towns, relationships between small businesses and customers can be intertwined, and a firm's contributions or lack of contributions to the local community are often common knowledge. There are no standardized and exacting regulations for business social responsibility activities and within large firms there is no customer expectation that the firm support small communities. Therefore, small business owners are more likely than managers of large, multinational corporations to be held personally accountable for citizenship behaviors he or she engages in (Besser, 2012). Indeed, small business owners in small to medium-sized towns participate in behaviors that are congruent with the exigencies of external stakeholders, including customers (Peake et al., 2020). Further, in the literature on entrepreneurial success, Wach et al. (2018) established a link between entrepreneurs' perceived achieved success beyond economic indicators, finding entrepreneurial success and satisfaction was partially identified by firm reputation, social responsibility, and customer loyalty.

Empirical evidence examining the positive relationship between business social responsibility and customer relationship quality is prolific. For example, the work of Bello et al. (2021) demonstrates that customers who are aware of a business' social responsibility efforts are more likely to exhibit enhanced feelings of satisfaction and possess higher levels of relationship quality. In a similar vein, findings by Shafiee and Tabeeian (2021) suggest customer relationship quality is improved through firm social responsibility. Empirical evidence also supports the claim that small businesses in small towns that engage in socially responsible business practices are generally more known and thus rewarded financially by local customers than businesses that abstain from such activities (Smith & Oakley, 1994).

Research examining the dynamics of customer relationship quality often investigate a set of dimensions including trust, commitment, satisfaction, and other variables (Obal et al., 2016). Notably, the most commonly studied variables of customer quality relationship are measurements of trust and commitment (loyalty) (Aljarah et al., 2008; Palmatier et al., 2006). While these variables are an important area of inquiry, relatively little is known about the intersection of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty to small businesses that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis and customer perceptions of these actions.

Customer Perceptions

Empirical evidence appears to confirm the notion that customers' perceptions about a firm are an aggregate of their cumulative experiences with the business, including perceptions of the business' actions (Baumgartner et al., 1997; Ha & Perks, 2005). Evidence by Rim and Kim (2016) suggests customers are inherently skeptical towards the underlying motives of firms that participate in business social responsibility activities. However, relatively little is understood on

how customers develop perceptions of business social responsibility (Green & Peloza, 2014). Previous research exploring customer perceptions of business social responsibility has focused on variables such as service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer rights awareness (Bello et al., 2021; Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022). Several justifications for this phenomenon are provided within the literature. First, customers perceive firms that engage in socially responsible activities as inherently responsible contributors to a community and society (Servera-Frances & Piqueras-Tomas, 2019). Indeed, customers who are aware of firms' engagement in business social responsibility activities has a significantly positive impact on their response to the firm (Shi, 2020). Drawing on this notion, if customers are concerned with the social position of a firm, they are likely to be more satisfied with the firm if they exhibit socially responsible behaviors. Second, business social responsibility increases a company's brand equity and perceived value, and thus, leads to greater overall perceptions of the firm (Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022).

The recent study carried out by Ghanbarpour and Gustafsson (2022) demonstrates that customer perceptions of business social responsibility are antecedents to customer satisfaction. By analyzing customer perceptions of business social responsibility and customer satisfaction against firms' financial performance of service companies in Norway and Sweden, the researchers established a link between customer perceptions of business social responsibility and positive long-term firm performance. Further, the researchers suggest these effects carry over to future periods' earnings. That is, firms that invest in increasing customer awareness and perceptions of business social responsibility at given point in time ultimately positively affect their customer base. Specifically, according to their results, for every one-point increase in

perceived business social responsibility behaviors, through the value of customer satisfaction, firms would realize a 1.6% to 3.6% increase in future profits (Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022).

Notably, research by Creyer and Ross (1996) suggests that the ethicality of firms represents the *status quo*; customers expect firms to engage in socially responsible behaviors that protect the environment, benefit charitable organizations, and support the communities in which they operate (Mohr et al., 2001). The latter is evidenced by the work of Brunk (2010) who found that customers expect firms to support local communities through the creation of foundations and diverting funds to local institutions such as libraries or schools. Though, a study carried out by Green and Peloza (2014) found customers perceive small businesses as *inherently* socially responsible, even in the absence of any knowledge of actual socially responsible behaviors.

A number of studies have explored the link between perceptions of business social responsibility and generational cohort. For example, Generation Z (those born after 1997) are conscious consumers that are more passionate about societal welfare matters than any other generation (Admirand, 2020; Dimock, 2019). These consumers often ‘vote with their dollar’, supporting businesses they perceive to be socially responsible, value people over profits, and whose values generally align with their own (Admirand, 2020; Kolb, 2007). Further, Generation Z is more likely to be loyal to a firm when they perceive the firm as trustworthy, authentic, and altruistically motivated (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Trust

A plethora of operational definitions for ‘trust’ exist within the literature. For example, Morgan and Hunt (1994) define trust as the level of confidence one has in the integrity and reliability of an exchange partner, while Servera-Frances and Piqueras-Tomas (2019) suggest trust is based on a belief or expectation of parties in an exchange relationship that leads to a

relationship. This paper adopts the foundational definition proposed by Mayer et al., (1995) wherein trust is “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712). Further, trust is the belief that a firm maintains and delivers on its promises without exploiting their customers or other parties (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005). Therefore, when customers feel a firm exhibits integrity and reliability without exploitation or the engagement in opportunistic behaviors, they are likely to trust the firm.

A number of scholars have recognized that firm trust is an integral component in the development of customer perceptions and attitudes, and previous studies have demonstrated that firm trust is positively related to firm loyalty and commitment (Atulkar, 2020; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Nguyen et al., 2022). Trust in a brand, company, or small business is a carefully considered process by the customer (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) and is formed through customers’ direct experiences with the firm (Nguyen et al., 2022) whether through in-person, omnichannel, or online encounters. When small businesses participate in socially responsible practices and use marketing messages to deliver that information, they are inadvertently constructing a brand image that creates an impression by consumers. Thus, through every philanthropic activity a small business engages in, customers formulate perceptions of trust of the business.

Past studies have yielded some important insights on the intersection of business social responsibility, customer perceptions, and trust. For example, through the adoption of business social responsibility activities, firms can positively affect customer perceptions of their organization (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001) while additionally increasing customer trust in the

business (Khan et al., 2015; Swaen et al., 2021). Bridoux et al. (2016) propose customer trust in a firm is a manifestation of its ability to be trusted. Other authors have even argued that establishing trust between the firm and stakeholders is the first result of business social responsibility activities (Pivato et al., 2008). Empirically, evidence supports the notion that unless customers trust a company, they are not likely to reward the company for philanthropic behaviors (Yoon et al., 2006). Indeed, in the literature on firm commitment and trust, there seems to be general agreement that commitment and trust are interrelated, and that commitment to a firm by consumers generally follows their perceptions of the firm's trustworthiness (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Servera-Francés & Piqueras-Tomás, 2019).

However, another line of research has established the relationship between organizational size and trust. For example, in an exploratory approach through personal interviews, Green and Peloza (2014) found that organizational size influenced customer perceptions of trust, and that organizational size was more important than charity orientation in general evaluations of the firm. Spence (1999) found evidence that small organizations are more likely than large organizations to develop close and personal relationships with customers, therefore enabling a foundation of trust between the business and stakeholder. Supporting this, empirical evidence finds customers are less trusting of large organizations as compared to smaller businesses (Lantieri & Chiagouris, 2009). These findings are further evidenced by Gallup polls that report US consumers are three times more likely to express trust in a small business than a large business (67% versus 21%, respectively) (Dugan, 2015). In fact, consumer trust in large businesses is feigning over time, dipping from 23% in 2019 to 19% in 2020, and finally 14% in 2022 (Saad, 2022). One possible reason for the discrepancy in trust is that consumers often view small businesses as more intertwined with local communities and their needs than large

corporations whose headquarters may be far removed from local municipalities (Dugan, 2015). On the other hand, a recent line of research on business social *irresponsibility* points out that unethical behaviors by large companies are often highlighted in the media (e.g., the Enron, Volkswagen emission, and Goldman Sachs scandals) (Stabler & Fischer, 2020); thus, potentially creating the perception that large corporations are more unethical than and therefore less trustworthy than small businesses.

Purchase Intent

Central to a firm's success and longevity is its ability to generate profits. While primary stakeholder groups can include employees, suppliers, or investors, it is the customers who voluntarily supply funds to an organization in exchange for products. Ultimately, these monetary transactions affect firm performance (Post et al., 2002), suggesting that engaging and retaining these key stakeholders is pivotal for a business's success (Hawkins & Hoon, 2019). Correspondingly, marketing scholars and management have traditionally used purchase intention behaviors as a proxy for repurchase intention or future sales (Morwitz et al., 2007). From a management perspective, purchase intention aids in forecasting the probability of a customer making a purchase within a specific timeframe and serves as a proxy of their actual behavior (Farris et al., 2010).

Bianchi et al. (2019) pointed out that purchase intention can be operationalized from two perspectives: "as a preference to re-purchase a given product and as the probability that the consumer chooses a particular product" (p. 210). The first half of the definition refers to existing customers' post-purchase behaviors, while the latter half pertains to a measure that captures the inclinations of customers (regardless of whether they are current customers or not) regarding their perception of whether the firm or product aligns with their needs and expectations. For the

purposes of this dissertation, the second part of the definition will be used to operationalize purchase intention: “The probability that the consumer chooses a particular product” (Bianchi et al., p. 210).

Previous research suggests that customer-perceived measures can influence long-term firm performance (Srinivasan et al., 2010). Against this background, perceptions of firms and the essence of their brand can play a pivotal role in the marketplace. In other words, when firms incite positive associations in the customers’ minds, this produces stronger purchasing behaviors from customers (Botero & Litchfield-Moore, 2021). Moreover, when customers have positive perceptions of a company, it may lead to greater word-of-mouth behavior, consequently increasing a firm’s financial performance (Choi & Choi, 2014). Conversely, when customers associate negative connotations with the firm or brand, customers may be less likely to engage in purchasing behaviors, ultimately hurting the firm’s performance and bottom line (Botero & Litchfield-Moore, 2021). Indeed, empirical evidence has supported these findings. Consider the study of Zhang and Ahmad (2021), who found business social responsibility activities had a direct and positive effect on customer purchase intentions. Further, the author’s found engagement in business social responsibility activities had a strong impact on purchase intent through the mediation of trust and brand image (Zhang & Ahmad, 2021).

Past studies have yielded some important insights into the intersection of business social responsibility and customer purchase intent. For example, the work of Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) demonstrates that while customers expect businesses to participate in socially responsible activities, they tend to repay firms’ philanthropic behaviors through their purchases. Perez and Rodriguez-del-Bosque (2015) demonstrate that customers’ perceived business social responsibility image increases customer satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention. Lee and

Shin (2010) found a positive relationship between customer perceptions of business social responsibility and purchase intention. Likewise, Su et al. (2015) found that both business social responsibility activities and company reputation had a significant effect on Chinese consumers repurchase intentions. In other words, customer perceptions of business social responsibility orientation can positively affect purchase intention.

Researchers have surmised that customer perceptions of a firm's business social responsibility practices can determine their subsequent behaviors and attitudes toward that business, its products, and its services (Aljarah & Emegwali, 2017; Brown & Dacin, 1997). This assertion is supported by the theory of reciprocity, which suggests that individuals exhibit behavioral responses towards perceived acts of kindness or unkindness. Specifically, individuals reward actions they perceive as kind and punish actions they perceive as unkind. Further, this theory suggests individuals evaluate situations not only on their perceived kindness or unkindness of the action, but also their perception of the intention of the underlying action (Bello et al., 2021).

In the marketing literature, customer satisfaction and consumer confidence are determined to be a long-term driver of a firm's financial performance. For example, research by Ghanbarpour and Gustafsson (2022) finds through the indirect phenomena of customer satisfaction, firms who engage in business social responsibility behaviors see financial gains both in the short-term and long-term. The literature on customer satisfaction and business social responsibility suggests that consumer confidence levels could be associated with purchase and repurchase intent (Aljarah et al., 2020). Consumer confidence and trust determines purchase and repurchase intent behaviors (Weisberg et al., 2011) and positively impacts buying behavior

(Kenning, 2008). Further, business social responsibility moderates the positive relationship between trust and customer purchase intention behaviors (Upamannu et al., 2015).

Scant literature on the intersection of purchase intention behaviors, business social responsibility, and small businesses can be found. In one study, research by Green and Peloza (2014) found customers perceive small businesses as having an inherent ‘buffer’ that offers them relative insulation from business social irresponsibility and would not punish the firm by shopping at a competitor instead. The aim of this dissertation is to extend this area of investigation by studying the impact of business social responsibility during a crisis on customer purchase intent within the small business context.

Customer Loyalty

Social exchange theory suggests the relationship between firms and customers is evolutionary and results in mutual commitments to each other (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and reflects a lasting desire to preserve a long-term and worthwhile relationship (Hutt, 2016) between invested parties. Arguing from this theoretical perspective, the end-goal of business social responsibility is to create the mutually beneficial long-term and committed relationship between customer and firm (Bhattachara et al., 2009). Empirically, studies have found a positive link between business social responsibility and customer commitment or loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2014; Servera-Frances & Arteago-Monroe, 2015; Vlachos et al., 2008). Further, most studies agree that customer trust positively influences firm loyalty (Vlachos et al., 2008).

There are many operational definitions to describe *loyalty* in the literature. Generally, the term describes a cycle wherein a customer repeats purchasing frequency from one particular brand or firm (Nguyen et al., 2022). This paper adopts the foundational and more comprehensive definition of loyalty from Oliver (1999) wherein loyalty is described as “a deeply held

commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, *despite* situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (p. 34). Hellier et al. (2003) further define customer loyalty as “the degree to which the customer has exhibited, over recent years, repeat purchase behavior of a particular company service; and the significance of that expenditure in terms of the customer's total outlay on that particular type of service” (p. 1765). Customer loyalty is congruent with the concept of repurchase intention, or a customer’s decision to purchase from the same company again, despite the availability of equivalent alternatives (Bello et al., 2020; Kuo et al., 2009). It is widely agreed upon in the literature that repurchase intention is declaration of loyalty (Amin, 2016; Zhang et al., 2011) and is considered an essential performance outcome for businesses (Bello et al., 2021).

A firms’ success is contingent upon its ability to amass and retain loyal customers. When a business can successfully sustain a repeat customer base, customers will repeat purchases from that firm (Nguyen et al., 2022).

In the literature on stakeholder attitudes and behaviors, there seems to be general agreement that trust in a firm is positively related to repeat purchases (e.g., Bridoux et al., 2016; Vlachos et al., 2009) and firm loyalty (Aljarah et. al., 2020; Stanaland et al., 2011). This notion is congruent with the work of Swimberghe and Wooldridge (2014) who suggest the end result of business social responsibility activities should not be customer satisfaction, and that, moreover, results should be directed at the indelible results of business social responsibility initiatives that build customer trust and loyalty. Indeed, customer loyalty is an essential attribute of firm success and longevity (Stanaland et al., 2011).

Perceived Motives

In the literature on customer response to business social responsibility, there seems to be general agreement that customers reward firms that engage in social responsibility behaviors and punish firms for socially irresponsible behaviors. Customer perceptions of the motivational factors behind a firm's engagement in business social responsibility can shape their perceptions of the firm (Green & Peloza, 2014). Nearly half of all consumers hold positive attitudes towards firms that engage in socially responsible behaviors; however, one-third of consumers view business social responsibility as negative and motivated by the self-interest of the firm (Mohr et al., 2001; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Consequently, firms not only need to engage in socially responsible behaviors, but the actions need to be perceived as authentically genuine by consumers if the firm expects to realize rewards (Alhouthi et al., 2016).

Authenticity is represented by the objective concept if something is legitimate, genuine, or trustworthy. Correspondingly, customer perceptions of brand authenticity are often linked to the success of that brand or firm (Nguyen et al., 2022). Thus, firms who engage in philanthropic activities should endeavor to create messaging that is perceived by customers as authentic. Alhouthi et al. (2016) define business social responsibility authenticity as "the perception of a company's [business social responsibility] actions as a genuine and true expression of the company's beliefs and behavior toward society that extend beyond legal requirements" (p. 1243). Alhouthi et al. (2016) additionally examined the role of business social responsibility and authenticity, concluding that perceived firm motivation positively affects customer perceptions of the company. Further, the authors provide empirical evidence supporting the notion that firms should strive to employ marketing messages emphasizing their altruistic intentions behind

business social responsibility campaigns, suggesting that messaging impacts customer perceptions of the firm (Alhouti et al., 2016).

The perceived motives behind business social responsibility are often intertwined with ethical and social issues. Successful business social responsibility activities should be perceived by customers as altruistic and the firm should position itself as one concerned about their community (Yuksel et al., 2010). In this vein, research by Foreh and Grier (2003) discovered customers assign two types of intentions to a firms' business social responsibility activities. Specifically, customers may assess a firms' intention related to the potential advantages it poses for society, characterized as an altruistic motive. Alternatively, customers often do not respond to firms' business social responsibility initiatives if they are perceived as being egotistical (e.g., self-interest), not necessarily because the firm actions *are* acting in self-interest, but customers believe they are being deceived (Foreh & Grier, 2003). For example, Garretson Folse et al. (2010) found that, in context to cause-related marketing, the size of a firm's donation can impact customer perceptions of the firms' motivation for participation. Other research suggests that donation type can impact customer perceptions of the firm, with product donations (versus cash donations) more likely to indicate the firm cares about the cause (Green & Peloza, 2014). Correspondingly, several researchers presuppose that consumers are often skeptical of a firm's true intentions when engaging in socially responsible activities, assuming firms' intentions are merely profit-oriented (Kim et al., 2010; Rifon et al., 2004; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

Recent research has tended to show that customers who perceive a firms' motives as altruistic will have a positive influence on perceptions of trust and credibility (Cheng et al., 2010; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2022). In this vein, if firm trust leads to loyalty and purchase intention, it is logical to assume that perceived altruistic motives have a positive effect on

purchase intent. Consider the study of Green and Peloza (2014), which found customer trust in small businesses leads to the belief that the firms engage in business social responsibility for the ‘right’ reasons. However, research by Gupta and Pirsch (2006) find customer perceptions of perceived firm motivations play an insignificant role in their purchase intentions, suggesting customers may still purchase from a business regardless of the perceived motivation of the firm (Yuksel et al., 2010). These discrepancies in perceived motivation represent a possible contribution area for the small to medium sized business and business social responsibility research.

Although firms may aim to engage in business socially responsible activities for altruistic reasons, if customers perceive the activities as acting in self-interest, the positive effects of the activity may cause a negative perception of the firm (Kim et al., 2010). Interestingly, publicizing philanthropic activities may result in conjecture from customers with respect to the firms’ motives (Whitehouse, 2006). The public relations rationale, however, provides justification as to why some small business owners are motivated to invest in philanthropic activities within their communities (Besser & Miller, 2004). Green and Peloza (2014) suggest customers feel negatively about a company when it is perceived their social responsibility actions are driven by the opportunity to exploit a cause. Thus, customer perceptions of the perceived motivation of the socially responsible activities is an important moderator of firm outcomes (Yuksel et al., 2010). Researchers have supported the notion that a multitude of potential moderating variables’ effects remain unexplored in relation to business social responsibility and customer response (Azmat & Ha, 2013; Gurlek et al., 2017).

Chapter 3: Research Hypotheses

Social Exchange Theory

Theoretical support for the presumed effects of business social responsibility on customer perceptions of small businesses can be derived from the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory is regarded as one of the most influential theories in organizational behavior to explain the framework of customer and company interactions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Despite differences in views on social exchange, there are areas of agreement. For example, most scholars contend that social exchanges comprise of a series of interactions between two parties that create obligations towards each other, and that these interactions are widely recognized to be interdependent of each other, yet contingent upon the behaviors of the other party (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). Emerson (1976) provided one of the earliest discussions of social exchange theory, noting that it is “a two-sided, mutually contingent, and mutually rewarding process involving ‘transactions’ or simple ‘exchange’” (p. 336).

While it is generally agreed that social exchange theory involves transactional exchanges, there is less consensus on whether these human social interactions are seen as *rational*. For example, Blau (1964) proposed exchange behaviors referenced self-directed choices made by individuals driven by the anticipated benefits they are likely to receive. From a rationality perspective, this suggests individuals engage in purposeful decision-making wherein they consider their own interests and reflect upon their choices prior to proceeding with action. Scholars such as Emerson (1976) and Bierstedt (1965), however, disagree with this sentiment, alternatively presuming individuals do not consistently engage in such conscious and complex decision-making. Indeed, Blau (1964) even explicitly states the norms of reciprocity are not

always motivated by expected returns. Paradoxically, however, in exchange theory relationships, such behavior typically *does* yield returns and social operant behavior is sustained over the long-term through reciprocal behavior that is rewarded (Emerson, 1976).

According to some scholars, the social exchange process begins when an entity treats another in a positive or negative fashion. In response, the treated individual then chooses to respond to the treatment with their own positive or negative behavior (Eisenburg et al., 1987; Gergen, 1969). This exchange of behaviors is collectively referred to as the reciprocating response. In their highly regarded review of social exchange theory, Cropanzano et al. (2017) suggest that social exchange theory “predicts that, in reaction to positive initiating actions, targets will tend to reply in kind by engaging in more positive reciprocating responses and/or fewer negative reciprocating responses” (p. 2). In this dissertation, focus is directed towards the reciprocity principle of social exchange.

Reciprocity is viewed as a societal norm (Levinson, 1965). Human behavior is greatly influenced by this norm, although individuals vary in the extent to which they follow it. Individuals are particularly inclined to reciprocate actions when they perceive it as morally correct and the ‘right’ thing to do (Cropanzano et al., 2017). As an example, consider the study of Eisenburg et al. (1987) that confirms the centrality of this phenomenon. Specifically, the researchers found individuals who are more likely to reciprocate societal norms hold positive reciprocity beliefs or exhibit high exchange ideology. Positive reciprocity beliefs and high exchange ideology have been shown to garner effects on the social exchange construct of organizational support (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Based upon this notion, it is logical to assume customers who exhibit positive reciprocity beliefs are more likely to act in kind to small businesses who engage in social responsibility acts after community crisis events.

Social exchange theory posits that interpersonal interactions are often viewed from a cost-benefit perspective through either economic or social exchanges. Economic exchanges between customers and companies include tangible activities whereas social exchanges include intangible outcomes such as respect, care, satisfaction (Gefen & Ridings, 2002; Nyadzayo et al., 2016). Like economic exchanges, social exchanges assume customers participate in the exchange under the assumption that their rewards justify the cost of participation. Further, social exchanges do not guarantee reciprocal rewards in return for investment costs, as, unlike economic exchanges, there are no governing rules to oversee the interaction (Blau, 1964, Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Central to social exchange is the belief in harmonious and reciprocal intentions (Gefen & Ridings, 2002) and, at its core, social exchange theory describes the evolution of relationships between two parties over time that result in trusting and loyal commitments (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Accordingly, this research employs social exchange theory to help understand customer perceptions of small business social responsibility orientation and response to community crisis. Specifically, this study employs social exchange theory to examine customer perceptions of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty to small businesses that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis.

Social Exchange Theory and Customer Perceptions

The principles of social exchange theory have been used to understand a variety of phenomena in business interactions and exchanges (e.g., Nyadzayo et al., 2019, etc.), including business social responsibility (Joseph & Jerome, 2017; Slack et al., 2015). For example, in the literature on customer perceptions of business social responsibility, current research seems to indicate that through philanthropic activities, firms can positively impact customer experiences

and increase customer satisfaction (Bello et al., 2021; He & Li, 2011). Further, by framing themselves in a socially responsible manner, businesses can engender a belief amongst their current or potential customers that the business is honest, trustworthy, and concerned about their stakeholders (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Galbreath and Shum (2012) suggest customer satisfaction is directly linked to firm involvement in socially responsible activities. Further, Lee et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and attitudes and socially responsible firm behavior.

Scholars have examined a wide range of individual and organizational behavioral response from the lens of social exchange theory, including prosocial organizational behaviors (Brief & Motowildo, 1986; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). Prosocial organizational behavior is defined as behavior wherein one party directs a behavior towards an individual, group, or community, and that behavior is performed with the purpose of promoting the well-being of the intended targeted individual, group, or community (Brief & Motowildo, 1986). Cropanzo et al. (2017) went even further to point out that prosocial organizational behavior is characterized by the intention of the behavior and not the actual effects of the behavior. Accordingly, “an action is ‘prosocial’ because of what it intends to do and not because of what actually transpires” (p. 7). With regard to this dissertation and considering prosocial organizational behavior from the lens of social exchange theory, benevolent giving by a small business after a community crisis would be inherently prosocial through the intended effects of community benefit. Indeed, some argue that any organizational action that is intended to benefit others is considered a prosocial behavior. Further, any prosocial behavior, including stewardship and helping, is considered advantageous to the organization (Cropanzo et al., 2017).

By extending the social exchange theory, it is logical to expect customers will hold positive perceptions of small businesses that engage in socially responsible behaviors that benefit a community following a crisis event because of a potential halo effect and perceived need to reciprocate in the social exchange process (Blau, 1964). Thus, based on social exchange theory and prior research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Firm response to local community crisis influences customer perceptions of the firm.

Social Exchange Theory and Trust

The construct of trust and trustworthy behavior, according to the social exchange process, suggests a lack of opportunistic behavior between parties. Examining trust from a sociological lens, Lewis and Wigert (1985) characterize trust as a cognitive “leap” surpassing what can be justified by rational expectation and empirical knowledge alone. Thus, trust supersedes where opportunistic behaviors would reasonably be expected. Indeed, as with commitment, social exchange theory predicts positive behaviors beget trust (a relational response) and the increased trust facilitates positive behavioral responses from the exchange participant (Cropanzo et al., 2017).

From a social exchange perspective, social life involves resources that are exchanged through reciprocity. Whereas economic exchanges are often quid pro quo and require less reliance on trust and more reliance on supervision and oversight, social exchanges are more unrestricted, involving more trust and flexibility (Cropanzo et al., 2017).

The social exchange literature suggests two antecedents of trust exist. The first source of trust, reputation, includes the collective perception and evaluation of an entity wherein there is knowledge of previous relationships or the relationship develops over time. The second, shared values, necessitates current knowledge of an entity’s value system, which may be transmitted

through the exchange process (Young-Ybarra & Wiersema, 1999). Researchers within organizational theory and sociology have emphasized the importance of trust within the social exchange process. Although the study of trust as a discipline is grounded in psychology and social psychology, it is ostensibly an interpersonal phenomenon, wherein, according to management scholars, the dynamics of trust extend to the organizational level (Lorenz, 1988; Park et al., 2017).

Trust in a firm is considered a pivotal aspect of any organizational relationship. Robinson (1996) defines organizational trust as “one’s expectations, assumptions or beliefs about the likelihood that another’s future actions will be beneficial, favorable or at least not detrimental to one’s interest” (p. 576). As a social construct, trust is the essential component of a two-way relationship wherein perceptions of trust influence behavioral responses toward the other party (Blau, 1964). Organizational trust, as a social construct, is historically linked to traditional theories, including the social exchange theory (George et al., 2020), and the core principle of reciprocity underlies the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Further, social exchange theory additionally suggests that trust between organizational parties has a positive impact on the willingness of both parties (or, within the case of this dissertation, customers) to adjust to situational changes through modifications of the agreement (Lorenz, 1988). Put another way, when customers trust a firm, they are more likely to positively respond to the firms’ actions. Indeed, Anderson and Narus (1990) found evidence that once trust is established between a customer and business, the business learns that acting within the joint interest of the customer and firm yields more positive outcomes than if acting solely in their own personal interest.

George et al. (2020) contends that social exchange theory provides a foundational basis of business social responsibility attitude propositions, as social exchange theory underlies the

social behaviors that result in the exchange process. Put another way, social exchange theory proposes social behavior is a result of reciprocity in exchange relationships wherein trust is its underlying bedrock. Previous research has supported the hypothesis that stakeholders' trust in a firm is related to perceptions of the firm's goodwill, values, and inherent principles (Mayer et al., 1995; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). In the same vein, Park et al. (2017) conclude that firm involvement in philanthropic business social responsibility behaviors influences customer trust in the firm. Similarly, in a meta-analytic review of 60 articles on business social responsibility and customer relationship quality, Aljarah et al. (2020) established a link between the effect of business social responsibility and customer trust, supporting the notion that "the more positive [business social responsibility] a company has, the higher confidence customers have in its reliability and integrity (i.e., trust)" (p. 39). Correspondingly, a company's existing reputation as being socially oriented results in greater customer trust when engaging in new philanthropic activities (Castaldo et al., 2008). In a study examining the adjacent relationship between employees and organizations, George et al. (2020) propose, based on social exchange theory, that business social responsibility creates organizational trust as a result of the reciprocal exchange relationship. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Positive customer perceptions of firm action positively relates to firm trust.

Social Exchange Theory and Purchase Intent

The social exchange theory punctuates the role of customer satisfaction, trust, and purchase intent, as higher levels of satisfaction and trust ignite purchase and repurchase intention behaviors (Weisberg et al., 2011). Empirical evidence seems to support the notion that when a firm's business social responsibility activities align with a customer's prosocial interests, it

generates satisfaction and trust, ultimately leading to purchase and repurchase intention behaviors (Duong et al., 2022).

Business social responsibility is largely considered a kindness action (Falk & Fischbacher, 2006); thus, it is logical to assume customers will likely reciprocate this kindness action through purchase intentions. Further, this line of research implies that customer behaviors are resultant of their cumulative and overall perceptions of a firm (Olsen & Johnson, 2003), which can impact a firms' financial performance not only at the time of the socially responsible activity, but also for the following periods (Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022). Specifically, from an economic perspective, results from Ghanbarpour and Gustafsson's (2022) study demonstrate that for every one-point increase in customer satisfaction, a firms' future earnings can increase by 10 percent or more. Further, the researchers find for every one-point increase in customer-perceived business social responsibility behaviors, it would lead to a 1.6% increase in a firms' future earnings through the antecedent of customer satisfaction (Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022). Indeed, what's good for the community is good for business (Besser, 1999).

This information informs the following hypothesis:

H3: Trust in the firm positively relates to purchase intent.

Social Exchange Theory and Customer Loyalty

Scholars have used various relational and interpersonal constructs to operationalize relationship quality, including trust (George et al., 2020; Lorenz, 1988) and commitment (Meyer & Allen, 2005). Unsurprisingly, these constructs occasionally exhibit divergent qualities that are found between economic exchange relationships and social exchange relationships (Blau, 1964). Behavioral constructs are considered more quid pro quo, while emotional constructs are less restricted (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). Drawing upon this and other works, Cropanzo et al.

(2017) contend if we apply social exchange theory, we can expect that a positive initial action will enhance emotional commitment, which is a reciprocal relational response.

At its core, social exchange theory refers to social interactions wherein one party anticipates a particular behavioral response from another party that, in turn, produces a certain benefit from exchange behavior (Blau, 1964). These benefits can include tangible and intangible resources with allegorical benefits that facilitate a positive social exchange relationship (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005). A number of scholars have contended that positive social exchange relationships additionally produce cooperative individuals who are more committed to maintaining mutual positive relationship goals. Thus, individuals committed to an organization feel an obligation to the organization and likely have higher reciprocation intentions (Bartikowski & Walsh, 2011; Froth, 2005), ultimately producing customer loyalty.

In a meta-analysis of business social responsibility and customer relationships, Aljarah et al. (2020) conclude that to increase customer loyalty, management should actively invest in business social responsibility activities. Further, the authors stress the importance of business social responsibility in building longstanding relationships with customers (Aljarah et al., 2020). In a similar vein, the work of Swaen et al. (2021) demonstrates that business social responsibility activities are of appreciable relevance to developing a positive firm reputation, which, in turn, needs to be maintained to facilitate long-term customer purchasing behavior.

With respect to business social responsibility, research suggests benevolent giving by a firm likely increases customer loyalty, an effect that occurs directly and indirectly through trust (Cuesta-Valino et al., 2019). Indeed, the findings of Bello et al. (2021) suggest customers have a penchant for recognizing business' social responsibility efforts and, in turn, this increases their motivation for patronage and loyalty.

From the business owner-manager perspective, participation in business social responsibility results in a positive association with business success and the loyalty of the community. In other words, business owners perceive their commitment to the community as a strategy of and metric for business success that results in enhanced customer loyalty (Besser, 1999). However, a further empirical study suggests a business' type of involvement in the community can result in a potential or actual loss of customers. For example, civic engagement by means of serving in local governance is perceived by business owners as riskier to their business than benevolent giving to the community. Further, business owners cited associations with controversial issues as a danger to losing customer loyalty and patronage (Besser & Miller, 2004).

Customer commitment is the psychological link between an organization and a customer that permits the latter to cultivate and preserve a valued relationship (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004). Customers form psychological commitments to organizations that result in reciprocal and enduring relationships (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2016). Thus, organizations such as small businesses should strive to develop customer commitment and loyalty to facilitate strong, lasting relationships. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests the emotional bonds between a customer and the organization through the phenomenon of commitment are better at predicting and anticipating customers' future behaviors and actions than cognitive belief does (Mattila, 2006). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Purchase intent positively relates to customer loyalty.

Social Exchange Theory and Perceived Motives

Affective commitment embodies the sense of emotional connection or affinity that consumers develop, maintain, and have towards an organization (Fullerton, 2003). Bartikowski

and Walsh (2011) contend that the business social responsibility activities a firm engages with directly lead to customers' affective commitment towards the business. This notion is congruent with the work of Singh et al. (2012), which suggests- in the context of consumer goods- customers' perceived ethicality of a firm positively influences brand trust, affect, and loyalty. Previous research has supported the hypothesis that customer perceptions of business social responsibility activities positively affect customers' affective commitment. Consider, for example, the study by Markov et al. (2018) that found, through the mediator of affective commitment, customer perceptions of the firms' ethicality positively and indirectly affect customer loyalty. Other research by Liu and Mattilla (2015) reveals customers who have high levels of affective commitment to a firm have a strong motivation to support the firm and improve their business.

In their groundbreaking study on consumer attributions for business social responsibility programming, Ellen et al. (2006) largely confirm Foreh and Grier's (2003) findings and expand the literature on customer perceptions of firm engagement. Specifically, Ellen et al. (2006) found customer attributions were largely more complex than previously established, providing empirical evidence that consumers assign four types of intentions to a firm's business social responsibility activities, including: strategic and egoistic self-centered motives and values driven and stakeholder driven other-centered motives. Notably, other-centered motives are not always perceived as positive for the firm. Value-driven motives infer that the firm engages in socially responsible behaviors for altruistic reasons and that they have genuine concern and care for the cause. Because motivations are perceived as earnest, customers attribute positive feelings towards the behavior and firm. However, when customers perceive firm motivations as stakeholder driven, customers assume a firms' socially responsible behaviors are the result of

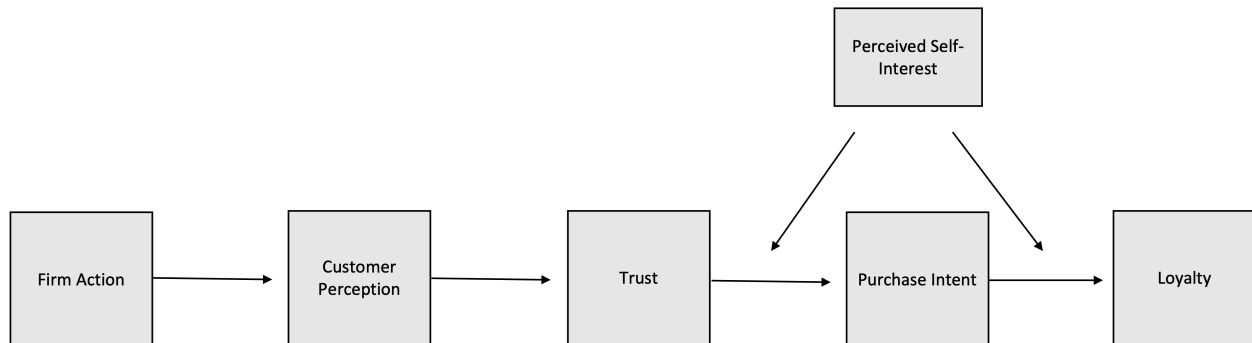
pressure from consumers and other stakeholders, resulting in an overall negative perception of the firm and activity (Ellen et al., 2006). Therefore, in the context of perceived motivations of small to medium sized businesses who respond to local community crisis through socially responsible behaviors, the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H5: Perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intent.

H6: Perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between purchase intent and loyalty.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

The focus of this dissertation is to examine customer perceptions of trust and loyalty and examine customers' purchase intent for small businesses that participate in socially responsible behaviors in the face of community crisis. To test the hypotheses, customer responses of small to medium-sized business social responsibility activities will be studied using an experimental survey design based on a vignette. Vignettes have traditionally been used in academic studies to explore ethical issues (Hyman & Steiner, 1996) such as business social responsibility (e.g., Bridoux et al., 2016; Rupp et al., 2013; White et al., 2012), and to evaluate customer behavior intentions (Dubinsky & Loken, 1989). Previously validated and established scales will be used to test the hypotheses. A detailed description of the vignette, research design, and measurement is provided below.

The data will be collected and analyzed following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) framework; a two-step analysis approach will be adopted. First, this study will conduct confirmatory factor analysis to test the model fit. Second, a linear regression model using conditional process analysis will be used to test the data. Specifically, Hayes's (2022) PROCESS v3.5 macro (Model 92) in SPSS 22 will examine indirect associations between the variables.

Vignette

Alexander and Becker (1978) define vignettes as "short descriptions of a person or social situation that contain precise references to what are thought to be the most important factors in the decision-making or judgment-making processes of respondents" (p. 9). In the literature on the use of vignettes in business and business ethics research, empirical evidence appears to support the notion that vignette studies are superior to non-vignette studies for an assortment of

reasons. For example, Wason et al. (2002) propose vignettes are preferable to direct-question-based scenario studies because vignettes are more realistic and offer respondents standardized stimuli that strengthens respondent involvement, internal validity, and the reliability of measurement tools. Additionally, vignettes allow researchers to study complex scenarios while simultaneously controlling for moderating variables. Further, vignettes improve construct validity by calling respondent attention to the research question(s) (Wason et al., 2002). Finally, vignettes provide researchers a method for examining the difference between behavioral intentions and actual behavior (Hymen & Steier, 1996).

To ensure robust data, a vignette was designed where survey participants will assume the role of a customer at a small business that participated in a socially responsible activity after a community crisis event. Specifically, the vignette portrays a hypothetical company in a small to medium-sized town that sells men's and women's apparel goods. This context was chosen because clothing is a relatable and universal product familiar to all study participants. Notably, business social responsibility is particularly important in the retail industry (the context of this research study) and has been shown as a significant driver of shopping decisions (Dal Mas et al., 2021). Additionally, consumer goods companies have previously been used in vignette studies including vignette studies examining customer perceptions of firm benevolence (e.g., Bridoux et al., 2016; Contini et al., 2020). Further, in their extensive study of business social responsibility in Fortune 100 companies in domestic natural disasters, Johnson et al. (2010) found retail and wholesale companies were more likely than other industry sectors to report engaging in disaster-related activities (47.4%) and had the highest mention of disaster-related statements (90.5%) in public business social responsibility reports. Thus, the use of a fictitious retail store that engages in socially responsible behaviors after a natural disaster is appropriate for this research study.

Wason et al. (2002) remind us that selecting an appropriate population is paramount in vignette research, and that the target population should be restricted to participants who can respond pointedly to all vignettes, i.e., “the manipulated variables and associated situations must be salient to respondents” (p. 53). Thus, data will be collected through an online questionnaire from a sample of individuals in small to medium-sized towns. To ensure participants reside in communities with population sizes required for this study sample, respondents will be asked to check a box confirming they live in a small to medium-sized town and insert their zip code prior to beginning the survey. After completion of the survey, the primary investigator will confirm the participant-inputted zip code aligns with a population size of less than 500,000 through the data cleaning process. Any completed surveys with inputted zip codes in which participants do not actually reside in a small to medium-sized town will be removed.

To address issues of reliability, the following is proposed. First, the vignette will be pretested with a panel of faculty and industry experts to ensure that study participants perceive the scenario as realistic (Bridoux et al., 2016; Finch, 1987). Wason et al. (2002) maintain vignettes must be believable, even if beyond participants’ familiarity and experiences. The scale from Bridoux et al. (2016) was used to pretest the vignettes and includes the items: “The situation described in the scenario was realistic” and “I had no difficulty imagining myself in the situation.”

Second, to control the moderating variable, the vignette will maximize comprehension by providing respondents with an appropriate number of details to control for idiosyncrasy (Hyman & Stiner, 1996), but not too many details as to overwhelm respondents. Correspondingly, the vignette should be designed with descriptions of stories that are easily understood and comprehended by all participants to minimize error and respondent fatigue (Matza et al., 2021).

Third, empirical evidence suggests that the framing (i.e., the explicit wording) of a vignette can impact participants' responses (Matza et al., 2021; Wason et al., 2002). As Wason et al. (2002) note, "the more levels of inference between the question asked and the question to be answered, the more potential validity problems" (p. 41). Thus, the wording of the vignette will be critically important to ensure that study participants understand the scenario from which they will answer questions.

All participants will read the same vignette that depicts a fictitious news article describing a tornado that hits a small town in the United States. While there are many types of crisis events that could be chosen for the vignette (e.g., provincial natural disasters, tragic school shootings, injury or death of a community member, etc.), a natural disaster was chosen because it is a naturally occurring event that often overwhelms local resources, communities, and municipalities (Gallant, 2008), and often necessitates support in recovery from the local community (Shi, 2020). Further, much previous research on business social responsibility and disaster aid/response to crisis has focused on natural disasters (e.g, Cheng et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2010; Shi, 2020), making it appropriate for this research study.

To create the vignette, the primary researcher collected an assortment of news articles from popular press on tornadic activity in small towns to use as background to write a news article about a fictitious tragedy. The vignette describes a powerful tornado in a small town that wreaks havoc on the residents, businesses, and community. Efforts of volunteers, businesses, and community members are detailed, in addition to information that a relief fund was set up to support those affected by the tragedy. The vignette was checked for readability and has a Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level score of 11. Further, to ensure there was no participant bias of the location in which the fictitious tragedy occurred, a state was not provided in the vignette and ChatGPT

was used to create a name for a fictitious small town that was not currently in existence in the United States.

Research Design

Following the reading on the vignette news article, study participants will be directed to one of two manipulations. Both manipulations provide a prompt describing to participants a fictitious apparel retailer (Threaded Identity) in a small community that has been in operation for four years and, following the tornadic activity described in the previous news article, has manufactured and produced a purchasable t-shirt for their store to aid victims of the disaster. Study participants are then asked to view a social media post by the fictitious apparel retailer that showcases a disaster relief t-shirt and accompanying message to the public. While there are a variety of social media platforms small businesses can use to communicate messages to the public, an Instagram post was deemed the most appropriate method of communication for the purposes of this study. An analysis of small apparel retailers' social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, etc.) after a community crisis revealed the sale of disaster relief t-shirts were primarily showcased with an Instagram post and accompanying message. This finding aligns with the literature on business social responsibility, public relations, and strategic communication, which indicates companies communicate their philanthropic activities on social media to engage their customers and the public due to its interactive, and conversational features (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2016; Shi, 2020). Empirical evidence by Shi (2020) further found that 68.2% of companies who use social media to communicate corporate disaster aid activities include images in their post.

Congruent with calls for future research on business social responsibility to employ experimental designs (Green & Peloza, 2014), the present study employs a quantitative

experimental design to address the phenomenon at hand. Specifically, the experimental research design involved two manipulations; participants will be directed to either one of the two manipulations to complete. The first manipulation includes a social media post by the fictitious apparel company that indicates 100% of proceeds from purchase of the t-shirt will go directly to aid victims. The second manipulation includes the same verbiage of the first manipulation but indicates that 10% of proceeds from purchase of the t-shirt will go directly to aid victims, and additionally prompts the reader to purchase other products from the company's website. Supporting this research design, Shi (2020) found that 72.1% of company social media posts about corporate disaster aid were focused on providing short-term aid and 76% focused on the individuals affected area. The two manipulations are designed to produce insights into how perceived self-interest from the firm impacts trust, purchase intent, and loyalty.

Monetary donations (i.e. – t-shirt proceeds) were chosen as the charitable orientation in this study because this type of philanthropic giving is the primary aid type communicated in the social media context. Further, in context of natural disasters, it is hypothesized that due to the extreme damage caused by such events, companies provide monetary donations over other types of aid giving because there is a considerable need for financial support (Shi, 2020).

Measurement

The present study employed a quantitative research approach designed to investigate customer perceptions of small business' response to community crisis. Measurement items included in this research study will be adapted from previous empirical studies. The items are discussed further below, and the measurement instrument in its entirety can be found in Appendix A. Some language and phrasing of previous scales is modified to fit the context of this research study. To ensure the variables are accurately measuring the constructs, the measurement

items will be pilot tested. This paper adopts the position that trust, purchase intent, and customer loyalty are measurable constructs.

Campbell and Stanley (1963) remind us that research results can be inconclusive or misleading if study participants are inattentive, while Hauser et al. (2018) points out that study participants in the online environment may hurry through the study without paying attention. Thus, manipulation checks will be employed in this study. First, based on the recommendation of Oppenheimer et al., (2019), an Instructional Manipulation Check, also called an attention check, inserted into the study is designed to check whether participants are actively reading and providing their opinion on statements or simply clicking answer choices without reading the provided statement. Second, a reverse-coded item is designed to see how closely survey participants are paying attention and to ensure survey participants are not “straight lining” responses by clicking the same answer on all rating scales (Hauser et al., 2018).

Trust

Congruent with the work of Bridoux et al. (2016) ($\alpha = 0.85$), this research study measures participants’ trust through a semantic differential seven-point scale that was adapted to fit the context of this research study. Measurement items include scales ranging from the believe that the fictitious company is “very undependable/very dependable,” “very incompetent/very competent,” “of very low integrity/of very high integrity,” and “very dishonest and untrustworthy/very honest and trustworthy.”

Purchase Intent

Brand equity encompasses a customer’s idiosyncratic and intangible assessment of a brand or company (Keller, 1993). In a retail setting, brand equity explains customer preferences for one brand or company over that of a competitor (Yoo et al., 2000); preferences can be

translated into purchase intent. Thus, purchase intent is measured and adapted from Swaen et al.'s (2021) scale on brand equity. This scale has shown reliable with a Cronbach's alpha level of 0.910. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale where participants rated statements about Threaded Identity from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample statements included: "It makes sense to shop at this retailer instead of at any other retailer, even if they offer the same products," and "Even if there is another retailer that is as good as this retailer, I prefer to go to this retailer."

Loyalty

Brand loyalty scales were adapted from Nguyen et al. (2022) ($\alpha = 0.878$). Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale where participants rated statements about Threaded Identity from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample statements included: "I would say positive things about Threaded Identity to other people," and "I would do more business with Threaded Identity in the next few years."

Self-Interest Motives

This study examines the effect of one moderating variable, perceived self-interest motives, for its effect on the relationship between trust and purchase intent and purchase intent and loyalty. Vignettes are particularly useful in research studies where moderating variables are important (Wason et al., 2002). Perceived self-interest scales were adapted from Nguyen et al. (2022) ($\alpha = 0.871$) and were measured on a 7-point Likert scale where participants were asked to rate statements about Threaded Identity from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample statements included: "Threaded Identity's response to this community crisis is only to increase sales and profit," and "Threaded Identity's response to this community crisis is to only benefit itself."

Business Social Responsibility

Perceived business social responsibility, which measures a customer's evaluation of business social responsibility (Stanaland et al., 2011), were measured using scales from Swaen et al. (2021) and Stanaland et al. (2011) and included the items: "This retailer is concerned about improving the well-being of society," "This retailer follows high ethical standards," and "This retailer is socially responsible." This scale has shown reliable with a Cronbach's alpha level of 0.939. Additionally, business social irresponsibility will be measured using the scale item: "This retailer is only concerned about its own profit at the expense of society" from Swaen et al. (2021) with a Cronbach's alpha level of 0.754. This is a reverse coded item which will help identify common method bias. The scale from Stanaland et al. (2011) measures perceived business social responsibility through the following Likert-scale item: "This retailer plays a role in our society that goes beyond the mere generation of profits." All items measured had a Cronbach's coefficient alpha that met the acceptable level of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Data Analysis

The data will be collected and analyzed following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) framework; a two-step analysis approach will be adopted. First, this study will conduct confirmatory factor analysis to test the model fit. Second, a linear regression model using conditional process analysis will be used to test the data. Specifically, Hayes's (2022) PROCESS v3.5 macro in SPSS 22 will examine indirect associations between the variables. Should a linear regression model not yield robust results, structural equation modeling will be implemented as the method of data analysis. The decision will be made for testing the model and what will be deemed the most appropriate and parsimonious method.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted to determine the model fit, verify the construct validity, and ascertain whether the model requires modifications or not. This analysis estimates measurement models and evaluates how they correspond to the data. Specifically, Bollen (1989) notes the following about confirmatory factor analysis:

In confirmatory factor analysis a model is constructed in advance, the number of latent variables is set by the analyst, whether the latent variable influences an observed variable is specified, some direct effects of latent on observed variables are fixed to zero or some other constant (e.g., one), measurement errors may correlate, the covariance of latent variables can be estimated or set to any value, and parameter identification is required.

(p. 311)

Linear Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression analysis will be performed to examine the proposed relationships between variables. Hayes (2022) defines a linear regression model as “an equation that links one or more input variables to an output variable by exploiting information contained in the association between the inputs and outputs” (p. 35). The objective of a linear regression analysis is to determine different parameters within the regression model, by generating an equation that provides estimations of the dependent variable based on one or more independent variables (Hayes, 2022). In this dissertation it is assumed that the antecedent of customer loyalty (firm action) are correlated. The assumptions of regression will be tested to ensure reliability of findings.

Conditional Process Analysis

A linear regression model using conditional process analysis will be used to test the data. Specifically, Hayes's (2022) PROCESS v3.5 macro in SPSS 22 will examine indirect associations between the variables.

While mediation analysis is used to examine direct and indirect pathways through which the antecedent variable X effects the consequent variable Y through one or more mediating variables, moderation analysis examines the antecedent variable X effects the consequent variable Y depending on one or more third variables. Conditional process analysis combines mediation analysis and moderation analysis and “focuses on the estimation and interpretation of the conditional nature (the moderation component) of the indirect and/or direct effects (the mediation component of X on Y in a causal system” (Hayes, 2022, p. 11). In other words, process modeling empirically estimates and tests hypotheses about their influence of the independent variables effect on the dependent variable in addition to the indirect effect of the mediated variables. This dissertation uses firm action as the independent variable, customer perception, trust, and purchase intent as the mediating variables, and loyalty as the dependent variable. Additionally, perceived self-interest is the moderating variable between trust and purchase intent and purchase intent and loyalty.

Congruent with previous business, marketing, and management research (Han et al., 2018; Qaisar et al., 2018), a linear regression model using conditional process analysis is appropriate for this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Results

Sample Selection

Over the past decade, the utilization of Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) has exponentially increased (Walter et al., 2019), making it the most frequently used online academic data collection method (Porter et al., 2019). Proponents of MTurk have pointed out that its popularity can be attributed to (a) access to a large and demographically diverse sample population, (b) the timeliness in which data can be collected, (c) cost-effectiveness, and (d) flexibility of research design (Aguinis et al., 2020; Buhrmester et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2015). Moreover, current studies appear to support the notion that MTurk data exhibit comparable or superior quality to data gathered in controlled laboratory settings, from expertly curated online panels, or through professional market research companies (Bentley et al., 2017; Buhrmester et al., 2018; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). MTurk samples also tend to better reflect the characteristics of the overall population when compared to samples consisting primarily of students and other in-person convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2017; Buhrmester et al., 2018). Although MTurk data is widely used, a number of scholars have expressed concerns regarding its application. Much of the debate on MTurk's legitimacy as a data collection source has revolved around the validity of research findings obtained from this platform (e.g., Barends & deVries, 2019; Chmielewski & Kucker, 2019; Stokel-Walker, 2018). Thus, to ensure validity of results of this research study, several measures were incorporated into the survey design, following guidance from respected scholars in the field (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2020; McCoy, 2023).

To address threats of self-misrepresentation, qualifiers were used to screen MTurk study participants (Aguinis et al., 2020). Feitosa, Joseph and Newman (2015) suggest screeners are

particularly useful when recruiting unique populations for a study, such as the unique population in this study. Specifically, the subjects of this sample included participants from the United States who lived in small to medium-sized towns. Participants were informed within the survey instructions only those residing in towns with a population size of 500,000 or less were eligible to participate in the study and were required to input their zip code at the completion of the survey. Thereafter, the zip codes were cross-referenced with population figures provided from the United States Census website to verify that participants met the residency criteria.

Next, to address threats of participant inattention, the use of two attention checks were embedded within the data collection tool, as recommended by Aguinis et al. (2020). Specifically, an attention check was inserted into the study to determine whether participants were actively reading and providing their opinion on statements or simply clicking answer choices without reading the provided statement. Second, a reverse-coded item was designed to ascertain how closely survey participants were paying attention and to ensure survey participants were not “straight lining” responses by clicking the same answer on all rating scales (Hauser et al., 2018).

To address challenges of self-misrepresentation and MTurker social desirability bias, a detailed description of the study, including the estimated time commitment, instructions, and compensation rules were included. Additionally, no cues on the objectives of the study that could inadvertently influence participants’ social desirability responses were provided (Aguinis et al., 2020).

A Human Intelligence Task (HIT) was crafted for MTurkers to view prior to the participating in the study. Lovett et al. (2018) suggests a primary complaint of MTurk study participants is that the HIT synopsis and instructions are unclear; Zhou and Fishbach (2016) suggest the HIT synopsis should provide an overview of the study including: (1) estimated time

commitment, (2) a description of what participants are being asked to do, and compensation rules. Accordingly, this study followed these recommendations.

Aguinis et al. (2020) recommend conducting a pilot test with a minimum of 10 to 30 participants and to monitor the results to ensure study instructions are clear, rectifying any program issues or data-collection problems along the way. This study conducted a pilot test with 40 participants and responses were closely monitored. Upon conclusion of the initial pilot test, it was found the manipulation of firm action did not yield the expected or desired results. Therefore, the manipulation was strengthened after the initial pilot test and responses were closely monitored. Conditions were changed from 50% and 100% of proceeds donated to aid victims of the natural disaster to 10% and 100% of proceeds donated to aid victims of the natural disaster.

Last, to ensure MTurk study participants did not complete and submit multiple experiments, qualifications were added within the MTurk survey application that made everyone who had completed the survey ineligible to complete it again (McCoy, 2023). Thus, participants of the pilot study were ineligible to complete the full study.

The survey garnered responses from 425 participants. A total of 115 surveys were excluded due to failure to pass the attention check, while an additional 29 surveys were excluded due to incompleteness. Thus, the final sample size for this study was 281.

Results

The data analysis for this dissertation utilized a thorough and comprehensive approach to ensure the validity of the findings. The data were analyzed using several approaches. Specifically, the following analyses were conducted. First, reliability statistics were computed to assess the consistency and stability of the measurement of the instruments used in this study, and

to assess whether the instruments yielded consistent results upon each administration (see Table 1). The reliability statistics provided a foundation for further analyses conducted.

Second, descriptive statistics were analyzed to summarize the means and standard deviations of the total number of surveys taken (see Table 2). The following is reported: firm action, trust, purchase intent, loyalty, self-interest, business social responsibility, age, education, race/ethnicity, shopping benefit, income, community satisfaction, small business owner, gender, and religiosity.

Third, the Pearson correlation matrix was computed to test the scales' psychometric properties, including the average, standard deviation, and correlations for the variables under analysis (see Table 3).

Fourth, confirmatory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted to determine the model fit, verify the construct validity, and ascertain whether the model required modifications or not (see Table 4). The confirmatory factor analysis was designed to assess the validity of the measurement model and to confirm the hypothesized factor structures. In accordance with Anderson and Prussia's (1997) findings, a critical value of 0.35 was selected as the boundary to ascertain whether an item constituted a factor.

Fifth, a linear regression model using conditional process analysis was used to test the data. The process macro in SPSS was employed to examine the mediation effects and identify the impact of the moderating variable in the proposed model. The mediating variables and dependent variable are reported independently for clarity of viewing. Table 5 reports business social responsibility; Table 6 reports trust; Table 7 reports purchase intent; and Table 8 reports loyalty.

Sixth, a post-hoc analysis was undertaken to determine between-subject effects of business social responsibility (see Table 9). This and the above analytical procedures collectively contribute to the comprehensiveness and reliability of the study results, and provide the opportunity to draw meaningful and impactful conclusions from the study.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

| Variable | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Trust | 4 | 0.69 |
| Purchase Intent | 4 | 0.68 |
| Loyalty | 5 | 0.79 |
| BSR | 5 | 0.70 |
| Self-Interest | 4 | 0.75 |

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement of the instruments used in a research study and whether the instruments yield consistent results upon each administration (George & Mallery, 2021). In this study, the internal consistency of the measurement instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure the reliability of the data. Reliability testing was conducted for each of the measurement items: trust, purchase intent, loyalty, overall business social responsibility, and perceptions of self-interest. The Cronbach's alpha for trust was $\alpha = 0.69$ and the Cronbach's alpha for purchase intent was $\alpha = 0.68$. While these values fall minimally below the recommended alpha range of 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), their proximity is noteworthy. Indeed, some suggest that the recommended alpha range of 0.70 is a general rule-of-thumb, and that Cronbach's alpha ranges between 0.60 and 0.80 are

generally considered acceptable (Hajjar, 2018). The Cronbach's alpha for loyalty was $\alpha = 0.79$, while the Cronbach's alpha for overall business social responsibility was $\alpha = 0.70$. The obtained alpha levels suggest internal consistency among the survey items, indicating that the instrument is reliable and accurately measures the intended constructs. Finally, the Cronbach's alpha for perceived self-interest was $\alpha = 0.75$.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>N</i> |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Firm Action | 1.50 | 0.50 | 281 |
| Trust | 5.75 | 0.68 | 281 |
| Purchase Intent | 5.45 | 0.72 | 281 |
| Loyalty | 5.49 | 0.75 | 281 |
| Self-Interest | 5.13 | 0.69 | 281 |
| BSR | 5.05 | 0.59 | 281 |

The variables of trust, purchase intent, loyalty, overall business social responsibility, and perceived self-interest were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics suggest that, based upon the vignette, participants trusted Threaded Identity and felt the retailer was dependable and reliable ($M = 5.75$; $SD = 0.68$). Further, participants agreed with statements supporting their purchase intention ($M = 5.46$; $SD = 0.72$) and loyalty ($M = 5.49$; $SD = 0.75$) to the retailer. While participants agreed that the retailer exhibited business social responsibility ($M = 5.05$; $SD = 0.59$), they conversely agreed the retailer was acting within their own self-interest ($M = 5.13$; $SD = 0.69$).

Demographic information was obtained from the 281 participants of this research study. Demographic data collected included participants' age, gender, education, race/ethnicity,

income, satisfaction within their community, if they were a small business owner, if they had shopped for a benefit item before, and religiosity. Results from the study indicate most participants were between the ages of 30-39 (59.2%). Eight-nine participants (28.6%) were between the ages of 18-29, 18 participants (5.8%) were between the ages of 40-49, 14 participants (4.5%) were between the ages of 50-59, and four participants (1.3%) were between the ages of 60-69. No participants were aged 70 or older. The majority of respondents (67.5%) identified as male; females represented 32.2% of the sample population. A total of 73% of the sample indicated their highest level of education was a Bachelor's degree. Thirty-seven respondents (11.9%) had a Master's degree, 25 respondents (8.0%) had a high school diploma, eight respondents had an Associate's degree, six respondents (1.9%) had a Doctorate or professional degree, five respondents (1.6%) had less than a high school diploma, and two respondents (0.6%) indicated their highest level of education was a vocational or technical certificate.

Most respondents (83.0%) identified as Non-Hispanic White, while 9.3% identified as Hispanic, 2.9% identified as Non-Hispanic Asian, 1.3% identified as Non-Hispanic Black or African American, and 1.0% identified as belonging to a different race or ethnicity. The majority (35.7%) of participants reported yearly income levels of \$40,526-\$86,375. Eighty-four respondents (27.0%) reported an income of \$9,951-\$40,525, 68 respondents (21.9%) made between \$86,376-\$164,925, 17 respondents (5.5%) made between \$164,926-\$209,425, 11 respondents (3.5%) reported an income of \$209,426-\$523,600, 11 respondents (3.5%) reported an income of \$523,601 or more, and seven respondents (2.3%) made less than \$9,951.

Most participants (55.3%) reported being satisfied with the community they currently live in. One hundred and eight respondents indicated they were very satisfied with the community

they currently live in, representing 34.7% of the total population. Twenty participants (6.4%) were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied, five participants (1.6%) were unsatisfied, and four participants (1.3%) were very unsatisfied with the community they currently live in. Most participants (85.5%) stated they were a small business owner, while forty-two participants (13.5%) indicated they were not a small business owner. The majority (90.7%) of respondents indicated they were a religious person; twenty-three respondents (7.4%) stated they were not a religious person.

When asked when the last time the participant had shopped for an item that benefitted some sort of disaster or crisis relief effort, most respondents (30.2%) stated it has been within the last month. Twenty-one percent of respondents stated they had shopped for a benefit item within the last six months, 18% within the last week, 14.5% within the last year, 9.6% within the last three years, 2.6% within the last three years, and 2.9% stated they had never shopped for an item that benefitted some sort of disaster or crisis relief effort.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix*Panel A: Average, Standard Deviation, and Correlations for Variables Under Analysis*

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Firm Action | 1.50 | 0.50 | - | | | | | | |
| 2. Trust | 5.75 | 0.68 | 0.04 | - | | | | | |
| 3. Purchase Intent | 5.45 | 0.72 | 0.06 | 0.58** | - | | | | |
| 4. Loyalty | 5.49 | 0.75 | 0.05 | 0.56** | 0.78** | - | | | |
| 5. Self-Interest | 5.13 | 0.69 | 0.08 | 0.29** | 0.54** | 0.55** | - | | |
| 6. Business Social Responsibility | 5.05 | 0.59 | -0.01 | 0.49** | 0.60** | 0.62** | 0.33** | - | |
| 7. Age | 1.97 | 0.77 | -0.80 | -0.10 | -0.10 | -0.10 | -0.10 | -0.57 | - |
| 8. Education | 4.81 | 1.09 | 0.03 | -0.02 | -0.02 | -0.05 | -0.04 | 0.06 | -0.01 |
| 9. Race Ethnicity | 1.39 | 0.97 | -0.03 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.08 | -0.02 | 0.21** | -0.17 |
| 10. Benefit Shopping | 2.88 | 1.49 | -0.04 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.02 | -0.10 |
| 11. Income | 3.23 | 1.26 | -0.07 | 0.03 | -0.03 | -0.00 | -0.01 | -0.01 | 0.01 |
| 12. Community Satisfaction | 4.22 | 0.76 | 0.04 | 0.16** | -0.12** | 0.80 | 0.04 | 0.15* | -0.05 |
| 13. Small Business Owner | 1.14 | 0.35 | -0.01 | -0.04 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.14* | 0.18** |
| 14. Gender | 1.31 | 0.47 | -0.11 | 0.12* | -0.02 | -0.03 | 0.04 | -0.01 | -0.11 |
| 15. Religious Person | 1.07 | 0.26 | -0.07 | -0.14 | 0.05 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.14* |

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

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Panel B: Average, Standard Deviation, and Correlations for Variables Under Analysis, Continued from Panel A

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. | 13. | 14. |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| 8. Education | 4.81 | 1.09 | - | | | | | | |
| 9. Race Ethnicity | 1.39 | 0.97 | 0.07 | - | | | | | |
| 10. Benefit Shopping | 2.88 | 1.49 | 0.18** | 0.21** | - | | | | |
| 11. Income | 3.23 | 1.26 | 0.01 | 0.16** | 0.26** | - | | | |
| 12. Community Satisfaction | 4.22 | 0.76 | 0.24** | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.13* | - | | |
| 13. Small Business Owner | 1.14 | 0.35 | 0.11 | -0.07 | 0.01 | -0.01 | -0.04 | - | |
| 14. Gender | 1.31 | 0.47 | 0.08 | -0.07 | 0.03 | 0.29** | 0.03 | -0.01 | - |
| 15. Religious Person | 1.07 | 0.26 | 0.02 | -0.11 | -0.04 | -0.13* | -0.14* | 0.20** | 0.04 |

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

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

For the purposes of this study, the scales' psychometric properties were tested, including the average, standard deviation, and correlations for the variables under analysis (see Table 3). Pearson correlations are considered strong with the r-value is larger than 0.7 (Nunally, 1978). The results above indicate the highest correlation is between loyalty and purchase intent ($r = 0.78$). Results also found a high correlation between loyalty and overall perceived business social responsibility ($r = 0.62$) and purchase intent and overall business social responsibility ($r = 0.60$). A moderate correlation was found between purchase intent and trust ($r = 0.58$), perceived self-interest and loyalty ($r = 0.55$), perceived self-interest and purchase intent ($r = 0.54$), and trust and overall perceptions of business social responsibility ($r = 0.49$). A low correlation was found between overall perceived business social responsibility and perceived self-interest ($r = 0.33$) and trust and perceived self-interest ($r = 0.29$). Note the remaining correlations (e.g., age, education, race/ethnicity, benefit shopping, income, community satisfaction, small business owner, gender, and religious person) either exhibited a low correlation or negative correlation with each other and the mediating, dependent, and moderating variable(s) (e.g., firm action, trust, purchase intent, loyalty, business social responsibility, and perceived self-interest).

Table 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis*Rotated Component Matrix*

| Factor Loadings | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
|--|------|------|------|----|------|
| Factor 1: Purchase intent | | | | | |
| Even if this retailer and another did not differ in any way, it is smarter to go to this retailer | 0.69 | | | | |
| Even if there is another retailer that is as good as this retailer, I prefer to go to this retailer | 0.58 | | | | |
| Even if the same products and services are available elsewhere, I would prefer to go to this retailer | 0.44 | | | | |
| It makes sense to shop at this retailer instead of at any other retailer, even if they offer the same products | 0.25 | | | | |
| Factor 1: Loyalty | | | | | |
| I would do more business with Threaded Identity in the next few years | 0.68 | | | | |
| I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with Threaded Identity | 0.67 | | | | |
| I would consider Threaded Identity my first place to buy services | 0.56 | | | | |
| I would say positive things about Threaded Identity to other people | 0.42 | | | | |
| I would recommend Threaded Identity to other people who seek my advice | 0.12 | | | | |
| Factor 2: Business social responsibility | | | | | |
| This retailer is concerned about improving the well-being of society. | | 0.72 | | | |
| This retailer follows high ethical standards. | | 0.22 | | | |
| This retailer plays a role in our society that goes beyond the mere generation of profits. | | 0.20 | | | |
| This retailer is only concerned about its own profit at the expense of society. | | 0.19 | | | |
| This retailer is socially responsible. | | 0.18 | | | |
| Factor 3: Self-interest | | | | | |
| The motive of Threaded Identity in helping the community after this crisis is very suspicious. | | | 0.73 | | |
| Being socially response is not a part of Threaded Identity's mission. | | | 0.73 | | |
| Threaded Identity's response to this community crisis is only to increase sales and profit. | | | 0.63 | | |
| Threaded Identity's response to this community crisis is to only benefit itself | | | 0.60 | | |
| Factor 5: Trust | | | | | |
| I feel that Threaded Identity is honest/trustworthy | | | | | 0.62 |
| I feel that Threaded Identity is of integrity | | | | | 0.59 |
| I feel that Threaded Identity is dependable/reliable | | | | | 0.41 |
| I feel that Threaded Identity is competent | | | | | 0.34 |

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with Varimax rotation was conducted to determine the model fit, verify the construct validity, and ascertain whether the model required modifications or not. In accordance with Anderson and Prussia's (1997) findings, a critical value of 0.35 was selected as the boundary to ascertain whether an item constituted a factor. This analysis was conducted in SPSS, not structural equation modeling, thus fit indices were not part of the reported output. Factor 3: self-interest, shows strong evidence of reliability with all critical values above the 0.35 level. However, factor 2: business social responsibility, demonstrates the only item meeting the critical value threshold is the statement, "This retailer is concerned about improving the well-being of society;" all other statements did not meet the critical value threshold. While these CFA results were surprising, it is important to note that previously established scales from Swaen et al. (2021) and Stanaland et al. (2011) were used to measure customer's evaluations of perceived business social responsibility. Results from the CFA demonstrate that purchase intent and loyalty load on the same factor (Factor 1). It is possible that because these variables are so highly correlated, participants may have had a difficult time differentiating between them. Additionally, previously established scales from Swaen et al. (2021) and Nguyen et al. (2022) were adapted and used for the purposes of this study. Items from factor 5: trust met the critical value of 0.35, although the statement "I feel that Threaded Identity is competent" measured at 0.34. Again, a previously established scale was used to measure participants' trust of the retailer (Bridoux et al., 2016). Within the CFA, some items exhibited cross-loadings that were above the 0.35 threshold. However, established scales were used to garner customer opinions. Some scholars suggest that to meet the criteria of CFA, particularly with regard to fitness indices, reliability, and discriminant validity, it becomes necessary to eliminate certain items from each factor within the measurement model (e.g.,

Awang et al., 2015). While there is evidence to support this assertion, no items were eliminated from this study, as previously established scales were used to measure customer responses.

A linear regression model using conditional process analysis was used to test the data.

The subsequent tables (Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8) report these findings.

Table 5: Process Model – Business Social Responsibility

| | Coefficient | Standard Error | T-Value | P-Value | Lower Limit Confidence Interval | Upper Limit Confidence Interval |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Constant | -.878 | .295 | -2.973 | .003 | -1.460 | -.296 |
| Firm Action | -.035 | .065 | -.537 | .592 | -.164 | .093 |
| Age | -.010 | .044 | -.214 | .831 | -.097 | .078 |
| Education | .017 | .032 | .546 | .585 | -.045 | .080 |
| Race/Ethnicity | .133 | .035 | 3.797 | .000 | .064 | .202 |
| ShopBen | -.024 | .023 | -1.040 | .299 | -.070 | .022 |
| Income | -.013 | .029 | -.454 | .650 | -.069 | .043 |
| CommSat | .090 | .045 | 1.999 | .047 | .001 | .178 |
| SB Owner | .245 | .097 | 2.543 | .0112 | .055 | .435 |
| Gender | -.004 | .075 | -.053 | .958 | -.151 | .143 |
| Religious Person | .078 | .129 | .603 | .547 | -1.176 | .331 |

Hypothesis 1 argued that firm response to local community crisis influences customer perceptions of the firm. The study results had a p-value above the 0.05 threshold, as well as a confidence interval that overlapped zero ($\beta = -.035$, $p = .592$, 95% CI [-.164, .093]); thus, the first hypothesis is not supported. Therefore, results from the data analysis suggest firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm.

Table 6: Process Model – Trust

| | Coefficient | Standard Error | T-Value | P-Value | Lower Limit Confidence Interval | Upper Limit Confidence Interval |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Constant | .270 | .320 | .845 | .399 | -.359 | .898 |
| Firm Action | .034 | .070 | .484 | .629 | -.103 | .170 |
| BSR | .468 | .071 | 6.584 | .000 | .328 | .608 |
| Age | -.025 | .048 | -5.35 | .593 | -.119 | -.006 |
| Education | -.032 | .034 | -.940 | .348 | -.100 | .068 |
| Race/Ethnicity | -.036 | .039 | -.945 | .346 | -.111 | .034 |
| ShopBen | .001 | .025 | .050 | .960 | -.047 | .050 |
| Income | -.020 | .030 | -.655 | .513 | -.080 | .040 |
| CommSat | .078 | .048 | 1.619 | .107 | -.017 | .172 |
| SB Owner | -.118 | .104 | -1.138 | .256 | -.323 | .086 |
| Gender | .186 | .080 | 2.340 | .020 | .029 | .342 |
| Religious Person | -.352 | .137 | -2.562 | .011 | -.622 | -.082 |

The second hypothesis argued that positive customer perceptions of firm action positively relates to firm trust. The study results yielded a p-value below the 0.05 threshold, as well as a confidence interval that did not overlap zero ($\beta = .468, p = .000, 95\% \text{ CI } [.328, .608]$); thus, the second hypothesis is supported. Therefore, conclusions from the data analysis show customer perceptions of firm action positively relate to trust in a firm.

Table 7: Process Model – Purchase Intent

| | Coefficient | Standard Error | T-Value | P-Value | Lower Limit Confidence Interval | Upper Limit Confidence Interval |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Constant | -.065 | .260 | -.250 | .803 | -.576 | .446 |
| Firm Action | .036 | .056 | .638 | .524 | -.075 | .147 |
| Trust | .391 | .053 | 7.384 | .000 | .287 | .496 |
| Self-Interest | .392 | .050 | 7.95 | .000 | .297 | .496 |
| TxPI | .135 | .068 | 1.996 | .047 | .002 | .296 |
| Age | .049 | .039 | 1.267 | .206 | -.027 | .125 |
| Education | -.004 | .027 | .027 | .874 | -.058 | .050 |
| Race/Ethnicity | -.014 | .031 | .031 | .664 | -.075 | .048 |
| ShopBen | .011 | .020 | .020 | .581 | -.029 | .051 |
| Income | -.010 | .025 | .025 | .679 | -.059 | .038 |
| CommSat | .015 | .040 | .040 | .712 | -.063 | .092 |
| SB Owner | -.101 | .085 | .085 | .232 | -.268 | .063 |
| Gender | -.116 | .065 | .061 | .076 | -.244 | .012 |
| Religious Person | .216 | .113 | .113 | .057 | -.007 | .438 |

The third hypothesis argued that trust in the firm positively relates to purchase intent. The study results found a p-value below the 0.05 threshold, as well as a confidence interval that did not overlap zero ($\beta = .391, p = .000, 95\% \text{ CI } [.287, .496]$); thus, the third hypothesis is supported. The data results suggest customer trust in a firm positively relates to their purchase intent.

The fifth hypothesis argued that perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intent. The study results had a p-value of below the 0.05 threshold, as well as a confidence interval that did not overlap zero ($\beta = .135, p = .047, 95\% \text{ CI } [.002, .296]$); thus, the fifth hypothesis is supported. Therefore, results from the data analysis suggest perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intention.

Table 8: Process Model – Loyalty

| | Coefficient | Standard Error | T-Value | P-Value | Lower Limit Confidence Interval | Upper Limit Confidence Interval |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Constant | 5.723 | .243 | 23.524 | .000 | 5.244 | 6.20 |
| Firm Action | -.002 | .053 | -.028 | .978 | -.106 | .103 |
| PurInt | .434 | .058 | 7.479 | .000 | .320 | .549 |
| Self-Interest | .248 | .054 | 4.590 | .000 | .142 | .355 |
| PIxCL | -.111 | .064 | -1.748 | .082 | -.236 | .014 |
| Age | .027 | .037 | .745 | .457 | -.045 | .994 |
| Education | -.014 | .026 | -.547 | .585 | -.065 | .037 |
| Race/Ethnicity | .008 | .030 | .270 | .788 | -.050 | .065 |
| ShopBen | .006 | .019 | .291 | .772 | -.032 | .043 |
| Income | .006 | .023 | .263 | .793 | -.040 | .052 |
| CommSat | -.042 | .037 | -1.150 | .251 | -.115 | .030 |
| SB Owner | -.009 | .080 | -.111 | .9112 | -.165 | .148 |
| Gender | -.055 | .062 | -.887 | .376 | -.176 | .067 |
| Religious Person | .021 | .108 | .843 | .843 | -.191 | .234 |

The fourth hypothesis argued that purchase intent positively relates to customer loyalty. The study results found a p-value below the 0.05 threshold, as well as a confidence interval that did not overlap zero ($\beta = .434, p = .000, 95\% \text{ CI } [.320, .549]$); thus, the fourth hypothesis is

supported. Therefore, the data analysis indicates purchase intent positively relates to customer loyalty.

The sixth hypothesis argued that perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between purchase intent and loyalty. The study results yielded a p-value above the 0.05 threshold, as well as a confidence interval that overlapped zero ($\beta = -.111, p = .082, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.236, .014]$); thus, the sixth hypothesis is not supported. Therefore, findings from the data analysis reveal perceived self-interest motives do not moderate the relationship between purchase intent and customer loyalty.

Table 9: Post-Hoc Analysis, ANOVA
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects, Business Social Responsibility

| | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|
| CorrectedModel | 9.139a | 10 | .914 | 2.845 | .002 |
| Intercept | 57.206 | 1 | 57.206 | 178.091 | <.001 |
| Age | .195 | 1 | .195 | .607 | .437 |
| Education | .001 | 1 | .001 | .003 | .957 |
| Race/Ethnicity | 4.081 | 1 | 4.081 | 12.705 | <.001 |
| ShopBen | .116 | 1 | .116 | .360 | .549 |
| Income | .029 | 1 | .029 | .089 | .766 |
| CommSat | 1.806 | 1 | 1.806 | 5.623 | .018 |
| SB Owner | 2.215 | 1 | 2.215 | 6.895 | .009 |
| Gender | .015 | 1 | .015 | .047 | .828 |
| ReligPer | .341 | 1 | .341 | 1.062 | .304 |
| Firm Action | .022 | 1 | .022 | .067 | .796 |
| Error | 89.299 | 278 | .321 | | |
| Total | 7441.920 | 289 | | | |
| Corrected Total | 98.438 | 288 | | | |

a. R Squared = .093 (Adjusted R Squared = .060)

The first hypothesis argued that firm response to local community crisis influences customer perceptions of the firm. As the first hypothesis was not supported, a post-hoc analysis was conducted to ascertain whether the manipulation presented in the vignette was yielding the expected results. The post-hoc analysis was undertaken to determine between-subject effects of business social responsibility and test the effectiveness of the model. A significant result would

have shown there was a difference between the two conditions, whereas a non-significant result would have suggested no difference between groups. As non-significant results were found, this suggests the manipulation presented in this study did not work, contributing to the justification as to why the first hypothesis is not supported. The post-hoc analysis reveals firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm ($p = .796$).

Chapter 6: Discussion

Contribution

Although a growing body of literature investigates the role of business social responsibility (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Dahlsrud, 2006; Gallardo-Vazquez et al., 2019; Severa-Frances & Arteaga-Morono, 2015; Stobierski, 2021, etc.), customer perceptions (Baumgartner et al. 1997; Ha & Perks, 2005, etc.), and customer perceptions of business social responsibility (Bello et al., 2021; Ghanbarpour & Gustafsson, 2022; Green & Peloza, 2014; Rim & Kim, 2016, etc.), this study adds to the body of knowledge and fills the research gap by exploring these phenomenon in a different context- small businesses, community crisis, and natural disasters. Further, few studies contemplate the variable of perceived self-interest within the conceptual model. In addition, this study links business social responsibility with social exchange theory, concentrating exclusively on the customer segment because it is the most relevant stakeholder from a marketing and managerial perspective.

This research contributes to the management and business social responsibility literature by establishing a link between business social responsibility and customer perceptions of outcomes, while considering perceived intent as a moderator. This research study, which measures customer perceptions (instead of business owner perceptions) of business social responsibility in response to community crisis in small to medium-sized towns, highlights that customer perceptions influence trust, purchase intent, and loyalty.

This study provides a distinctive viewpoint on the interplay between business social responsibility and customer response within the small business context by extending the research on small business social responsibility and establishing a connection between firm action and customer loyalty. This study also offers insights on various customer perception behaviors,

encompassing trust, purchase intention, and loyalty, specifically in the context of small businesses that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis. Additionally, this enhances our understanding of this phenomena and provides contributions to the literature by considering the effects of perceived self-interest of the firm.

This research significantly contributes to the existing literature by adopting a social exchange theory perspective. By doing do, it advances the knowledge and understanding of how customers perceive small businesses that participate in socially responsible behaviors in the face of community crisis and offers insights on how these perceptions influence customer loyalty. This contribution spans across the domains of marketing, management, and small business literature by deepening our insights into the intricate dynamics between business social responsibility and customer responses in the small business landscape.

The ensuing sections of this chapter detail discussions and contributions for the following constructs: business social responsibility, trust, purchase intent, customer loyalty, and perceived self-interest of the firm. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the limitations of the study and puts forth recommendations for future research endeavors.

Customer Perceptions

The results of this study answer the call from Cheng et al. (2018) to investigate societal expectations regarding business social responsibility during natural disasters by providing valuable insights for businesses to prepare them for engagement in disaster relief efforts and fostering strong partnerships with the community. The general picture emerging from the analysis is surprising, as the data suggest firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm, as it was hypothesized that firm action would drive customer perceptions of the firms' social responsibility. The results of this study are interesting

in that previous studies have found how a firm responds to a crisis within the local community has an impact on how customers perceive the company (Bello et al., 2021; Ellen et al., 2000; Gautier & Pache, 2015). Garretson Folse et al. (2010) found that, in context to cause-related marketing, the size of a firm's donation can impact customer perceptions of the firms' motivation for participation and overall business social responsibility. Other research suggests that donation type can impact customer perceptions of the firm, with product donations (versus cash donations) more likely to indicate the firm cares about the cause (Green & Peloza, 2014). A possible reason for this discrepancy might be that the manipulation conducted within this research study was not strong enough to yield the intended and hypothesized results. Despite this, a possible interpretation of this finding can be explained by previous research. According to the research of Creyer and Ross (1996), the ethical conduct of firms represents the norm or the *status quo*; customers expect firms to partake in socially responsible activities that protect the environment, benefit charitable organizations, and support the communities in which they operate (Mohr et al., 2001). This expectation is further evidenced through Brunk's (2010) research, which suggests that customers expect firms to actively support local communities by establishing foundations and providing funds to local institutions such as libraries or schools. Moreover, Green and Peloza's (2014) study found that customers perceive small businesses as *inherently* socially responsible, even in the absence of any knowledge of actual socially responsible behaviors. This collective body of research highlights the underlying customer expectations of firms- irrespective of their size- to engage in ethical and socially responsible business practices and behaviors. According to previous research (e.g., Besser, 2012; Green & Peloza, 2014), customers tend to hold a baseline assumption that small to medium-sized businesses inherently contribute to the economic development and well-being of the community

in which they operate. The finding in this study suggests the need for additional research to continue to understand how firm response to a local community crisis influences how customers perceive the firm.

Trust

This study contributes to the conclusions of Park et al. (2017), Mayer et al. (1995), Aljarah et al. (2020), and Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) about the influence of customer perceptions of a firms' business social responsibility actions on trust. Moreover, it complements the works of Green and Peloza (2014), Spence (1999), and Lantieri and Chiagouris (2009) by examining this phenomenon within the small business organizational context. As in previous studies such as Khan et al. (2015) and Swaen et al. (2021), the results of this analysis confirm that customer perceptions of firm action and participation in socially responsive business behaviors positively relate to trust in a firm.

Trust plays a critical role in a firms' success within the context of customer/firm and the organizational relationship. Specifically, in examining the connection between customers and firms and through the adoption of a social exchange perspective, this research sheds light on the nature of these interactions. In the context of the business/customer relationship, a social exchange perspective suggests social exchanges involve more trust and flexibility than quid pro quo economic exchanges (Cropanzo et al., 2017). This means that the interactions between businesses and customers are built on a foundation of mutual trust. In essence, fostering trust becomes a foundation for establishing and maintaining lasting relationships between a firm and their customers. The findings of this study draw upon the framework of social exchange theory, emphasizing the role of trust as a foundational element in reciprocal exchange relationships between the firm and the customer. Social exchange theory predicts positive behaviors beget

trust (a relational response), in turn, facilitating positive behavioral responses from the exchange participants. Indeed, trust is a critical component of the social exchange process (Cropanzo et al., 2017). The findings of this research provide theoretical support that when customers trust a firm, they are more likely to have a positive response to the firms' philanthropic behaviors.

Purchase Intent

The results of this study reveal that trust in a firm positively impacts customer purchase intentions. The findings are supported by research from Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) who found that customers tend to repay firms' philanthropic behaviors through their purchases, and the work of Perez and Rodriguez-del-Bosque (2015) who demonstrate that customers' perceived business social responsibility image of a firm increases customer purchase intention. Likewise, the corroborating studies by Lee and Shin (2010) and Su et al. (2015) support these findings. As such, this research helps to answer the call by Ghanbarpour and Gustafsson (2022) for research to investigate the impact of business social responsibility on customer purchase intention in the retailing and goods sector, and the call by Botero and Litchfield-Moore (2021) to examine customer perceptions of small firms using a specific product or service (e.g., the benefit t-shirt proposed in the survey). Thus, in response to socially responsible initiatives, customers exhibit a tendency to positively reciprocate a firm through purchase intent behaviors. This reciprocal behavior is manifested through an increased likelihood of purchasing products at the time of the social responsibility act and in the future, thus supporting the social exchange theory (Bianchi et al., 2019).

Empirical evidence further solidifies the concept that when a firm's business social responsibility activities align with a customer's prosocial interests, it not only generates satisfaction, but also fosters trust. This trust, in turn, becomes a pivotal factor influencing

purchase and repurchase intention behaviors (Duong et al., 2022). Therefore, this research provides theoretical support for the social exchange theory, and emphasizes that the strategic alignment of a firm's business social responsibility practices coupled with customers' values not only leads to satisfaction with the firm, but additionally cultivates a sense of trust. In turn, this creates a positive cycle between the firm and customer that significantly impacts purchasing behaviors and the increased likelihood of customers choosing to support the firm long-term.

Customer Loyalty

This study suggests that customers and potential customers of small businesses in small to medium-sized towns appreciate the business social responsibility actions of the firm. Congruent with research by Servera-Francés and Piqueras-Tomás (2019), results of this study find positive perceptions of firm action translates into higher levels of firm trust, thus intensifying customer loyalty. Notably, this increased level of trust fosters customer loyalty, and emphasizes the significant impact that socially responsible activities can have on the relationships between firms and their current or potential customer base. As small businesses in small to medium-sized communities engage in socially responsible practices- particularly during times of local community crisis- they not only are perceived positively with their current and potential customer base, but additionally create a sense of trust that enhances the likelihood of customer patronage and long-term commitment. This reinforces the notion that, in the context of small business in small to medium-sized towns, business social responsibility plays a pivotal role in the interplay between customer trust and loyalty. In one respect, the results of this research are not surprising. However, the positive correlations between customer perceptions, trust, and loyalty provide evidence that small businesses in small to medium-sized towns that participate in business social responsibility after a community crisis can expect positive outcomes.

Social exchange theory posits that the evolving relationship between firms and customers leads to mutual commitments and a sustained desire for a long-term relationship (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005; Hutt, 2016). From this theoretical standpoint, the ultimate objective of business social responsibility is to foster a mutually beneficial, enduring relationship between customers and firms (Bhattachara et al., 2009). This is supported by the empirical evidence that demonstrates a positive association between business social responsibility and customer loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2014; Servera-Frances & Arteago-Monroe, 2015; Vlachos et al., 2008). The results of this study support these and previous findings that within the reciprocal social exchange relationship, positive social exchange relationships result in customers who are more committed to a business that participates in socially responsive behaviors, thus facilitating a sense of customer loyalty. This is an effect that occurs directly and indirectly through the manifestation of trust (Cuesta-Valino et al., 2019).

Perceived Self-Interest

Recent research has tended to show that customers who perceive a firms' motives as altruistic will have a positive influence on perceptions of trust and credibility (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2022). In this vein, if firm trust leads to loyalty and purchase intention, it is logical to assume that perceived altruistic motives have a positive effect on purchase intent. Consider the study of Green and Peloza (2014), which found customer trust in small businesses leads to the belief that the firms engage in business social responsibility for the 'right' reasons. Cheng et al. (2010) additionally found when individuals believe a firm's business social responsibility motives are intrinsically-based, customers have more favorable attitudes towards the firm. Conversely, when stakeholders believe the firms are acting in self-interest, they have less favorable attitudes towards the firm. However, research by Gupta and Pirsch (2006) find

customer perceptions of perceived firm motivations play an insignificant role in their purchase intentions, suggesting customers may still purchase from a business regardless of the perceived motivation of the firm (Yuksel et al., 2010). These discrepancies in perceived motivation represent a contribution area for small to medium sized business and business social responsibility research. This study explored the effects of perceived self-interest as a moderating variable between trust and purchase intent, and purchase intent and loyalty, and answers the call of Shi (2020) by employing an experimental design to study the business social responsibility relationships. Although past research has found support for relationships between perceived motivation and self-interest in relation to trust, purchase intent, and loyalty (e.g., Singh et al., 2012; Alhouti et al., 2016, etc.), this study found mixed support.

Congruent with the work of Singh et al. (2012), results from this study found perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intent. This finding supports the work of Alhouti et al. (2016) who found firms not only need to engage in socially responsible behaviors, but the actions need to be perceived as genuine by consumers if the firm expects to yield positive outcomes. As in the previous study by Yuksel et al. (2010), the results of this analysis confirm that customer perceptions of the perceived motivation of a firms' socially responsible activities is an important moderator of firm outcomes. Further, the use of perceived self-interest as a moderating variable answers the call by Azmat and Ha (2012) and Gurlek et al. (2017) to explore potential moderating variables' effects in relation to business social responsibility and customer response.

Despite some existing literature suggesting that perceived self-interest motives positively impact customer loyalty, as reflected by purchase intent behaviors, the findings of this study were unexpected, yet still consistent with research from Gupta and Pirsch (2006). Contrary to

expectations, this research discovered that perceived self-interest motives do not play a moderating role in the relationship between purchase intent and loyalty. That is, the results challenge the prevailing assumption that customers' perceptions of a firm's perceived self-interest impact their loyalty to the firm and subsequent purchasing behavior. Despite existing literature suggesting a positive association between perceived self-interest motives and customer loyalty, the results of this research study suggest a more complex relationship. This emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of the factors that influence customer perceptions of perceived motivations in the context of small to medium-sized businesses engaging in socially responsible behaviors. This unexpected outcome suggests further exploration to better understand and explore the dynamics of customer perceptions and behaviors in the context of small business response to community crisis in small to medium-sized towns.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study sought to understand customer perceptions of small business response to community crisis in small to medium-sized towns. This research study has several limitations that represent future research opportunities and areas in which to contribute to the literature. First, and congruent with research on stakeholder reactions (e.g., Bridoux et al., 2016; Pivato et al., 2008), dependent variables were self-reported by study participants through intentions and perceptions rather than actual behaviors. Bridoux et al. (2016) suggest an impediment to this type of research is that "participants might realize that their reported intention does not have actual consequences" (p. 15). Thus, future research should examine actual customer behaviors, for example, through qualitative methods such as case studies or ethnographic research. Additionally, further studies should isolate the effects of participants' social desirability bias

(Krumpal, 2013) in examining customer intentions to associate with small businesses practicing socially responsible behaviors.

Second, there are often multiple methodologies for examining research questions; this study employed the use of a vignette to investigate the proposed hypotheses. While vignettes can provide robust information, there are limiting factors associated with their use. First, vignette-based research methods are not standardized, and thus, the mechanisms for their development may differ between studies. Similarly, there is no standardization in scenarios (Matza et al., 2021) to assess customer perceptions of business social responsibility. Second, framing effects can bias participant responses in vignettes (Matza et al., 2021; Wason et al., 2002). Therefore, interpretation of vignette results should be approached with caution (Matza et al., 2021).

Third, a perpetual challenge in the literature on business social responsibility includes the ability to measure perceived notions of business social responsibility within differing industries (Swaen et al., 2021). In particular, one of the primary challenges of measuring business social responsibility is that its meaning differs from person to person (Votaw, 1972). Thus, future researchers should design instruments that measure general and specific customer perceptions of business social responsibility (Latif & Sajjad, 2018).

Fourth, there are many types of crisis and social events that can impact communities, such as provincial natural disasters, tragic school shootings, injury or death of a community member, workers strikes, social movement, community protests, etc.. This research centers on a natural disaster- specifically a tornado- as the chosen subject of investigation because it is a naturally occurring event that often overwhelms local resources, communities, and municipalities (Gallant, 2008), and often necessitates support in recovery from the local community (Shi, 2020). Further, much previous research on business social responsibility and disaster

aid/response to crisis has focused on natural disasters (e.g, Cheng et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2010; Shi, 2020). However, future research should study this context in different crisis or disaster formats, allowing for future relations of the designated variables.

Fifth, as there are more frequent and intense natural disasters occurring due to climate change, it is hypothesized that companies will be increasingly responsible for corporate disaster aid in the future (Johnson et al., 2010). Further, philanthropic giving through proceeds of t-shirt sales is on the rise. Take, for example, the canned meat company Spam, who donated not only 264,000 cans of Spam (\$1,000,000 retail value) to aid in the disaster-relief efforts of the devastating Maui, Hawaii wildfire of 2023, but additionally developed a “Spam Brand loves Maui” t-shirt wherein 100% of the proceeds were donated Aloha United Way’s Maui Fire Relief Fund. Thus, this research study could be replicated within the context of large, multi-national firms (Boyette, 2023).

Sixth, a retail store was chosen as the philanthropic entity in this research study because clothing is a relatable and universal product familiar to all study participants, consumer goods companies have previously been used in vignette studies including vignette studies examining customer perceptions of firm benevolence (e.g., Bridoux et al., 2016; Contini et al., 2020), and retail and wholesale companies are more likely than other industry sectors to report engaging in disaster-related activities (Johnson et al., 2010). However, future research should replicate this study using alternative industries, such as the hospitality or technology industries, to determine if results are consistent. Such studies may reveal key differences in research findings in addition to understanding how managerial strategies may differ. Similarly, agencies such as schools and churches often provide aid relief to communities in crisis. Thus, future research should examine this phenomenon focusing on institutions such as schools and churches.

Seventh, future research should consider a longitudinal study that would provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Specifically, a longitudinal study would allow researchers to examine whether purchase intentions drive loyalty and long-term repurchase intentions.

Several suggestions of qualitative investigation are provided as recommendations for future research, including (1) digital ethnography, (2) mixed methods, and (3) case study. While classic ethnography observes study participants or phenomenon physically in natural settings, digital ethnography places emphasis on observations made through wired and wireless technology (Masten & Plowman, 2003). Haryanto et al. (2016) argue in favor of digital ethnography, suggesting that, in their study, it is employed to “portray attitudes, judgements, comments, and perceptions” (p. 675) of customer behavior in the retail environment. Future researchers could, for example, identify small businesses in small to medium-sized communities that had responded visibly to community crisis through social media platforms including Facebook, X, and Instagram. Visible response could include the promotion of philanthropic activities (e.g., the sale of items wherein proceeds benefit affected victims, serving as a donation drop-off center, etc.) in response to the crisis. Customer comments and reactions to these posts could be extrapolated, coded, and analyzed to discover perceptions of the organization. Archival social media data has been used by ethnographers to study a range of human behaviors, and researchers such as Postill and Pink (2012) suggest that the methodological implications of such studies can be wide-reaching.

To test the hypotheses, customer perceptions of business social responsibility and small business response to community crisis in small to medium-sized towns can be studied using mixed methods. Congruent with previous research validating this approach (e.g., Khanal et al.,

2021; Yin, 2007) this type of methodology is appropriate for this research study as it allows us to understand customer perceptions of small and medium-sized businesses that participate in socially responsible activities in the face of community crisis. Further, by cross-examining primary quantitative data with qualitative data, this type of research may provide a more robust understanding of the phenomenon at hand. In conjunction with the quantitative survey used in this study, a researcher could, for example, conduct semi-structured interviews using a purposive sample of customers of four small retail companies in a small town. The semi-structured interviews between the primary researcher and individual interview could more deeply examine the research questions. Transcripts of the semi-structured interviews could be analyzed verbatim and thereafter coded to match research hypotheses for the qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this type of investigation because it allows flexibility of questioning and spontaneous responses from interviewees (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Interviewees should be provided a framework and outline of the topic to be discussed in addition to research objectives of the study.

An investigative case study could glean new insights on customer perceptions of small business' social responsibility practices in the face of community crisis. Yin and Heald (1975) suggest case studies are a highly formalized process in which highly structured closed questions allow researchers to extract data and convert it to quantitative forms for the purposes of statistical analysis. For example, a single case study of an organization, such as a small apparel retailer in a small to medium-sized community, could be examined. Single cases studies are representative of everyday situations and results of the study are assumed to be generalizable to the wider, average population (Yin, 2003). Thus, a single case is appropriate for this research because the chosen retailer is representative of a typical small business in a small to medium-

sized town that responds visibly to local community crisis through business social responsibility acts (e.g., the creation of a product where proceeds benefit a community impacted by crisis). This population is generalizable (Eisenhart, 1989) and the study could easily be replicated to extend the research (Pettigrew, 1988). In the same vein, single case studies have been used to empirically examine business social responsibility in the retailing sector (Mas et al., 2021).

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this research study was to examine customer perceptions of small business' social responsibility behaviors and response to community crisis. Specifically, this study examines customer perceptions of trust, purchase intention, and loyalty to small businesses in small to medium-sized towns that participate in socially responsive behaviors in the face of community crisis. The following research questions were proposed:

- What impact does firm action have on customer trust?
- What impact does firm action have on customer purchase intent?
- What impact does firm action have on customer loyalty?
- What is relationship between customer trust, intent, and loyalty?
- How does perceived self-interest moderate trust and purchase intent?
- How does perceived self-interest moderate purchase intent and loyalty?
- How do firm actions in the face of community crisis impact customer perceptions?

To answer the research questions, an empirical investigation focusing on customer responses to a small business in a small town that engages in socially responsible behaviors following a community crisis was conducted. Employing an experimental design using a vignette, survey participants were directed to read a fictitious news article detailing the aftermath of a powerful tornado in a small town that wreaks havoc on residents, businesses, and the community. The vignette introduced a hypothetical retail company specializing in men's and women's apparel goods, which respond to the disaster by creating a relief t-shirt. The experimental design involved two conditions: one indicating 100% of t-shirt proceeds will go to aid disaster victims, and the second indicating 10% of proceeds will go to aid disaster victims.

Additionally, participants in the second manipulation were prompted to consider purchasing other products from the company's website.

The data were analyzed using several approaches. Specifically, the following analyses were conducted: reliability statistics, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation matrix, confirmatory factor analysis with varimax rotation, linear regression analysis, and a post-hoc analysis. Results from the research study find firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm. However, results found positive customer perceptions of firm action positively relates to firm trust, trust in the firm positively relates to purchase intent, and purchase intent is positively related to customer loyalty. While perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intent, it was found that perceived self-interest motives do not moderate the relationship between purchase intent and loyalty. Further, this study found firm response to local community crisis does not influence customer perceptions of the firm.

Several theoretical and managerial conclusions can be drawn from the results of this research study. This chapter includes a discussion of the conclusions and implications of the results.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides an examination of the interplay between customer perceptions of business social responsibility within the small business context, encompassing the dimensions of trust, purchase intent, and loyalty. In this examination, the theoretical framework of social exchange theory serves as the foundation through which the dynamics of these relationships are analyzed and understood. Social exchange theory posits that customer and company interactions create obligations towards each other, and that these interactions are widely recognized to be

interdependent of each other, yet contingent upon the behaviors of the other party (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). Emerson (1976) provided one of the earliest discussions of social exchange theory, noting that it is “a two-sided, mutually contingent, and mutually rewarding process involving ‘transactions’ or simple ‘exchange’” (p. 336).

This research authenticates the applicability of social exchange theory within the context of customer/firm relationships and contributes to the literature in several ways. In particular, it provides a framework for understanding the social context of the reciprocal relationship between small businesses and their customers. The theoretical lens used in this study enhances our understanding of the dynamics between small businesses and customers, in the context of social responsibility and local community crisis and provides valuable insights on the impact of these interactions.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of reciprocity within the context of small businesses, local communities, and consumer relationships. Small business entrepreneurs should recognize the significant and important role that reciprocity plays business social responsibility. Specifically, this study finds customers reward small businesses that are engaged in philanthropic activities, particularly in the face of community crisis. Therefore, in an effort to facilitate and maintain long-term success of the firm, the ability to perpetuate the cycle of reciprocity materializes as a critical success factor (Lahdesmaki & Suutari, 2011). This phenomenon aligns with the tenants of social exchange theory, emphasizing the interdependence and reciprocal nature of social exchanges between customers and firms.

It is becoming more evident that, to analyze, predict, and interpret the outcomes of business social responsibility with any level of confidence, a more detailed comprehension of the underlying processes that engender the social exchange process are needed (Bhattacharya et al.,

2008). The theoretical model tested in this dissertation demonstrates that business social responsibility actions positively influence customer perceptions in a variety of ways. However, there were unexpected findings.

The empirical findings of this research challenge the anticipated effects of the social exchange theory in the context of small businesses in small to medium-sized communities' response to local community crisis. Social exchange theory, rooted in the principal of reciprocity (Blau, 1964), posits that benevolent actions, such as those related to philanthropic business social responsibility behaviors, facilitate positive perceptions and reciprocal responses from those involved in the social exchange process (Cropanzo et al., 2017). However, the specific application of social exchange theory within part of this research study yielded unexpected results.

Contrary to the hypothesized relationship, response to local community crisis does not significantly influence customer perceptions of the firm. This unexpected outcome prompts a reevaluation of the theoretical underpinnings of this study. According to social exchange theory, positive customer perceptions were expected due to the potential halo effect necessary to reciprocate the social exchange process (Blau, 1964). However, in the absence of a significant result, the prevailing assumptions of the social exchange theory are challenged. This result contradicts the general trend in the literature that suggests a firm's response to local community crisis influences customer perceptions (Bello et al., 2021; Ellen et al., 2000; Gautier & Pache, 2015). Despite these established findings, the manipulation used in this research study may not have been robust enough to yield the hypothesized results. It is possible the vignette developed and administered within this study encompassed too much information for participants to grasp the concept of the manipulation. Moreover, the unexpected outcome could be interpreted through

the lens of customer expectations where the norm, as suggested by Creyer and Ross (1996), is that, irrespective of firm size, customers expect firms to engage in socially responsible activities that benefit the environment, charitable organizations, and their local community (Mohr et al., 2001). This result suggests further exploration of the nuanced factors that influence customer perceptions with regard to social exchange theory.

This research underscores the pivotal role of trust in customer and firm relationships and provides theoretical support for the tenants of the social exchange theory. This research extends the work of Cropanzo et al. (2017) by finding that trust- an essential component of reciprocal exchange relationships- is essential for fostering positive behavioral responses from customers. The results of this study are aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of social exchange theory, which suggests that positive behaviors beget trust and, in turn, this trust leads to a cycle of reciprocity. In other words, this research reinforces the foundational role of trust in the reciprocal exchange relationships between customers and firms. This study empirically validates the positive relationship between positive customer perceptions of firm action and firm trust by emphasizing the role of trust in the social exchange process. Further, this study supports previous assertions by Park et al. (2017), Aljarah et al. (2020), and George et al. (2020) that trust is intricately linked to perceptions of a firm's goodwill, values, and inherent principles (Mayer et al., 1995; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002), thus aligning with social exchange theory's emphasis on reciprocity. Additionally, this theoretical support contributes to a broader understanding of social exchange theory and its application within the small business context and the interplay of customer trust.

Aligned with social exchange theory, increased levels of customer satisfaction and trust are shown to be critical factors that drive purchase and repurchase intention (Weisburg et al.,

2011). This research study provides support that when a firm's business social responsibility responses align with customers' prosocial interests, it increases levels of trust, and subsequently influences customer purchase behaviors (Duong et al., 2022). When framed as a reciprocal act through customer purchase intentions, this research supports the underlying theoretical constructs of social exchange theory (Falk & Fischbacher, 2006). Moreover, this theory provides support for the monetary implications of business exchanges, as it demonstrates that trust in the firm positively relates to customer purchase intention behaviors. Thus, this research contributes to the literature on social exchange theory through the application of purchase intent. Indeed, at the time of this publication, no literature on the intersection of social exchange theory, purchase intention behaviors, business social responsibility, and small businesses could be found. Thus, this research presents a novel approach to social exchange theory by extending it within this specific discipline.

This study additionally highlights the role of social exchange theory within the interplay of customer loyalty and business social responsibility. Social exchange theory suggests that a firms' philanthropic actions facilitate a reciprocal relational response from the customer that enhance emotional commitment (Cropanzo et al., 2017). By utilizing the tenants of business social responsibility within the framework of social exchange theory, the results of this research suggest that small businesses in small to medium-sized towns that engage in socially responsibility business practices in the face of community crisis not only strengthen customers' trust and purchase intent, but also their loyalty to the firm. Thus, reciprocal and enduring relationships between firms and customers are materialized. Empirical evidence supports the notion that business social responsibility activities foster customer commitment and firm loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2014; Karaosmanoglu et al., 2016). The positive correlation found between

purchase intent and customer loyalty underscores business social responsibilities' role in the creation and formation of lasting relationships with customers in small to medium-sized towns.

This research aligns with existing literature that proposes a positive perception of a firm's self-interest in engaging in socially responsible practices enhances affective commitment by the customer and contributing to the social exchange theory framework (Bartikowski & Walsh, 2011; Markov et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2012). This research introduces perceived self-interest of the firm as the moderating variable in the relationship between trust and purchase intent, and purchase intent and loyalty. Within the context of social exchange theory, the moderating variables emphasize the role of reciprocity in exchange relationships (Alhouti et al., 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010). However, the unexpected finding that perceived self-interest motives do not moderate the relationship between purchase intent and loyalty challenges prevailing assumptions regarding the social exchange theory and suggests a further need for exploration. However, the finding that perceived self-interest motives moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intent suggest, in regard to social exchange theory, customers' perceptions of a firm's motives can play a role in shaping the dynamics of the reciprocity principle within exchange relationships. This supports the theories' premise that when a customer perceives a firms' behaviors as genuine and altruistic, this can lead to increased trust and subsequent purchase intentions.

Managerial Implications

The concept of business social responsibility originated with Bowen's (1953) comprehensive and foundational discussion of business ethics and socially responsible behavior in *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. Since then, business social responsibility has received considerable attention from multiple scholarly and managerial perspectives (Saeidi et

al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016). While some organizations have historically engaged in socially responsive practices, stakeholder awareness of business social responsibility in the past few decades has led to more firms embracing these practices. This dramatic increase in business social responsibility behaviors and reporting those behaviors, suggests firms consider business social responsibility an important and strategic tool in developing and maintaining enduring customer/firm relationships (Severa-Frances & Arteaga-Morono, 2015). Other empirical evidence appears to confirm the notion that, in developed countries, firms place emphasis on meeting the social needs of consumers and consider business social responsibility an essential business practice (Aljarah et al., 2020).

This study not only contributes to the literature on social exchange theory, but yields several practical and managerial implications, as well. From a practical perspective, results of this study should be particularly helpful to management or small business owners who are charged with substantiating how business social responsibility during community crisis benefits the firm. Business leaders need to understand the motivations for engaging in business social responsibility and the challenges surrounding customer factors in relation to organizational performance. Moreover, given that business social responsibility contributes to customer trust, purchase intent, and loyalty, small businesses should designate more capital and resources to this area. However, in recognizing that customer perceptions may not be significantly influenced by the firm's specific response to local community crisis events, firms should strategically emphasize fostering enduring partnerships within the community. This involves social efforts that extend beyond immediate crisis situations and contribute to the well-being of the local community long-term (Besser, 2012).

For small businesses actively involved in philanthropic activities or donation initiatives, it is necessary for management to assess various factors that can influence customer perceptions. A critical aspect to consider is the size and magnitude of donations, as emphasized in earlier studies by Garretson Folse et al. (2010) and Green and Peloza (2014). While this study suggests firm response does not influence customer perceptions, management should consider the balance between the size and type of contributions and customer expectations during local community crisis. This strategic alignment is instrumental in cultivating a positive and favorable image of the firm within the community.

Given the normative expectation for firms, irrespective of size, to engage in philanthropic activities, small firms should strategically focus on strengthening their ethical business practices (Creyer & Ross, 1996). Management should leverage the results identified in Green and Peloza's (2014) study that customers inherently perceive a small business as socially responsible. This implies that small firms should incorporate and highlight socially responsible behaviors as integral components of their identity and values. Regarding trust, firms should recognize the pivotal role in the reciprocal exchange relationship between firms and customers (Cropanzo et al., 2017). Indeed, transparent communication strategies of philanthropic efforts is crucial to align customer expectations with trust and purchase intent (Creyer & Ross, 1996).

Social responsibility has become a critical component within the modern business environment and is vital to the long-term and sustainable success of any business (Sathish et al., 2011). Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests the value of lost customers significantly effects firm profitability through either the loses of direct sales and/or the indirect effect of word-of-mouth, social sharing, etc. (Hogan et al., 2003). Furthermore, the costs associated with recruiting new customers exceeds the costs of retaining existing customers (Tong & Wong, 2014; Storbacka et

al., 1994). Jiang and Rosenbloom (2005) highlight that loyal customers significantly contribute to greater product consumption, and thus, greater profits. To this end, it is necessary for management to strategically employ business practices that retain customers, such as the implementation of socially responsible activities into their business plans. Indeed, small businesses can use business social responsibility as a strategic management tool to improve their relationships with customers (Swaen et al., 2021).

Small business owners/managers should evaluate how their business social responsibility initiatives align with firm goals, branding, customer expectations, or community needs. Moreover, management can interpret the findings of this study to help justify business social responsibility strategies that yield immediate positive effects for the local community and long-term effects on consumer trust and purchase intent. As already affirmed by Bianchi et al. (2019), business social responsibility holds notable implications for small businesses, impacting both immediate and long-term financial outcomes. In the short term, it can encourage purchasing behavior, while in the long-term, it plays a role in developing a positive brand image. For small business, these outcomes translate into impactful managerial decisions that influence decision-making and strategic planning.

The data provide preliminary evidence to suggest that small business owners should strive to communicate targeted marketing messages if they wish to reap the rewards of engaging in business social responsibility after a community crisis. Marketing messages should emphasize altruistic motivations of philanthropic activities and focus on community benefits of the initiative. To give an example, small business owners could communicate the impact of community benefits through the firm's website or social media outlets by showing photographs, reels, or infographics of how their contributions have positively impacted the local community.

Prior research by Shi (2020) confirms this notion, suggesting that firms should consider showcasing sincerity in their business social responsibility communications in an effort to elicit public-serving motives and decrease suspicion from consumers. Further evidence from Cheng et al. (2010) suggests firms should develop messaging that targets their community-focused initiatives and motives, and their involvement with partnering emergency management systems. Participation in business social responsibility messages positively impacts customer perceptions of businesses and their philanthropic efforts (Ruiz de Maya et al., 2016).

In summation, businesses must maintain flexibility and adaptability in response to shifting and dynamic customer expectations. This involves staying informed of changes in society and customer preferences, and evolving perspectives on business social responsibility; this allows businesses to modify managerial strategies as necessary.

The findings of this study contribute to both theory and practice by improving our understanding of customer perceptions of small business response to community crisis in small to medium-sized towns. It is the hope that this research will encourage future examination of this topic and provide new insights in understanding this phenomenon.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205

IRB2 #00003206

July 19, 2023

Kevin Knotts, Ph.D.
Management and Healthcare Administration Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 2035790-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Knotts:

Protocol Title: [2035790-1] GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES: SMALL BUSINESS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE IN SMALL TO MIDSIZED COMMUNITIES

Site Location: MU

Submission Type: New Project

APPROVED

Review Type: Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study unless there is an amendment to the study. All amendments must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Amber Chatelain.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Lindsey Taylor at (304) 696-6322 or l.taylor@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bruce F. Day'.

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

Anonymous Survey Consent

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Good times, bad times: Small business social responsibility and community crisis response in small to mid-sized communities” designed to analyze customer perceptions of small business’ response to local community crisis in communities with a population size of 500,000 or less. The study is being conducted by Amber Chatelain and Kevin Knotts from Marshall University and has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research is being conducted as part of the dissertation for Amber Chatelain.

This survey is comprised of reading a short article and answering questions that should take approximately 15 minutes of your time. Your replies will be anonymous, so do not type your name anywhere on the form. The risks involved with this study include minor stress if you have experienced a natural disaster in your community. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose to not participate in this research study or to withdraw. If you choose not to participate you can leave the survey site. You may choose to not answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Once you complete the survey you can delete your browsing history for added security. Completing the on-line survey indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply. If you have any questions about the study you may contact Kevin Knotts at 304-696-3089.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

By completing this survey you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please print this page for your records.

If you choose to participate in the study you will find the survey at https://marshall.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8v78XwwQ9WcovEq

Pre-Test / Reliability and Validity Test

Please read the following description carefully:

| | Not true for me (1) | (2) | (3) | Neutral (4) | (5) | (6) | Very true for me (7) |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| The situation described in the scenario was realistic. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I had no difficulty imagining myself in the situation. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Vignette: News Article

Instructions:

Please read the following news article prior to answering survey questions.

Tornado wreaks havoc in Small Town, USA: Recovery efforts made by community

At least two people are dead and dozens have been hospitalized after powerful storms and at least one tornado pummeled the small town of Avalora Springs on Friday night. The violent tornado reached maximum winds of 170 mph, ripped off roofs of homes, leveled entire communities, destroyed businesses, and knocked out power for hundreds of residents, officials say.

At least 500 residents in the pathway of the tornado were affected, the Mayor of Avalora Springs said. She described the destruction left in the wake of the tornado, telling reporters many neighborhoods and commercial businesses were damaged.

Drone footage showed some houses were completely crushed into piles of wood and rubble while others had their roofs ripped off, exposing the inside of homes littered with storm debris. Many large trees have been ripped from the roots or toppled over, making some residential roads impassable for residents and first respondents.

The Mayor will meet with emergency responders to assess the damage and begin recovery efforts. “It is unbelievable how this storm lasted for just a short time and what it will leave our community with forever,” she said.

The Governor has issued a State of Emergency in all counties affected by the severe storms, according to a release.

“I am devastated by the destruction to our community and loss of life in our small town,” the Governor said. He will tour the deadly storm damage on Sunday, he said during a Saturday news conference. “We will work together to rebuild our community and support each other during this difficult time.”

The recovery effort is expected to be a long and difficult process, but the community and several local businesses are assisting with relief efforts. Volunteers have been working around the clock to clear debris and churches have opened their doors to provide food and shelter to those who need it. Donations have been pouring in, and the small town has set up a relief fund to support those affected by this tragedy.

Instructions:

Please read the following information on Threaded Identity and view the social media post from the company. Rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

Manipulation #1

Threaded Identity is a small apparel retailer operating in a small community of 100,000 people and has been established for four years. The retailer sells products that can be found at other local retailers, but offers an assortment of items and t-shirts manufactured and produced for specifically for their own store.

After the destructive tornado described in the previous news article, Threaded Identity manufactures a supportive t-shirt. The following is the company's social media post for the t-shirt.



Text reads: We are heartbroken to see the devastation our neighbors, friends, and family are experiencing from Friday's tornado. To support this community, we are lending a hand and a way for you to give back to victims of this tragedy through this disaster relief tee. 100% OF PROCEEDS FROM THIS TEE WILL GO TO DIRECTLY AID VICTIMS. We are partnering

with the Tornado Relief Effort to ensure funds are going directly to those affected and they will receive aid to assist with immediate needs and rebuilding for the future.

We are stronger together.

Manipulation #2

Threaded Identity is a small apparel retailer operating in a small community of 100,000 people and has been established for four years. The retailer sells products that can be found at other local retailers, but offers an assortment of items and t-shirts manufactured and produced for specifically for their own store.

After the destructive tornado described in the previous news article, Threaded Identity manufactures a supportive t-shirt. The following is the company's social media post for the t-shirt.



Text reads: We are heartbroken to see the devastation our neighbors, friends, and family are experiencing from Friday's tornado. To support this community, we are lending a hand and a way for you to give back to victims of this tragedy through this disaster relief tee. 10% OF PROCEEDS FROM THIS TEE WILL GO TO DIRECTLY AID VICTIMS. We are partnering with the Tornado Relief Effort to ensure funds are going directly to those affected and they will

receive aid to assist with immediate needs and rebuilding for the future. This shirt is available for purchase on our website for a limited time, along with our other products.

We are stronger together.

Trust

I feel that Threaded Identity is

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Very undependable (unreliable) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Very dependable (reliable) |
| Very incompetent | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Very competent |
| Of very low integrity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Of very high integrity |
| Very dishonest and untrustworthy | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Very honest and trustworthy |

Purchase Intent

Please rate the following statements about Threaded Identity:

| | Strongly disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | Neutral (4) | (5) | (6) | Strongly agree (7) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| It makes sense to shop at this retailer instead of at any other retailer, even if they offer the same products | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Even if the same products and services are available elsewhere, I would prefer to go to this retailer | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Even if there is another retailer that is as good as this retailer, I prefer to go to this retailer | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Even if this retailer and another did not differ in any way, it is smarter to go to this retailer | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Loyalty

Please rate the following statements about Threaded Identity:

| | Strongly disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | Neutral (4) | (5) | (6) | Strongly agree (7) |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I would say positive things about Threaded Identity to other people | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would recommend Threaded Identity to other people who seek my advice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with Threaded Identity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would consider Threaded Identity my first place to buy services | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would do more business with Threaded Identity in the next few years | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Perceived Self-Interest Motives

Please rate the following statements about Threaded Identity:

| | Strongly disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | Neutral (4) | (5) | (6) | Strongly agree (7) |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Threaded Identity's response to this community crisis is to only benefit itself | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Threaded Identity's response to this community crisis is only to increase sales and profit | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To indicate you would like to get paid for completion of this survey, please check the Neutral box | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The motive of Threaded Identity in helping the community after this crisis is very suspicious | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Being socially response is not a part of Threaded Identity's mission | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Overall Business Social Responsibility

Please rate the following statements about Threaded Identity:

| | Strongly disagree (1) | (2) | (3) | Neutral (4) | (5) | (6) | Strongly agree (7) |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| This retailer is concerned about improving the well-being of society. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This retailer follows high ethical standards. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This retailer is socially responsible. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This retailer is only concerned about its own profit at the expense of society. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This retailer plays a role in our society that goes beyond the mere generation of profits. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Demographic / Psychographic Information

Zip Code **Please input your zip code here.**

Age **Please choose the range that best describes your age.**

- ☐ 18-29 (1)
- ☐ 30-39 (2)
- ☐ 40-49 (3)
- ☐ 50-59 (4)
- ☐ 60-69 (5)
- ☐ 70+ (6)

Gender **Please share your gender.**

- ☐ Male (1)
 - ☐ Female (2)
 - ☐ Non-binary / third gender (3)
 - ☐ Prefer not to say (4)
-

Education **What is your highest level of education completed?**

- ☐ Less than high school (1)
 - ☐ High school diploma (2)
 - ☐ Vocational/technical certificate (3)
 - ☐ Associate's degree (4)
 - ☐ Bachelor's degree (5)
 - ☐ Master's degree (6)
 - ☐ Doctorate or professional degree (Ph.D., M.D., D.D.M., J.D., etc.) (7)
-

Race/ethnicity **Please select the category below that most closely identifies you.**

- ☐ Non-Hispanic White (1)
- ☐ Non-Hispanic Black or African American (2)
- ☐ Non-Hispanic Asian (3)
- ☐ Hispanic (4)
- ☐ Other (5)

When was the last time you shopped for an item that benefitted some sort of disaster or crisis relief effort?

- ☐ Within the last week (1)
- ☐ Within the last month (2)
- ☐ Within the last 6 months (3)
- ☐ Within the last year (4)
- ☐ Within the last 3 years (5)
- ☐ More than 3 years ago (6)
- ☐ Never (7)

Please select the category that best reflects your income level in the prior year.

- ☐ Less than \$9,951 (1)
- ☐ \$9,951-\$40,525 (2)
- ☐ \$40,526-\$86,375 (3)
- ☐ \$86,376-\$164,925 (4)
- ☐ \$164,926-\$209,425 (5)
- ☐ \$209,426-\$523,600 (6)
- ☐ \$523,601 or more (7)

Community Satisfaction Please rate your satisfaction with the community you currently live in.

- ☐ Very unsatisfied (1)
 - ☐ Unsatisfied (2)
 - ☐ Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied (3)
 - ☐ Satisfied (4)
 - ☐ Very satisfied (5)
-

Small Business Owner. **Are you a small business owner?**

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

I consider myself a religious person

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

If you answered “Yes,” to the question above, please indicate your primary faith community:

- ☐ Christian, Catholic (1)
- ☐ Christian, Protestant (2)
- ☐ Islamic (3)
- ☐ Judaism (4)
- ☐ Hinduism (5)
- ☐ Buddhism (6)
- ☐ Other (7)